WILLIAM BAZIOTES' DUALITY: ESCAPING THE ORDINARY AND FINDING THE EXTRAORDINARY

by

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(Under the Direction of Janice C. Simon)

ABSTRACT

Succinctly, decisively, Ethel Baziotes said of her husband, William Baziotes, "he saw all of life in duality." This perspective of his was an enduring one. It was also one that helped to define Baziotes' place in the art world that emerged in New York City in the first half of the twentieth century. While many artists converged about New York from areas across the United States and Europe during this period, bringing with them an array of personal experiences, cultural ideas, and artistic orientations, Baziotes arrived in New York in 1933 with an established and personal focus that would both draw him to and distinguish him from his Surrealist and Abstract Expressionist contemporaries.

INDEX WORDS: William Baziotes, duality, Charles Baudelaire, French Symbolist Poetry

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DEDICATION

With immeasurable gratitude and affection, I dedicate this project to my family. To Michael, Alexander, Isobel, and William, I say an extra ‘thank you,’ for your encouragement, your sacrifices, and so much in between.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Succinctly, decisively, Ethel Baziotes said of her husband, William Baziotes, "he saw all of life in duality."[1] This perspective of his was an enduring one. It was also one that helped to define Baziotes' place in the art world that emerged in New York City in the first half of the twentieth century. While many artists converged about New York from areas across the United States and Europe during this period, bringing with them an array of personal experiences, cultural ideas, and artistic orientations, Baziotes arrived in New York in 1933 with an established and personal focus that would both draw him to and distinguish him from his Surrealist and Abstract Expressionist contemporaries.

This paper intends not to analyze or debate Baziotes' status relative to Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism. Rather, it aims to demonstrate that Baziotes shared a particular set of interests with members of these two groups, and these common interests contributed to the personal and professional associations that he developed with several artists associated with Abstract Expressionism and Surrealism. These perspectives and concerns, though, held such personal and enduring importance for Baziotes that their relevance to his work had a depth and complexity reaching far beyond their ability to generate relationships with other prominent artists.[2]

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[1] Statement in *William Baziotes: Painting and Works on Paper, 1952-1963* (New York: BlumHelman Gallery, 1984), unpaginated.

[2] For discussion about the art world evolving within and around New York in the early and middle 20th century, and for information regarding Baziotes' associations with members of the Surrealist and Abstract Expressionist movements, see Anne Eden Gibson, *Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-Run Periodicals* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990); Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Robert Carlton Hobbs and Gail Levin, *Abstract Expressionism: The Formative Years* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978); Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Irving

The course of Baziotes' professional career as a painter gravitated around New York City, where he almost exclusively lived and worked until his death in 1963, but it did not begin there. Instead, it began in a time and place decidedly removed from that which he occupied, and it ended even more distantly. Together, Baziotes' images and his words forge a path that starts out in the world of Charles Baudelaire, then venture through the mysterious and evocative realms of the French Symbolist poets and the Surrealists, and end with an approach to what Baziotes himself described as "a more real reality."[3] The principle guiding the direction of this journey is the same as the perspective articulated by Ethel Baziotes; specifically, its compelling force is an ongoing exploration of the concept of duality.

Baziotes' initiation to the dualistic nature of life, and the corresponding literature that captured his attention, came years before the start of his career as a painter. Born June 11, 1912 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to parents originally from Greece, Baziotes' early childhood was financially and socially comfortable. His family moved to Reading, Pennsylvania before he was a year old; his father and a cousin opened "The Crystal Restaurant," which Baziotes described as "a first-class place…My father was up and coming." His father's business prospered for several years, but on Thanksgiving Day 1919, a catastrophic fire destroyed the restaurant and dramatically redefined the make-up of Baziotes' life. From a "seventeen-room house in the best section of town,"[4] Baziotes found himself in "the worst part of town. I didn't know how I had gotten there, but

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Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); and, Sandler, "Baziotes: Modern Mythologist," *Art News* (February 1965), pp.28-31, 65-66.

[3] Barbara Cavaliere, "William Baziotes: The Subtlety of Life for the Artist," *William Baziotes: A Retrospective Exhibition*, ed. Michael Preble (Newport Harbor, CA: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1978), p.44.

[4] Donald Paneth, "William Baziotes, A Literary Portrait," (New York, 1952-61), William Baziotes file, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

suddenly we were living in a two-room apartment next to the railroad station…Seventh Street was lined with cheap honky-tonks, bars, brothels, pawn shops…Lower depths of Reading." As Baziotes' environment changed, so his cohorts and their activities changed. "In the old place, everybody was a good little boy, home at five-thirty, allowed up late only on Friday night. Different here, the kids were hard-boiled. We played on the tracks after school, stayed out to ten, twelve on weekends. Benny Bananas, a pimp…taught us to throw curves." The sudden introduction to a previously unglimpsed side of life clearly shocked Baziotes but, rather than turning away from it, Baziotes appears to have responded with interest, as though the shock came mingled with attraction.

Concurrent with his involvement in this new, tougher milieu, Baziotes' mother maintained her insistence that he attend church and also, until high school, he persisted in attending school regularly if not enthusiastically. Baziotes' aversion to school grew so that he was repeatedly late or absent and, "if I caught a cold and was in bed two days, I'd stay out the whole week. My mother used to kid my father, give me a note. My father was extremely suspicious of me. He felt I was playing some kind of double game."[5] The life he led, and hid from his father, did take on two distinct aspects. He ventured to burlesque and vaudeville shows, he played cards and shot craps, but he also joined the YMCA for basketball, boxing, and swimming and then bought a canoe to take upon the Schuylkill River. "I'd lie down in the bottom and drift. It was a nice way to relax and feel free," he said.[6] Years later, Baziotes recounted experiences and influences effecting his painting. Perhaps reflecting the lasting impressions made by his journeys on the

[5] Paneth.
[6] Paneth.

canoe, he described having an appreciation for "a feeling of everyday things dropping away, of leaving you in a dream state, of being half-hypnotized, of time standing still, of life becoming magical."[7]

In the early 1930s Baziotes worked at the Case Glass Company. There, he primarily contributed to the creation of stained glass windows for churches. What Baziotes recognized as of greatest value, though, was that he met and became a part of a group of people who shared his interests in art and literature. He said that

> I was extremely fortunate to have worked there. When I walked in, I didn't know anything about art…The artists at Case's began to educate me. They were guys who had studied art at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art…They had terrific ideas, Cubist reproductions on the walls…Played music, showed me books…[8]

During this time at Case Glass, Baziotes also met Byron Vazakas, a poet who lived in Reading and whose literary interests aligned with Baziotes' own sensibilities. Their friendship had a tremendous influence on him, for Vazakas, recalled Baziotes, "added to my life a feeling for the more drastic aspects of life." Vazakas also, said Baziotes, "[i]ntroduced me to the decadent French poets—Rimbaud, Verlaine, Mallarmé—and gave me a copy of Baudelaire's *Intimate Papers*."[9] Expanding on this group of writers, Vazakas added that, "Valéry, of course, I spoke of to him,"[10] and he further elaborated on the nature of their early friendship and the interests they cultivated with one another, saying,

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[7] Museum questionnaire, 1949, Baziotes file, Archives of American Art, unpaginated.
[8] Paneth.
[9] Paneth.
[10] Cavaliere, "An Introduction to the Method of William Baziotes," *Arts Magazine* (April 1977), p.125.

> [w]e took walks in City Park (Reading) and nearby mountains, talking, talking, talking. Although he already had a good knowledge of contemporary European literature in general, as well as American, my emphasis on poetry helped to cement this association, just as did his *eye* for art in landscape…I recall pointing out to him that Baudelaire stood to French poetry in his era as Cézanne to contemporary painting.[11]

Clarifying just how significant Baudelaire was to Baziotes, Vazakas also recognized the specific elements that most strongly drew Baziotes to the literature they discussed:

> Baudelaire had this sinister atmosphere combined with sensuality. That's what Bill saw, and he also admired Baudelaire's individuality, as he liked the vagabond existence of Rimbaud…*My Heart Laid Bare*, those little notes at the end of Baudelaire's poems—that was Bible for Bill. I think that was a strong guideline, the things that Baudelaire said about the artist and his life in those little notes.[12]

Scholarly literature pertaining to Baziotes acknowledges this appreciation for 19th century French literature that Baziotes established early in his adulthood. The research, however, tends to focus on a limited number of Baziotes' images and a relatively small portion of Baudelairian and Symbolist writing. Baziotes himself articulated overt connections between two of his paintings: *The Balcony* (figure 1; 1943), he said, "spiritually had the effect of Baudelaire's poem by that name,"[13]and *Mirror at Midnight* (figure 2; 1942), he told his wife, conveyed the spirit of Baudelaire's *Favors of the*

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[11] Byron Vazakas, 1975, quoted in Cavaliere, "William Baziotes: The Subtlety of Life for the Artist," p.34.
[12] ibid. It is also in his writing to Vazakas that Baziotes makes explicit another personal connection he felt between himself and Baudelaire. Mona Hadler, in "William Baziotes: A Contemporary Poet-Painter," *Arts Magazine* (June 1977), p.102, quotes one of Baziotes' letters, dated 1934: "If you will read Baudelaire's prose poem *Crowds* you will get an idea of a certain feeling that has been in me since I was a little boy, but which I never discussed or the occasion never presented itself."
[13] Paneth.

Moon.[14] The most valuable scholarly examinations of Baziotes and Baudelaire include publications by Mona Hadler, Barbara Cavaliere, and Stephen Polcari. These authors direct considerable attention to these two images and poems referenced by Baziotes, and they extend their analyses to include some discussion of a number of other paintings and literary sources.[15] Additionally, these scholars recognize that duality interested Baziotes, but they offer limited consideration of the nature of the relationship Baziotes developed between his own work, the writing of Baudelaire and the French Symbolists, and the concept of duality.

Hadler, Cavaliere, and Polcari mark my point of departure in studying the specific influences of Baudelaire, as well as Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Paul Valéry, on Baziotes' lasting concern with duality. I intend to build upon these earlier investigations by engaging in a detailed reading of an extensive amount of Baudelairian and Symbolist literature, focusing on its approach to duality, and then applying this analysis to particular works by Baziotes. To this end, I have selected for my discussion, Baziotes' *Figure on a Tightrope* (figure 3; 1947), *The Mirror* (figure 4; 1948), and *Aerial* (figure 5; 1957). As noted above, both Baziotes and Vazakas recognized that Baudelaire and the Symbolist writers had captured Baziotes' attention by the early 1930s, before Baziotes moved to New York to pursue a career as an artist. It was in the 1940s, though, that the connection between Baziotes' painting and his literary

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[14] Interview with Ethel Baziotes, 1975, cited in Mona Hadler, "The Art of William Baziotes." Dissertation, Columbia University, 1977, p.146.

[15] Barbara Cavaliere, "An Introduction to the Method of William Baziotes," *Arts Magazine* (April 1977), pp.124-131; Mona Hadler, "William Baziotes: A Contemporary Poet-Painter," *Arts Magazine* (June 1977), pp.102-110; Cavaliere, "William Baziotes: The Subtlety of Life for the Artist," in *William Baziotes: A Retrospective Exhibition*, ed. Michael Preble (Newport Harbor, CA: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1978), pp.23-71; Hadler, "William Baziotes: Four Sources of Inspiration," in *William Baziotes: A Retrospective Exhibition*, ed. Michael Preble (Newport Harbor, CA: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1978), pp.77-100; Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

interests became most explicit. In addition to the Baudelairian references in Baziotes' *Mirror at Midnight* and *The Balcony*, Baziotes announced an inescapable association between his work and Baudelaire's when he titled one of his 1944 paintings *Fleur du mal* (figure 6). Baudelaire published his *Fleurs du mal* in 1857; amongst the poems included in the volume are *Favors of the Moon* and *The Balcony.*

Given the emerging strength of Baudelaire's presence in Baziotes' work in the 1940s, my study begins with Baziotes' 1947 image, *Figure on a Tightrope*. The painting extends the chronology established by *Mirror at Midnight* and *The Balcony*, but it is also a rich and complex example of Baziotes' work that had yet to receive scholarly attention. I further my discussion with *The Mirror*, not only because it also derives from this fertile period of Baziotes' career, but also because it represents a subject to which Baziotes returned repeatedly. In the decade of the 1940s, Baziotes produced at least five images with the word 'mirror' in the title: *Mirror at Midnight* (figure 2; 1942), *Night Mirror* (figure 7; 1947); *Figure and Mirror* (figure 8; 1947); *The Mirror* (figure 4; 1948); and, *Mirror Figure* (figure 9; 1948).[16] Finally, attesting to the enduring nature of Baziotes' appreciation for 19th century French literature, I conclude my analysis with a discussion of *Aerial*, which dates to 1957 and exemplifies the work Baziotes created in the last years of his life. As with *Figure on a Tightrope*, both *The Mirror* and *Aerial* offer valuable insights into the bond between Baziotes' literary interests and his work, and they are images only incompletely considered in the Baziotes literature. With this set of images, I seek to unveil meaningful relationships between the art and literature, and I also aim to

[16] Hadler, dissertation, p.194, notes that "during the forties no less than ten [of Baziotes'] paintings incorporate the word mirror into their titles." Aside from this one reference, I have been unable to find references to, or images of, more than five mirror-oriented paintings.

examine the impetus for, and rewards of, adopting the dualistic perspective that Baziotes cultivated through much of his life.

Chapter 2
Baudelaire: A Pervasive Influence

Both tumultuous and stimulating, the years Baziotes spent in Reading provided a foundation for the path he was compelled to follow in 1933. "I stuck around town…but I felt I was prolonging something. I knew I wanted to get out," he said. In August 1933, he moved to New York City with a determined certainty that he must pursue a career as an artist. He described his decision, saying that "[a]rt came in like a growth, bothering me. It wasn't really a choice, but kind of like fate, I had to do it."[17]

Once in New York, Baziotes immersed himself in the city's cultural environment. He studied at the National Academy of Design and made frequent trips to the art room at the 42nd Street branch of the New York Public Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Columbia University art library, and various galleries around the city.[18] Of his life during this period, he said, "[i]t was all art."[19]

The Works Project Administration hired Baziotes in 1936, first assigning him to teach at the Queens Children's Museum for fifteen hours each week, and later putting him on the Easel Project. The schedule allowed him sufficient time to develop his own painting and drawing while also providing the opportunity to engage in the social and professional activities that he found most appealing. The particular people, places, and events that he pursued, as well as those he avoided, reflected the interests he had begun to cultivate while in Reading. Baziotes described his circumstances, saying that he

> [c]ouldn't mix too much with other artists. Most had given up painting completely, too many parties. Wasted social conscious talk. Didn't do anything, but everybody

[17] Paneth.
[18] Hadler, "William Baziotes: Four Sources of Inspiration," p.78.
[19] Paneth.

> talked…I started to go all over places by myself. Tough bars on Columbus Avenue…Saw a hell of a knife fight. Take a ferry to New Jersey. A dark street, lower middle class, blue lamp over the street, skimpy lawns…bump into a bar…Like to see things like that.[20]

Despite recognizing his disinclination toward the prevailing social milieu of the WPA artists, Baziotes did enjoy the companionship of some of his colleagues and he developed significant acquaintances during his early years in New York. He remembered, for example, that "[a]round 1938, 1939, met other guys I liked. Sculptor, married, and had two kids. Trying to live on a WPA salary, talked a whole lot about art, Francis Lee. Threw two parties a week, hell of a large loft. This was pure fun…"[21] Through Lee and his parties, Baziotes met a wide array of people, including "[a]rchitects, photographers, businessmen, college students, wealthy women, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the surrealists, Paul Robeson, Auden MacNeice, John Garfield, art dealers too."[22]

The connection to Francis Lee brought Baziotes into contact with several European Surrealists who had moved to the New York area to avoid much of the turmoil of World War II.[23] He met Kurt Seligmann in 1939 and, in the following year, he became friends with Gordon Onslow Ford and Roberto Matta Echaurran. He described Onslow Ford and Matta as "two important young surrealists…pretty good painters, interesting men."[24] Shortly after becoming acquainted with Matta and Onslow Ford, Baziotes met Robert Motherwell. Knowing that Motherwell held a great appreciation for

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[20] Paneth.
[21] Paneth.
[22] Paneth.
[23] See Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern* Art; Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*; Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting*; Sidney Simon, "Concerning the Beginnings of the New York School: 1939-1943," *Art International* (Summer 1967), pp.17-23.
[24] Paneth.

the same French literature that Baziotes studied, Matta invited the two to dinner at his home and, according to Motherwell, he and Baziotes "became friends on the spot."[25]

Baziotes found in Motherwell a colleague whose fascination and expertise regarding 19th century French literature rivaled his own. Not only was Motherwell familiar with the literature that had kept Baziotes' attention, but Motherwell was fluent in French and had studied much of this literature while living in France in 1938/39.[26] Motherwell's first-hand experiences with French culture and literature, as well as his interests in automatism and psychoanalytic theory, primed him for a prominent intermediary role between many American and European artists.[27] As such, Motherwell developed amicable relationships with many of the same artists that Baziotes interacted with, and Baziotes' friendship with Motherwell[28] intensified the cultural environment that was already enriching Baziotes' personal interests.

Baziotes considered as friends several other artists who were a part of New York's evolving art scene. He engaged in some of his earliest experiments with automatism, for example, with Motherwell, Gerome Kamrowski and Jackson Pollock.[29] Further, when Peggy Guggenheim opened her gallery, The Art of This Century, in the

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[25] Simon, "Concerning the Beginnings of the New York School: 1939-1943," p.21.

[26] Paul Schimmel, "Images of Metamorphosis," in *The Interpretive Link: Abstract Surrealism to Abstract Expressionism, Works on Paper1938-1948* (Newport Beach, CA: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1986), p.22.

[27] Barbara Haskell. *The American Century: Art and Culture 1900-1950* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999), p.331.

[28] In April Kingsley, *The Turning Point: The Abstract Expressionists and the Transformation of American Art* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p.90, Kingsley reveals that the friendship between Motherwell and Baziotes was so close that, at one point, when Baziotes and his wife invited almost no one into their home, they did welcome Motherwell.

[29] Haskell, p.334. While Baziotes' initial interest in automatism may have been connected to the attention drawn to it by the Surrealist presence in New York at this time, the technique would remain a significant facet of his creative process for many years. In a statement originally published in the Winter 1947/48 volume of *Possibilities 1*, for example, Baziotes wrote that, "[w]hat happens on the canvas is unpredictable and surprising to me…Each painting has its own way of evolving…" For further documentation regarding the automatist experiments of Baziotes, Pollock, and Kamrowski, see Martica Sawin, "'The Third Man,' or Automatism American Style," *Art Journal* (Fall 1988), pp.181-186.

fall of 1942, Baziotes' interaction with both American and European avant-garde artists increased substantially. As Baziotes remembered, "[v]arious people got around Peggy. Breton, Léger, Duchamp, Chagall, Mondrian. Great influx of Europeans. First time American [sic] had anything where could talk to Europeans."[30] For Baziotes, this rich artistic environment provided the opportunity to associate even more frequently with an expanded group of people affiliated with the Surrealist movement. It also led to further contact with many individuals most often associated with Abstract Expressionism so that, by the end of the 1940s, Baziotes had engaged in activities with not only Motherwell and Pollock, but with numerous other artists, including Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman.[31] These relationships, especially combined with Baziotes' close friendship with Motherwell, generated a social situation that was ready and able to significantly enhance the particular literary interests Baziotes' had brought with him from Reading to New York.

Baziotes articulated a specific literary connection between himself and the Surrealists in a letter he wrote to Byron Vazakas shortly after moving to New York. Discussing his intentions in painting, Baziotes wrote that

> when Picasso was eighteen, he said, 'The technique of my painting comes from the old masters, Redon and Lautrec. What I am trying to do is translate the Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé soul states into paint.' Not bad for a young man

[30] Paneth. Additionally, Baziotes was invited by Breton, in October 1942, to participate in "First Papers of Surrealism," the first major Surrealist exhibition in New York. See Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting*, p.33 for further details pertaining to the exhibition.

[31] See "Artists' Sessions at Studio 35 (1950)," in *Modern Artists in America*, ed. Robert Goodnough (New York: Wittenborn Schultz, Inc., 1952), for a thorough presentation of the content of these sessions' activities as well as a full listing of all the art and literary figures involved in the meetings. Also, in the fall of 1949, Baziotes participated in the exhibition, "The Intrasubjectives." The show included Willem DeKooning, Arshile Gorky, Adolph Gottlieb, Morris Graves, Bradley Walker Tomlin, and others. See Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting*, for further detail.

> who did it too. This is my trend for the future and I doubt whether I will swerve from it.[32]

As the work of the Symbolist poets figured prominently in the objectives Baziotes designed for his own painting, it also occupied a significant position in the ideological formulations of the Surrealists. Baudelaire, as predecessor to these Symbolists, held a comparably notable place. David Hare, who edited the Surrealist publication *VVV* and was a friend of Baziotes', affirmed the influence and said that "Baudelaire permeated the whole atmosphere. Baudelaire was a hero in the early forties. Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Kafka were pillars of the Surrealist movement."[33]

Central to the Surrealists' focus on Baudelaire's writing was the principle of correspondences. Baudelaire believed that there exists a direct relationship between tangible aspects of the exterior or natural world and less apparent aspects of the interior or spiritual world.[34] He set forth his idea in his poem *Correspondences* (c.1861):

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[32] Hadler, dissertation, p.130.

[33] 1975 interview quoted in Hadler, "William Baziotes: A Contemporary Poet-Painter," pp.102-103. The Surrealist-based publications of the 1940s were an expressive venue, too, for Baziotes. In addition to contributing paintings and drawings to various periodicals, he was responsible for having a passage from Paul Valéry's *The Silence of Painters* included in the Winter 1947/8 volume of *Possibilities 1*. Portions of the excerpt address two topics particularly salient to Baziotes: the connection between painting and literature, and the quest for new formulations of truth. Specifically, Valéry wrote that,

> …I was well aware that the silence of painters before their easel is specious and vain. In fact before their canvas-mirage, they indulge in endless discourses in which lyricism is mingled with courseness—a whole *literature* refracted, repressed, sometimes reshaped…literature sometimes plays a rather striking role behind the scenes of creation.
>
> A painter who aspires to greatness, to liberty, to sureness; who demands of himself the powerful and gratifying sensation of advancing, of raising himself to higher spheres, of surprising himself by new developments of his views, by more ambitious combinations of *will*, *knowledge*, and *power*—such a painter is led to sum up his experience, to be strengthened in his own 'truths' as well as to define the vaster or more complex works of his dreams.

[34] Anna Balakian. *Literary Origins of Surrealism: A New Mysticism in French Poetry* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1947), p.45.

In Nature's temple living pillars rise,
And words are murmured none have understood,
And man must wander through a tangled wood
Of symbols watching him with friendly eyes.

As long-drawn echoes heard far-off and dim
Mingle to one deep sound and fade away;
Vast as the night and brilliant as the day,
Colour and sound and perfume speak to him.

Some perfumes are as fragrant as a child,
Sweet as the sound of hautboys, meadow-green;
Others, corrupted, rich, exultant, wild,

Have all the expansion of things infinite:
As amber, incense, musk, and benzoin,
Which sing the sense's and the soul's delight.[35]

To Baudelaire, one essential function of art is that it illuminates relationships between the natural and spiritual realms. In his poetry, he sought to accomplish this by presenting parallels between the two worlds that he composed with symbols having a degree of ambiguity that allows for a multiplicity of interpretations. In this way, the perspective of individual readers is both suggested and accommodated and this, in turn, alludes to the universal connectedness of all people, in both the concrete and spiritual spheres.[36]

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[35] *Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry*, ed. T.R. Smith (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919), p.149. Much of the poetry and prose I include in this paper derives from this particular source because it is a book Baziotes himself owned and read. In Hadler, "William Baziotes: A Contemporary Poet-Painter," p.110, Hadler notes that, "[a]ccording to Ethel Baziotes, New York, February 20, 1974, by 1940 Baziotes had purchased this edition of Baudelaire's writings and kept it in his library as a cherished possession. This is the only time he ever bought two copies of a book." Also, there is no evidence that Baziotes ever read any of the Symbolist or Baudelairian literature in its original French; for this reason, I have included only English translations.

[36] Anna Balakian, introduction to *The Flowers of Evil and Paris Spleen*, trans. William H. Crosby (Rochester, NY: BOA Editions 1991), p.7. Balakian also writes that, with regard to the associative nature of Baudelaire's verse, "the associations may be spontaneous, but the way they are presented is very deliberate and contrived and the ambiguity is intentional." This description also characterizes a type of duality found in much of Baziotes' work: while he made use of automatism as a method for beginning a painting, the total process and final product reflect a concerted deliberateness of composition.

For the Symbolist poets who followed Baudelaire, this principle of correspondences was also crucial. They, too, wrote with the understanding that observations of nature would relate to more internal reflections regarding human ideas and qualities of the human soul.[37] To poets such as Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé, discovering these connections represented a means of revealing otherwise-concealed truths about human existence. For Valéry, too, this type of analysis is crucial to the most meaningful intellectual inquiries. In his *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci* (c.1895), Valéry explains,

> Is it not the chief and secret achievement of the greatest mind to isolate this substantial permanence from the strife of everyday truths? Is it not essential that in spite of everything he shall arrive at self-definition by means of this pure relationship, changeless amongst the most diverse objects, which will give him an almost inconceivable universality, give him, in a sense, the power of a corresponding universe?[38]

A key to expressing the truth available through this concept of material and spiritual correspondence is the use of indirection. More specifically, these poets believed that qualities such as suggestion, ambiguity, and mystery are essential to the idea of absolute truth. Mallarmé emphasized this point, stating that "[e]verything that is holy and seeks to remain holy shrouds itself in mystery."[39] Valéry, also, believed that being vague while contemplating such lofty concepts as "[t]ime, space, [and] the infinite" was

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[37] Balakian, *Literary Origins of Surrealism*, p.46.
[38] *Selected Writings of Paul Valéry*, (New York: New Directions Publishing Corp., 1950) p.94.
[39] E.H. Blackmore and A.M. Blackmore, *Six French Poets of the Nineteenth Century: Lamartine, Hugo, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.xxxiii.

unavoidable precisely because they are "clumsy words [and] any proposition that aims to be unambiguous forgoes them."[40]

As Baudelaire's deliberately associative compositions broaden the scope of their interpretation and applicability to his readers, the ambiguous or indirect nature of the Symbolists' poetry also allows for a more emphatic impact upon their readers. Quoting and commenting on Mallarmé's poetry, one literary critic explains that,

> Part of [its]strength…lies in the things it *avoids* saying. It 'shrouds itself in mystery'; many of its details are dimly lit and uncertain, and a few of them simply cannot be understood without more information than Mallarmé has supplied…Yet, by appearing to say less it actually says more…their resonances go deeper, their perspectives extend further.[41]

As the belief in material and spiritual correspondences influenced the ideas and forms in the Symbolists' work, so too did the principle contribute to the Surrealists' creative practices. The desire to illuminate relationships that are largely concealed but are indicative of fundamental truth established a foundation for the Surrealists' interest in the connection of things which, from a traditional point of view, appear unconnected. Having absorbed Freud's psychoanalytic theories, which advocate turning away from the conscious and rational processing of ideas, the Surrealists found in Baudelaire's correspondences another, complementary construct promoting the exploration of the nonrational.[42] In directing attention away from comprehensions based upon what Valéry called "common sense," these approaches renounce "the ability we once had of denying

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[40] André Maurois, *From Proust to Camus: Profiles of Modern French Writers.* Trans., Carl Morse and Renaud Bruce (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1966), p.60.
[41] *Six French Poets of the Nineteenth Century*, pp.xxxv.
[42] Polcari, p.23

and brilliantly refuting the existence of opposites." This common sense, Valéry continued, "is no longer invoked except through ignorance."[43] Instead of following this outdated sort of thinking, one route that held appeal for the Surrealists was that of automatism. For the Abstract Expressionists, too, it was a technique with tremendous creative value. As automatism bypasses the standard processes of reasoned and orderly analysis of the world, it promotes an intuitive approach that can access the unconscious and make use of forces such as chance and irrationality.[44] Automatism embodies the potential for demonstrating "the mystical manifestation of the inconceivable but existent *disorder* of things."[45]

In the art and literature adopting this view, the value of establishing and expressing concealed relationships between typically unrelated entities lay in the revelation of a reality that is beyond that of standard human perception. The reward for traveling this new path is a perspective more complete and truthful than that which would accompany the belief that the visible world alone constitutes reality.[46] These lines of thought were directly relevant to Baziotes and, in the early 1950s, he articulated the particular way in which they combined to inform the process and purpose of his work:

> Breton said poetry is two dissimilar things in the world put together. A surrealist attitude towards things. An image coming in from the unconscious, making irrational elements work together. In my type of painting I often feel we have horror and something very beautiful. A certain strangeness, too. I love the mysterious in painting, the stillness and the silence. I want my pictures to take effect very slowly, to obsess and to haunt.[47]

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[43] *From Proust to Camus*, p.63.
[44] Polcari, pp.23-24.
[45] Balakian, *Literary Origins of Surrealism*, p.9.
[46] ibid., p.19.
[47] Paneth.

In this statement, Baziotes explained how ideas originating with Baudelaire, and then extending to the French Symbolists and the Surrealists, function with one another in his own painting. He referred to the coexistence of unrelated elements, the force of the unconscious, the presence of the irrational, and the properties of strangeness and mystery. He also clarified his wish that the paintings produce an impact on viewers that is not immediate or direct, but rather is gradual and even otherworldly.

The concept of duality occupies a notable position in Baziotes' work and, consequently, he made certain reference to it in this explication. First, he referred to "two dissimilar things" combined, and then he specified the coexistence of horror and beauty in his painting. That Baziotes alluded to duality in these two particular ways underscores the connection he established between himself and a continuum of ideas originally set forth in Baudelaire's writing and then extended into the 20th century by the Surrealists. Specifically, Baziotes cited Breton and the Surrealists directly, and, in noting his own tendency to intermingle the elements of horror and beauty, went on to suggest a strong tie to Baudelaire who addressed the same topic frequently and dramatically. For example, in *The Artist's 'Confiteor'* (1869) Baudelaire wrote that "[t]he study of beauty is a duel in which the artist cries out in terror before being conquered,"[48] and, in his poem *Hymn to Beauty* (c.1861), he wondered, "Are you from heaven's depths or hell's infinity/ O Beauty? Just your gaze, infernal and divine,/ Can pour out such a mix of crime and courtesy.…"[49] The contemplation of juxtapositions such as these assumes an essential role in Baziotes' painting, and the 19th century French literary figures who addressed

[48] *The Flowers of Evil and Paris Spleen*, p.337.
[49] ibid., p.53

comparably dramatic and oppositional relationships constituted a compelling venue for Baziotes' own examination of duality.

In the years surrounding World War II, when Baziotes participated in New York's cultural avant-garde, the heightened popularity of writers such as Baudelaire and the Symbolists likely reinforced the appreciation he already held for their writing. His fascination with their ideas, though, and their connection to his own perspectives, both predated and outlasted this wave of more widespread appeal. The enduring and personal nature of Baziotes' affinity for this literature is clear in a simple sentiment recalled by Ethel Baziotes; her husband, she said, would call Baudelaire his brother.[50]

Baziotes' connection to Baudelaire might well have been grounded in parallels that Baziotes found running between the courses of their early lives. As Baziotes had experienced a jolting shift in his social and economic status, so too did Baudelaire (1821-1867) live a tumultuous life.[51] Familial stability and a comfortable social position characterized Baudelaire's childhood, but his family also suffered a catastrophic tragedy that dramatically altered their circumstances. When Baudelaire was a child, his father unexpectedly died. His mother's remarriage shortly afterwards further confounded the disaster for Baudelaire, as he and his stepfather never formed an amicable relationship. The consequences of their conflict included a break from his family and the support they provided him. Baudelaire chose to remove himself from the presence and directives of his stepfather and, instead, pursue his wish to cultivate a literary career. As he found

[50] Hadler, dissertation, p.130.
[51] *Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry*, pp.11-36, contains biographical information that describes much of the turmoil Baudelaire experiences. As Baziotes owned two copies of this book, he would have had access to all of these details.

work, inconsistently, as a translator and art critic, he continually battled against a life of poverty and vagrancy.[52]

Baudelaire's friend, Théophile Gautier, described the way in which Baudelaire reacted to the spectacle of life that confronted him once he was removed from the comfortable lifestyle of his parents' home. Gautier's account echoes Baziotes' own recollections about observing life in the streets of Reading, New York, and New Jersey. According to Gautier,

> What [Baudelaire] likes is to follow man, wan, overstrung, writhing, tortured by the fictitious passions and the genuine weariness of modern days, through sinuosities of the vast madrepore that is Paris; to watch him in his troubles, his anguish, his wretchedness, his prostration, his excitement, his nervousness, and his despair. He gazes at the nascent evil instincts, the foul habits idly crouching in their filth…The sight, which both attracts and repels him, fills him with incurable melancholy…[53]

While the "melancholy" Gautier attributed to Baudelaire was not characteristic of Baziotes, the attraction to unidealized, and even sinister, surrounding presences was shared by Baziotes. This orientation illuminates a degree of affiliation between Baudelaire and Baziotes that is founded on, and then extended beyond, that of common experiences.

Duality was an almost constant presence in Baudelaire's life. At times he experienced it directly, and at times he sought it out for observation and contemplation; his death, even, was an emphatic encounter with it. Specifically, Baudelaire was prone to excessive drug use throughout his adult life, and this habit contributed to his amusement,

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[52] Balakian, *Flowers of Evil and Paris Spleen*, p.4.
[53] *The Works of Théophile Gautier in Twenty-Four Volumes*, trans. and ed. F.C. deSumichrast (New York: George D. Sproul, 1903), XXIII, 45-46.

his misery, and his creative output: "He took opium to quieten his nerves when they trembled, for something to do when they did not, and made immoderate use of hashish to produce visions and heighten his phantasy."[54] It also led, however, to a diagnosis of "'general paralysis of the insane,'" a condition that forced him to live his final months "motionless and inert, his eyes the only part of him alive, unable to speak or even to write…"[55] As his life, then, had been defined by a need to find, live, and communicate the extremes of human experience, the course of his death was a gradual manifestation of the absolute denial of those exact activities.

Excessive degrees of drama and volatility were not uncommon in the lives of the Symbolist poets read by Baziotes. Stephane Mallarmé (1842-1898), for example, experienced twice an abrupt and terrible disruption of his generally comfortable life. First, his mother died when he was a young child, and then his own son died at eight years old. However, it was the intertwined lives of Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) and Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) that provided Baziotes with tales of most extraordinary theatricality.

Approximately ten years older than Rimbaud, Verlaine had been in the midst of living a fairly conventional and respectable life as a writer, when Rimbaud sent him a copy of his poem, *The Drunken Boat* (1871). Impressed with the writing, Verlaine invited Rimbaud to see him in Paris. Newly married, Verlaine and his wife, Mathilde, were living in her parents' apartment when, unannounced, the 17-year-old Rimbaud arrived. As historian Rupert Christiansen vividly accounts, Rimbaud was "a beautiful dirty boy…[who] comported himself like a monosyllabic lout." He stayed with the

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[54] *Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry*, p.23.
[55] ibid., p.25.

couple for approximately nine months; during this time, "[t]he *farouche* Rimbaud thieved and sulked and showed no *politesse*, let alone gratitude…[but] the highly susceptible Verlaine was infatuated with the boy—to the bafflement of his naïve and pregnant wife."[56]

Verlaine and Rimbaud left Paris, traveled together to England and Belgium, and engaged in a passionate intimate relationship lasting approximately 13 months. The end of their affair came when, having "grown disgusted with [Verlaine's] drunken orgies interspersed with accesses of religious fervor,"[57] Rimbaud tried to leave Verlaine. In frantic despair, Verlaine attempted to kill Rimbaud. While he did not succeed in ending his life, he did shoot Rimbaud in the wrist. For the assault, a Belgian court sentenced Verlaine to two years in prison.[58]

Following the demise of their relationship, the two poets engaged in markedly different lives. Verlaine's wife divorced him and gained legal custody of their daughter.[59] Throughout the turmoil, Verlaine continued to write. He even composed a significant number of poems during the course of his imprisonment, and these reflect a suddenly-renewed Catholic faith that overwhelmed him at the time. These also stand in stark contrast to other volumes of his poetry, which reveal an entirely different aspect of

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[56] Rupert Christiansen, *Tales of the New Babylon, Paris 1869-1875* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), p.390.
[57] Joseph M. Bernstein, *Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine: Selected Verse and Prose Poems* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1947), p.xxiii.
[58] Louis Simpson, *Modern Poets of France: A Bilingual Anthology* (New York: Greenberg, 1926), p.434.
[59] Bernstein, in *Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine: Selected Verse and Prose Poems*, p.xxvii, provides an account of the years following Verlaine's parting with Rimbaud:

> …despite his religious faith, [Verlaine] lived a Bohemian life of dissipation and poverty…He was a pathetic figure as he flitted from one café to another, from one drinking-session to another, a helpless and hapless indifidual who nevertheless continued to write one volume of verse after another. Although hailed in certain literary circles as an outstanding poet, he died in Paris in 1894 almost penniless and in relative obscurity.

his personality. Arthur Symons, who knew Verlaine personally and published a book in 1919 addressing his life and work, noted that, "[t]o Verlaine every corner of the world was alive with tempting and consoling and terrifying beauty…" and, consequently, "[h]e sinned, and it was with all his humanity; he repented, and it was with all his soul."[60] This pattern continued through his life: he alternatingly spent time teaching, farming, writing, and suffering the consequences of his episodes of drunken and violent behavior.[61] The totality of Verlaine's life and poetry embodied the result of his continual oscillation and struggle between the two opposing positions. Symons recognized this fundamental quality when he quoted one of Verlaine's close contemporaries, Charles Morice:

> The soul of an immortal child…that is the soul of Verlaine, with all the privileges and all the perils of so being…the excessive suspicions and the excessive confidences, the whims so easily outwearied, the deaf and blind infatuations…Years, influences, teachings, may pass over a temperament such as this, may irritate it, may fatigue it; transform it, never—never so much as to alter that particular unity which consists in dualism, in the division of forces between the longing after what is evil and adoration of what is good…[62]

The end of Verlaine's life was characterized by a fluctuating tendency comparable to that which had contributed repeatedly to his greatest joys and deepest unhappinesses. Alcoholism had rendered him impoverished and ill and yet, even in this condition, Symons recalled that "I have never seen so cheerful an invalid…he would tell me…droll stories cut short by a groan, a lamentation…and

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[60] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1919), pp.205, 207.
[61] Michael Bishop, *Nineteenth Century French Poetry* (New York: Twayne Publishing, 1993), p.221.
[62] ibid., p.210

then, suddenly, the good laugh would be back, clearing the air."[63] Verlaine, himself, also acknowledged the unrelenting play of forces that dominated his personality and directed much of his life. He spoke of himself as, most basically, "angel AND devil, " set in a state of "betweenness" with regard to "the problem of [my] life."[64]

Although the journey was significantly different, the end for Rimbaud was similar to the painful physical demise experienced by both Verlaine and Baudelaire. In the years following his break with Verlaine, Rimbaud traveled extensively across Europe, Asia, and Africa. He worked at times, he simply wandered at other times, but he did not write. By the age of 19, he had produced all the poetry he was ever to write. His death, at the age of 37, came after he developed a problem with his knee. The condition rapidly worsened to such a degree that his leg was amputated. Complications arose following the surgery, seriously compromising his general physical state. According to the account provided by Symons, who had known Rimbaud as well as Verlaine, "[h]is sufferings were an intolerable torment, and more cruel to him was the torment of his desire to live. He died inch by inch, fighting every inch…"[65]

Rimbaud's life consisted of two distinct phases. In the earlier, literary period, he dedicated himself to a pursuit of reality and truth that existed beyond the material world in which he lived. As he, himself, declared, his mission as a poet had been "that you have to be a *seer*, you have to make yourself a *seer*. The Poet makes himself a *seer* by a long vast *disordering* of *all the senses*…he reaches the unknown."[66] Rimbaud turned

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[63] Symons, p.209.
[64] Bishop, p.245.
[65] Symons, p.285.
[66] *Six French Poets of the Nineteenth Century*, p.xxx.

away, though, from this quest for the spiritual unknown and, instead, spent the second half of his life engaged in a quest for an entirely different type of unknown: the concrete and visible realities he would find as he ventured to some of the most remote and distant parts of the world.[67]

The dualistic tendencies that Baziotes found in the experiences of the Symbolist writers manifested themselves on a more personal level, too. Valéry (1871-1945), for example, was fully aware of the dichotomous nature of his own character, and he pointed out the discrepancy between his outward appearance and his concealed—but actual—disposition. "I pass for being gentle," he said, but "I am violent, absent-minded. I appear light-hearted and happy, I am really boredom and despair personified."[68] Verlaine's self-reflections illuminate an even more sensational pair of opposites at work within his personality. As previously noted, he recognized himself as both "angel AND devil" and, in an extension of this analysis, presented himself in an unequivocally dualistic manner:

> I believe, and I sin in thought as in action; I believe, and I repent in thought, if no more. Or again, I believe, and I am a good Christian at this moment; I believe, and I am a bad Christian the instant after. The remembrance, the hope, the invocation of a sin delights me, with or without remorse…[69]

Just as Théophile Gautier's narrative account of Baudelaire's life in Paris uncovers for us a parallel between his and Baziotes' captivation with the sinister, Verlaine's perception of

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[67] In *Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine: Selected Verse and Prose Poems*, Joseph M. Bernstein interpreted Rimbaud's change in focus, from the spiritual and literary realm to the actual physical world, as a result of the realization that "he felt he was on the wrong road. He tried to retrace his steps and…confront and describe the real world" (p.xxv). In the context of recognizing the dualistic nature of a writer's, or artist's, perspective, Rimbaud's abrupt shift of attention, from one extreme to the opposite other, suggests that an exploration of both was essential to his achieving a thoroughness or wholeness of experience.

[68] Agnes Ethel Mackay. *The Universal Self: A Study of Paul Valéry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p.29.

[69] Symons, p.228.

his own life as an alternating series of affairs with evil and goodness demonstrates a substantive similarity between his personality and Baziotes'. "Evil tempts me as much as the good, " Baziotes confessed. "I would like to be the purest of men, and yet the lewd fascinates me. A great love can bring tears to my eyes; yet at times you have seen me gaze with delight at corrupted men. I worship physical beauty like a Rubens, but then, like Grunewald, I must smell the sores of the leper."[70] Baziotes then concluded his statement with the request that, "let *me*, when *I* die, have the freedom to ramble between paradise and hell."[71] Verlaine certainly succeeded in engaging in just such a rambling. Contrary to Baziotes' own hopes, however, Verlaine managed to accomplish it while still living in the material world.

Baziotes encountered a journey of comparable scope in the work of Rimbaud. Having asserted that his poetic mission was "to be a seer,"[72] Rimbaud addressed the vast nature of his endeavor, and expressed it in terms that clarified his intention of traversing the gaps that separate even the most extremely opposed positions. He wrote that "I shall unveil every mystery: religious or natural mysteries, death, birth, future, past, cosmogony, the void."[73]

Rimbaud's litany of conquerable dichotomies, as well as Verlaine's forays to the cusp of both the divine and the condemned, correspond with Ethel Baziotes' description of her husband as someone who "saw all of life in duality—Paradoxes—Ironies—Psychological Juxtapositions."[74] Her statement not only reveals something essential about the perspective her husband brought to his own work, but it also concisely

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[70] *William Baziotes: Late Work, 1946-1962* (New York: Marlborough Gallery, 1971), p.7.
[71] ibid.
[72] *Six French Poets of the Nineteenth Century*, p.xxx.
[73] "Night in Hell," in *Six French Poets of the Nineteenth Century*, p.269.
[74] Ethel Baziotes, statement in *William Baziotes: Paintings and Works on Paper, 1952-1961*, unpaginated.

explicates the concerns that bound him to writers such as Baudelaire, Valéry, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé.

Baziotes directly addressed his obsession with duality in one of his most acclaimed paintings, *Cyclops*[75] of 1947 (figure 10). The image contains a single dominant figure, colored pink and set upon a base spanning most of the lower edge of the canvas and also extending up the left side of the composition. The round upper portion of the figure contains a circular shape recalling the single eye associated with the Cyclops of ancient myth.[76] In the upper right corner of the painting, Baziotes included a roughly triangular shape, defined within by a dark zigzagging line. Elongated, pointed, and

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[75] *Cyclops* acquired a unique importance in Baziotes' career. It achieved unprecedented critical recognition by winning the Walter M. Campana Memorial Purchase Prize in the 38th Annual Exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1947. *Cyclops* was the first work by an artist associated with Abstract Expressionism to receive an honor of such magnitude. See Samuel M. Kootz, *Recent Paintings by Baziotes: Feb. 16 thru Mar. 6 1948* (New York: Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, 1948), unpaginated; and, Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, p.213, for further detail regarding critics' reception of *Cyclops* and Baziotes' varying critical status.

[76] In the *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, 2nd edition (New York: Random House, 1999), p.498, "cyclops" has two pertinent definitions.

First, based upon Classical mythology, it can refer to a member of a family of giants with a single round eye in the middle of the forehead; and second, it can denote "a freshwater copepod of the genus *Cyclops*, having a median eye in the front of the head." While the second definition might derive from the first, each of these meanings points to subjects of noted interest to many Abstract Expressionist artists,and especially to Baziotes. As Mark Rothko pointed out, mythology has immediate relevance to the Abstract Expressionists "because it expresses to us something real and existing in ourselves" (Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko, *The Portrait and the Modern Artist*, mimeographed script of a broadcast on "Art in New York," H. Stix, director, WNYC, New York, October 13, 1943, quoted in Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting*, p.65. See also pp.62-70 for further consideration, and bibliographic information, regarding the Abstract Expressionists' appropriation of myth). Ancient myth was particularly salient to Baziotes, too: his parents were born in Greece; in the evenings of his childhood, with his siblings, Baziotes would attend a Greek school; and, in this environment,Baziotes learned the Greek language, the culture's history, and its mythology (Hadler, dissertation, pp.10-11). In 1949, Baziotes contemplated the significance of this upbringing and stated that his work was likely influenced by "the fact that my parents were Greek and lived in a neighborhood that was made up of Greeks" (Museum questionnaire, Baziotes file, Archives of American Art, unpaginated).

The second definition of "cyclops," relating as it does to a "tiny marine or freshwater crustacean," has direct associations with natural, evolutionary history. Polcari, in *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, pp.25-38, discusses at length both the Surrealists' and the Abstract Expressionists' interests in "origins and evolution," and makes the assertion that "[e]volution is the principle and subject of Baziotes's work" (p.216). Indeed, Ethel Baziotes verified that her husband repeatedly visited the Museum of Natural History (interview cited in Hadler, dissertation, p.234) and, in "Symposium: The Creative Process," *Art Digest* (January 1954), p.16, Baziotes himself specified that "[m]an, the ape and evolution" were amongst the inspirations for his paintings.

glowing yellow, this form also refers to Homer's ancient saga, as it evokes the fiery staff Odysseus and his comrades used to blind the Cyclops.[77]

The contours and forms of the composition are largely soft and rounded, and the prominent colors, too, are bright but soft. In marked contrast to these elements, though, is the staff-like protruding form in the upper right of the canvas. Its colors—dark reds and browns set against a relatively pale yellow ground—and its sharp lines—creating a series of rough points—evoke a sense of threat not found in other parts of the composition. Dangers lurk in this form: simultaneously, it hovers above the *Cyclops*' head as if poised to strike a devastating blow, and it appears to encroach upon the creature, as a predator baring to its prey a set of jagged and vicious teeth.

Reinforcing this connotation of threat mingled with harmlessness, Baziotes described specific characteristics of a rhinoceros that had effected his conception of *Cyclops*. Just as his composition reflects, the eyes and mouth were critical to Baziotes' experience with the animal:

> …my wife and I went up to the Bronx Zoo and went to see my favorite animal—the rhinoceros…I had some peanuts, and as I gave them to the rhino, he sucked in my hand and held it. My wife got scared, but I was terribly interested. He was playful and cute and toylike, but at the same time he chilled me: he seemed prehistoric and his eyes were cold and deadlooking.[78]

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[77] R.L. Eickhoff, *The Odyssey: A Modern Translation of Homer's Classic Tale* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, LLC, 2001), p.173, provides this account of Odysseus, the spear, and the Cyclops: "I ran to the fire, whispering to my fellows to bring the club…We thrust the point into the bed of coals and watched it turn to a fiery glow, green as it was. Then we lifted the spar upon our shoulders and crept up onto the monster's bed. Carefully, we aimed the glowing point, and then, as a shipwright directs its burning awl, we bore it into the monster's eye."

[78] Paneth.

Baziotes' actual encounter with the rhinoceros infused all aspects of his composition: the "playful and cute and toylike" appear in the *Cyclops*' gentle curves and soft pink form; its unblinking blue eye takes on a "chilled" and "deadlooking" aspect; the striated yellow and brown component resembles the peanuts Baziotes extended to the rhinoceros; indeed, they appear directed towards the animal's upturned, receiving mouth. Baziotes even alludes to the zoo setting by painting a green, park-like background and gray slabs suggestive of the rhinoceros' rocky, caged enclosure.

The associative nature of *Cyclops* amplifies its dualistic nature. It interweaves the human and the animal; it brings together the amusing and the lethal; and, as the mythical arises from the personal, the image also embodies a duality of context. It fuses the intimate with the universal, as well as the prehistoric with the present. Such references to both mythology and distant evolutionary history emerge in Surrealist and Abstract Expressionist compositions,[79] but in Baziotes' multifaceted intertwining of disparate realms, *Cyclops* also speaks directly to the Baudelairian theory of correspondences.

In *Dwarf* (1947; figure 11), a work less renowned than *Cyclops* but painted in the same year, Baziotes again mingles the harmless with the perilous and explores his interest in figural aberrations. It is, he said, "a figure that is a combination of human and animal." Providing additional connotations, however, he said that "I owned a book of horribly maimed soldiers of the first world war. There was one picture I kept returning to…He looked like [*Dwarf*] and I used to draw him many times."[80]

Dwarf resembles *Cyclops* in several ways. Its single, oddly-shaped figure is comparable to the dominant figure in *Cyclops*. Both figures' heads have a single eye

[79] Polcari, pp.27-28, 33-35, 216.
[80] Letter to Alfred H. Barr at The Museum of Modern Art. Baziotes file, Archives of American Art, unpaginated.

containing concentric circles, and both images include a set of jagged lines creating a potentially ferocious mouth. In *Dwarf*, Baziotes included a second, circled eye in the figure's abdominal area. It floats within a form having a fetal shape, creating an embryonic quality that reiterates Baziotes' interest in evolution and morphological development. As with *Cyclops*, Baziotes also connects the pleasant with the frightening in *Dwarf*. He says that it "expresses a quiet horror and an overall sensuous feeling," and "the circular form (eye) in the head and the jagged lines (teeth) underneath it, I think these forms are inspired from having looked at the lizards and pre-historic animals." The effect on Baziotes of these sources was also consistent with his appreciation for them in *Cyclops*; he explained that they "have for me a particular fascination of their own, passive and yet so deadly."[81] Baziotes' extended remarks reveal that *Dwarf* and *Cyclops* share not only formal references to duality but that in both paintings he intends to convey a presence that mixes the human and the animal, the harmless and the menacing. Baziotes' deliberate juxtapositions echo Baudelaire's own recognition of "the charms of horror," and his belief that "a mingling of childishness, nonchalance and malice"[82] is essential to an effective representation of beauty.

[81] ibid.
[82] In *Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry*, pp.137, 218.

Chapter 3
Figure on a Tightrope, The Mirror, Aerial: Approaching the Unknown

These "charms of horror," Baudelaire continued, "please none but the brave." This seems certainly true in Baziotes' *Figure on a Tightrope*. Formally and thematically, the image resonates with horror, charm, and bravery. These qualities are implicit in the very feat described in the painting's title: any individual walking a tightrope engages in an act of risk balanced by bravery. The depth of the performer's bravery is all the more enhanced by the horror associated with the journey's possible failure. Contrasting with the gravity of the situation, however, the carnival setting in which it occurs is typically playful and light-hearted. For both the performer and the observer, charm and horror coexist, just as they had done for Baziotes in *Cyclops* and *Dwarf*. Further, the performer's willingness to act in spite of fear and danger, much like Baziotes' own experience with the rhinoceros ("the rhinoceros…sucked in my hand and held it. My wife got scared, but I was terribly interested"[83]), is essential to the endeavor's dual nature.

Beyond the juxtaposition of playful harmlessness and life-threatening danger, which ties this image to the more explicated *Cyclops* and *Dwarf*, several aspects of *Figure on a Tightrope* underscore Baziotes' concerted attention to duality and allude to its manifestation in Baudelairian and Symbolist literature. Despite the singular form of the painting's title, Baziotes placed two figures and two tightrope lines in his composition. The two lines run nearly parallel to one another, and as the lower line approaches the right side of the composition it descends vertically to the bottom of the canvas. At the left side of the canvas, Baziotes painted a pink form, which he divided

[83] Paneth.

into three vertically-oriented, globular sections. To its right is a pale blue figure whose general shape resembles the figures in *Cyclops* and *Dwarf* and whose primary internal feature, as Baziotes made clear for *Cyclops* and *Dwarf*, functions as an eye. Baziotes placed both figures against a blue ground that, absent of any delineations of time or place, renders the setting indefinable.

Baziotes' figures navigate two separate but related portions of the canvas. The white-blue figure appears to stand upon the upper green line. The pink figure obscures parts of both lines and thus appears in front of them. However, Baziotes established a strong connection between the pink form and the horizontal lines: the outline around the pink figure, which surrounds all but its lowest area, is the same phosphorescent green as the two tightrope lines. With the green lines encompassing most of the pink figure and also extending to the footing of the blue figure, Baziotes fortified the relationship between the two forms. By choosing to include two figures and two tightrope lines, rather than the singular examples put forth in the title, Baziotes affirms that the subject here is duality. He presents, simultaneously, two aspects of a single thing.

As one character among many circus performers, the tightrope-walking figure held personal significance for Baziotes. Aware of the extensive art historical tradition of painting circus performers, and especially clowns, Baziotes executed several interpretations of the subject himself.[84] His statements reveal that he appreciated their inherent contradictions, making them an appropriate symbol of the artist: "[t]he clown is a romantic and classical image. The artist doesn't want to reveal his feelings directly, so

[84] The September 25, 1995 Pennypacker-Andrews auction catalogue, *Important Twentieth Century Unreserved Art Auction of Recently Discovered Works by William Baziotes (1912-1963) from the private collection of Constance and the late Harry Baziotes*, references at least 11 images of circus figures. Hadler, dissertation, pp.34-38, also discusses Baziotes' exploration of the subject.

he presents himself in a disguise; his clothes and gestures are gay and beautiful, but his face is sad."[85] The clown's costume is perhaps his most defining feature. For many artists, including Baziotes, a harlequin pattern of repeated diamond shapes commonly articulates at least a portion of the costume. Such a pattern appears conspicuously in Baziotes' *Untitled (Clown with Apple)* (1939/40; figure 12). The pink form in *Figure on a Tightrope* both reiterates the pink color of the hat in *Clown with Apple* and appears as an abstracted variation of this traditional diamond pattern. The pink form's prominence in the image attests to the importance Baziotes placed on the performer's masquerading, and therefore dual, nature. It is the costume itself that alerts the viewer to the potential for dramatic contradiction between the performer's external appearance and internal personality; in effect, the costume prompts the questioning of truth and reality.

The search for, and revelation of, truth is a quest that surfaces prominently in the French literature influential to Baziotes. Baudelaire asserted that art should reveal the hidden truths forming correspondences between the natural and the spiritual worlds,[86] and Rimbaud declared that his purpose as a poet was "to be a seer, finding a language capable of translating the absolute."[87] In *Bally* (c.1871), Rimbaud described a carnival scene in which masquerading characters engage in antics ranging from the comical to the terrifying:

> Oh most violent Paradise of frenzied grimace!…In improvised costumes, in the style of a bad dream, they play laments, tragedies…witty as history or religions have never been…Master jugglers, they transform place and persons

[85] Paneth.
[86] *Literary Origins of Surrealism*, p.45.
[87] *An Anthology of French Poetry from Nerval to Valéry in English Translation with French Originals*, ed. Angel Flores (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), p.104.

> and make use of magnetic comedy…Their banter, their terror lasts a minute, or months on end.
>
> I alone hold the key to this savage ballyhoo.[88]

Rimbaud filled his carnival with dramatic juxtapositions ("most violent Paradise"), costumed performers capable of casting doubt over the identities of both people and places ("improvised costumes…transform place and persons"), and even ambiguity regarding the element of time that surrounds the events ("lasts a minute, or months on end"). In contrast to the chaos and uncertainty of the scene, Rimbaud's final line is an unequivocal assertion: uniquely and powerfully, he possesses the instrument required for both understanding and controlling these mysterious events. This knowledge and ability would assure his status as a seer, or as one who is "capable of translating the absolute."

Baziotes, too, sought to uncover the truths situated outside of the visible world. He said that the substance of his work "has to do with the human personality and all the mysteries of life, not simply colors or abstract balances. To me, it's all reality."[89] This perspective relates directly to the conception of the artist as a figure who is simultaneously concealed and revealed by a chosen costume. Specifically, as an artist approximates a masquerading performer, his costume provokes a reevaluation of reality. In turn, the artist's quest to penetrate beyond the veracity of the material world suggests that, ultimately, he also possesses an ability to discern veiled truths. The artist, in this

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[88] *An Anthology of French Poetry from Nerval to Valéry*, p. 130.
[89] Franks, Paula and Marion White, "An Interview with William Baziotes," *Perspective No.2* (New York: Hunter College, c.1956-57), p.30, in *William Baziotes: A Memorial Exhibition* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1965), p.42.

way, can both enquire about and find the answers to all the questions surrounding "the mysteries of life."

Figure on a Tightrope stresses this relationship between the two roles of the artist by having the green lines connect the pink figure to its companion, the white-blue figure with a dominant eye form. Not only are the two forms bound to one another, but as the blue form appears to be looking out from the canvas, the pink form appears to be looking into it. In this way, the two forms assert that the artist assumes two roles, that of performer and that of spectator. The formal emphasis that Baziotes placed on the blue figure's eye reaffirms that the ability to see was integral to his formulation of the challenges, abilities, and rewards involved in artistic endeavors. It also relates to Baudelaire's opinion that an artist should strive to recognize and communicate the correspondences that bind the visible natural world to the spiritual realm.

In addition to the circus figure, the carnival setting further manipulates the question of reality in *Figure on a Tightrope*. As an orchestrated performance, the tightrope-walker's activity is a fabricated set of circumstances. The feat presented, though, is altogether real, as it requires actual skill and it culminates with measurable success or failure. Baziotes claimed that, in his paintings, "I want something that evokes mood, a background, a stage set for certain characters that are playing certain parts."[90] *Figure on a Tightrope* creates just such a scene, and it addresses the confronting and questioning of reality in much the same way as Baudelaire does in one of his prose poems. In *A Heroic Death* (1869), Baudelaire described the last performance of a character named Fancioulle:

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[90] "An Interview with William Baziotes," in *William Baziotes: A Memorial Exhibition,* p.42.

> The Sieur Fancioulle excelled especially in parts either silent or little burdened with words, such as are often the principal ones in those fairy plays whose object is to represent symbolically the mystery of life…
>
> [Fancioulle] came and went, he laughed, wept, was convulsed with an indestructible aureole about his head, an aureole invisible to all, but visible to me, and in which were blended, in a strange amalgam, the rays of Art and the martyr's glory…Fancioulle proved to me, in a peremptory, an irrefutable way, that the intoxication of Art is surer than all others to veil the terrors of the gulf; that genius can act a comedy on the threshold of the grave with a joy that hinders it from seeing the grave, lost, as it is, in a Paradise…[91]

As Baudelaire recounted the masterful execution of Fancioulle's performance, Baziotes also presented his tightrope-walker in a moment of extraordinary accomplishment. With the figure poised upon the green rope, Baziotes depicted an instant of perfect balance. Whether or not it will continue is unknown. The canvas' blue ground contributes to the scene's ambiguity. It is a setting that betrays no indications of any particular time or place, and it corresponds visually with Baudelaire's description in *The Double Chamber* (1869). The room, Baudelaire wrote, "is like a reverie; a chamber truly *spiritual*, where the stagnant atmosphere is lightly touched with rose and blue."[92] Not only do rose and blue permeate Baziotes' image—blue seeps into both forms, rose dominates the harlequin figure, and the background is almost exclusively blue—but the indistinct atmosphere of *Figure on a Tightrope* is as dream-like as that in *The Double Chamber*. This atmosphere suggests that in an instant of ideal balance, which is a most

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[91] *Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry*, pp.55-56. This passage shares with *Figure on a Tightrope* the duality of comedy juxtaposed with tragedy, or joy paired with terror, and it constitutes a direct tie to both *Cyclops* and *Dwarf*. This thematic continuity takes visual form in Baziotes repeated use of a number of elements: toylike shapes, soft blue, pink, and green colors, and a prominent single eye that is at least partially blue and is defined by concentric circles.

[92] *Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry*, p.116.

finite and circumscribed moment of time, there exists a suspension of time, a timelessness, that relates in its limitlessness to eternity. In fact, Baudelaire wrote that in the realm of *The Double Chamber*, "[m]inutes are no more; seconds are no more. Time has vanished, and Eternity reigns—an Eternity of delight."[93]

Baziotes lent a dualistic quality to the element of time in *Figure on a Tightrope*, not simply by recognizing both the finite and infinite, but by actually fusing the two concepts in a single image. This unified presentation underscores the inescapable nature of the connection that binds the finite with its opposite, the infinite, and it suggests that Baziotes acknowledged Baudelaire's belief in the existence of correspondences that unite even the most disparate elements. In devising a composition that is as much an image of a moment as it is an image of timelessness, Baziotes accomplished just what Baudelaire admired in critiquing "the painter of modern life:" Baziotes became "the painter of the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity that it contains."[94]

The duality permeating Baziotes' *Figure on a Tightrope*, and central to Baziotes' literary interests, is vast in scope and quickly reappears in subsequent paintings. In *The Mirror*, he approached duality in a particularly self-referential manner. The canvases, he said, "are my mirrors,"[95] suggesting that a painting involving the theme of a mirror would be especially self-oriented. This reference, along with the mirror's unique physical properties, make this reflective device particularly well-suited to Baziotes' consideration

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[93] *Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry*, p.117.
[94] *Baudelaire: The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon Press, 1965), pp. 4-5. In this essay, Baudelaire named Daumier as an example of one of the artists to have successfully taken up "the sketch of manners" and become an accomplished example of "the painter of modern life." In addition to specifying the ability of these painters to fuse the transient with the eternal, Baudelaire recognized that their work was "of a mixed nature, by which I mean that it contains a strong literary element." Both of these characteristics could describe Baziotes, too.
[95] William Baziotes, "I Cannot Evolve Any Concrete Theory," *Possibilities 1* (Winter 1947/48), p.2.

of duality.[96] As explained earlier, the subject of the mirror was so compelling to Baziotes that he turned to it several times in the 1940s.

Two forms dominate the composition of *The Mirror*. The larger of the two, occupying most of the central and left areas of the canvas, Baziotes painted in shades of pink, green, and yellow, with these particular pinks and greens resembling those in *Cyclops*, *Dwarf*, and *Figure on a Tightrope*. The shapes and organization of this large form resemble an abstracted face, with the yellow areas suggesting eyes and then, below, in the black spaces defined by pink and green contours, the suggestion of both a mouth and nose. While this assemblage of parts does convey the impression of a face, it is also readable as a composition of two distinct forms. In this view, the left and right sides of the form appear separate, except for an overlapping section where the lower portion of the green form coincides with the extending left area of the pink form. Indeed, this form seems, itself, to divide into two distinct profiles. The black areas that had appeared as shadows helping to articulate a mouth and nose seem, in this way, rather like a part of the dark ground surrounding the forms, or empty spaces that emphasize the separation of green from pink. In both interpretations, the yellow, pink, and green elements stand out dramatically from their dark, almost uniformly black, ground.

In the right section of the canvas, Baziotes included a second form, this one placed against a burnt sienna background. Baziotes articulated it with wide bands of color, the brightest and most prominent of which run vertically down the center of the form. These central bands are, in the lower area, a pink/blue color and, in the upper area,

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[96] For more on the function and history of mirrors, see Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*, trans. Katharine H. Jewett (New York: Routledge, 1994). Melchior-Bonnet offers a thorough discussion of the mirror's ability to both duplicate and distort images. She also presents an extensive account of production and commerce issues relating to mirrors, and she considers the roles mirrors have played in a great deal of art and literature.

the same bright green as in the form at the left. The surrounding bands, however, are darker variations of these colors. Finally, above the green portion of the band, Baziotes painted a roughly oval, blue/gray shape that resembles the curve of hair swept across a forehead. In fact, this banded form suggests a sculptural portrait bust, with the brighter colors indicating a face in light, and the darker colors on either side representing its shaded parts. Beneath this head, the form narrows and then widens, as in a portrait bust's neck and shoulder areas. While the pink and green form to the left also resembles a face, this curvilinear, bust-like form is the far more volumetric of the two forms. It is, actually, the most three-dimensional element in the painting. Looking across *The Mirror*, from left to right, the components in the image become increasingly sculptural. Underscoring this transformation, Baziotes painted a brown border into the left edge of the canvas; on one side it is curvilinear, on the other side it is a straight line, and it resembles the frame of either a painting or a mirror. A similar element extends across the bottom of the canvas, uniting the face and bust forms. The banded form, though, distinct as it is in its volumetric quality, is also separated from the rest of the composition by its own frame, which appears as a rectilinear background painted in siennas and browns. The flattest forms in *The Mirror* occupy the area within the framing on the left side of the canvas. Their lack of three-dimensionality suggests a deliberate manipulation of positive and negative space. By alluding here to optical uncertainty, Baziotes emphasized the unreliability of conventional perception and, as *The Mirror* begins to incorporate a greater sense of depth, Baziotes also emphasized the possibility of acquiring a more fully-developed vision. While this transformational process appears underway in the mingling of green and pink found in the lower area of the large, face-like form, it is at its most

vivid, appropriately, in the yellow eye shape occupying the central part of the canvas. In contrast to the yellow shape on the left, Baziotes shaded and contoured this form to render it especially three-dimensional. By becoming an eye and a vessel, it is both a source and container of illumination.

In general, the banded, curvilinear form on the right side of the canvas shares few overt similarities with the pink and green component on the left. However, in its most prominent colors (green and pink/blue), its alternating bright and dark sections, and its having a rounded area situated in the upper portion of the form, it constitutes a reconfiguration of the elements defining the larger green and pink form. Compared to its counterpart at left, its components are at once more compact—in its apparent size—and more expansive—in its dimensionality. It, too, then, reasserts the transformational force at work in *The Mirror*.

In the formal relationships between the banded form and the pink/green form, Baziotes injected the idea of a mirror's reflected image into both of the painting's dominant components. Regarding the question of what might be materially real and what might be a reflection, Baziotes put forth a multiplicity of possibilities, creating an unending ambiguity: it may be that the bust-like form is a reflected image of that on the left; it may be that the banded form is a concrete object and the form on the left is actually its reflection; it may be that the larger green and pink elements, each topped by a yellow eye shape, actually represent an object and its reflection; or, no such direct relationship may exist. Rather than being problematic, this uncertainty enriches the image. Its ambiguity, in fact, tightens its bond with reality. Valéry addressed this relationship in a letter he wrote regarding his own compositions:

> The obscurities attributed to me are but thin and transparent compared to those I find all about me. Happy are those who are sure they perfectly understand themselves! I am possessed, my friend, of that unhappy sort of mind that is never quite sure whether it has understood without realizing it; I have great difficulty distinguishing between what is evidently clear and what is positively unclear.[97]

Valéry's explication allows for the paradox that ambiguity can generate clarity. In much the same way, the performer's character and costume in *Figure on a Tightrope* represent, simultaneously, differing aspects of a single thing and, as a result, prompt a reevaluation of reality. Baziotes constructs a comparable challenge in *The Mirror*, and it is the very concept of the mirror itself that provides the uncertainty, the questioning, and the reformulation.[98]

The formal and thematic ambiguities in *The Mirror* contribute substantially to its provocative, querying nature. Amplifying this quality, Baziotes chose to create a mirror-oriented image containing not just one single figure with an object clearly identifiable as a mirror, and not a figure paired with its identical reflection, but an image dominated by two distinctly different forms. This juxtaposition suggests both an uncertainty about the authenticity of the visible world and the potential for reflection (either as physical engagement with a mirror or as a more internal type of contemplation) to reveal contradictory but coexistent elements. With its focus on faces and profiles, *The Mirror* becomes particularly self-referential, and the image's allusions to the artist as both

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[97] *From Proust to Camus*, pp.55-56.

[98] The uncertainty referred to by both Baziotes' image and Valéry's passage relate to Melchior-Bonnet's observations concerning the questions and suggestions surrounding mirrors. She writes that, "[b]ecause it does not duplicate reality exactly—in the mirror the right hand becomes the left—the reflection poses questions about image and resemblance: it returns an image that closely relates to, yet differs from the reflected object itself. And just where does this image reside?…the mirror offers an enigmatic and divergent way of knowing" (*The Mirror: A History*, pp.101-102).

performer and visionary further emphasize this personal aspect. Together, these formal elements restate Baziotes' declaration that his canvases "are my mirrors,"[99] and what they expose is a multifaceted and dynamic constitution.

Baudelaire voiced a belief about his own dualistic nature in *Heautontimoroumenos*[100] (1855). An ominous tone runs between the opposed pairs of words Baudelaire used to describe his existence and, at the outset, a mirror assumes a prominent, personal, and menacing role in the poem:

> I am the hateful mirror…
> I am the wound and the knife!
> I am the blow and the cheek!
> I am the limbs and the wheel,
> And condemned and executioner![101]

Baziotes' *The Mirror* does not possess the overtly sinister quality of Baudelaire's poem, but it does share its interest in revealing an unexpected presence of duality. Both compositions depend on the deliberate combining of opposed pairs. Baudelaire united the wound with the knife, the blow with the cheek, the limbs with the wheel, and the condemned with the executioner. In *The Mirror*, Baziotes brought together numerous perceptual and physical pairings: positive and negative space, flat and sculptural forms, an image and an object, a still-life and a portrait bust, the frame and the framed, and the contained and the container. The juxtaposition of distinct but related forms in *The Mirror* and, similarly, in *Heautontimoroumenos*, recall Baziotes' statement about the effect of

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[99] Paneth.
[100] While Baudelaire does not specifically inform his readers that this poem refers directly to himself, it does correspond closely to other statements he made regarding the oppositional forces that circulate within any individual's character. He had written, for example, that there are "in every man, at every moment, two simultaneous postulations, one toward God, the other toward Satan" (*Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry*, p.229).
[101] *An Anthology of French Poetry from Nerval to Valéry*, p.30.

certain Surrealist principles on his painting. He had explained that, "Breton said poetry is two dissimilar things in the world put together. A surrealist attitude toward things…making irrational elements work together…I love the mysterious in painting."[102] This interest in forging unconventional relationships underscores Baziotes' affiliation with Baudelaire. Indeed, Baudelaire's theory of correspondences prompted the Surrealists and Abstract Expressionists, and the Symbolists before them, to consider and promote a formulation of reality that breaks with familiar and rational boundaries.

Baudelaire and Baziotes appear to have held comparable opinions, too, regarding the mirror's provocative nature and its function as a device capable of accessing that which exists far beyond the ordinary. "To me a mirror is something mysterious," Baziotes revealed, "[i]t's evocative of strangeness and otherworldliness."[103] In his notes about the desire "to aspire uninterruptedly to be sublime," Baudelaire wrote that a requirement for attaining such an ideal would be to "live and sleep before a mirror."[104] Keeping with these associations, Baziotes' painting of *The Mirror* does not present an image fully concordant with sights available in the visible world. Instead, it permits a glimpse unconstrained by the common or expected. In *Figure on a Tightrope*, Baziotes acknowledged the artist's exceptional visionary status by placing formal emphasis on the performer's eye. Here, the eyes again figure prominently, and the notion of sight is fortified by the thematic inclusion of an object—the mirror—whose primary purpose is centered upon the concept of vision.

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[102] Paneth.
[103] "An Interview with William Baziotes," in *William Baziotes: A Memorial Exhibition*, p.42.
[104] *Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry*, p.226. Baziotes' image presents a comparable dichotomy. Before his mirror he places both faces and objects; together, they refer to the active and inert states, or the need Baudelaire expressed, to "live and sleep before a mirror."

In form and function, a mirror relates closely to a window: both are panes of glass, both address the subject of seeing, and, when illumination and darkness exist on opposite sides of a pane of glass, a window can become a mirror. Windows and mirrors, also, are both threshold devices. Signalling a transition from one plane of existence to another, they both imply the discovery of something novel.[105] As an integral part of creative activity, Baziotes advocated the process of looking as if through a mirror and also as if through a window; that is, he valued observation that is a self-examining type of reflection and that which is an evaluation of the exterior world. Baziotes' decidedly dualistic approach to looking is evident in his assertion that an artist "must look at the world; must enter into other men's lives; must look at the earth and the sky; must examine the dust in the street; must walk through the world and his mirror."[106] Rather than looking at his mirror, Baziotes specifically sought to look "through" it. By looking at his mirror, he would likely find a straightforward representation of himself and his surroundings. By looking through his mirror, though, he implies the crossing of a threshold and the pursuit of a passage outside of his familiar environment. In fact, he emphasizes the truly liminal nature of the mirror when he declares the importance of being able to "*walk through*…his mirror" [italics mine]. The mirror is exactly this type of mechanism in *Alice in Wonderland*. In the story's second installment, titled *Through*

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[105] The liminal character of mirrors deserves further, undivided attention. Baziotes' production of mirror-based images clearly establishes the importance of the theme in his work, but it emerges prominently elsewhere in the cultural world of post-war New York. For example, Carl Gustave Jung and John Graham both influenced a number of artists with whom Baziotes interacted in the 1940s (including Jackson Pollock), and both Jung and Graham promoted particular beliefs regarding the mirror's ability to provide perspectives that are typically inaccessible. For further detail about Jung's mirror beliefs, see Carl G. Jung, *The Integration of the Personality*, trans. Stanley M. Dell (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1939), and for information pertaining to Graham's beliefs and influence see Polcari, pp.43-45, 240-245. Extended examination, however, is needed regarding Baziotes' personal involvement with Jung's theories and Graham's ideas.

[106] *William Baziotes: Late Work, 1946*-1962, p.7.

the Looking-Glass and what Alice found there, Alice discovered that the mirror leads to a decidedly curious place:

> …she began to look about, and noticed that what could be seen from the old room was quite common and uninteresting, but that all the rest was as different as possible. For instance, the pictures on the wall next [to] the fire seemed to be alive, and the very clock on the chimney-piece (you know you can only see the back of it in the Looking-glass) had got the face of a little old man, and grinned at her.[107]

According to Baziotes, however, observation could be internally focused (looking with "his mirror"), but it also could be externally focused ("look at the world…look at the earth and the sky"). In its most artistically complete form, though, he advised that it should be both. Baudelaire puts forth a similar perspective in a prose work titled, aptly, *Windows*. He draws attention to the richly suggestive quality of the exterior world, especially as it is heightened by gazing through a darkened window. The image Baudelaire created in *Windows* is one aligned with *The Mirror*. Just as Baudelaire described, Baziotes' composition is a darkness pierced by light; it has an aspect of mysterious ambiguity that contains both "gloomy" and "dazzling" colors, and it is a place both "dark or luminous." *The Mirror* expresses much of what Baudelaire contends:

> There is nothing more profound, more mysterious, more fertile, more gloomy, or more dazzling, than a window lighted by a candle. What we can see in the sunlight is always less interesting than what goes on behind the panes of a window. In that dark or luminous hollow, life lives, life dreams, life suffers.

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[107] Carroll, Lewis. *Alice in Wonderland*, ed., Donald J. Gray (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1992), pp.112-113. In the world beyond the mirror, Alice finds that inanimate objects become animate. This juxtaposition corresponds to the active and inert states that both Baziotes and Baudelaire included in their references to mirrors.

> …Perhaps you will say to me: 'Are you sure that it is the real story?' What does it matter, what does any reality outside of myself matter, if it has helped me to live, to feel that I am, and what I am?[108]

Rimbaud also wrote a poem, titled *Windows*, recognizing the transformative and enlightening power of looking:

Disgusted with the dreary hospital, and the rank fumes
Rising with the banal whiteness of the curtains
Toward the great crucifix tired of the bare wall,
The man destined for death slyly straightens his old spine,

Shuffles…to press
His ashen gaunt and skeletal face
To the panes…

Drunk, forgetting the horror of the holy oil,
The herb teas, the clock and the inflicted bed,
The cough, he lives again; and when twilight bleeds on the tiles,
His eye on the horizon gorged with light,

Sees golden ships, fine as swans,
On a scented river of purple, sleepily
Rocking the rich faun flash of their lines
In a great calm charged with memory!

In this way…I flee and I cling to all those windows
From where one turns one's back on life, and hallowed,
In their glass, washed by eternal dews,
Gilded by the chaste morning of the Infinite

I see myself and I brag I am an angel! And I die, and I long
--Let the glass be art, let it be mysticism—
To be reborn…[109]

The main character in Rimbaud's poem, "the man destined for death,"[110] undergoes a remarkable transformation when he gazes through a window. As Baziotes'

[108] *Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry*, pp.45-46.
[109] *An Anthology of French Poetry from Nerval to Valéry*, p.142.

mirror offers an altered vision of reality, Rimbaud's window also generates a most extraordinary experience. The poem's setting begins as a "dreary," "rank," "banal" hospital room permeated by a sense of imminent death. Approaching the window, though, the dying man experiences a change in his consciousness that comes to have physical consequences. Becoming "drunk," he is relieved of all the burdens of earthly existence: illness, death, medicines, even the passing of time, vanish from his awareness. In their place, as his eye seems "gorged with light," he encounters the exact opposite of what had filled his hospital room. Instead of the impending darkness of death and the harsh "whiteness of the curtains," the room acquires "a great calm" and becomes a place of beauty and vibrant color.

This imagery fills *The Mirror*, too. As death, or blackness, encroaches upon Rimbaud's man, Baziotes' background is also black. The mirror, however, brings luminescence; its two eye forms even appear "gorged with light." Further, the power of Rimbaud's window is as great at Baziotes' mirror: both grant an escape from the common and limited course of earthly life and unveil, as an alternative, a rich new existence. Baziotes presented this transformative process most explicitly in his treatment of the yellow-eyed, pink and green form. In the joining and intertwining of the pink and green colors, Baziotes' viewers appear to be witnessing an act of transformation. Given the ubiquitous ambiguity, and the changing nature of *The Mirror*'s forms, any ordinary processing of this scene is simply inadequate. By conventional standards, reality here is uncertain. Punctuating this prevailing elusiveness, the image's most intense illumination issues from the two yellow eye shapes. This attention to eyes alerts the viewer to

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[110] While Rimbaud's *Windows* gives a detailed, almost individualized, scene, the poem actually presents a universal story. As Rimbaud introduces his readers to "the man destined to death," he creates a protagonist representing every living person--past, present, and future.

Baziotes' high regard for the artist's visionary status. Just as the window, for Rimbaud, embodies "mysticism" and compels a cry "[t]o be reborn," for Baziotes, the mirror is a mystical device and the artist's engaging with it uncovers a renewed, revelatory vision.

In its concern with concepts such as the power of the artist's vision, the presentation of the unexpected, and the significance of ambiguity or mystery, *The Mirror* extends the contemplations that had driven Baziotes' acclaimed *Cyclops* and, in the same period, *Dwarf* and *Figure on a Tightrope*. *The Mirror* also reinforces Baziotes' bond with Baudelaire and the Symbolists, and fortifies the role of duality in his work. However, as his career progressed, Baziotes did not turn away from this set of ideas. In a physical sense, duality even permeates Baziotes' painting process in his later works. Acknowledging the role of indirect and intuitive forces, Baziotes said in late 1947 that "[e]ach painting has its own way of evolving…Each beginning suggests something. Once I sense the suggestion, I begin to paint intuitively."[111] Several years later, in 1954, he recognized again the prominence of a type of automatism in his work, explaining that "[i]nspiration comes to me unexpectedly, never by virtue of deliberate stimulation."[112] Yet, this absence of conscious manipulation contrasts with what became an increasingly prolonged and methodical painting practice. Lawrence Alloway noted this aspect of Baziotes' technique: "[he] scumbles, laying one color over another in soft, rather dry touches. The process is a slow one, and one that became increasingly protracted through the 1950s."[113] By his own account, Baziotes estimated that, by the 1950s, he would work

[111] William Baziotes, "I Cannot Evolve Any Concrete Theory,"
[112] William Baziotes, in "Symposium: The Creative Process," p.16.
[113] *William Baziotes: A Memorial Exhibition* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1965), p.16.

for six to twelve months on each painting he produced.[114] As *Aerial* demonstrates, in the later years of Baziotes' life, when his creative methods give his paintings their most ethereal, mottled colors and their most refined forms, duality remains critical to his compositions.

Baziotes' vision is at its most expansive in *Aerial*. Like Rimbaud's *Windows*, it presents a transformative movement vast enough to reach from the confines of ordinary earthly existence out to the unbounded realm of the infinite. Without making as overt a reference to thresholds as *The Mirror*, *Aerial* signifies the potential to transcend limiting barriers and penetrate a distant but revelatory realm.

In *Aerial*, two primary forms occupy a space divided into two distinct but contiguous sections. Baziotes selected particularly evocative colors for each of these four components. The pink tone of the canvas' lower section suggests the terrestrial as well as the corporeal. Earth and flesh, with their acutely transitory connotations, represent one pole of *Aerial*'s duality. Correspondingly, they also constitute the base of the composition. The upper, far larger portion of the canvas, though, Baziotes painted a mottled gray. With its relative size, its location, and its color, this area conveys notions of both sea and sky. The dominance of this section of the canvas over the pink ground below fits well with the definition of "aerial" as something "of, in, or produced by the air…[something] inhabiting or frequenting the air…[or] reaching far into the air."[115]

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[114] Baziotes, "Symposium: The Creative Process," p.16. Additionally, in *An Introduction to the Method of William Baziotes*, p.127, Cavaliere connects the slowness of Baziotes' process to the 19th century French poets' concern for indirection and ambiguity. She also brings to the subject an intense emotional component, contending that "[t]he atmosphere of calm on the surface of Baziotes' paintings is deceptive. What appears as delicate silence is filled underneath with painfully emotive turbulence."

[115] *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, p.31.

The larger of the two forms in *Aerial* exists in the composition's lower section. It is essentially white, but it has mottled undertones reminiscent of the blue-white creature in *Figure on a Tightrope*. Although it rises from its earthly foundation, its lowest point remains embedded in the pink base. This tail- or root-like connection to the earth contrasts with the wing-like appendages on either side of the form: it appears, simultaneously, ascendent and grounded. Maneuvering through the grayish space above, the smaller form seems to move up and across the canvas. It has characteristics of a dog or rodent—a tail, extended limbs, a long snout—but its blue color also reiterates its association with the sea and the sky. Its placement and shape render its relationship to the white form ambiguous. It might be leaping out of the white form, but it also might be the prey pursued by the white form. Either way, it is poised to break the boundaries of the canvas; it will, momentarily, begin a venture into the literal and figurative unknown.

Another ambiguity surfaces upon further consideration of the white form and its placement on the canvas. Although the pink base of the image suggests a terrestrial or corporeal realm, the shape of the line that marks the meeting of the pink and gray areas has a wavy, or scalloped, characteristic. This form implies that the base of the image can also allude to the sea, with its waves appearing to meet the sky beyond it. This interchangeability between sea and earth enhances the suggestive nature of *Aerial* and gives to the rising white form yet another quality: its biomorphism now includes a floating, aquatic aspect.

Baziotes included a final compositional element in the uppermost area of the canvas. There, though faintly visible, he placed a horizontal white line; at its left it curls upward, at its right it meets the very edge of the painting, and midway through it is

intersected by a line closely resembling a circle. Just as the mottled white form indicates a connection between *Aerial* and *Figure on a Tightrope*, this line also draws the two images together. The feat of the tightrope-walker occurs, of course, in the sky; in fact, the tightrope-walker is an aerialist. The sky is prominent in both paintings, but an allusion to the rope surfaces in both, too. It is the green line, supporting the white form and intersected by the harlequin form, in *Figure on a Tightrope*. In *Aerial*, the rope suggestion emerges in the horizontal white line, also intersected by a curvilinear shape. In the scheme of *Aerial*, this white line functions as a horizon line. Its circle suggests either the sun or the moon, in the process of rising or setting and casting a reflection down onto the sea. This linear component formally balances the composition by serving as a counterpart to the line below where the pink and gray areas meet. Further, it reflects Baziotes' signature in the lower right corner of the canvas, and it generates a connection between the other two white elements in the composition and Baziotes, himself, personally. The white horizon line, though, also reinforces the reading of the canvas' space, from bottom to top, as that of earth, sea, and sky. By emphasizing this specific conception of *Aerial*'s space, Baziotes amplified the sense of ascension permeating the image and reaffirms the significance of its title. The peaks in the pink area direct attention upward; the white form originates in the nautical or terrestrial region, but it appears to be rising; and the blue form, highly energetic and elevated, embodies the possibility of extending past the earth, the sea, and even the sky, and meeting up with everything, endlessly, beyond.

Baziotes' presentation of a sea that meets with the sky, and then leads to the infinite, finds expression in Rimbaud's poem, *Eternity* (1872):

I have recovered it.
What? Eternity.
It is the sea
Matched with the sun.[116]

In addition to the thematic connection between Rimbaud's poem and Baziotes' painting, there is a correspondence between the compositional simplicity of both works. Rimbaud and Baziotes both addressed eternity, the most expansive of all ideas. To do so, though, Rimbaud relied on few and simple words, and Baziotes, in contrast to the heaviness and complexity of *The Mirror*, used a small number of forms with soft, muted colors. Both compositions juxtapose a relatively modest form with an immeasurably vast subject.

Intermingling the formally subtle with the conceptually sublime, Baziotes' *Aerial* becomes, also, a visualization of the effects Valéry described in *Psalm on a Voice* (c.1926):

Half whispering,
In a soft voice and a faint voice saying great things:
Important, astonishing, profound and true thing,
In a soft voice and a faint voice.

…That voice scarcely wrinkling the air,
That power in a whisper,
Those perspectives, those discoveries…[117]

The "great things" so delicately articulated in *Aerial* pertain to the relationship illuminated between the terrestrial and the otherworldly realms. Rather than asserting that the two worlds must remain isolated opposites, Baziotes emphasized their connection to one another. He accomplished this by composing each facet of the image in such a

[116] *An Anthology of French Poetry from Nerval to Valéry*, p.119
[117] *Selected Writings of Paul Valéry*, p.82.

way that together they smoothly direct attention up through, and out of, the canvas. As the blue form carries the viewer's gaze to the upper edge of the painting, it does what Valéry described in *How calm the hour is…*(c.1925), it seems to "plunge into the ecstasy of space" and progress towards "the threshold of all that is possible."[118]

The blue form's movement from one realm to another involves a liminal device much like the one in Rimbaud's *Windows*. In *Aerial*, the blue form appears to be nearing a threshold as it approaches the white horizon line; however, the reality of the threshold's presence becomes more substantial as this form directs the viewer's attention towards the edge of the canvas. There, *Aerial*'s blue form, along with its viewers, might expect to find a frame. It could, conceivably, resemble the frame in *The Mirror*, and its implications are as great as those in both *Windows* and *The Mirror*: beyond it, there exist the infinite and the unknown.

The ethereal paint colors and texture in *Aerial* strengthen its window and mirror connotations by echoing the hazy and insubstantial translucence that often characterizes a view through glass. Alice, in *Through the Looking-Glass*, embarks on her otherworldly venture after encountering just such a threshold:

> 'Let's pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it's turning into a sort of mist now. I declare! It'll be easy enough to get through…'And certainly the glass *was* beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist.[119]

In *Aerial*, Baziotes emphasized the inescapably transformative nature of the movement from one realm to another. Specifically, while the white form rises up from

[118] *Selected Writings of Paul Valéry*, p.78.
[119] Carroll, p.111.

its base, it cannot fully break its bond with this place of origin. Only in an altered state can it continue to ascend. The blue form represents this advanced state, and it does have a direct relationship to the white form: the contours defining the white form lead the viewer's gaze immediately up to the blue form, and this blue form's elevated position occupies a point on the same trajectory created by the white form's upward reach. Additionally, the appendages of the white form resemble those of the blue form, but the blue form has one appendage more than the white, as if to suggest it has a more advanced and complex existence: the white form, with its attached wings, suggests the avian or aquatic, and the blue, with more prominent limbs, suggests the mammalian.[120] The universal salience of evolutionary change becomes highly personal in *Aerial*, however, because Baziotes included his white, linear signature at the bottom of the canvas as a complement to the horizon line up above. In their formal relationship, the two white lines fuse the intimate with the infinite.

The coloring of the two primary forms in *Aerial* further enhances their connection to one another and their relation to the infinite: a hint of blue infuses the white form, but this blue becomes dominant and solidifying in the form above. With its elevated status and its orientation outside of the canvas, the blue coloring of this form has a particularly spiritual connotation that conforms to Kandinsky's notion that *"[b]lue is the typically heavenly color."* Leaving behind, as it is, the terrestrial and the transitory, this form appears propelled by the force Kandinsky believed is inherent in the color blue;

[120] In evolutionary terms, the sea is the ultimate point of origin, the place from which all life evolved. See Hadler, *William Baziotes: Four Sources of Inspiration*, for more information regarding Baziotes' well-documented interest in evolutionary history.

the force, he said, is "a call to the infinite, a desire for purity and transcendence."[121] The coolness of this blue form also contrasts markedly with the earthly and corporeal warmth of the rosy realm below, as if further asserting its departure and distinction from its original state and place. The sense of transcendent otherworldliness becomes more intense given that this blue form is actually rising up through a vast atmosphere that is, itself, infiltrated by the color blue. As it transcends earth, sea, and sky, it changes in form and color, but never fully denies its connection to its white predecessor, which itself cannot fully escape its point of origin. Ascension and transformation, *Aerial* declares, are essential to reaching a transcendent plane of existence.

A similar transformative process, also oriented around the reference points of earth, sea, and sky, infuses Valéry's *Cemetery by the Sea* (1891-1893). With its imagery so correspondent to *Aerial*, it offers a compelling expression of the sentiment presented in this work of Baziotes':

The sea, the sea, forever rebegun!

…Fair sky, true sky, consider how I change!
…I abandon myself to this bright space,
Over the tombs my shadow runs its race,
Taming myself to its fragile movement.

…Terrestrial fragment offered to the sun,
This place by torches governed pleases me,
Composed of gold, of stone and somber glades,
Where so much marble trembles over shades;
Over the tombs there sleeps the faithful sea!

[121] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art, and painting in particular* (New York: Wittenborn Schultz, Inc., 1947), p.58. The relationship between Baziotes and Kandinsky goes beyond the scope of this paper, but warrants further attention. Baziotes, with his regular attendance at New York's museums, likely visited the Museum of Non-Objective Painting's 1945 memorial exhibition of 227 of Kandinsky's works. Also, in considering his familiarity with Kandinsky, Ethel Baziotes stated that her husband would discuss with Gordon Onslow Ford "Madame Blavatsky and Uspensky's influence on Kandinsky." Mrs. Baziotes believed that while "her husband respected Kandinsky [he] felt no emotional alignment" (Hadler, dissertation, pp.96-97).

…Arise and enter the next state!
This thoughtful pose, my body, dissipate!
Drink, my breast, of the wind, a rising bourn!
A freshness breathed from off the quickening sea
Gives back my soul…O salty potency!
I'll run to the wave and from it be reborn![122]

In addition to the general correlation between *Aerial* and *Cemetery by the Sea*, a few specific passages form a strong kinship between the poem and the painting. As Baziotes' blue form appears to make its way across "the quickening sea," its constitution seems fortified by the effects of the "salty potency:" no longer is it as ethereal, and even granular, as the white form. It is composed, instead, of a saturated and solid blue. *Aerial*'s white form, too, rises from the earth and gestures upwardly, as if it is Valéry's "terrestrial fragment offered to the sun." Valéry's mention of "so much marble" then elaborates upon the specific nature of both this "terrestrial fragment" and of Baziotes' form. As the poem's title suggests, Valéry's "marble [that] trembles over shades" describes the tombstones scattered throughout a graveyard; in *Aerial*, the allusion has further resonance: it fortifies the presence of the earth—as the place where the stone would first be found—and it reinforces the transitory aspect of earthly existence. A tombstone, of course, signifies the end of physical life and, with its inscription, it even concretely defines its parameters. Baziotes' ambiguously biomorphic white form, too, with its translucence and its floating skyward, simultaneously defies the material properties of tombstones while also conforming to their spectral connotations. As such, this ghostly white form effectively announces the interwoven nature of the earthly and the otherworldly.

[122] *An Anthology of French Poetry from Nerval to Valéry*, pp.272-274.

Valéry's *Cemetery by the Sea* and Baziotes' *Aerial* share as well their perspectives regarding the sea. In both cases, the sea is evocative of the infinite; it becomes, even, an intermediary between the transitory and the eternal. For Valéry, the sea is "over the tombs" and "forever rebegun," and is a place to go "and from it be reborn." In *Aerial*, too, the sea constitutes a marked departure from the surficial, and it appears almost indistinguishable from the endless realm of sky. The transformative ability it possesses in *Cemetery by the Sea* also surfaces in *Aerial*'s blue form, which moves across the sea as a separate but related materialization of the white form. In its full scope, *Aerial* tells of a transformative journey that begins with the mundane and then ventures, ascendingly, toward the unlimited and unknown. It recognizes the earth, sea, and sky as integral points in the journey; ultimately, it echoes Valéry's instruction to "arise and enter the next state."

Whether placed within the context of the universal, the specific, or the union of the two, the sea is a transformative and revelatory force in *Aerial* and its related literature. In words that quite literally describe *Aerial*, Valéry's *The Lost Wine* (1891-1893) affirms that the extraordinary is inextricably bound to the sea:

> From this infusion of smoky rose
> The sea regained its purity,
> Its usual transparency…
> I saw high in the briny air
> Forms unfathomed leaping there.[123]

The contemplation of an expansive seascape offered to Baudelaire the same experience as it does in *Aerial* and *Cemetery by the Sea*: it uncovered the route to the uncharted and unending realm of the infinite. Baudelaire wrote about the immeasurable

[123] *An Anthology of French Poetry from Nerval to Valêry*, p.281.

immensity of the sea in *Already!* (c.1861), relating its tremendous effect on him. "I could not," he claimed, "without heartbreaking grief, tear myself away from that sea, so monotonously seductive, that sea so infinitely varied in her frightful simplicity…she seemed to hold within her and to represent the mood, the agonies and the ecstasies of all the souls who've lived, are living now and who will ever live."[124] To Baudelaire, the sea was captivating and provocative. Its boundaries were indiscernible and it possessed an endless changeability despite its unfailing austerity. Its limitless space mingled with the concept of equally unconstrained time, so that it dismantled and transcended the restrictions commonly imposed upon terrestrial existence. Its vastness possessed a mystical presence that fused the past, present, and future. For Baudelaire, it accommodated and brought into view even the most exaggerated experiences "of all the souls who've lived, are living now and who will ever live." The sea has a power strong enough to replace the finite with the infinite.

In the sea, Baudelaire found an escape from the ordinary. His formulation, though, was also a restatement of the universal connectedness that established his principle of correspondences. In contrast to this universal perspective, the quest for the infinite became most unequivocally personal in Valéry's *As on the Shore of the Ocean* (c.1927):

I plunge into the interval of two waves.—
Time regretfully
Finite, infinite…
What does this time enclose?

…To be reduced, restored,
To be transformed into immutable number.

[124] *Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry*, pp.115-116.

…More than alone on the shore of the ocean,
I give myself like a wave
To the monotonous transmutation
Of water into water,
Myself into myself…[125]

As Baudelaire's and Valéry's compositions demonstrate, there is a dualistic nature inherent to the revelations associated with a study of the infinite, especially when manifested in elements of sea and sky. Baziotes' own fascination with duality made him readily receptive both to Baudelaire's unlimited vision in *Already!* and to Valéry's highly individualistic *As on the Shore of the Ocean*. In line with Baudelaire's universal scope, Baziotes explicitly announced that his painting "has to do with …all the mysteries of life;"[126] however, taking on the intimately personal context of Valéry's poem, Baziotes also explained that "[t]he canvases are my mirrors, they tell me what I am like at the moment."[127] Baziotes' lasting fascination with juxtapositions suggests that *Aerial* embraces both perspectives. Indeed, as Baziotes bound the personal to the universal by matching his signature with *Aerial*'s horizon line, he effectively translated Baudelaire's most concise explication of correspondences, "I, that is all; all, that is I."[128]

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[125] *Selected Writings of Paul Valéry*, pp.80-81. Valéry had a long-standing and deeply personal affinity for the sea. He was born, and then grew up, in the French port city of Sète, and throughout his life the sea had a tremendous allure for him. In his biography of Valéry, André Maurois wrote that "[t]o all appearances [Valéry] was studying law; in actuality, he was regretting the fact that he wasn't a sailor" (*From Proust to Camus*, p.48). Additionally, Agnes Ethel Mackay noted the significance to Valéry of actually being in the sea. "Swimming," she wrote, "was his greatest joy. His whole being trembled with delight as he approached the sea to dive into the great transparent waves, to throw himself into its mass and movement." She recognized further that the sea was not just physically, but also intellectually, transformative for Valéry. In the water he said "he became 'the man he would like to be': his body became the direct instrument of his mind and the author of all his ideas" (*The Universal Self*, p.27).

[126] Franks and White, "An Interview with William Baziotes," in *William Baziotes: A Memorial Exhibition*, p.42.

[127] Paneth.

[128] *Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry*, p.212.

Chapter 4
Conclusion

Consistently, Baziotes explored the expressive possibilities of duality in paintings with only ambiguous references to the concepts of time and place. His lack of specificity hints at endlessness as well as constructs that only exist outside of the commonplace. Similarly, his compositions include figures and forms that do not replicate those found in the visible world, but that do possess a biomorphic quality. This establishes both their essential connection to, and their departure from, the ordinary living beings that inhabit the familiar world. As with Baziotes' treatment of time and place, this biomorphism gives his forms and figures a quality of suggestiveness, but it also prevents their associations from becoming lost in total abstraction. It assures, too, that his compositions escape the binding constraints of literality. As with perceptions informed by Baudelaire's theory of correspondences, Baziotes' images are inherently mutative and associative. It is Baziotes' balancing of the familiar with the unfamiliar that heightens his paintings' evocative nature and emphasizes the expansive view offered by his dualistic outlook.[129]

Rather ironically, the deliberate ambiguity in Baziotes' images, and their consequent multiplicity of associations, underscore the entirely unambiguous importance of Baudelaire in Baziotes' life and work. Towards the end of his career, Baziotes emphasized the significance of both indirection and Baudelaire when he paraphrased

[129] Baziotes' ambiguous biomorphism, as well as his ability to simultaneously convey two distinct aspects of a single thing, might imply that he sought to include in his images a message about gender or, specifically, androgyny. However, in the context of his literary concerns and their bearing on the dualistic perspective he cultivated in his work, this lack of gender specificity relates more to the sense of universality evident in much of his work than to a commentary on male-female issues. It also relates to Polcari's assessment that "[e]volution is the principle and subject of Baziotes' work" (*Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, p.216), as the simple, elemental aspect of Baziotes' biomorphic forms suggests the earliest evolutionary stages of life, when gender remains undifferentiated. In a context that varies from the focus of this paper, though, the issue of gender in Baziotes' work would benefit from further attention.

Baudelaire and claimed that, "I have a fear of being easily understood."[130] While the brevity of this shared apprehension starkly contrasts with the quantity and complexity of its implications, it does concisely expose both the force guiding much of Baziotes' persistent attraction to duality and the overlapping appeal of Baudelaire's ideology.

In *The Painter of Modern Life*, Baudelaire wrote about "Beauty, Fashion, and Happiness," and argued that "beauty is always and inevitably of a double composition, although the impression that it produces is single."[131] In Baziotes' work, this premise holds true, too. While his paintings might not be oriented around the explication of beauty in any traditional configuration, his regard for a type of vision that is "inevitably of a double composition," and its reconciliation with the aim of creating a single effect, results in his images' consistent ability to convey an impression of the unexpected. However, going further with the notion of expressive unity, Baziotes' work frequently stresses the idea of harmony. Rather than implying that a dichotomous nature can only generate irresolvable conflict, Baziotes tended to illuminate the harmonious coexistence of disparate elements. In *Aerial*, Baziotes presented this perspective in the smoothly progressing relationship between the terrestrial and all that might lie beyond it. In *The Mirror*, Baziotes acknowledged this scheme in the image's intermingling, transforming facets. And, in *Figure on a Tightrope* the task of finding a state of harmony acquired an inescapable gravity as it became an expression of the delicate balance of forces critical to the performance. These compositions' varied denials of discordance and separateness point out the extent to which Baziotes' approach to duality correlated with Baudelaire's *Correspondences*:

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[130] *William Baziotes: Late Work, 1946-1962*, p.7.
[131] *Baudelaire: The Painter of Modern Life*, p.3.

As long-drawn echoes heard far-off and dim
Mingle to one deep sound and fade away;
Vast as the night and brilliant as the day,
Colour and sound and perfume speak to him.[132]

Just as Baziotes' dualistic view reflected, and was enriched by, Baudelaire's thoughts about correspondences, it also related directly to Baudelaire's opinions about the value of a refined imagination. In its ability to invite the contemplation of unconventional arrangements and prompt the reevaluation of expected formulations of reality, the duality in Baziotes' images serves as an exercise in imagination. As such, it bestows upon his paintings a greater depth of meaning, a greater approximation of truth, and a more powerful means of departure from the mundane. Baudelaire gave to the imagination the title of "Queen of the Faculties," and wrote of its status and function relative to the material world. He believed that "[t]he whole visible universe…is a sort of pasture which the imagination must digest and transform,"[133] because "there is nothing more formidable in our battles with the ideal than a fine imagination disposing of an immense armoury of observed fact."[134] The imagination incalculably contributes to the search for insights available only outside the scope of standard experience. Baziotes' compositions bear in mind those of Baudelaire, as his paintings make visual allusions to Baudelaire's explanation that "[i]magination is the queen of truth, and the *possible* is one of the provinces of truth. It has a positive relationship with the infinite."[135] When imagination, possibility, truth, and the infinite find a place and a way to converge, the

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[132] *Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry*, p.149.
[133] *The Mirror of Art: Critical Studies by Charles Baudelaire*. Trans. and ed., Johnathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon Publishers, Inc., 1955), p.239.
[134] ibid.
[135] *The Mirror of Art*, p.233.

result, said Baudelaire, is striking. He discussed just such a meeting in his critique of the Paris Salon of 1859:

> One might perhaps say that, gifted with a richer imagination, he expresses for us above all the inmost secret of the brain, the *wonderful* aspect of things, so faithfully does his work retain the stamp and temper of its conception. It is the infinite within the finite! It has the quality of a dream! and by this word I do not mean those riotous Bedlams of the night, but rather a vision that comes from intense meditation, or, with minds less naturally fertile, from artificial stimulants.[136]

The object here of Baudelaire's generous praise was Eugène Delacroix, but the statement equally well describes Baziotes' own accomplishments. With its allusions to Baudelaire's ideas about correspondences and imagination, Baziotes' dualistic view amplified the distinctly revelatory nature of his work.

Taking on Baudelaire's appreciation for a new type of vision, the French Symbolist poets drew attention to the enlightening powers of suggestion and indirection. They strengthened Baziotes' perspective with their belief in the superiority of nonobjective, evocative compositions. In *The Art of Poetry* (c.1884), Verlaine told of the execution and outcome of this principle:

> The best song is a hazy song
> Where Vagueness and Precision join.
>
> There, are eyes beautiful and veiled,
> And the quivering light of high noon,
> There, in a cooled autumnal sky,
> Is a blue confusion of bright stars.
>
> For we must have Nuance still,
> Not Color—nothing but nuance!

[136] *The Mirror of Art*, p. 250.

Ah! only nuance can betroth
Dream to dream and flute to horn![137]

Baziotes, too, made his own claim about the importance of colors appearing as "hazy," "beautiful and veiled." As almost an elucidation of Valéry's desire for "[n]uance still/Not color—nothing but nuance," Baziotes explained that, "I paint with 'in between' colors. When you look at nature, the colors are in between, and when you add psychology, they are even more in between."[138] Like the Symbolists, Baziotes found that a clearly objective vision was insufficient, and a greater truth would come from a more subtle and multifaceted observation. The dualistic approach that infused his images with a tremendous associative and imaginative quality adheres to Mallarmé's Symbolist dictum that, "to name is to destroy, to suggest is to create."[139]

To the associative and ambiguous, the Surrealists added the irrational and unexpected. Baziotes' sustained curiosity about paradoxes and juxtapositions had made him responsive to what he once called "a surrealist attitude towards things,"[140] and the outlook he offered in his paintings, too, synchronized with Surrealist objectives. As they concentrated on the irregular and the evocative, the Surrealists sought to "give to poetry and art the new formula…to create images and objects which in all their concrete character might give the human mind a representation of the infinite or the eternal."[141]

The search for a "new formula" capable of uncovering "the infinite or the eternal" had occupied not just the Surrealists, but Baudelaire and the Symbolists as well. It also resonated with Baziotes, driving his fascination with duality and directing his literary

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[137] *An Anthology of French Poetry from Nerval to Valéry*, p.99.
[138] Paneth.
[139] *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, p.196.
[140] Paneth.
[141] *Literary Origins of Surrealism*, p.19.

focus. Observations of the surrounding material world marked Baziotes' point of departure in his work,[142] but they proved an incomplete view of reality. Instead, Baziotes responded to his willingness, perhaps even his need, to look beyond the overtly visible and uncover a depth and breadth of vision that would otherwise remain obscured by the constraints imposed upon ordinary perception. The pursuit of concealed truths, with their potential to expose dramatic juxtapositions, held a lasting appeal to him. "Something I read a long time ago," he wrote in 1949, "and which has stayed with me is this: A critic speaking of Beethoven stated that he appeared to be like the Caribbean Sea—beautiful, serene, and exotic on the surface. And all the time below, are the sharks."[143] For Baziotes, things simply were not always as they seemed at first glance.

To see more than the material world around him, Baziotes harnessed all the potential contained within the construct of duality. It propelled his journey by providing a structure that would challenge and broaden the boundaries that ordinarily confine perceptions. It also ensured that Baziotes would be well-accompanied during the course of his explorations. He affirmed this when he said, with regard to his creative endeavors, "I do not feel alone."[144] For Baziotes, the ultimate companion on this journey, the figure with whom he felt a filial bond, was Baudelaire. Although Baziotes set out a century and a continent apart from Baudelaire, his experiences were meaningfully allied with and affected by Baudelaire's. Baziotes took a path in his contemplation of duality that drew

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[142] In Paula Franks and Marion White, eds., "An Interview with William Baziotes," in *William Baziotes: A Memorial Exhibition*, pp.41-42, Baziotes explained, "Suppose I look at the Hudson River at night—that is, the boats, the moving water, the buildings across the river, and the lights flickering. I go home with these impressions in my mind and start painting. Later on, however, during the painting, I might realize that what was just to the side of me, say a street lamp, a tree, a bench, and a man sitting there, attracted me more than anything else. I don't make any deliberate attempt to find subject matter. Certain things that go on around me make very strong impressions on me; impressions I might not be completely aware of at first."

[143] Letter to Alfred Barr, Archives of American Art, unpaginated.

[144] Baziotes, "Symposium: The Creative Process," p.33.

from Baudelaire and then intertwined with the Symbolists and the Surrealists. This course was itself, historically, predicated on Baudelaire, whose exploits and opinions had primed the literary world for those of the Symbolists. In turn, the Symbolists' perspectives worked with Baudelaire's and had a distinct impact upon the direction in which the Surrealists would venture. Despite its lengthy, wandering course, though, this path never lost sight of its connection to Baudelaire. In his poem *The Voyage* (c.1861), Baudelaire unveiled the relentless impulse that drove his life and work:

> The fire within the heart so burns us up
> That we would wander Hell and Heaven through,
> Deep in the Unknown seeking something *new*![145]

Baziotes aspired to the same extremes—he had implored, "let me…have the freedom to ramble between paradise and hell"[146]—and he was guided in the same revelatory manner. The presence of duality lends an extraordinary quality to his images, allowing them to take on a scope and aim correspondent to Baudelaire's. As Baziotes said, "[i]t is there when a few brushstrokes start me off on a labyrinthian journey that I am led to a more real reality."[147] For Baziotes, the unending enquiry into the truth of what was objectively evident necessitated an excursion into the limitless realm of the unknown. There, where the familiar becomes juxtaposed with the mysterious, Baziotes had the privilege of stealing a glimpse of the new reality he sought, and it was one whose most alluring aspect

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[145] *Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry*, p.185. Paul Valéry made a statement offering a similar sentiment. In a letter to his friend André Gide, he described his exasperation with the nature of observations he had been able to make, at that point, in his personal and intellectual endeavors. Like Baudelaire, he felt compelled to find something "new." He wrote, "'I have visited ships and cathedrals [he complained], I have read the most marvelous works, of Rimbaud and Mallarmé, I have, alas! analyzed their means and have always met the most beautiful illusions as to their genesis and birth. Where shall I find a newer magic; a secret of living and creating which would surprise me?'" (*The Universal Self*, p.26).
[146] *William Baziotes: Late Work, 1946-1962*, p.7.
[147] Undated statement in Cavaliere, "The Subtlety of Life for the Artist," p.44.

is its exceptional verity. By transferring this perspective onto his canvases, he extended to his viewers this same privileged vision.

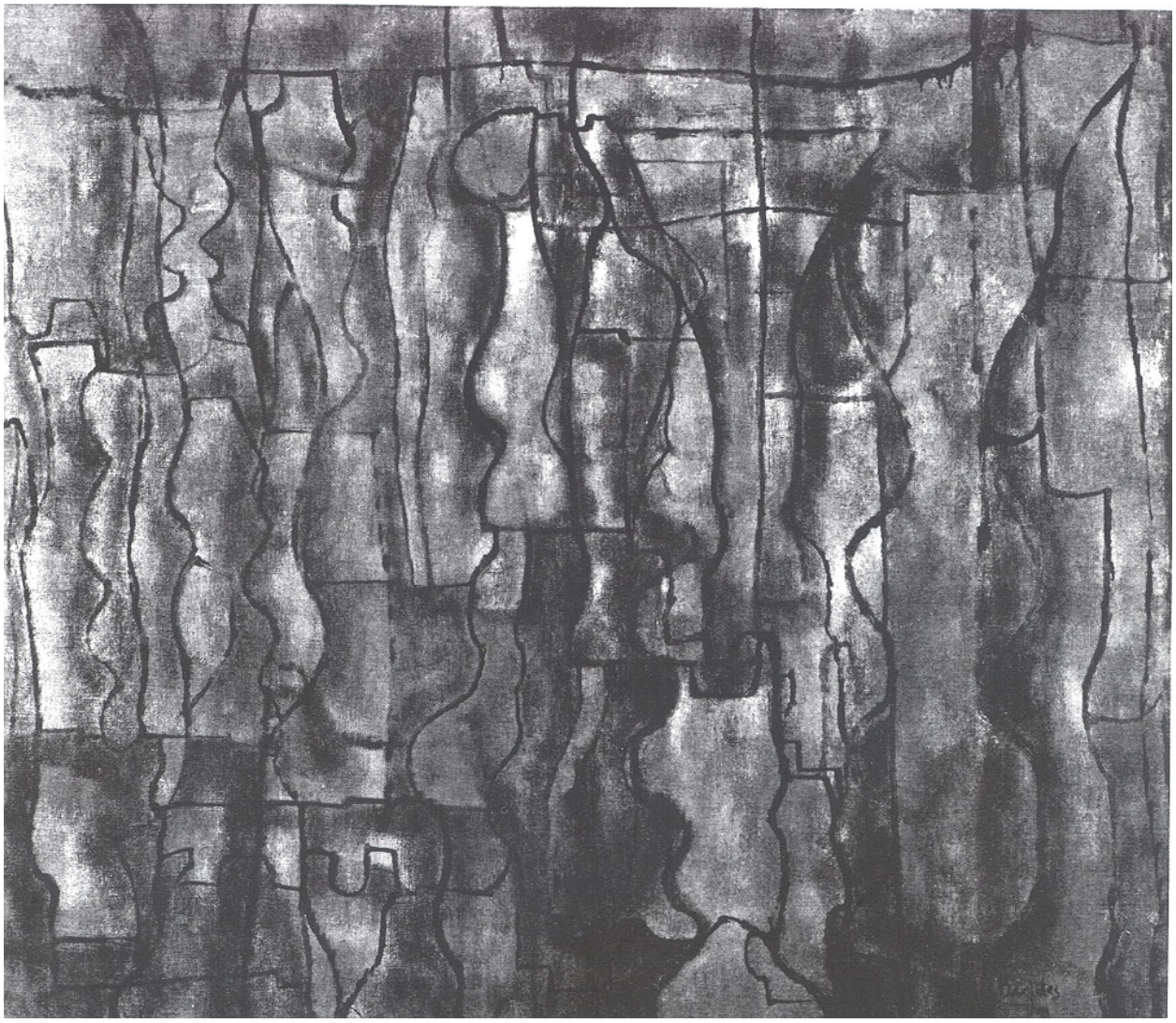

Figure 1: William Baziotes, *The Balcony* (1943)

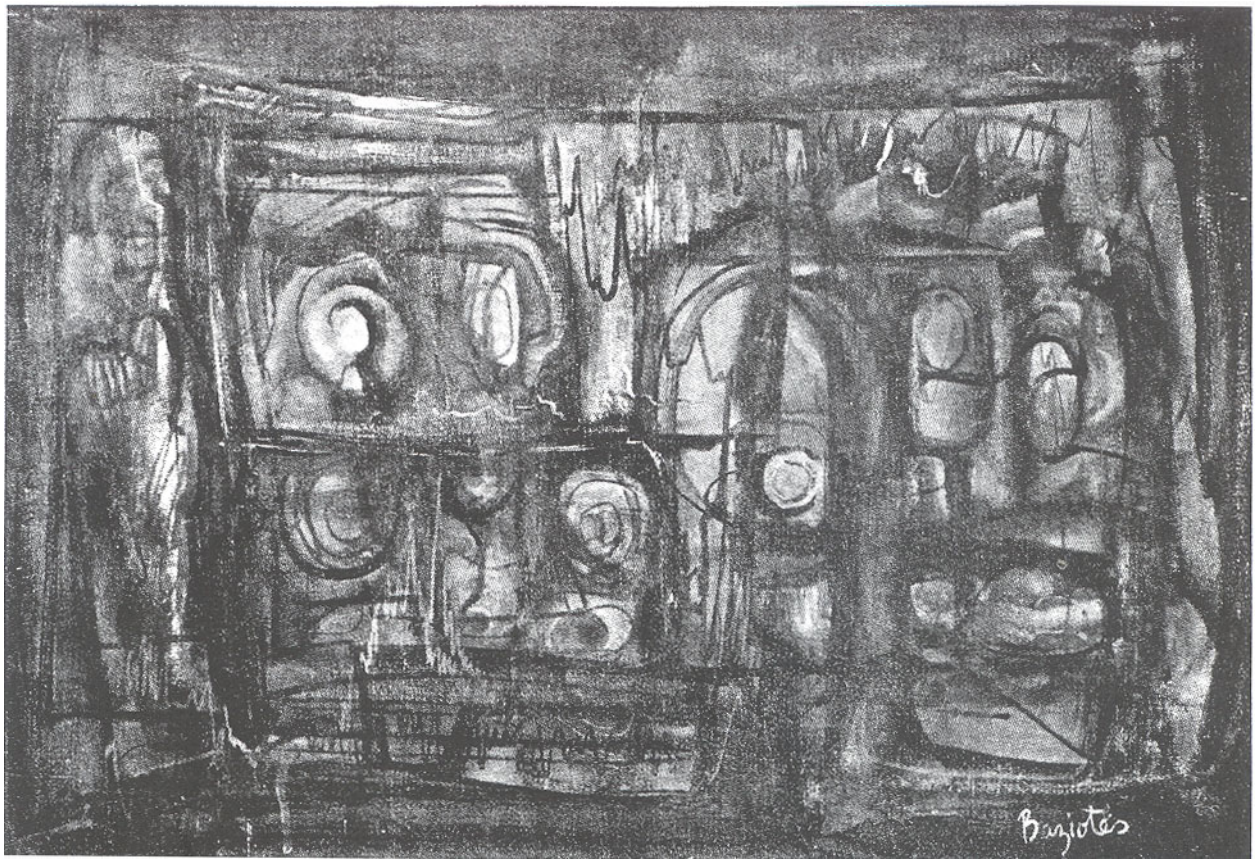

Figure 2: William Baziotes, *Mirror at Midnight* (1942)

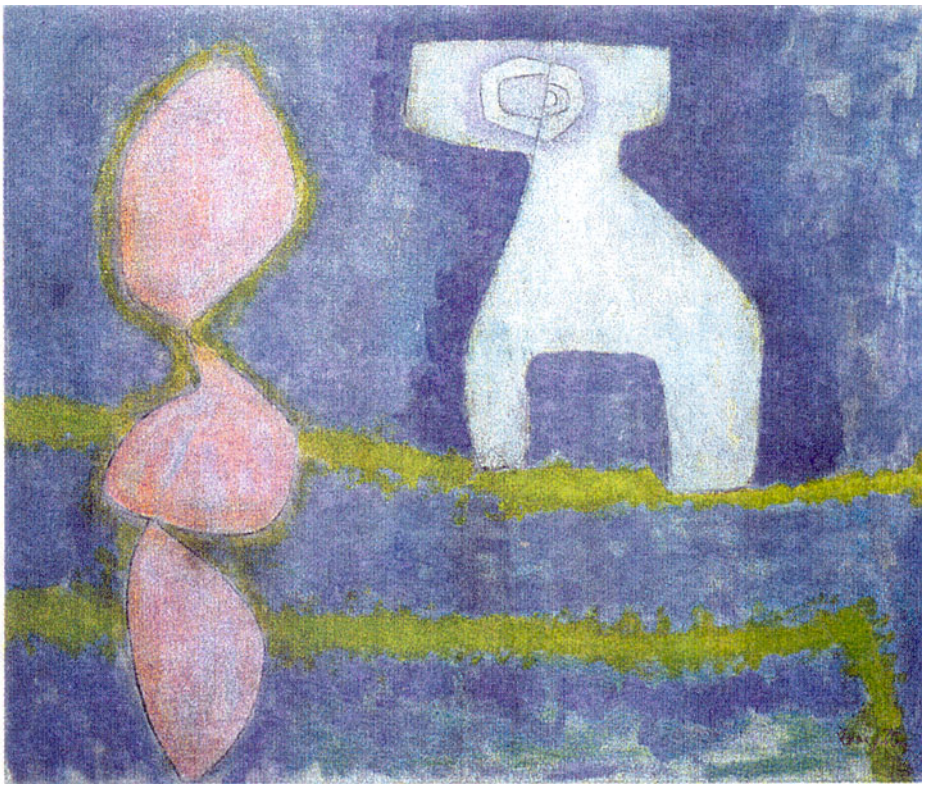

Figure 3: William Baziotes, *Figure on a Tightrope* (1947)

Figure 4: William Baziotes, *The Mirror* (1948)

Figure 5: William Baziotes, *Aerial* (1957)

Figure 6: William Baziotes, *Fleur du mal* (1944)

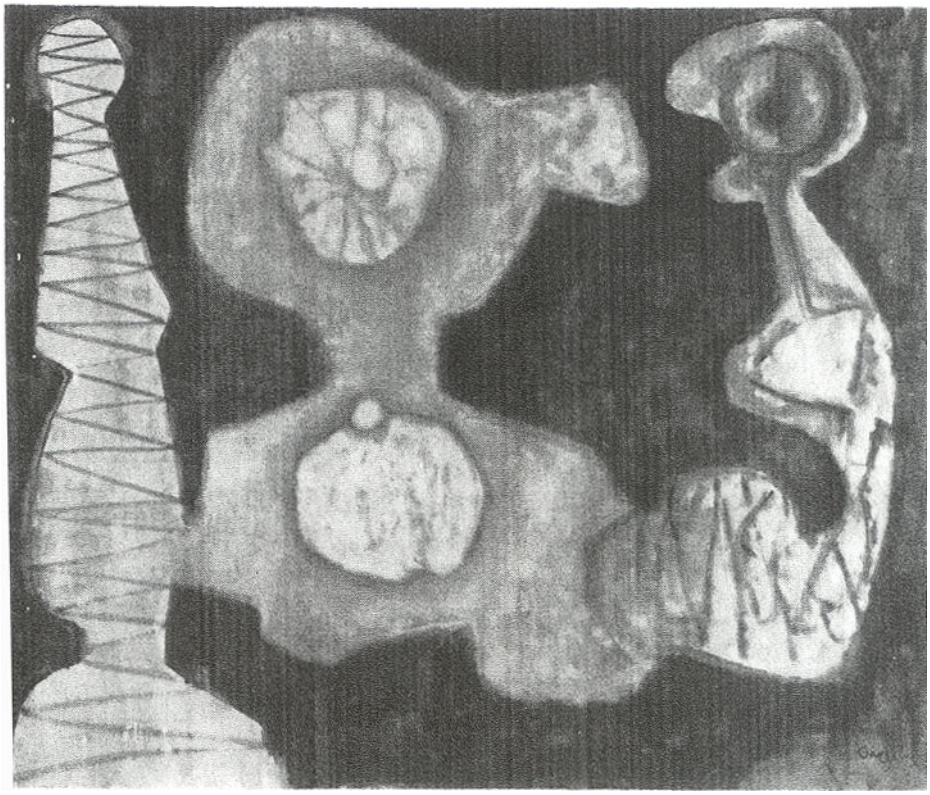

Figure 7: William Baziotes, *Night Mirror* (1947)

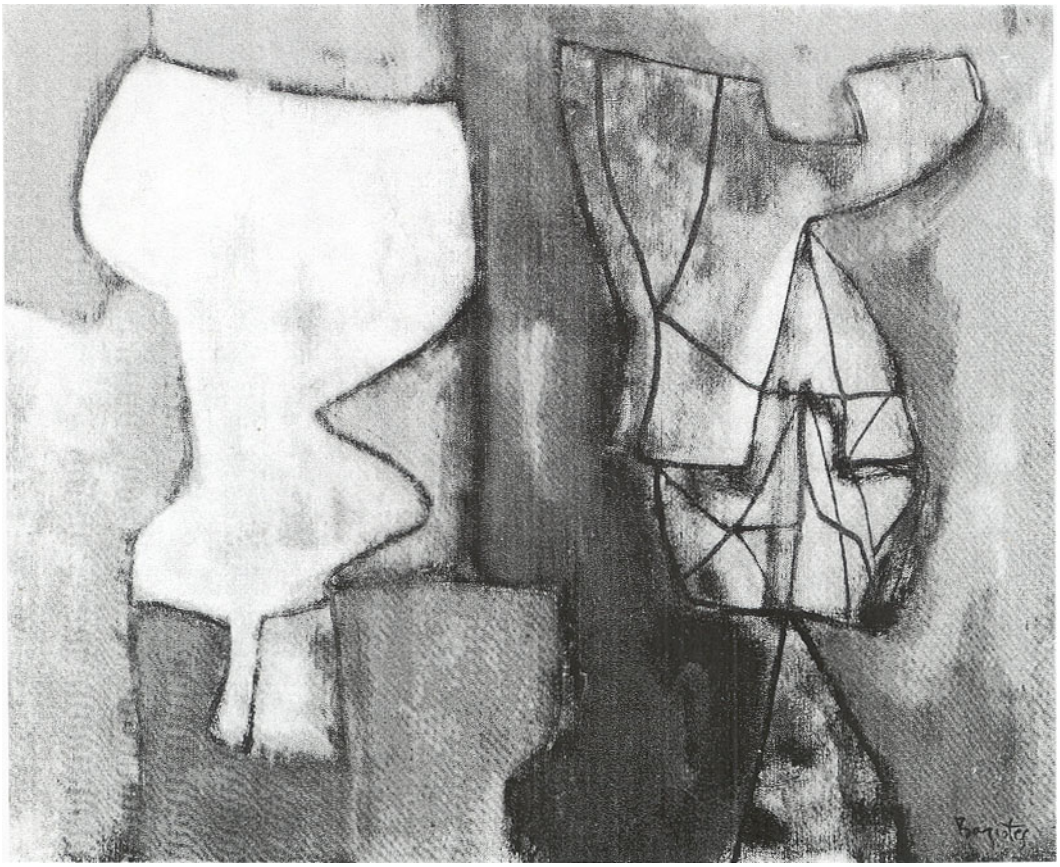

Figure 8: William Baziotes, *Figure and Mirror* (1947)

Figure 9: William Baziotes, *Mirror Figure* (1948)

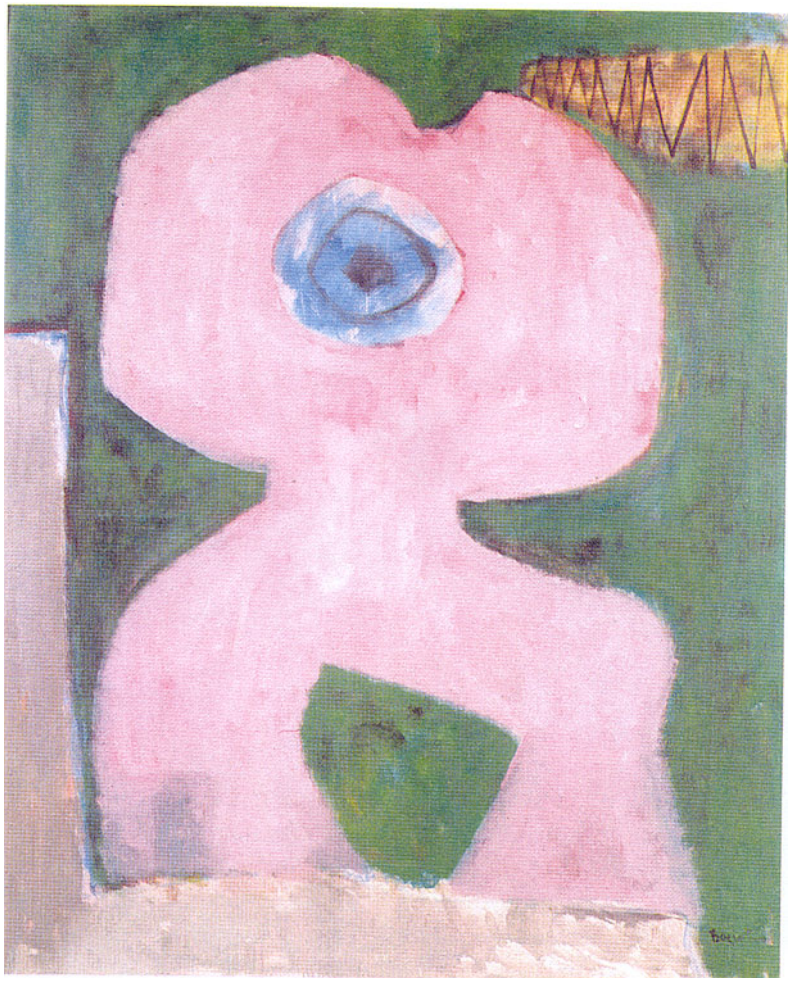

Figure 10: William Baziotes, *Cyclops* (1947)

Figure 11: William Baziotes, *Dwarf* (1947)

Figure 12: William Baziotes, *Untitled (Clown with Apple)*, (1939-40)

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