

## Article

# A Beautiful Failure: The Tragic—And Luminous—Life of Jim Harvey (An Experiment in Narrative Theology)

J. Sage Elwell

Department of Religion, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX 76129, USA; sage.elwell@tcu.edu

**Abstract:** Jim Harvey was the artist who created the Brillo box that Andy Warhol copied and made famous. Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* changed the course of art history and the entire field of aesthetics and the philosophy of art. Meanwhile, Jim Harvey died a failed second-generation Abstract Expressionist. To his death, Harvey refused to accept that his Brillo box was a work of art. However, the theory—the story—that was woven about Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* transformed them from commonplace objects into multimillion-dollar masterpieces. As a counterbalance, this article appeals to narrative theology as a way to tell Jim Harvey's story. Appealing to narrative theologian James McClendon's notion that a biography can reveal an image—a metaphor—that serves as a prism through which that individual's life can be seen and understood, this article suggests that the defining metaphor of Jim's life was "artists are prophets". Importantly, this essay is not an attempt to redeem Harvey's artistry, although it may provoke a reconsideration of his work. Rather, it is an exploration of the tragic and luminous life of a beautiful failure.

**Keywords:** Jim Harvey; James Harvey; Andy Warhol; Arthur Danto; Brillo Box; Pop Art; Abstract Expressionism; narrative theology; religion and art



**Citation:** Elwell, J. Sage. 2022. A Beautiful Failure: The Tragic—And Luminous—Life of Jim Harvey (An Experiment in Narrative Theology). *Religions* 13: 235. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13030235>

Academic Editors: Joseph Rivera and Verna Marina Ehret

Received: 29 December 2021

Accepted: 22 February 2022

Published: 9 March 2022

**Publisher's Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

In *Beyond the Brillo Box* the philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto quipped, "The original designer of the Brillo box of those years, James Harvey, in fact was a failed second-generation Abstract Expressionist who went into commercial art as a *pis aller* [last resort]" (Danto 1992, p. 154). Jim Harvey created one of the most iconic works of modern art, and yet died an artistic failure. He was only 36 years old, and on his death bed, he refused to acknowledge that his Brillo box was a work of art (Harvey 2017). Moreover, he further refused to admit that Warhol's *Brillo Box* was a work of art. To him, Warhol's box was, at best, an example of excellent design work, and at worst, nothing short of a defilement of the sanctity of art.

Jim dedicated his entire life and the whole of his being to art. Born in Canada in 1929, his family moved to Detroit when he was two years old. As a child, he created an "art corner" in the basement of his family home, complete with a paper station and easel, where he drew plants and animals in oil pastels and colored pencils. As an adolescent, rather than going to the local public school, he pleaded with his parents to attend a special high school for the arts, which he supplemented with weekend art classes at the Detroit Institute of Arts. He then went on to study drawing and painting at the Art Institute of Chicago. Upon graduation he moved back to Detroit where he worked at a department store for a year just to earn enough money to move to New York City to pursue his dream of being a working artist. He then spent the next 13 years fighting to make it in the fiercest art scene in the world.

Sadly, after hanging hundreds of paintings in well-reviewed solo and group exhibitions in New York City, the only thing Jim is remembered for is his Brillo box—the very type of thing he despised. To him, commercial design was a caricature of true art. It was a distortion of what pure art was meant to be. It was anti-art, and he held to this conviction even as he saw the *Brillo Box* entering the annals of modern art history.

The following is an attempt to understand why Jim so fervently believed that art and beauty belonged exclusively in the ethereal realm of the transcendent and refused to even countenance the possibility that beauty might be found in the mundane trivialities of day-to-day immanence. Or put more simply, this article looks to the life of Jim Harvey to try and understand why he could not see the artistic merit—the beauty—of his own creation. This is the story of the tragic, yet luminous life of Jim Harvey, a beautiful failure, recounted as an experiment in narrative theology.

## 2. Narrative Theology

Discussions of narrative theology often begin with Richard Niebuhr's 1941 book *The Meaning of Revelation* (Niebuhr 1941). However, in his 2020 article "Redating Narrative Theology", David Pickering makes a persuasive case that its modern origins can be found in G.K. Chesterton's 1925 book, *The Everlasting Man* (Pickering 2020). Regardless of its seed-origins, by the 1970s narrative theology was in full flower. Following on the heels of Stephen Crites' 1971 article "The Narrative Quality of Experience" (Crites 1971) published in *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, in 1975 James Wiggins observed of the annual conference of that self-same journal, "Indeed, at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society for Biblical Literature in 1974, no fewer than a dozen sessions of various subgroups were devoted to some aspect or another of the relationship between religion and narrative" (Wiggins 1975, p. 13).

By the 1980s the area had grown so much (and was so unruly) that pruning was in order. Consider the following efforts to organize the field. In his 1983 article "Narrative Theology: An Overview", Gabriel Fackre created a typology of narrative theologies based on the type of story under consideration: canonical story, life story, and community story (Fackre 1983). In his 1984 book *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, George Lindbeck described two types of postliberal theologians: foundationalists and anti-foundationalists (Lindbeck 1984). In his 1985 book *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise*, Ronald Thiemann referred to "experiential-expressivist" and "cultural-linguistic" narrative theologians (Thiemann 1985). In his 1986 article "Of Words the Speaker, of Deeds the Doer" Ronald Grimes identified six clusters of narrative theologians respectively working with: sacred biography, faith development, psychobiography, character and community, biblical narrative, and myth and ritual (Grimes 1986). Moreover, in his important 1987 article "Two Types of Narrative Theology" Gary Comstock advanced on Lindbeck and Thiemann by dividing the field into "pure" and "impure" narrative theologians (Comstock 1987). All of this prompted Paul Lauritzen to observe in that same year that "the theme of narrative is so popular today that a virtual cottage industry of academic scholarship has grown up around the discussion of this theme" (Lauritzen 1987, p. 322).

As this chronicle of growth and division indicates, the field of narrative theology was and remains varied and contested. Over 30 years have passed since Lauritzen's observation, and the field has only become more complex as narrative theology has been expanded and applied to too long neglected areas such as race, gender, queer, and disability studies. Nonetheless, one thing continues to unify this otherwise varied subject area. From G.K. Chesterton's *Everlasting Man* to Adriaan van Klinken's 2018 article "Autobiographical Storytelling and African Narrative Queer Theology" (van Klinken 2018), narrative theologians rightly elevate the particularity of stories over abstractions when it comes to conveying the truth of the human experience. As G.K. Chesterton observed, "the only two things that can satisfy a soul are a person and a story; and even a story must be about a person" (Chesterton 1920, p. 90).

In his edited volume *Religion as Story* James Wiggins writes, "The temptation of theology has been to interpret the foundational stories given by religion and then treat the interpretation as if it were that which was originally given" (Wiggins 1975, p. 19). Here, Wiggins points to the primacy of story over abstraction and interpretation. Given what follows, I would modify Wiggins' assertion to claim that the temptation of art history and

art criticism has been to interpret art and artists, and then treat those interpretations as if they were that which was originally given. However, what was originally given were the particularities of the artists, their contexts, and the art they created.

In *Biography as Theology* James McClendon claims that biography can disclose an “image” of faith. Elaborating, he writes:

By images, I mean metaphors whose content has been enriched by a previous, prototypical employment so that their application causes the object to which they are applied to be seen in multiply-reflected light; they are traditional or canonical metaphors, and as such they bear the content of faith itself. (McClendon 1974, pp. 96–97)

A biography reveals the metaphor—the image—that informed that person’s life and served as the lens through which they perceived the world. For instance, McClendon claims that the dominant image of Dag Hammarskjöld’s life was that of Servant and the Cross, while that of Martin Luther King Jr.’s was the Sermon on the Mount and the Exodus. According to McClendon, these images were the defining metaphors by which these men encountered and engaged the world.

Explicating McClendon’s claim, Michael Goldberg writes that these images “converge in an individual’s life to shape ‘the way he sees things,’ his character. That is, these images help form the context within which a man sees his life and within which he makes his life commitments” (Goldberg 1982, p. 68). The way a person lives out their commitment to these images is what McClendon means by religion. Thus, the search for these metaphors (images) in a person’s biography is a search for their religion.

What follows is the story—a thumbnail biography—of the artist Jim Harvey. As such, following McClendon, it is an exploration of the particularities of Jim’s life in an attempt to ferret out the images, the metaphors, that constituted his religion and that compelled him to reject the immanence of Pop in favor of the transcendence of abstraction. Through the unfolding of his story, I propose that the metaphor by which Jim lived his life was “artists are prophets”.

### 3. Preface to the Story of Jim Harvey

The following is based on interviews with Jim’s few remaining friends and family conducted over the course of several years. I am immensely grateful to Bill Harvey, Henry and Ilse Girard, Marcia Gauger, Joan Washburn, and George French. Without their kindness, patience, and generosity, this article would not have been possible.

The following also draws on Jim’s personal journals, sketch pads, photographs, passports, and the envelopes he sent home while traveling abroad. The visa stamps in his passports and the postmarks on the envelopes were used to reconstruct these travels, though sadly, the letters those envelopes ferried have been lost. This material was made available to me by Jim’s younger brother Bill, whom I visited several times at his home in Howell, Michigan over the course of many years. Without access to this material and Bill’s vivid recollections, it would have been impossible to tell Jim’s story.

Additionally, the following also draws on a series of interviews Jim conducted with Richard Brown Baker for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art between December 1962 and March 1963. All sources are cited, and conflicting accounts of events are noted. The names of some people and places have been changed to protect the privacy of those still living and their descendants.

Those that knew Jim, loved him. He was a gentle yet passionate soul. Over the course of my interviews with his friends and family, the life that came into focus was that of a man committed above all to beauty: beauty in art, in friendship, in love, and in life. Indeed, Jim described himself and his painting as “romantic” (Baker 1962–1963, pp. 10–11). However, what he meant by this was that he and his painting were “Romanticist” in the nineteenth-century philosophical and aesthetic sense of the word. Indeed, the young man his friends and family describe was undoubtedly a Romantic—a wanderer above the sea of fog.

Jim would have agreed with Théophile Gautier that those who prefer “mills to churches and bread for the body to that of the soul... deserve to be economists in this world and also in the next.” Indeed, for Jim, “Nothing that is beautiful is indispensable to life” (Gautier 1890, pp. 29–30). He was a disciple of Gautier’s art for art’s sake religion, and believed that by an alchemical mixture of color, rhythm, and depth, a canvas could be transformed into a painted icon of sacred beauty. He believed with the entirety of his being in a purity of form and color. Like Kandinsky before him, Jim believed there was something spiritual in cold Prussian blue on bitter lemon yellow and verdant viridian green against desiccated desert brown. For Jim, this was neither hyperbole nor esoteric art-speak. It was the air he breathed. It was his faith. Beauty was Jim’s religion and the metaphor—the McClendonian image—that “converge[d] in... [his] life to shape ‘the way he [saw] things’” (Goldberg 1982, p. 68), was “artists are prophets”. For Jim, artists were prophets calling people away from the mundane and toward the beautiful. What follows tells the story of how he came to this faith, how he lost it, and how, with the help of his friends and family, it was rediscovered nearly sixty years later.

Lastly, there is not room enough here to tell Jim’s story in full. This is not an attempt to capture Jim’s robust 36 years of life in a mere 25 pages. Therefore, to demarcate the unfolding of Jim’s story, I have punctuated the following with section markers (\*\*\*) to delineate and propel this abbreviated narrative forward. It is an experiment that serves as both an application of and exercise in narrative theology to offer a broad stroke picture of Jim’s tragic and luminous life.

#### 4. A Beautiful Failure

Jim first met Andy Warhol at a costume party in Chicago in the Spring of 1949. With floppy red hair, a gangly frame, and freckles that spread across his pale cheeks, Jim was a walking Raggedy Andy doll. He was in his second year at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and living with his aunt, uncle, and younger cousin George on Chicago’s northside. Meanwhile, Warhol was preparing to graduate from Carnegie Tech, and with the “a” still dangling from his last name like a vestigial tail, that night Jim met Andy Warhol. The rumor was that Andy was in town because he was considering teaching at an art school just south of Chicago in Indiana (see Bockris 1990, p. 48). The day after the party, Jim gushed to his cousin George, “Andy is going to be a great artist” (French 2014). And indeed, Andy was a great artist while Jim was forgotten—though to tell the difference is to tell a story.

Jim moved to New York City in December of 1951. He shared a cold-water flat on 54th street in Midtown with a friend from Chicago named George Verdak. Now illegal, cold-water flats in New York City in the 1950s had no running water, no heat, and no bathrooms or showers. The only source of heat was an oven, and to bathe, Jim and George had to heat up water portaged in pots from a communal bathroom on the stovetop and towel themselves clean.

George was a ballet dancer with a thick black broom-bristle mustache who would eventually perform with the Ballet Russes. George invited Jim to New York to work with him on an avant-garde ballet called *Optica*. The entire set was going to be nothing but optical illusions, and Jim would be on the payroll as lead set designer. However, just weeks after Jim arrived in New York, George dropped the idea and moved to St. Louis.

Jim came to New York City to break into the burgeoning art scene with the promise of a day job creating exciting, boundary-pushing set designs for a new kind of ballet. He was going to be part of a group—a troupe—of likeminded artists and performers, dancers, and dreamers, who wanted to change the world with their art. They were going to make something new, something beautiful and inspiring, and he was going to be a part of it. However, it never happened. Like an illusion that was never really there, when George left, *Optica* went with him.

Thus, just weeks after arriving in a city of millions, the one person Jim knew was gone. It was winter in New York and Jim was friendless, jobless, penniless, and starving in a city of strangers. He had been abandoned in a hollowed-out loft apartment without a bathroom,

without water, and without heat in the dark doldrums of January and February. To stay warm, he huddled under a blanket in front of the open mouth of the oven, its heavy door lolling out like a behemoth metal tongue.

\*\*\*

It is difficult to convey the sincerity of Jim's conviction that art, that beauty, defied the worldly demands for productivity and efficiency that drain the soul of vigor and passion; his genuine belief that art, and art alone, could save humanity from the bleak drudgery of the head-down, forward march of work-a-day existence. Every effort rings of esoteric bromides about a religion of beauty, or worse, the saccharine rhetoric of a failure used to scaffold shoddy work. However, regardless of his place—or absence—in the canon of art history, his own writings and the attestations of his friends and family unequivocally confirm that Jim sincerely, if naively, believed that art could save humanity from the desiccating machinations of modern industry that leave the individual alienated and estranged from himself and his fellows.

Jim was raised in Detroit and his family had a lake house at Pettibone Lake in northwestern Michigan. When Jim was a teenager, a family with a neighboring lake house asked him to paint a picture of their home with the lake in the background and the orange sun dipping below the green-blue waters at the horizon. Although flattered, Jim flatly refused. He told them they should just take a picture if that's what they wanted. He was not going to paint anything that amounted to a simple reproduction of a scene that lacked anything of himself in it. He needed to transform it and make it his own, which was precisely *not* what the family was asking for. When Jim's father heard of his refusal and counter suggestion that they "should just take a picture", he was furious. A child in the 1940s in the upper-Midwest had no right to speak to his elders with anything even approximating disrespect. Following his father's insistence, and duly chastened, Jim complied and completed the painting. However, when the neighbors asked him to sign it, he again refused. Only after his father again insisted did he relent, although as a token of his recalcitrance, he agreed only to sign the back of the canvas. He did not want his name associated with what he considered to be a hackneyed reproduction of a "pretty" scene. For Jim, the purpose of art was to transform and elevate, not mindlessly reproduce. Reproduction was the purview of industry not artistry—and there could be no overlap between the two (Harvey 2016).

This firm conviction in the power of creativity and art carried Jim out of his teenage years and into young adulthood. One of the few surviving letters Jim sent to his family is a missive written on his 20th birthday while in art school in Chicago. In the letter, Jim explains, "I couldn't ask for a better school because here I learned what art can be, what a wonderful way of life it is, and [it] is now just part of me".<sup>1</sup> Art was part of him. It was his way of life. Moreover, in a sketch book from 1951, Jim copied down this quote from Frederic Prokosch's book *The Seven Who Fled*: "A landscape is a spiritual thing. A landscape is a state of the spirit, it is a constant longing for what is about to come, it is a reflection incomparably detailed and ingenious of what is everlasting in us, and everlastingly changing".<sup>2</sup> For Jim, painting a quaint scene of the neighbors' lake house was a transgression against the Prokoschian spirituality of a *true* landscape. His dear friend Joan Washburn, who was with Jim at the opening of Andy's *Brillo Box* show, succinctly captured his appetite for beauty when she observed, "They just couldn't make culture fast enough for Jim" (Washburn 2017). That culture, which Jim considered the art of the pure and true, was the air he needed breathe, and without it he suffocated in the mediocre mines of industry, efficiency, and productivity.

In hindsight, Andy's vision—his version—of the confluence of art, commodity, and commerce clearly won the day. The reality of art-market capitalist realism has rendered talk of "pure" or "true" art terribly naïve, as if art, mired as it is in commercial capitalism, could have ever trucked with transcendence. However, reflecting on this seeming naivete, the storied art critic Irving Sandler observed that, "Instead of dealing with transcendence, much of the art history of younger scholars is shot through with irony...Ironists do not comprise a receptive audience for Abstract Expressionist painting and its fervent rhetoric. Indeed, when

irony is fashionable, high seriousness seems alien—even laughable” (Sandler 2009, p. 215). Laughable indeed. Yet, this “high seriousness” was Jim’s aspirational reality. He, and many other artists of his time and ilk, sincerely believed “pure art” could convey a truth beyond words—a spiritual truth. However, as Sandler rightly observed, irony kills such naked sincerity, beating it back into the bushes where it hides, shunned but uncowed until it is once again safe to venture guileless feelings.

\*\*\*

Through the latter part of 1952, Jim apprenticed as a commercial designer at Egmont Arnes. He loathed the work. For eight hours a day, five days a week, he learned the craft of lettering, spacing, and coloring. His tools were rulers, T-squares, and color swatches. It was paint-by-numbers art where the most creative, the most innovative designs were invariably shot down. The companies who hired Egmont Arnes could not afford to take risks. Thus, while the executives of these companies came in asking for completely new looks for their products, they could not abandon their old look for fear of losing customers who only knew their products by their labels, not their contents. All creative decision making was done by committees of corporate bureaucrats. The result was the triumph of mediocrity. To Jim, it was the opposite of art. It would be better to not create at all than to participate in the aesthetic bastardization of the arts that was commercial design. It was an inversion—a perversion—of real art. Despite this strict aesthetic, even moralistic, aversion, it paid the bills, and Jim was getting very good at it, though he hated himself for it.

Like a pacifist strangely gifted in the arts of war, Jim was increasingly conflicted. By day, he was a commercial designer creating the least offensive, most banal branding on cardboard, and by night, he was an impassioned Abstract Expressionist creating love and violence on canvas. On nights and weekends he painted cubist inspired, Hans Hoffmannesque push-pull paintings in pallets of cadmium red, Hansa yellow, and robin-egg blue. His process always began with a pencil sketch on paper to determine composition and scale. He then transferred that sketch to a prepped canvas—stretched and gessoed—using charcoal. From there, he painted through the night, never stopping, not even to eat, until it was done.

In his interview with Richard Brown Baker, Richard asked Jim about this process, “Well, do you eat—don’t you eat any supper, or—?” Jim flatly replied, “No. No, nothing”. Richard pressed on, “Well, let’s say, typically, today you might start at four o’clock...in the afternoon and you may still be painting at midnight, or one a.m.?” Jim replied, “Oh yes, and then I will stop and eat then, but not before and not break in between at all” (Baker 1962–1963, pp. 2–3). Painting was a labor of love for Jim. It was a spiritual practice like prayer or meditation. There could be no interruption. Jim gave himself over to the process like an iconographer in devotional ecstasis while writing an icon of the Saints.

However, despite his impassioned efforts, no one would buy his paintings and the galleries refused to show his work. It simply was not good enough. On the weekends, when he was not painting, he trudged up and down gallery row trying to persuade gallery owners and curators to include him in their exhibitions. Most of the gallerists refused to even speak with him, let alone consider his work. Antoinette Kraushaar, the owner of the Kraushaar Gallery, told him he simply needed more work and advised him to peddle his paintings at the smaller, less well-known galleries in the Village (Baker 1962–1963, p. 47). The rumor was they would show anyone. Others suggested he join one of the coop galleries, where artists paid to have their work shown. But Jim refused to pay to have his work hung—it was insulting—and so the canvases piled up in his frigid apartment, unseen by anyone but him.

Finally, after being deserted by George and the resultant failure of the *Optica* ballet to provide him with an income; after months of living alone in a freezing apartment with no heat or running water; after months of nothing but rejection from galleries; and after months of the defiling tedium of apprenticing at a job he despised creating products he loathed, Earle Olsen, a friend from Chicago who moved to New York shortly after Jim, suggested that Jim apply for a Fulbright scholarship. Reading between lines, Earle had

presumably taken notice of Jim's abject failure on so many fronts, as well as his deteriorating mental and emotional state—to say nothing of the fact that Jim did not have access to a shower and likely looked and smelled as such. In short, by proposing the Fulbright, Earle was suggesting that it might be time for Jim to get out of New York City.

\*\*\*

While Jim was a student in Chicago, he regularly visited the Oriental Institute Museum. He would sit on the floor for hours, drawing Khorsabad's Court with its Winged Bull-Man Aladlammu, the colossal King Tutankhamun, standing 16 feet tall and weighing 6 tons, and the stunningly adorned coffin of the Egyptian temple singer Meresamun with her faded pallet of muted blues, quiet reds, soft greens and the beautiful falcon of Ra spread across her chest. These were entire mythologies, religions, in paint and stone where there was no difference between art and religion. Each was built into the other. They were inseparable and irresistible (French 2014). Jim ached in his bones for this union of art and religion, this sacred beauty.

As a boy, Jim regularly begged his parents to drive him to the stunning art deco Catholic Shrine of the Little Flower Basilica in Royal Oak, Michigan. There, he marveled at the monumental stone crucifix that greeted visitors with Christ's forlorn and forsaken head tilted down in merciful pity. In his sketch book, he copied the picturesque murals and statues that were tucked around the gilded octagonal sanctuary (Harvey 2014). From boyhood to young adulthood, this comingling of art and religion was his natural métier, and in October of 1952, at 23 years old, he applied for a Fulbright scholarship to Egypt.

After a depressingly difficult start in New York, while he waited to hear if his Fulbright application would be accepted, things began to turn around. First, in November, he had an abstract painting accepted into the 1952 Whitney Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Painting. Then, in December he had a print of an etching titled *Skeletal Concretion* accepted into the "American Water Colors, Drawings, and Prints" exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum. Lastly, heeding Antoinette Kraushaar's advice, Jim tried the smaller, less well-known galleries in Greenwich Village, and early in 1953 he managed to secure his first solo show in New York City, as well as representation, at a storefront gallery on 51 Street called the Roko Gallery.

Like an arid desert that flowers when it rains, the waters of artistic success were starting to fall on Jim's desiccated New York life, and he was beginning to blossom. Then, in May of 1953, the State Department notified him that he had been accepted as a Fulbright Fellow to Egypt. His flower was blooming.

\*\*\*

Jim arrived in Cairo in September of 1953. The Fulbright students stayed in the Mena House Hotel for the first two weeks where they had daily cultural sensitivity and language training. The Mena House Hotel sat in the shadow of the pyramids, which stood above the palatial hotel like great peaked eyebrows. Originally built as a hunting lodge for Egyptian King Khedive Isma'il Pasha in 1869, by 1953 the hotel had added 30 rooms and a swimming pool and been transformed into a masterpiece of imperial splendor built by Egyptians for the British. Each boxy addition was added on like a tinker toy expansion in an architectural style the British considered appropriately Egyptian, but with all the amenities that the Western upper-class expected.

When Jim arrived, Egypt had officially been a Republic for all of four months and was a playground for wealthy foreigners. Everything was for sale: artifacts, relics, hashish, police. There was never a second thought, it was just given, accepted by both buyer and seller, without malice between either party. At least none that Jim saw. Any resentment or bruised pride was easily bandaged over with dollar bills or pounds sterling, as Jim would soon learn when he met Henry Girard.

Henry was American aristocracy. Descended from French Huguenots, in the 1800s the Girard family came to New York and purchased enormous swaths of land in and around Manhattan. Eventually, the Girards became one of the wealthiest families in the young

United States, with the Girard family name mingling in the mouths of the new oligarchy with the likes of the Rockefellers and Astors.

In 1953 Henry was fresh out of Harvard, with ruddy cheeks and a mop of tousled brown hair the likes of which was permissible only for the elite in the otherwise high and tight 1950s. Moreover, Henry bore a brand of devil-may-care lackadaisicalness that only the supremely wealthy could afford. Upon graduation, Henry felt he needed another year of study of Arabic, and thus sought a Fulbright fellowship for a year of study at the American University in Cairo. Thus, he met Jim while on an “Honorary Fulbright” in Cairo, for which he received no funds (Baker 1962–1963, p. 71).

Unlike Jim, who was raised in Detroit and schooled in the punchy, stick-gun games of Midwestern boys, Henry was raised in East Coast boarding schools and educated in the elocutionary ways of New England brahmins—all superlatives and grace. His was a world of manners and customs that was utterly unfamiliar to Jim. While Jim’s middle-class birthright was the sickening fear of unemployment and poverty with hard work sold as the only tonic, Henry’s birthright was wealth, privilege, and soft, uncalloused hands. Nonetheless, Henry had the earnest good heartedness of a purebred Labrador. That is, while he was clearly of fine breeding and well trained, he was above all a good man whose tail wagged generously.

During their two weeks of Fulbright-mandated cultural awareness and language training at the Mena House Hotel, Jim and Henry shared nearly every meal. Together, they explored Cairo and took day trips to the Pyramids of Saqqara and the Red Sea. After those two weeks Henry went on to attend classes at the American University in Cairo while Jim ventured forth for his own education.

\*\*\*

From November 1953 to May 1954, Jim traveled and painted throughout the region alone. Beginning in Luxor, where he painted in the Pharaonic tombs of the Valley of Kings for nearly two months, he then went on to Mt. Sinai, the Oasis of Siwa, Cyprus, Jerusalem, Amman, Ma’an, Petra, Baalbek, and finally back Cairo.<sup>3</sup>

In Luxor, Jim studied the murals and carvings inside the Golden Crypt in the tomb of Pharaoh Seti I. There, he learned that when the tomb was first discovered in 1817, there were still paints and brushes on the floor. It was as though the artist, having completed his sacred duty, died from fulfillment to join his Pharaonic patron. Jim then travelled across the desert to Nubia to the temple of the oracle of Amun, a prophetess named Phe-monoe, daughter of Zeus, who spoke for the God Amun. In Cyprus, he visited the castle of Othello, and from there he went to Jerusalem, where he visited the Church of the Nativity and the Holy Sepulcher. Everywhere he went, art and religion were intertwined. From to the tombs of the Pharaohs to the birthplace of Jesus, art served a higher, transcendent purpose.

The art historian James Elkins has observed, “Once upon a time—but really, in every place and in every time—art was religious... What we call art and what we call religion were inseparable...” (Elkins 2004, p. 1). Jim was discovering this firsthand, realizing that what inspired him to create, to paint, was sourced in divinity, and had been since humans first dared to make their mark. Of critical importance is not whether the art actually brooked the divine, but rather, that for Jim, there was a world where people believed that it did and created in accordance with that belief. These first travels were Jim’s gateway to a world where art was religion and religion was art.

\*\*\*

After months of travelling, Jim arrived back in Cairo in May of 1954 where he reconnected with Henry. While Jim was traveling and discovering the art of gods and epics, Henry was falling in love. Her name was Ilsebet Tanner, Ilse for short. Ilse was petite and lean with a springy fitness that belied her delicate doll-like features and her humble umber hair, which she always wore kerchiefed in Muslim Cairo. She had been studying in Florence but came to visit her mother in Cairo for Christmas, where she met Henry.

Ilse’s mother was Danish, and her father was British, and as a young woman, Ilse attended a finishing school outside London called The House of Citizenship. The school



had a policy of taking in a handful of girls each year from the “colonies”. That is where Ilse befriended a beautiful, demure young woman from the Kingdom of Bhutan named Kesang Dorje. And shortly after Jim arrived back in Cairo and reconnected with Henry, Ilse received a letter from Kesang.

In the letter, Kesang explained that in the two years since leaving The House of Citizenship, she had returned to Bhutan and gotten married. Her groom’s name was Jigme Choden, and he was the King of Bhutan. Thus, Ilse’s dear friend Kesang was now the Queen of the Kingdom of Bhutan. The letter went on to detail the wedding with a girlish glee that was only loosely anchored by Kesang’s newly bestowed imperial gravity. The letter concluded with a formal invitation, invoking the royal “we”, for Ilse and whomever she chose to accompany her, to visit Queen Kesang Choden in Punakha, the capital of her Kingdom (Baker 1962–1963, pp. 73–74).

Like a bird that has flown into a window, Jim was stunned numb when Ilse shared the letter with him and Henry. From Detroit to Cairo, Jim never imagined he would be one acquaintance away from actual royalty. But Henry, more at ease among the noble castes, unconcerned by trivialities such as money, and above all, utterly smitten with Ilse, immediately suggested they all take a road trip to Bhutan. Henry would foot the bill.

\*\*\*

Over the next several weeks, the trio planned the more than 6000-mile trek from North Africa, across the Middle East, and into the Indian subcontinent. Henry recruited a friend from Harvard and his wife, David and Virginia Winston, who were on their honeymoon in Cairo. Ilse convinced her friend Marilee Mattas, the daughter of the Lebanese Ambassador to Egypt, to join them as a sort of personal chaperone. Henry, recognizing they would need a linguist to manage the various dialects they would undoubtedly encounter as they travelled, recruited an American named Cecil Davis who was an expert in the tribal languages of Persia and Afghanistan. Importantly, Cecil was nearing 30, while the rest of the gang were just broaching their mid-20s, and as he had been recommended by the Fulbright program, none of them had ever met him. He was an unknown quantity, but a necessary risk.

There were seven people in their would-be traveling circus: Jim, Henry, Ilse, Marilee, David, Virginia, and Cecil. To accommodate them all, Henry bought two large Jeep Willy troop carriers and one smaller Jeep Willy CJ3B. All three vehicles were snub-nosed utilitarian military leftovers, painted desert beige with matching canvas tops and sides. Since there was bound to be mechanical trouble, Henry hired a local mechanic named Farouk to join them. And that made eight.

In Cairo, Henry had the vehicles outfitted for desert travel, adding everything from surplus gas cans to a small refrigerator. He then had the vehicles shipped to Alexandria, where the gang would begin their adventure. From Alexandria their three-Jeep caravan travelled out of Egypt, up into Jordan, then Lebanon and Syria, before heading west to Cyprus, then back east into Turkey, Iran, and across Afghanistan and Pakistan, and finally into India, where they found themselves stranded in the town of Kalimpong in northwestern India. After months of travel, they finally abandoned their trip in Kalimpong and never made it to Bhutan. By December of 1954, Jim was heading back to New York City.

Jim could never have afforded to take the trip. By June 1954, he only had enough Fulbright money left for his passage back home. His fellow travelers—save for Farouk—all came from money and as they trekked through desserts, forests, monsoons, and sandstorms, Jim relied on their surfeit of kindness and generosity. In this sense, Jim was a guest, yet he was never made to feel less-than or a burden, and buoyed by their munificence, the trip changed his life.

A complete account of Jim’s adventures on this trip is beyond the scope of this thumbnail biographical sketch. Moreover, having compiled hundreds of pages of interview transcripts from those remaining few who were with Jim on this remarkable adventure, it is clear that, now, nearly seventy years later, recollections of events vary widely. However,

a few salient highlights illuminate how the trip confirmed Jim's emergent Romantic belief in something approximating a religion of art.

\*\*\*

Jim did not know how to drive. This meant that Henry, Farouk, Cecil, and David rotated driving the three vehicles while Jim rode with the women. For most of the trip the roads they traveled were not roads at all, but Bedouin trails for goats, camels, and horses that were porcupined with horse-shoe nails. In addition, the refrigerator Henry added to one of the troop carriers was so heavy that the wheel well rubbed the passenger-side rear tire. Consequently, there were a lot of flat tires, and Jim did not know how to change a tire. On these occasions, Jim again spent most his time with the women.

Among their cohort, Henry, Cecil, and David were young aristocratic academicians, destined to prosper in a world made for men like them. Isle, Marilee, and Virginia were young women destined to become the wives of those men in that world. Among them, Jim alone did not fit in that world. His world was not readymade. Rather, like the weaver finch that makes its nest from colorful yarn and paper scraps, Jim was weaving his world from the beauty he encountered. It would be a world entirely of his own creation. Reflecting on this peculiarity of Jim's very being in the world, Ilse presciently observed, "Jim always walked so his toes hit the earth first. It was almost like he floated" (Girard 2014b). Thus, Jim went about lightly in the world with hollow-boned wings.

Throughout the trip Jim was treated with a sort of genteel deference, as though he was someone to be protected and looked after. When, for instance, Jim fell ill in Chaghcharan, Afghanistan, the entire trip came to a halt so that he could be tended to. It was as though Jim was in touch with something deeper, something ineffable, almost spectral, that left him prone to the wiles of the world precisely because he was open to unseen forces like some kind of medium or a thaumaturge.

\*\*\*

Jim saw centaurs at the Orontes River in Hama, Syria. As Jim sat on the riverbank drinking tea and watching the sun begin its descent into the underworld, seven men on horseback rode in from the desert. Their white Bedouin tunics were dusty and brown, and their faces were the color of dirty pennies. Together, they trotted out into the river, then onto a spit of land where they undressed. Jim watched their naked bodies, bronzed brown and lean, as they washed themselves and then their garments. They then turned to their horses, leading them into the river to cool and wash them with river-splashes. Then, in the universal play of boys, the men began to splash one another. First one, then two, then all—they mounted their horses and loped in the water, splashing one another, naked and unashamed. A horse's mane became a man's torso and a man's legs, lost in the water, became a horse's legs as man became horse and horse became man. And thus centaurs were born. They were glorious-majestic man-beasts. It was mythology brought to life. It was the birth of gods.

Then, in a murmur as though collectively recalling they were in fact men with men's work to do, they all promptly rode out of the water, dismounted, and dressed, putting cool wet tunics on newly clean bodies, and the gods became men again and rode away (Baker 1962–1963, p. 90). In 1955, less than a year later, Jim completed an untitled painting in hungry hues of deep burnt orange depicting abstract figures striding before sunset yellows that evoke the silhouettes of men and horses rising out of shades of the cool, pale blue waters of the Orontes, from whose banks Jim had once seen centaurs.

From Syria, the group traveled to Iran. On the way, Virginia began vomiting and having fainting spells. In Tehran, they discovered that she was pregnant. It was 1954, David and Virginia's family name was well known, and they were only just on their honeymoon. The child was perchance conceived out of wedlock. Although nothing was ever said, David and Virginia flew back to America three days later.

Down one driver, the caravan pressed on to Northern Iran and the town of Gonbad-e Qābus, where there stood a 200-foot tower that pierced the sky like a spear. Built between 1006–1007 from tan baked-bricks, ten-sided, and 50 feet around with a conical top, it marks

the grave of Qābus, the most famous of the dynasty of Ziyarid rulers. The legend is that Qābus's body once rested on display in a glass coffin that hung suspended from chains anchored at the top of the tower. If this was ever true, neither chains, body, nor glass coffin remain.

In his interview with Richard Brown Baker, Jim recalled the tower in wonder. However, he neglected the fact that Qābus was a tyrannical ruler, focusing instead on Qābus the poet. Jim recalled, "The tower was, I guess, around a hundred and fifty, or two hundred feet high, all of brick with a pointed, conical top and inside, suspended on a chain in a glass coffin was the poet...it was an extraordinary monument built for a poet instead of an emperor or a general." When Baker asked who built it, Jim answered, "Perhaps the monarch...but it's an extraordinary monument to a man such as this" (Baker 1962–1963, p. 96). The "man such as this" that Jim was referring to was a poet. However, the tower was in fact commissioned by the warlord Qābus himself and he supervised its construction, overseeing its completion in his lifetime.

While Qābus was indeed a respected writer and calligrapher, he was first and foremost a ruthless ruler of the Ziyarid dynasty that controlled the ancient Caspian territories. It is therefore revealing that Jim recalls this soaring brick monument that is more like a spear than a kalam, the traditional instrument of the Muslim calligrapher, as an homage to a poet, and not a warrior-king. It seems, for Jim, there were enough memorials honoring warriors and kings—death and power. What the world needed were more monuments to poets, painters, and performers, because for Jim, it was the artists who truly advanced the spirit of the age.

As a testament to this conviction, shortly after visiting the tower Jim got arrested for taking photographs of mosques and mausoleums.<sup>4</sup> After visiting Gonbad-e Qābus, Jim and the rest of group traveled further east toward the Afghanistan boarder. They had been advised by Iranian tribal leaders and local guides not to go into Afghanistan since it was "so wild and primitive and barbaric" (Baker 1962–1963, p. 97). However, the art and architecture native to that region of northeastern Iran near the Afghan border was so stunning that Jim could not resist. Non-Muslims were not allowed into the great glittering mosques of Bojnurd, Tus, and Mashhad, with their brilliant golden domes that shown like fantastical islands amidst seas of lapis lazuli tiles.

Jim was so irresistibly drawn to this beguiling splendor that he violated Islamic religious and Iranian civil law and entered a Mosque to photograph it. He hungered to preserve it so that he might later revisit it, cherish it, and remake it. The same boy who refused to paint his neighbors' lake house sought to preserve in photographic splendor the mosques of Iran so that he might later remake them in paint by the light of his imagination. Jim risked imprisonment in an Iranian jail to capture that sacred beauty—and he was promptly arrested.

Jim did not know Arabic or the local tribal dialect, thus he had no idea what was happening to him. He must have been absolutely terrified. He was like a sparrow that has flown inside a house, and not understanding the very idea of inside, he exhausted himself crying and flapping about with no hope of escape. The Iranian coup d'état of 1953 was less than a year old, and young Americans imprisoned in Iran at that time could simply be disappeared, never to be heard from again. However, Jim was fortunate that Cecil, the linguist, was able to explain to the local authorities that he was simply a naïve tourist and that it would not happen again. Henry presumably smoothed the edges with a generous bribe or two, as just days later they crossed into Afghanistan with Jim in tow, embarrassed and wings clipped, but nonetheless among their migrating herd.

\*\*\*

In Afghanistan Jim noticed that Cecil was starting to crack up. No one in the group had ever met Cecil before he joined them for the trip, and he was slightly older than all of them. He had served in WWII and was a trained linguistic. Meanwhile, they were young 20-somethings flitting about the Near East and having the adventure of a lifetime. Thus, they never shared a natural comradery with Cecil and conflict was inevitable. In fact,

Henry had wanted to leave Cecil back in Tehran but Cecil “talked him into [it] and cried and pleaded and everything else that he wanted to go on and continue the trip. So Henry let him”. However, by the time they got to Afghanistan, Cecil was regularly “crying and having fits” (Baker 1962–1963, pp. 98–99). He was set to completely lose it.

Jim recalls that Cecil felt he was being taken advantage of. While the rest of the group was out taking in the art and culture, Cecil was merely their translator, talking Jim out jail and ordering their food. For Jim, and presumably for the rest of the group, the trip was a feast of art and beauty. In contrast, for Cecil, it was work. He was on the job.

For Jim, the magnificence of the Mosques, the studied gracefulness of the painted Persian miniatures, and the soaring monuments to poets, more than made up for the flat tires, flea-ridden hotels, and weeks without showers. However, for Cecil, it was too much. He did not, could not, give himself over to the art, to the beauty, and let himself be refreshed and renewed by it, because he was working. From museums to tea houses, he was their translator—explaining wall plaques and ordering their dinner—never relaxing into the experience. As Jim recounts, “[Cecil] was taking the idea that he was being used... his idea was we were just sort of picking his brain—he was being used... Well, [Cecil] was slowly deteriorating his relationships with everybody in the group. And this was unfortunate in Afghanistan... and it was here [Kabul] that Cecil finally cracked up completely” (Baker 1962–1963, pp. 98–99). Reflecting on what transpired nearly 60 years later, Ilse diplomatically recalled, “Yes, yes... I wonder if he had a slight nervous... Well... So maybe the whole thing was just a little too much. I’d forgotten this bit. That he did something strange” (Girard 2014b).

For Jim, the trip was a revelation of the ancient commingling of art and religion, beauty and divinity. On the contrary, for Cecil, there was no time for such esoteric art appreciation. For him, the trip was work. In his mind, he was an unpaid personal translator for spoiled rich kids. The heat was grueling, the roads were little more than corrugated goat trails, the distances were enormous, when it rained, the Jeeps bogged down in the mud, and when they were not staying in flea infested hotels, they were sleeping in them. To top it all off, Farouk contracted syphilis, and Cecil had to give him penicillin shots in his backside three times a day as he was the only one who understood the doctor’s instructions.<sup>5</sup> It was all too much for him.

The day they arrived in Kabul, Henry and Jim went to the bazar where Jim bought a rebab. Eager to play this ancient stringed instrument, the two returned to the hotel where Jim was sharing a room with Cecil. As he approached the room, Jim smelled smoke and heard manic singing. When he opened the door, he could not believe what he saw. Jim recalls:

It was a wooden hotel—and [Cecil] was building a bonfire out of letters, he was singing cowboy songs and sitting stark nude in the middle of the room building this bonfire on the wooden floor. When we tried to speak to him he no longer recognized us at all, so Henry had to rush out and try and get the American Consulate—they came over and then had to get people in the hospital to take him away in a straitjacket... [it was] a complete crack up, [a] complete mental break up, you know. (Baker 1962–1963, pp. 99–100)

Over the course of the past month, Jim had watched Cecil retreat into himself, interacting with the others only when called upon to translate a road sign or assist in a purchase. He was a well-trained servant, present and prepared to work when called upon, but otherwise, just another piece of luggage. He was functional, but completely hollowed out. The result was a dissociative mental collapse followed by catatonia. Jim regarded this as the inevitable consequence of demeaning work that outstripped the spiritually levitating and liberating efficacy of beauty and art; all that is left is a functionary, a shell, an empty box. Jim registered Cecil’s crackup as a warning flare shot into the darkness of his subconscious.

Following Cecil’s breakdown, the group took another day in Kabul to regroup before embarking on what would be the final leg of their journey. However, with Cecil gone, Henry and Farouk were the only ones left that could drive the Jeeps. And yet, now with

syphilis, Farouk decided to return to Egypt, leaving only Jim, Marilee, Ilse, and Henry to venture on into India. Henry arranged for two of the Jeeps to be put in storage, and the motley gang sojourned on into India in the last of their flat-nosed Jeeps.

\*\*\*

From Luxor to Kabul, Jim had witnessed first-hand the primordial fusion of art and religion. From the incantatory paintings adorning the tomb walls of the Pharaohs where he studied and sketched for months, to the mosques of Iran that he risked imprisonment to see and capture on film, Jim's Romantic religion of beauty was being built one sculpture, one mural, one painting at a time. And like the rise and extrados of an archway, the capstone of this theo-aesthetic would be set in India.

When asked what part of the trip made the biggest existential and artistic impact on him, Jim answered without hesitation, "I think India. Of all of them—the carving and art of India has had a longer and carrying power... Certain things about it, the very sensuous forms which go in with the way of thinking, too—I mean, their religion and the relationship [between them]..." When pressed to explain, he elaborated, saying, "What they celebrated in forms is vitality of fecundity...the great sort of joy in life and sensuality and growth...this Indian art had a tremendous effect on me... [because] to understand the art you have to experience the country... And get to know what the religions mean and what the people are involved in, in this way" (Baker 1962–1963, pp. 104–6). In short, for Jim, art and religion ultimately coalesced into a single expression in India.

In India, Jim toured the Ajanta caves where he marveled, awestruck, at the great murals and reliefs of the Buddha and his many past lives. He got lost in the Ellora cave complex, raptured by the elaborately adorned temple walls featuring complex carvings of Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain gods and myths: dancing Shiva, the Goddess Ganga, the man-lion Narasimha, and the fearsome Kali, with her lolling tongue and garland of decapitated heads. He took all of this with him, and in the years that followed he completed a series of swirling abstractions in rich earth tones punctuated by occasional violent bursts of blood orange and Indanthrone blue bearing titles such as *Naga* (1960), *Kali-Durga* (1960), *Devi* (1961), *Approach to Ajanta* (1961), and *Brahmaputra* (1961).<sup>6</sup>

Completed shortly after his return to the States, these works are a testament to the powerful and lasting impact the art and religion, and the religion of art, he discovered in his travels, and in India in particular. All of that energy was swirling inside him, until finally this personal union of art and religion cohered in the northeastern Indian village of Kalimpong when he spent ten days with a living Buddha.

\*\*\*

In Bombay the group received a telegram from Kesang in Bhutan. Kesang explained that monsoons had completely wiped out many of the already treacherous mountainous passes that led into Bhutan. However, they were welcome to stay in the official Royal Residence in India, the Bhutan House, which was located in Kalimpong, India just outside Darjeeling and only four hours from the Bhutanese boarder. There, they could wait and see if the flooding might abate, allowing them to finally make their way to Punakha and the King and Queen of Bhutan. Two days and two flights later they were welcomed to Bhutan House by Kesang's younger brother Dudjom Jigdral Yeshe Dorje, who was a living Buddha and an incarnation of the 9th century Vajra master Padmasambhava, who is said to have introduced Buddhism to Tibet.

Dudjom Rinpoche, as he was known, was the Supreme Head of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism. He had been living in Lhasa but fled to Bhutan House following the Chinese invasion of Tibet. Reflecting on the shock of sharing quarters with an enlightened being, Jim recalled, "we were walking up the streets and we saw people falling on their faces every time they saw Rinpoche [*sic*]. Naturally, we were curious, and it turned out he is a living Buddha, he's one of the 67 incarnations of the Buddha" (Baker 1962–1963, p. 102). For nearly two weeks, Jim spent every day living with and listening to the teachings of this living Buddha.

Dudjom Rinpoche had long black hair that he wore tied back in a knot that perched atop the collar of his saffron and gold monk's robe. Seated on a throne-like chair draped in burgundy and gold fabric and wearing dark tinted glasses, Dudjom Rinpoche read from the loose-leaf sutras of the secret Mantrayana teachings of Padmasambhava. Speaking in Tibetan, his voice was low and hushed as Jim listened to the call and response of Dudjom Rinpoche and his translator.

It is impossible to reconstruct Dudjom Rinpoche's teachings from that time. However, in the Preface to his translation of Dudjom Rinpoche's substantial two-volume tome *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, the Scottish Tibetologist Gyurme Dorje observes that "these treatises were composed during the years immediately following his arrival in India as a refugee" (Rinpoche 1991, p. XXIX). This would have been precisely when Jim and his companions arrived in Kalimpong. The two-volume work was in fact Dudjom Rinpoche's attempt to safeguard the history and teachings of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism in the face of the existential threat posed by the cultural devastation wrought by the Chinese invasion of Tibet. Or, as Dudjom Rinpoche himself more diplomatically wrote, his work represented an attempt to preserve the Nyingma school of thought during a "period of great uncertainty and instability" (Rinpoche 1991, p. 885).

Given that Dudjom Rinpoche began compiling and composing the fundamentals and history of the Nyingma school immediately after arriving in India, it stands to reason that his teachings during this time would be reflected in those writings. However, that two-volume set would eventually run to nearly 1000 pages of extremely complex esoteric Buddhist teachings. Yet, without parsing the intricacies of the Nyingma philosophy, there is an overarching theme that runs throughout Dudjom Rinpoche's approach to the Nyingma school. Dudjom Rinpoche regarded the entire Nyingma school and his teachings on Nyingma philosophy and history as a "mandala gift". Additionally, one of his regular tasks at the time—and throughout his adult life—was to bless thangkas, sacred Buddhist paintings produced on cloth or silk.

Dudjom Rinpoche's understanding of mandalas and mandala gifts was far more expansive than the colorful, intricate geometric circular (sand)paintings representing the interior and exterior cosmos that were used as visual aids (yantras) for mediation pursuant to enlightenment. However, he did use these mandalas in his practice, and mandalas and thangkas were an essential feature in his teachings as well as a constant presence in the daily ritual practices that Jim observed while in Kalimpong. Moreover, given the difficulty translating the filigreed complexities of Nyingma philosophy, Jim's primary exposure to and comprehension of Dudjom Rinpoche's teachings would have been visual. Thus, after months of absorbing the religious art of North Africa, the Middle East, and India, Jim's journey concluded with the mountaintop experience of a living Buddha's mandala gift of art made sacred and the sacred as art.

After nearly two weeks in Kalimpong taking in the teachings of Dudjom Rinpoche, it became apparent that floods had absolutely destroyed all routes in or out of Bhutan and they could not be restored until after monsoon season ended. With that, the trip was over. They would not reach Bhutan. Imagining Jim's disappointment, Richard Brown Baker asked, "So the ultimate objective of your journey was never achieved then?" Reflecting on the real objective of his journey, the purpose that was ultimately fulfilled in Kalimpong, Jim replied, "[A]ctually, of course, [the objective of] our journey was to see all these things..." (Baker 1962–1963, p. 103). That objective had indeed been accomplished.

Over the next two months, traveling by way of Milan, Paris, and London, Jim made his way back to the United States, arriving in New York City in December of 1954. He was a changed man. The intuition he left with had blossomed into a flower of certainty—art was sacred, and artists were prophets.

\*\*\*

Back in New York, Jim's life plummeted from the heights of his charged ecstatic vision of the transcendence of art and beauty. Abstract Expressionism in New York, while

not completely drowned, was sinking fast. Paintings like Jim's were earnest anchors of abstraction in a rising sea of conspicuous consumption that prized shiny new baubles and gewgaws that floated on the cultural surface and scoffed at pretenses to arcane depth. Jim left New York at the crest of Abstract Expressionism's popularity and returned to find the wave was crashing.

Early in 1955, fresh off his adventures overseas and on a quasi-religious high, Jim went to the Roko gallery, where he had his first solo show before leaving for Egypt. There he found that the owner, Michael Freilich, had only sold one of his pieces—and he had sold it cheap. When asked if he was pleased with the sale, Jim replied:

Well, I was pleased until I realized what the size of the painting was and what sort of price that he must have sold it for, and I gradually realized that it seemed like rather a ridiculous... so... evidently he sold [it] for one hundred dollars, but it was a painting that was quite large and it hadn't seemed to me that I'd left a price... that low on the thing. (Baker 1962–1963, p. 123)

Thus, as early as 1955 the market for second-generation Abstract Expressionism was drying up.

Disappointed and angered by the slight, Jim officially quit the Roko Gallery that day—although he let Mr. Freilich hold on to some of the work he had left with the gallery before his Fulbright trip. Jim would later describe the gallery as little more than a “frame shop [with a] rather grubby, tacky atmosphere.” With something akin to the self-righteousness of the newly converted, he could not, would not, stay with a storefront frame shop that, to his mind, ran a gallery as a mere side business. By the end of 1955, Jim decided “there was no point in even keeping the old work there, and [he] withdrew everything from the gallery” (Baker 1962–1963, pp. 124, 127).

Unfortunately, Jim had nowhere else to go. No one would show his work and no one would represent him. He tried to show Kodachrome slides of his work to Eleanor Ward at the Stable Gallery in the hopes of securing a show, but she refused to even see him. She actually lost the slides he left for her to review. Commenting on yet another snub, Richard Brown Baker remarked “[Y]ou were a bit miffed, I imagine... it seems that your *amour propre* as an artist must have been offended” (Baker 1962–1963, p. 147). Jim brushed off the obvious insult as the price of doing business as an artist in New York City, but he was clearly hurt. Jim was a nobody whose slides weren't even worth keeping track of. His *amour propre* was indeed bruised, and all the more so as the same Eleanor Ward would showcase his own Brillo boxes in her gallery less than a decade later—albeit under Warhol's moniker.

Short on money and long on hunger and a place to sleep, Jim rented another cold-water flat, just as he had when he first came to New York. Jim was thus again without a job and living without heat, water, a shower, or a bathroom, to say nothing of a gallery, representation, or a paycheck. Again, he was alone and on the precipice of poverty. To avoid complete destitution, he managed to get his old job back at Egmont Arnes designing packages for precisely the kind of culture-candy that would soon leap from grocery stores to galleries, stunning the artworld and sending Jim's life skidding into a ditch. When asked if his job at Egmont Arnes gave him any “spiritual satisfaction” or sense of “mission accomplished”, Jim adamantly replied, “None whatsoever. It is appalling the limitation of even the mental capacity” (Baker 1962–1963, p. 169). Every day designing brands and boxes was a fresh misery.

Over the next few years Jim found himself right back where he was before he left for Egypt, but without the youthful giddy glee of having his first solo show at the Roko, the hopeful promise of gallery representation, or the warm esteem of having his work in an exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Annual. In the fast-paced artworld of New York City, those small accomplishments were eons ago and long forgotten. Tellingly, while at a fashionable upscale party attended by several members of NYU's Fine Arts Institute, a young woman who worked at the Guggenheim approached Jim and asked, “What does it feel like to come back and find that the sort of work that you're doing is

completely passé here in New York...?" (Baker 1962–1963, p. 136). While Jim refused to accept this new aesthetic reality, the comment must have landed like a sucker-punch.

\*\*\*

Between 1956 and 1959 Jim had three reviewed exhibitions of note. The first two shows were at the Parma Gallery and the third was at the Graham Gallery. Importantly, each review emphatically described Jim as an Abstract Expressionist. The first review appeared in the *New York Times* in November of 1956 and described Jim's paintings as a "substantial contribution to abstract expressionism" and noted that "Egypt is his theme" (Preston 1956, p. 43). The second review appeared in *ARTnews* in March of 1958 and described Jim's work as "standard expressionism" and the subject of his "whirls of paint" as a "romantic Arabian Night's conception of the East" (Hale 1958, p. 60). Most pointedly of all, the third review, also in the *New York Times*, declared, "If 'abstract expressionism' means thick paint, a broad impulsive brush and a nostalgia for open spaces, then Mr. Harvey is an abstract expressionist" (Ashton 1959, p. 21).

Thus, in the late 1950s the New York artworld unequivocally considered Jim an Abstract Expressionist who was cultivating his own style as he toiled away in burnt palates of paint dabs and slashes to render the Gods and myths that so inspired him on his trip across the desert. Unfortunately, it was at precisely this time that the artworld literati were decamping from Abstract Expressionism's emotion-laden lands. Increasingly, Jim was an artist without an audience. Nowhere is this more evident than in the series of panel discussions hosted at the Club in December of 1958 and January of 1959 titled "Has The Situation Changed?" The entire series was an implicit condemnation of the creaking ossification and irrelevance of Abstract Expressionism.

The Club was the intellectual epicenter of New York Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s. If the Cedar Tavern was the drunken teenager of Abstract Expressionism, all angst and fistfights, the Club was the slightly less drunk college student, all theory, and late-night philosophizing. Members included Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, Philip Pavia, and many other artists, writers, poets, philosophers, and critics—all stars of varied luminosity in the constellation of Abstract Expressionism. Originally run out of Ibram Lassaw's studio or the Waldorf Cafeteria, by 1949 the founding members had rented a loft at 39th and 8th and started charging membership fees (or booze) to cover rent. As word spread, they began putting together formal talks and panels on Friday nights.

Originally festive laid-back affairs, over the years these Friday night events took on a gravitas that befitted their increasing consequence in the New York artworld. In addition, and tellingly, at a Club panel as early as May 1956, art critic Clement Greenberg declared that gesture painting had become "timid, handsome, second generation...in a bad way" (Greenberg 1956; quoted in Sandler 1978, p. 279). Thus, it was little surprise that by December-January of 1958–59, while the Club's Friday night panel was convened as a query—"Has The Situation Changed?"—the moribund fate of Abstract Expressionism was far from being an open question. It was well on its way to being decisively settled, and with it, Jim's fate and faith. The artist Allan Kaprow said it best when, during one panel session, he stood up and declared:

I am convinced that painting is a bore. So is music, literature, etc., etc. What doesn't bore me is the total destruction of ideas that have any discipline. Instead of painting, move your arms; instead of music, make noise. I am giving up painting and all of the arts by doing everything and anything. (quoted in Sandler 2003, p. 231)

Abstract Expressionism had become a *school* of painting, an uninspired discipline to be taught to novice painters. It was a crumbling edifice that needed to be toppled and like the horns at Jericho, Allan Kaprow's declaration set the already fragile walls crumbling.

\*\*\*

Over the next two years Jim's work received blandly positive reviews. However, importantly, in each review he was invariably and seemingly purposefully identified as an Abstract Expressionist, a label that had become an artworld codeword for hackneyed



and “academic” in the worst sense of the word. The soul, the passion, and the fire that had once burned through the canvases of Pollack, de Kooning, and Hoffman had been tamed and made teachable. Like Germanic folklore that was once told to terrify, Abstract Expressionism had become little more than moralizing fairytales. Thus for many, being labeled an Abstract Expressionist was an aesthetic scarlet letter that only grew deeper crimson with each passing season (See for example: (Preston 1960, p. X15; O’Doherty 1961a, p. 23; O’Doherty 1961b, p. X20)).

Jim and Andy stayed in touch after their initial meeting at the costume party in Chicago. While the two ran in different social circles, they were both part of the relatively small (though rapidly growing) New York art scene of the 1950s and early 60s. Thus, Jim knew exactly what Andy and his fellow Pop Artists were creating in the storefronts and galleries of New York City.

On 21 February 1963, Richard Brown Baker pushed Jim on the artistic merit of Pop Art, claiming that some of Pop Artists “rise above literal rendition into a re-ordering that has elements of creativity in it.” Jim decidedly replied, “Yes, but I have seen very few that do anything other than just render the back of a soap box...” (Baker 1962–1963, p. 169). Despite the early date, given that Jim and Andy knew each other, it is entirely possible that Jim was speaking of his own soap box and Andy’s copies. Regardless, Jim refused to acknowledge the artistic merit of either his box or Andy’s.

In fact, after Baker purchased Lichtenstein’s now-famous painting *Blam*, depicting an exploding airplane in his signature cartoon style, Baker recalled that “in [Harvey’s] view, [it] is no more than an enlarged commercial design...To my claim that Lichtenstein has transcended his idea, that his picture has an overall crispness and serenity, and that its black lines set up visual vibrations, Jim would concede nothing” (quoted in Farrell 2011, p. 85). Despite the fact that the artworld was pivoting away from the rarified air of Abstract Expressionism and toward the deceptively banal figurations of Pop, a turn Jim was all too aware of, he remained firm and would concede nothing.

Jim refused to accept that the majesty and mystery he encountered in the desert art of tombs and temples and the mandalas of Kalimpong could possibly be contained and conveyed in the mechanically reproducible tchotchkes of consumer culture. To his mind, they lacked the soul—the spirit—that animated true art. Referring to Warhol directly, Jim plainly explained, “I can’t possibly relate Andy Warhol in comparison not only as a painter...but as a person to de Kooning or Kline or Rothko or any of these people...” Excitedly getting to the heart of the matter, he continued, “I feel that there’s a certain sort of sincerity to something that is—again, this sounds romantic, but it isn’t—to pure form, to color, to beauty that this other movement [Pop Art] totally—well, it is anti-that—I mean, they come in to be against it. It is an anti-art movement...” (Baker 1962–1963, p. 139).

\*\*\*

For Jim, Pop Art was an inversion—a perversion—of his Romantic ideal of “true” art. His entire sense of self—his core identity—was tied up with pursuing this vision of art, and for him, that vision’s truest expression was in Abstract Expressionism. He sincerely believed in the purity of form, color, and beauty. But as previously noted, Irving Sandler was right when he observed that, “when irony is fashionable, high seriousness seems alien—even laughable” (Sandler 2009, p. 215). And people were laughing at Jim.

The ascendancy of Pop Art and its anti-aesthetic destroyed Jim. It completely wrecked him, leaving him to question everything. Ironically, this is the same time that Jim created the Brillo box. Thus, just as he was falling apart artistically—spiritually—he was doing some of his best design work. Perhaps it was precisely because he was so spiritually drained that he was able to complete such a masterful, yet to his mind, spiritless, commercial design.

Jim created the Brillo box in 1961. The Brillo company was losing out to S.O.S. Soap Pads and desperately needed a new look. The old box was red, white, and black, and in the Cold War-infused 1960s, red and black smacked of communism. Jim swapped the black for blue and turned the box into a red, white, and blue banner for the American way. He dropped the old slab serif font of the “B” in Brillo and made all the letters sans serif. The

new clean sweep of “Brillo” and the red water brackets referenced the product’s purpose by evoking scrubbing, shine, and dishwasher. And making the “i” and the “o” red while leaving the rest of the letters blue allowed the “i” stand out like a stick-figure while leaving the “o” to do the work of “Oh!”—like a surprise. However, it was not too obvious or over the top. Rather, it let the customer discover the references, like a little achievement. In short, it was a brilliant design. Tragically, Jim never accepted that it was a work of art. To him, it was nothing more than a well-designed advert for soap pads befitting only stockrooms and store shelves.

\*\*\*

While creating the Brillo box by day, Jim continued to paint by night, and in early 1962 he was invited to have a solo show at the famous Galleria del Milione in Milan, Italy. The Galleria del Milione was one of the oldest and most well-respected galleries in Europe. Founded in 1930 and bombed in WWII, it endured. A major Picasso exhibition in 1949 put the gallery on top, and exhibitions of Yves Kline and Marc Chagall further secured the galleries’ reputation. The Galleria del Milione was a place that collectors, critics, and journalists paid attention to, and if Jim had a successful show there, it would secure his place back in New York. A blessing conferred by Europe would stamp Jim with the regal seal of the old world. Thus, his exhibition at the Milione was set to be his springboard into the pantheon of the contemporary artworld.

The first sign that the show was going to be a failure was printed in the exhibition brochure itself. Translated from the Italian, the opening lines read, “For some time alarmist rumors have swirled about the fate of action painting. These rumors have been accompanied by figurative calls for, if not order, then at least for conscious disorder or an accumulation of the visual certainties of objective experience” (Russoli 1962).

The first lines of the catalog copy for Jim’s big European breakout show called into question the very fate and validity of his style of abstract action painting. Moreover, it countered with a call for the concrete figuration of visual certainties. That call for “visual certainties of objective experience” is a semi-oblique reference to the specific, mundane, everyday objects that Pop Art took as its primary subject. The brochure itself was nothing short of a slap in the face. As such, from opening night the tone was set—the avantgarde had moved on and what was on display at the Milione was the left-behind rearguard. The catalog said it in black and white for all to read. One can only hope that Jim could not read Italian and did not ask for a translation.

The Milan show was in November of 1962. Just three months later, in February of 1963, Jim had another exhibition in New York at the Graham Gallery. In a review of the paintings included in that show, Irving Sandler noted that, “A number suggest landscapes recalled in the act of painting. Several others are based on figures, composed of massive forms. One writhing crucifixion was inspired by an Easter procession in Seville, and four black, red, and brown canvases, by bullfights” (Sandler 1962, p. 11). Comparing the list of titles cataloged for the 1962 exhibit in Milan to Sandler’s descriptions of the paintings in the 1963 exhibit in New York, it is clear that few, if any, of Jim’s paintings sold at the Milione. They were all still available for show and for sale in February of 1963.

In short, the Milan show was a bust. Jim’s big break broke. And like salt in the wound, less than five pages after Sandler’s *ARTnews* review of Jim’s 1963 Graham Gallery show, art critic Gene Swenson offered a singing review of Warhol’s show at the Stable Gallery, touting the beauty of his *Campbell’s Soup Cans* and *Marilyn Monroe* series. Jim was pouring his heart and soul onto writhing canvases of crucifixions, while Andy was copying soup can labels and celebrity headshots and the artworld was loving it. The aesthetic pendulum had swung, and Jim got hit.

\*\*\*

In an artist’s statement from this time, Jim described how, while traveling through the Near East, he fell in love with the desert landscapes and the art of India. He writes that, for him, they, “seem universal in their concepts... It is a spiritual thing that reflects constantly man’s presence in its bare simplicity...It is what is everlasting in us...”<sup>7</sup> Jim believed that

art should possess what the theologian Paul Tillich called a “depth dimension” that arises out of the interplay between form, content, and style, and speaks to divinity. This depth dimension transcends the constituent parts that make up the whole in a rhythmic intimation of the divine that trucks in the beautiful and sublime. At its best, art should be beautiful, terrifying, or terrifyingly beautiful. It should harken to sex, violence, and the gods. This was the art Jim believed in.

Jim held that art should evoke—and be evoked by—the universal, the spiritual, and the everlasting. Meanwhile, what Warhol was offering with his flat, screen-printed celebrations of commodity fetishism was to Jim’s mind, the exact opposite. Warhol’s jejune work was particular, profane, and temporal. It was a fad. Recalling the Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky’s writing *On the Spiritual in Art*, Jim believed that Warhol’s soup cans and his pop pinups lacked any “inner necessity” (Baker 1962–1963, p. 144). There was nothing behind them, nothing driving them. They lacked any sense of compulsion. They simply had no reason to be. Jim was thus completely flabbergasted when, a year later, he and Joan Washburn attended the opening of Warhol’s exhibit at the Stable Gallery on 21 April 1964.

\*\*\*

After waiting in line to get in, Jim and Joan stepped into the white cube Stable Gallery to discover identical copies of Jim’s Brillo boxes stacked floor to ceiling like a grocery store warehouse. Visitors had to carefully step over and maneuver around boxes while winding through narrow labyrinthine pathways demarcated by ceiling-high walls of boxes on either side. Jim was utterly gob smacked. He leaned over to Joan and whispered, “Oh my God. I designed those” (Gaddy 2007, p. 83).

Jim and Andy chatted that evening at the gallery, however, there is no record of their conversation (Gaddy 2007, p. 83). Nonetheless, it is reasonable to suppose that Jim told Andy he created the Brillo box. This is evidenced by the fact that after the show closed, Andy called Jim and asked if he would be interested in trading one of his boxes for one of Andy’s. Jim agreed, but insisted both boxes were his and neither was a work of art (see Bockris 1990, p. 151).<sup>8</sup> Perhaps this is what they discussed that evening at the Stable Gallery.

One can imagine a tense, yet polite, clash between Harvey’s Romantic idealism and Warhol’s paradoxically airy materialism. A small knot of people gathering round the two artists in anticipation of a schoolyard fight, with whispers rising from the crowd: “He’s the one who actually made the Brillo box”. “Andy just copied it”. “I bet he’s furious!” However, as much as a conflict like this may have been playing out in Jim’s overactive imagination, the two artists appear to have simply exchanged courteous pleasantries, with Jim burying his anger and resentment beneath a placid smile while laughing the whole thing off as a comical lark.

Indeed, in the days that followed Warhol’s *Brillo Box* show, Jim’s friend Marcia Gauger recalls that he told her he thought it was funny. “We all laughed”, she said. “The Brillo boxes...they were funny” (Gauger 2017). And yet shortly after the show, Jim reached out to Henry Girard and asked if could sue Andy (Girard 2014a). Surely both reactions were true. As with the night of the opening, it makes sense that on the outside, Jim would laugh it off and play it cool like it was joke that he was in on. But on the inside, Jim did not think it was funny in the slightest—it was no joke, and if it was, he certainly was not in on it.

In point of fact, shortly after Warhol’s show opened, the Graham Gallery that represented Jim at the time issued a statement on his behalf saying that “while Andy was selling these [boxes] for three hundred dollars, here this poor starving artist James Harvey had to support himself by making commercial things like Brillo boxes” (Bockris 1990, p. 151). Additionally, the design company Stuart and Gunn that paid Jim to make the Brillo box also issued a statement on Jim’s behalf claiming, “It is galling enough for Jim Harvey, an abstract expressionist, to see that a pop artist is running away with the ball, but when the ball happens to be a box designed by Jim Harvey, and Andy Warhol gets the credit for it, well, this makes Jim scream: ‘Andy is running away with my box’” (Gaddy 2007, p. 83).<sup>9</sup>

Jim was furious about the press releases (Harvey 2019). They made him look like a petulant child, complaining that none of the other kids wanted to play with him. He felt

that they were patronizing and paternalistic, representing an anemic apology for Abstract Expressionism in general, and a pathetic plea for sympathy for his art in particular. Jim was right. The press releases made him and the once-feral Abstract Expressionist style he represented look disgruntled, tamed, and declawed. While the demise of Abstract Expressionism was gradual and second and third generation artists such as Jim continued to paint in the gestural style, in hindsight, Andy's *Brillo Box* show at the Stable Gallery marked the death of the movement. Not coincidentally, it is also when Jim started to get sick.

\*\*\*

Jim retreated after the *Brillo Box* show. He felt like a laughingstock and a pariah. *Time* magazine ran a brief blurb on him featuring a photograph of him kneeling in front of one of his abstract paintings while holding a Brillo box (*Time* 1964, p. 24). A month earlier, Arthur Danto published a robust philosophical defense of the aesthetic merit of Warhol's boxes. Danto argued that, whereas Jim's boxes were simple commonplace objects, Warhol had turned the question "what is art?" into art itself, and in so doing, had turned art into philosophy (Danto 1964). For Danto, Warhol's boxes marked the end of art inasmuch as they took the question of their own being *qua* art as their subject and thereby transcended art to become philosophy. In short, Warhol's boxes were philosophy as art and art as philosophy, while Jim's boxes were just boxes.

Jim was swimming against the swelling tide of Pop Art, and from *Time* magazine to academic journals, he was drowning in the wrong kind of publicity. He was the man who made the box that destroyed Abstract Expressionism, wrecked his own artistic career, and ruined his own personal faith in art, all while refusing to even acknowledge the artistic value of the very box he created. It was at this time that he began suffering severe fatigue, body aches, night sweats, and an unrelenting low-grade fever. Perhaps triggered by the stress, a long latent illness was beginning to bloom inside him. Jim desperately needed to leave New York City to find reprieve from the ever-present reminders of his nauseating failure.

\*\*\*

Upon returning from their trek across the Middle East and India over a decade earlier, Henry and Ilse had gotten married. By 1964 they were living on the Girard family's palatial estate outside Paris. Henry first heard of Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* when Jim consulted him about suing Andy, and thus Henry was aware that Jim was spiraling. Out of admirable concern and pity, Henry invited Jim to visit he and Ilse in Paris, and even proposed another trip across the deserts of the Middle and Near East in attempt to once again reach Bhutan. Although this proposal was presumably largely an attempt to lift Jim's flagging spirits, it was precisely what Jim needed: to return to the source of his inspiration, the wellspring of his faltering aesthetic faith, the ancient gods in paint and stone that formed the foundation of his now-crumbling religion of art. Jim was a prophet who had lost his faith and needed to return to the source of his conviction for reaffirmation. Above all, Jim ached to know that of all the things he had created, he would be remembered for more than a soap box.

Jim arrived in Paris on 18 February 1965, and based on the stamps in his passport, he had already secured travel visas for India and Nepal while in New York City. Additionally, in a letter he sent to his brother on 10 March, he explained that he hoped to "join Henry in Bhutan".<sup>10</sup> Jim clearly had visions of retracing the path of his first desert adventure. Like an addict chasing the elusive first high, Jim was chasing the source of his lost faith. Tragically, he never again saw the ancient deserts of Persia, sat on the banks of the Orontes, or got lost in the caves of Ajanta. Jim never made it to Bhutan.

Shortly after arriving in Paris, Jim began complaining of stomach pains. Because he had to be immunized to travel to India and Bhutan, Henry and Ilse took him to the American Hospital in Paris for a general checkup and to receive the necessary inoculations. The next day, while awaiting confirmation that he was fit to travel, Jim was visiting the Louvre when a sharp spasm of pain erupted in his guts and he collapsed on the Louvre's central plaza. He was being rung out like towel. The pain was unbearable, and he thought

his appendix had burst. Doubled over, he managed to hail a cab to take him to the American Hospital in Paris.

In the emergency room, Jim was in agony and his stomach was nightmarishly distended and rock hard. The doctors initially thought it was tumor and told him he likely needed surgery immediately. However, an X-ray revealed it was an enlarged spleen and the doctors explained that it was likely from a virus. But it was not a virus. It was blast stage acute myelogenous leukemia.

\*\*\*

Only two letters separate the Latin words “miracle” and “misery”—*mirabilis* and *miserabilis*—and only one letter separates the Latin words for beauty and war—*bellus* and *bellum*. In the hospital in Paris, Jim was teetering on the precipice between miracle and misery, beauty and war—and no one told him.

In a letter to Jim’s brother Bill dated 7 March 1965, Jim’s doctor in Paris, Stewart H. Jones M.D., explained “As you probably know, myelogenous leukemia is an incurable eventually fatal disease... Most authorities feel that treatment does little to prolong life...” Terrifyingly, Dr. Jones continued, “Your brother does not know the diagnosis and it is probably just as well to keep him in the dark as long as possible.” He follows this with a handwritten postscript that reads, “If you call please don’t say anything to upset your brother. He doesn’t know the diagnosis”.<sup>11</sup> His doctors lied to him. His nurses lied to him. The technicians lied to him. Everyone lied to him. While he had once been teetering, he was now falling into misery and war.

After weeks in the hospital, Jim was released and went to the Girard estate to recuperate. In a letter to Jim’s brother Bill, Henry explained, “Jim is resting now and does not know what is the matter and is in fact looking forward to continuing his journey as soon as possible...It therefore seems most unwise to inform Jim of the nature of his illness. He can be told that somewhere on his trips East he has contracted something...He need never know more”.<sup>12</sup> Misery and war. Jim died just twelve weeks later.

On 16 July 1965, the *New York Times* ran Jim’s obituary. The short remembrance begins, “James Harvey, 36, An Abstract Artist”, and concludes by noting that “In 1953 and 1954, he studied in Egypt on a Fulbright fellowship” (*Obituaries*, p. 27). Jim thus died an abstract artist who, in 1953 and 1954, in the deserts of the Middle and Near East and in the monsoon beaten Bhutan House in Kalimpong, discovered for himself a transcendent truth of art. Tragically, he lost that truth in a box and died before he could empty it out and rediscover it.

## 5. Conclusions

To end at the beginning, although the art critic Arthur Danto disparaged Jim as “failed second-generation abstract expressionist” (Danto 1992, p. 154), 36 years after Warhol’s *Brillo Box* show when he was asked about underrated artists, Danto replied, “Another forgotten artist is James Harvey, the man who created the Brillo box that Warhol copied. He was going to have a brilliant career as an Abstract Expressionist but died in his early 30s. I’d like to revive him” (quoted in Rigney and Rowland 2000).

Perhaps that is what this essay is: an attempt to revive Jim Harvey couched as an experiment in narrative theology. After all, it was the philosophical story that Arthur Danto spun that secured Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* in the pantheon of art history, whilst leaving Harvey’s Brillo boxes on the scrap heap. A year before Jim died, Danto himself rightly observed, “What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo Box is a certain theory of art” (Danto 1964, p. 581). In short, it is the story that makes the difference.

As noted at the outset of this essay, the narrative theologian James McClendon claimed that people organize their lives around root metaphors that give their lives meaning. He called these metaphors “images”, by which he meant “metaphors whose content has been enriched by a previous, prototypical employment so that their application causes the object to which they are applied to be seen in multiply-reflected light; they are traditional or

canonical metaphors, and as such, they bear the content of faith itself” (McClendon 1974, pp. 96–97). They are the prisms that illuminate a life’s meaning.

Importantly, the intent of the foregoing has not been to redeem the art of Jim Harvey—though as Danto observed, Jim’s work arguably merits reconsideration. Rather, this unfolding of Jim’s story has been an attempt to discover the metaphor that bore the content of his faith—the meaning of his life. Thus, as McClendon proposed and as Danto implied, this has been an attempt to revive the story of Jim Harvey as viewed through the prism of the metaphor “artists are prophets” that so powerfully colored his life. The tragic irony is that Jim was right: Andy Warhol was undoubtedly an artist–prophet forecasting what was to come and who would be left behind. Jim’s tragic and luminous life is a powerful story of one such a beautiful failure that was left behind.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- 1 Written by Jim Harvey in a letter to his parents, courtesy of Bill Harvey.
- 2 Copied into Jim’s sketch book circa 1950, courtesy of Bill Harvey.
- 3 These travels were determined by examining the visa stamps in Jim’s passports, the postmarks on letters he sent to his family, comments made in his Smithsonian Interview, and fragmentary notes in his journals and sketch books. All of Jim’s personal effects were made available to the author by his brother, Bill Harvey.
- 4 The journal of Marliee Mattas notes of this portion of the trip simply, “Jim and Ilse arrested for photography” (p. 3). In the Smithsonian Interview, Jim recalls of Mashhad, “we couldn’t enter these tombs; we could only see from the outside, we could see them from the outside, we could see them from the doorways, we could photograph the doorways, but we couldn’t step foot inside the tombs or the mausoleums at all, or the mosques” (p. 97). Reading these two documents together, it appears Jim did step foot inside to take a photograph. Additionally, Bill Harvey and Henry Girard both recalled a time that Jim and Henry were arrested in Russia. Both Bill and Henry’s recollections of this event are vague. This Russian arrest likely took place during another trip across the Middle and Near East taken by Jim and Henry in 1957. Unfortunately, this trip is beyond the scope of the present project. However, recollections and records of that trip further confirm Jim’s enthrallment with the religious art of these regions.
- 5 According to Ilse, this task eventually fell to her, as she had a gentler touch than Cecil.
- 6 From the notebooks of Jim Harvey, courtesy of Bill Harvey.
- 7 Artist’s Statement included in a resume by Jim Harvey, courtesy of Bill Harvey.
- 8 This was confirmed by Bill Harvey during an interview with the author in 2019.
- 9 This was further confirmed by Bill Harvey in an interview with the author in 2019.
- 10 Passport and letter, both courtesy of Bill Harvey.
- 11 Letter from Stewart H. Jones, M.D. to Bill Harvey, dated 7 March 1965. Courtesy of Bill Harvey.
- 12 Letter from Henry Girard to Bill Harvey, dated 10 March 1965. Courtesy of Bill Harvey. Underlining in original. Jim did eventually learn his diagnosis and, by all indications, Henry and Ilse had the best of intentions in not disclosing Jim’s diagnosis to him and only meant to keep from upsetting him while arranging for one final trip.

## References

- Ashton, Dore. 1959. Art: Heir to Mondrian: Ilya Bolotowsky’s Works on View—Other Exhibitions Open Here. *New York Times*, October 9.
- Baker, Richard Brown. 1962–1963. *Transcription of a Tape—Recorded Interview of James Harvey by Richard Brown Baker, December 1962–March 1963*. Washington: The Smithsonian Archives of American Art.
- Bockris, Victor. 1990. *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Chesterton, Gilbert Keith. 1920. *A Miscellany of Men*. London: Methuen.
- Comstock, Gary. 1987. Two Types of Narrative Theology. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55: 687–717. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Crites, Stephen. 1971. The Narrative Quality of Experience. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39: 291–311. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Danto, Arthur. 1964. The Artworld. *The Journal of Philosophy* 61: 571–84. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Danto, Arthur. 1992. *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux.
- Elkins, James. 2004. *On The Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*. New York: Routledge.
- Fackre, Gabriel. 1983. Narrative Theology: An Overview. *Interpretation (Richmond)* 37: 340–52. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Farrell, Jennifer. 2011. *Get There First, Decide Promptly: The Richard Brown Baker Collection of Post War Art*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- French, George. 2014. Interview with the author by phone. July 31.
- Gaddy, James. 2007. Shadow Boxer. *Print* 61: 78–84.
- Gauger, Marcia. 2017. Interview with the author by phone. April 17.
- Gautier, Théophile. 1890. *Mademoiselle de Maupin: A Romance of Love and Passion*. Translated by J. S. Chartres. Chicago: Laird and Lee Publishers.
- Girard, Henry. 2014a. Interview with the author in Washington, DC. March 26.
- Girard, Ilse. 2014b. Interview with the author in Washington, DC. March 23.
- Goldberg, Michael. 1982. *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Greenberg, Clement. 1956. The Role of the Critic in Contemporary Art. *Club Panel*, May 25.
- Grimes, Ronald. 1986. Of Words the Speaker, of Deeds the Doer. *The Journal of Religion* 66: 1–17. [CrossRef]
- Hale, Herbert. 1958. James Harvey [Parma: March 17–April 5]. *ARTnews* 57: 60.
- Harvey, Bill. 2014. Interview with the author in Howell, MI. July 16.
- Harvey, Bill. 2016. Interview with the author in Howell, MI. April 16–18.
- Harvey, Bill. 2017. Interview with the author in Howell, MI. July 11–13.
- Harvey, Bill. 2019. Interview with the author by phone. October 20.
- Lauritzen, Paul. 1987. Is 'Narrative' Really a Panacea? The Use of 'Narrative' in the Work of Metz and Hauerwas. *The Journal of Religion* 67: 322–39. [CrossRef]
- Lindbeck, George. 1984. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- McClendon, James. 1974. *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Niebuhr, Richard. 1941. *The Meaning of Revelation*. New York: Macmillan Co.
- Obituaries. *New York Times*, July 16.
- O'Doherty, Brian. 1961a. Shahn's Exhibition on The Bomb and Gaudnek's House Were Highlights. *New York Times*, December 16.
- O'Doherty, Brian. 1961b. This Week Around the Galleries. *New York Times*, December 17.
- Pickering, David. 2020. Redating Narrative Theology: A Challenge to the Conventional Chronology. *The Heythrop Journal* 61: 998–1010. [CrossRef]
- Preston, Stuart. 1956. About Art and Artists. *New York Times*, November 17.
- Preston, Stuart. 1960. Danish Art and America 1960. *New York Times*, October 16.
- Rigney, Robert, and Penelope Rowland. 2000. Underrated/Overrated. *ARTnews*. December 1. Available online: <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/underrated-overrated-32/> (accessed on 21 February 2022).
- Rinpoche, Dudjom. 1991. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: It's Fundamentals and History*. Translated and edited by Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Russoli, Franco. 1962. *James Harvey: Una Mostra Personale Del Pittore*. Translated by Nicolas Albanese. Exhibition Catalog. Milan: Il Milione.
- Sandler, Irving. 1962. James Harvey. *ARTnews* 61: 11.
- Sandler, Irving. 1978. *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Sandler, Irving. 2003. *A Sweeper-Up After Artists: A Memoir*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Sandler, Irving. 2009. *Abstract Expressionism and the American Experience: A Revelation*. Lenox: Hard Press Editions.
- Thiemann, Ronald. 1985. *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Time. 1964. Art: Art in New York. *Time Magazine* 80: 24.
- van Klinken, Adriaan. 2018. Autobiographical Storytelling8+ and African Narrative Queer Theology. *Exchange* 47: 211–29. [CrossRef]
- Washburn, Joan. 2017. Interview with the author by phone. July 11.
- Wiggins, James. 1975. *Religion as Story*. New York: Harper Forum Book.