

Comparative Study

Sigmar Polke, Jackson Pollock, and Janet Sobel

After visiting Sigmar Polke's *Alibi* exhibition at Museum of Modern Art in New York City I was able to understand how the artist depicted his perception of reality through art disciplines that are derived from the movement of paint, specifically the art of dripped paint. In this comparative study I will focus on the use of drip art by different artists within different contexts to create movement as well as a juxtaposition of dimensions within paintings. I will examine the use of drip as concepts and abstract elements in space and composition in Sigmar Polke's *Watchtower*, Janet Sobel's *Hiroshima*, and Jackson Pollock's *Number 8*. The study analyses the effects that this style within different techniques displays the artist's ideas that result from the cultural and social context within which the paintings were created. This was then used to develop my own artistic project *What color are we?*, by examining identity through the depiction of the impact of external social forces on humans' identity through movement of dripped paint. This project focuses specifically on the identity crisis that society provokes on the individual, portraying universal and permanent elements in individuals, such as hands.

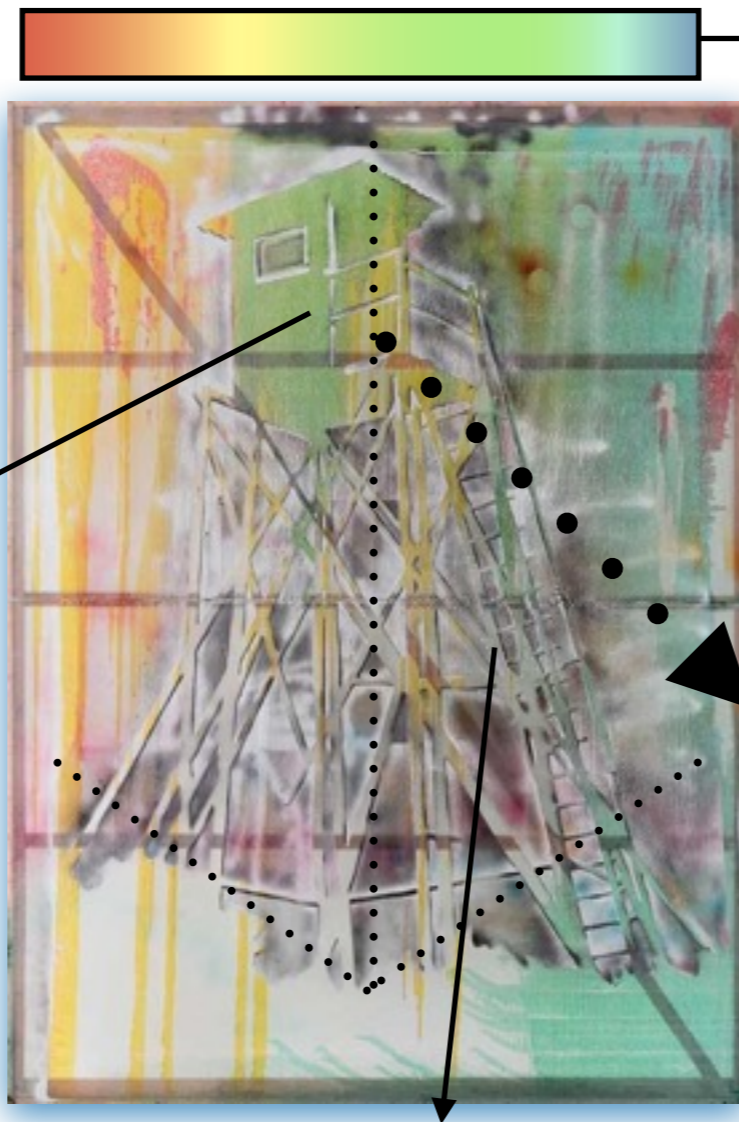


Title	<i>Watchtower</i>	<i>Number 8</i>	<i>Hiroshima</i>
Artist	Sigmar Polke	Jackson Pollock	Janet Sobel
Date	1984	1949	c. 1948
Medium	Enamel on bubble wrap	Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas	Oil on canvas
Dimensions	118 1/8 x 88 9/16 in	34 1/8 x 71 1/4 in	unknown

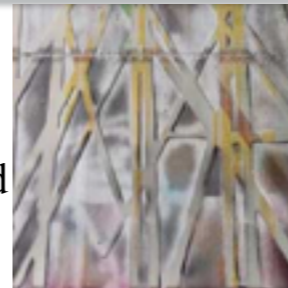
Formal Qualities

Shapes: The background is composed by irregular colored shapes or drips which extend downward. This sets the downward movement of the piece, as the environment around the watchtower gravitates in this direction. This mixed color shapes create a movement that communicates a state of turmoil in the environment.

Space and Composition: The painting's composition is based on the combination of positive and negative spaces. As the top of the tower is depicted through the negative space created by white color that outlines the stenciled object, the artwork uses a style of transparency to portray the watchtower. However, the white shapes create positive spaces, as in the legs or the ladder next to the window. The shifts from positive to negative space creates a sense of transparency in the tower. which is not presented as a solid object as well as different perspectives in terms of the actual color of the object. By combining integrating the transparency and concreteness of figures, Polke puts into question the concrete existence of the watchtower, portraying it as an illusory concept. The painting is horizontally divided into four rectangular sections intersected by a diagonal line. This displays the idea of fragmentation not only of the forms in the object but also the whole image.



Lines: The lines that compose the watchtower are smudged lines. The colors of these, black and white, diffuse into the background, creating a glow region around the main object. The contrast between the black and the white help depict the different legs of the watchtower. Among the lines that form the lower part of the tower, some appear to be aligned, yet contain different colors, creating the juxtaposition of these posts.



Color: Polke's use of hues ranging from rose red to aquamarine blue creates harmony as these are organized in a gradation from warm colors to cool colors, representing two different sides form one spectrum, possibly alluding to the East and West of Germany overlooked by watchtowers. De-saturated glazed colors in the background add a sense of transparency. Due to the transparent nature of the object, these hues become part of the tower, contrasting with the white and grey colors radiating around it. These tonal variations add some density to the tower, yet the emptiness of the tower emphasizes the predominance of the surrounding environment in the tower.

Form: The central form in the painting is the tower. Although the watchtower's structure is not symmetrical, there is a sense of balance conveyed by the geometrical shape and space created by the object. The form is placed in a two-point 'street level' perspective that creates spacial symmetrical balance (shown through the dotted lines). This perspective displays the tower as a monumental object, due to its overpowering height to the eyes of the viewer.

Texture: Polke uses a smooth texture created through the watered effect of the paint on the layer underneath the tower. This flatness results from the uniformity of the different layers. As the tower is created by the mere use of negative spaces, the layer of paint that constitutes the watchtower lacks depth, creating a texture of flatness, reinforcing the watchtower's lack of positive space reinforcing and, thus, lack of solid substance. Most of the paint is adhered in a vertical way, creating a texture composed of thin vertical lines.



World War II, the Cold War, and Polke's symbolism

Polke, as a German who lived throughout the last years of World War II, he communicates his criticism of the contemporary atrocities in Germany. Born in 1941, “when the ‘hypnotic appeal’ of the Third Reich was at its apex”, he witnessed a political atmosphere that “shattered forever the belief... that reason would lead to liberation” (Halbreich 66). By 1945, as the war was ending, he and his family moved from Silesia (present-day Poland) to Thuringia (later Soviet-occupied East Germany). In 1953, they move to Düsseldorf (West Germany).

Over the twentieth century in Germany, hunting towers were usually located in fields and forests, in strategic locations for hunters to aim and target animals. Polke uses this concept to create a symbol with a meaning beyond the hunt for animals; “its material fluctuations mirror the unstable meaning of the subject, a structure used... to protect the Eastern border, and to guard the concentration camps, thus shifting associations from the mundane to the monstrous” (61). Through a subtle criticism, Polke turns a tower initially meant to target animals, into a reference to towers used to alienate and guard from other region’s hostility, and control people suppressed in concentration camps.

Polke creates symbols of atrocities out of the ordinary, within this cultural context.

Nazi Oppression

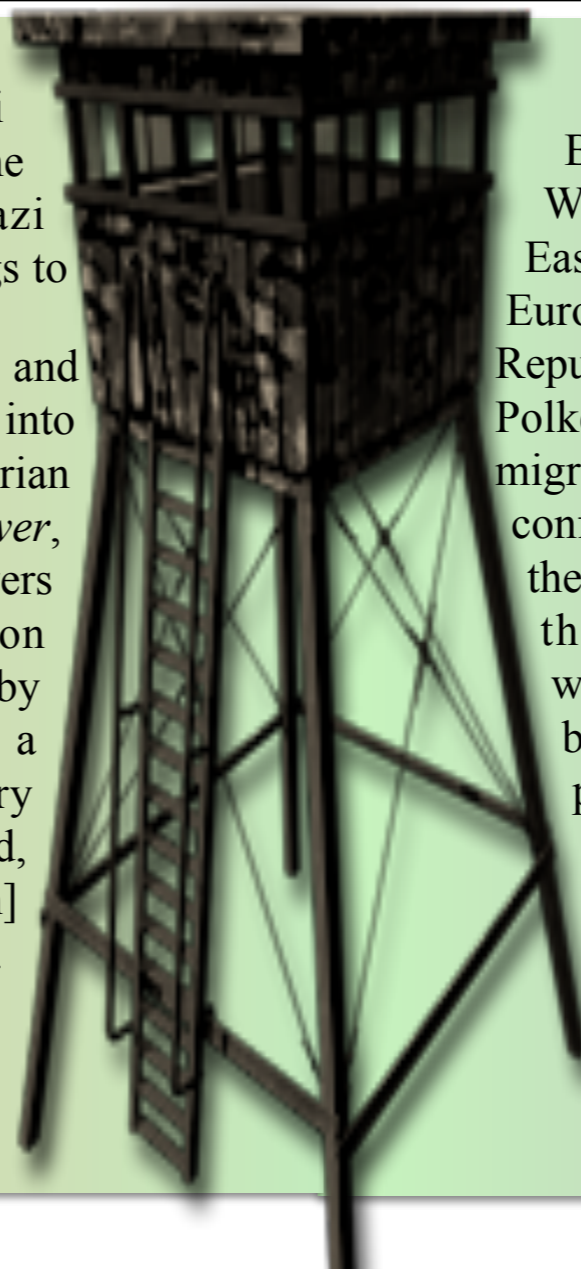
Polke’s exposure to the oppression and results of the Nazi regime is a crucial trigger for his art. Having lived in Silesia, he witnessed the characteristic human atrocities of Nazi concentration camps. In his studies of Nazi elements, he brings to light the psychological and social repercussions of the war on society, initially focusing on the study and criticism of the swastika’s evolution into the symbol of terror and authoritarian power. In relation to the *Watchtower*, Polke makes reference to the watchtowers from which the Nazi concentration camps were observed and guarded by “place a stenciled image of a concentration-camp-style observatory against an inchoate painted background, connecting a “metaphysical quest [with] the face of state tyranny” (Robinson).

Two spreads from an untitled album (*Swastika*). After 1982. Colored ink on paper, spread: 10 3/8 x 14 3/4" (26.3 x 37.4 cm).

The tower is a symbol of authoritative power, an apparatus for Nazi superiority over the concentration camps’ victims.

The Cold War’s alienation

By the 1980s, nearing the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Eastern bloc was separated from Western Europe, specifically the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. Polke had lived in both regions and had migrated from one to the other due to rising conflicts at the beginning of the Cold War and the rise of the Soviet Union. As a response to this, Polke recreates the idea of the watchtowers located, during that time, in the borders of Eastern Germany to serve for protection of the Eastern bloc, as shown on the left. As a victim of the German division, Polke presents the reality of the Iron Curtain, as a manifesto against this focus of restrictions to freedom, involving freedom of movement among these geographical regions.



Function and Purpose in Sigmar Polke's *Watchtower*

Watchtower, as part of Polke's oeuvre, is a representation of Germany's contemporary reality at the time in which the artworks were created. Polke depicts the recurred concept of the watchtower, turning it into a symbol with references to the Nazi regime, as well as the Cold War's division. Furthermore, Polke communicates a criticism through this artwork.

The hue in the background gradually changes from yellow to turquoise, as a segment of a color spectrum.

Figuratively depicts the transition from East to West in Germany during the time of the Berlin Wall, yet communicating a sense of unity that the watchtower violates. This forms a source of the subtle criticism that composes Polke's art.

To complement this idea, the watchtower's geometric balance represents a division. Its two-point 'street level' perspective portrays the tower as monumental and overpowering to the eyes of the viewer.

Polke employs this overpowering perspective in order to depict the watchtower's (Nazi and Communist leaders) attempt to establish and impose control on its surroundings. The geometrical balance shows the division between East and West Germany during the Cold War.

However, the use of the fragmentation of the dividing horizontal lines and a diagonal intersecting line across the painting disrupt the watchtower.

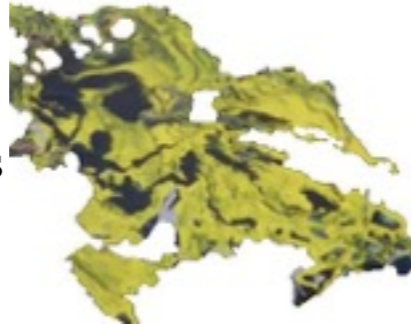
Through this, Polke expresses his opposition to the division of Germany and questions the watchtower's authority and power. He also communicates the eventual failure of the Nazi regime to control human freedom.

The negative space created in the watchtower adds a sense of emptiness to it. Its color and substance is taken over by the drained colors of the background.

This represents the lack of solidness in the watchtower, which is reflected in its cultural context as the lack of authority in the eyes of the people from both East and West. This emptiness creates a sardonic or ironic tone, by acknowledging its existence but portraying it as lacking essence or meaning, as if it was nonexistent. This contrast creates an ironic tone.

Formal Qualities

Shapes: Sobel utilizes different shapes in the canvas, some which gradually disintegrate into fragments and linear traces, and others which are blended into the background. The yellow irregular shapes at the bottom are symbolic representations of human faces, distorted by blending them into moving irregular figures and creating holes in the paint of the these shapes, as a repercussion of its environment's disaster. At the top, the background contains a dark face, evident through its eyes, eyebrows, mouth and nose, as a universal observer, which is disguised in the background's opacity.

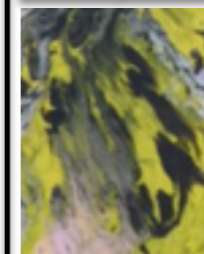


Line: Most of the canvas is filled with linear traces. The perpendicular lines, with downward drips, add rhythm to the painting, through the repetition of these intersections. The ends of these drips have a downward movement, which alludes to the gravitational downward movement that the explosion has as the ashes eventually fall. This pattern conveys an explosive movement into the environment, as the lines farther away from the center have more irregular traces, creating a state of disorder. The irregular lines on the background, such as the white drips on the top, are interconnected, as a uniform cloud resulting from the explosion.



Scale: Sobel uses a high viewpoint in the figure, portrayed through the overall upward movement of the lines and irregular forms, and reinforced through the figure on top, as an absolute and overpowered observer. This leads to an overwhelming scale that immerses the viewer through a macrocosmic effect that creates a contrast with the viewer's position.

Composition and space: *Hiroshima* is composed of a variety of shapes, lines, and figures arranged in a hectic composition. While the yellow, light blue, and white shapes build up in a diminishing arrangement from bottom (signaled by the green arrows), the lines made vertical and horizontal drips convey a sense of disorder in the atmosphere above the shapes. These drips are created by parallel paint traces and their drips gravitating in a perpendicular direction. As lines and shapes belong to superimposed and overlapping layers, Sobel depicts a static scene of many moving elements, as in a specific instant of an explosion. Although merely abstract, shapes and lines create an overwhelming and saturated canvas, as each trace creates positive space, overloading the painting with this abstract explosion. However, the asymmetrical balance is present between right and left side.

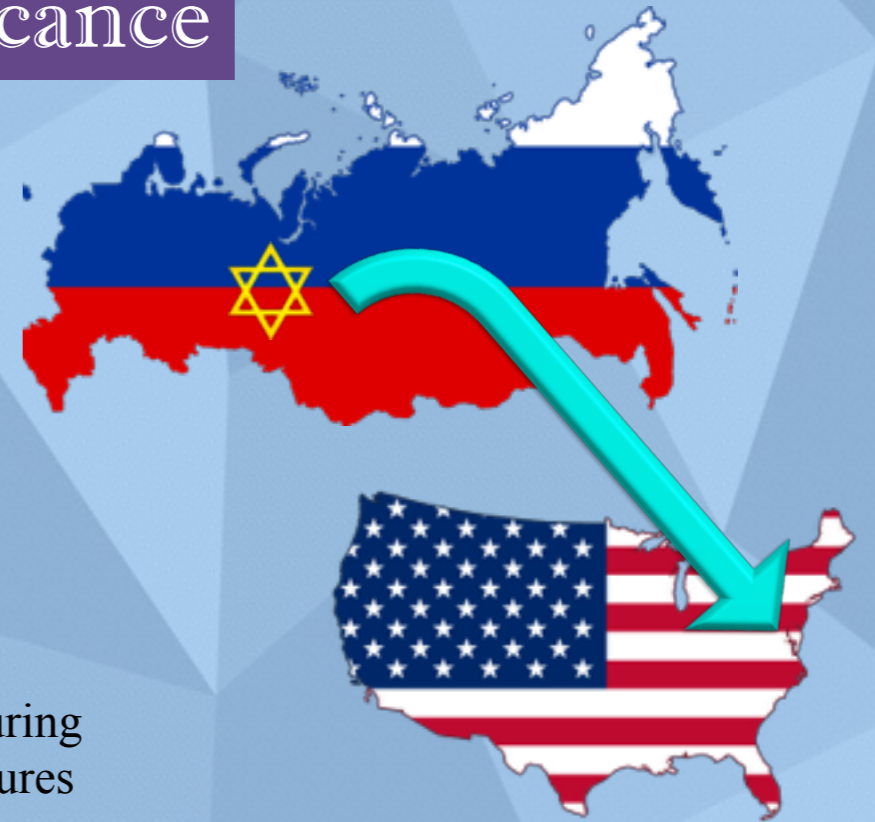


Color: The canvas is predominantly occupied by different tones of primary colors. These generally have low values, as a result of their combination with black. This gradation from yellow into black adds movement to the painting, as if the shapes and lines drift and disappear into the darkness. Different linear layers of bright and dark colors, including black, light blue, white, and lilac create a sense of juxtaposition, in which different shapes and lines are entwined. Through this, the brighter and outer colors and shapes are emphasized, such as the yellow abstract figures in the bottom center. This also creates a sense of disorder through different layers

Symbolism and Cultural Significance

Sobel was born to a Jewish family in a *shtetl* (Jewish village in Eastern Europe), at the end of the 19th century. As a result of the czarist authorities in power and the social turmoil during this time, her father was murdered in a pogrom.

- The artwork expresses Sobel's view of the Hiroshima bombing from a religious point of view by portraying an omnipresent and omnipotent figure above that prevails through the crisis and the catastrophic explosion.
- This serves as a symbol and reference to God, as an observer and ultimate judge for all atrocities in the world.



Anti-Semitic acts, specifically “the violent death of her father” led to “her family’s narrow escape to the U.S.” in 1908. Her “identity as a Jew of Diaspora” (Levin 12) determined the way she viewed the global war (WWII).

- As a result of her experience as a Jew during times of executions and repressive measures of the czarist regime of terror, Sobel criticizes the massive execution of innocent people and expresses empathy for them.
- From her perspective as a Jewish, she evaluates the bombings of Hiroshima as an immoral and inhumane act that degraded humanity under the eyes of the divine.



During the 1940s, as a Jew living in New York, she communicated her concerns with the ongoing global conflict. As part of the United States’ response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the US dropped a bomb in Hiroshima, Japan 1945 (Navarro 10).

- As for the case of *Hiroshima*, the painting recreates the scene of the explosion of an atomic bomb in the city of Hiroshima during 1945.
- Aside from the moral criticism, Sobel focuses in expressing her concerns about the rise of crisis and hostility existing between the country in which she lived and the international community.

Function and Purpose



Moral criticism: The symbol of an overpowering face at the top of the painting is a key element for the Sobel's attitude toward the subject and the function of the painting. Unlike the rest of the canvas, this face is not obstructed by the dripping lines and shapes. This provides a sense of pureness but also of omnipotence. Within Sobel's religious and historical context, she "combined religious and contemporary motifs. As one reviewer described it: 'the mushroom cloud of the bomb explosion rises in the foreground, surrounded by devastation'" (The divine, represented in "the face of God the father'" (Levin 12) is capable of observing and judging the explosion from the top. From a Jewish perspective, the artist reminds the viewer of morality, in presence of these human atrocities committed on Earth. This idea is reinforced by the transparency and dullness in the gray tones of the face, conveying the idea of an omnipresent being, who is not vulnerable to these atrocities. Through this she communicates criticism against the Hiroshima bombings, which, she portrays as a source of human suffering that but also as a violation of morality.

Disaster of the explosion: Sobel recreates the scene of the explosion of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima in 1945. She portrays the state of disaster in the environment, creating a reference to the social and physical chaos the resulted from the mass murder. The artist archives this through the movement conveyed by the linear traces. The perpendicular drips create a motif, which conveys the downfall and loss of individuals, and figuratively, the suppression of hopes and freedom as a consequences of wartime. The diverse use of contrasts and tonal variety adds to the state of disaster, in which different layers allude to the different social groups, objects, and individuals affected. The composition's sense of overload resembles the atmosphere of disaster, overwhelmed with social, economic, emotional, political, and individual conflicts that emerged as a result of the detonation caused. Through this, the artist expresses comprehension and a figurative portrayal of the crisis left by the Hiroshima explosion, as a way to remind the viewer of the atrocities committed by the United States in the Japanese city.



Human suffering and deterioration: Along with the devastating mood conveyed by the portrayal of the explosion, the artist emphasizes the human suffering resulting from it. Figuratively, the yellow amorphous shapes at the center bottom of the canvas, represent the distorted faces and victims blown away by the explosion. By blending the yellow tones into black, Sobel depicts the faces drifting into darkness. These also show an appearance of fragmentation due to the holes that they have and their irregular edges. This conveys the idea that the faces are distorted and the identity of these falls victim to the catastrophe. Through it, the artist reminds the viewer of the impact and repercussions and impact on the individual.

Formal Qualities

Space: The painting is composed of overlapping and intersecting of layers of different shapes and lines. These abstract traces and irregular shapes create positive space, which overloads the spatial aspect of the canvas. Although there is a visible background layer, this is not seen as negative space, as it resembles the irregular figures in it, creating a sense of heaviness in the canvas.



Color: Pollock uses a warm saturated palette of colors. These are used to create other colors as shown in the diagram below. Lighter colors are used in the bottom layers, dark colors contrast with these in the middle layers, including the black, allowing for a second contrast with the brightest layers on the top including the radiant orange and the white, which contact with the darker colors below and around these. This contrast emphasizes the layers in the painting. The brightest and darkest colors, in this case, the cream white and black create an outstanding contrast. The relatively low value of these colors add a natural sense to the painting, as they are colors often found in nature, compared to brighter tones which would make the painting artificial.



Shape: The different layers in the piece contain different shapes, creating variety within the canvas. This variety adds depth, as there are elements of different shape at different positions. The entwinement and juxtaposition of layers and shapes achieves a sense of unity as these homogenous abstract shapes are all connected and present in every layer of color. In addition, the shapes are free of geometrical conventions. The irregularity of every amorphous shape conveys spontaneity as they are the mere result of splattered and dripped paint. Shapes, mainly points, add value to the piece by creating more concrete and static figures in the painting's composition.

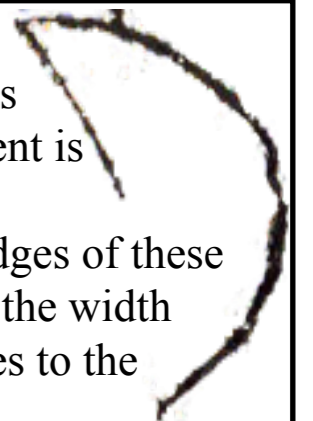


Composition: The repetition of abstract objects or shapes in *Number 8* achieves a rhythm and unity of the piece, for Pollock creates traces of the same nature. The repeating paint drops and dripping lines that Pollock creates in different colors and layers creates a rhythm through patterns that are notable in different layers and locations in the painting. As part of the spontaneous and dynamic approach that Pollock utilizes, the constituting elements do not conform to any specific symmetrical arrangement or balance, leading to an irregular and unbalanced composition.



Texture: *Number 8* contains a relief surface created by the different layers of paint and the thickness of each paint layer. For example, the white drops display a different relief, created by the texture of the paint in this outermost layer, as bumps in the piece. This texture emphasizes the paint's impact on the canvas as a concrete element of power exerted on it. Overall the artwork contains a dense texture, due to the relief surface that most of the drips create, overloading the canvas and creating slight paint protuberances.

Line: Dripped paint creates abstract lines which appear to intersect shapes by crossing these. Its overall movement is due to the linear traces' diverse and irregular directions. In addition the edges of these are not straight but irregular, varying the width of lines, adding noise and disturbances to the mood of disruption.



Living his infancy with his mother, “an intimidating woman” who “cultivated such a fear in Jackson” (Sedivi 17), nourished his emotional inhibition. Pollock grew dependency on alcohol since the age of 15, considered an escape for his mentally unstable condition. However, it soon became a factor that stimulated and increased his mental health. In 1937, he underwent a nervous breakdown. Due to this, in 1938, he “began sessions with Jungian psychoanalysis to help with his alcoholism and neurosis” (Fitzgerald 3). Joseph Henderson, Pollock’s psychologist deduced that “he was ‘portraying the unconscious in these drawings’ ”(Sedivi 16). His exposure to Jungian psychology influenced his view of art as a way to manifest unconscious thoughts.

Living his adolescence through the middle of the Great Depression and born to a poor family, Pollock faced financial struggles since the early stages of his life. “As a teen” during the years of the Depression, he experienced a challenging lack of financial support in his education, for which he “stole food and gasoline” (Dalirian 61). By the beginning of the 1940s unemployment in America was still high. In 1938 Pollock was expelled from the Federal Art Project (FAP) for extensive nonattendances. However he was later rehired for a lower salary. This crisis and state of poverty in which he lived were a major cause for his frustrations.

Red Scare: While the United States had already been concerned about the rise of Communism after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, a second Red Scare was emerging in the late 1930s with the rise of control of the USSR in Europe. In 1939 Pollock lost his job at FAP due to political ideas behind the art project after being considered by politicians a left-wing organization, while it was a merely artistic project (Dalirian 56).

Pollock finds the need to express his mental instability. By laying the canvas on the floor and painting by moving around it, he treats the painting as a therapy.

As a result of the rejection and crisis within his socioeconomic context, the artist represents the contemporary social attitude by venting their shared despair and frustrations due to the crisis and to the socioeconomic instability.

Expresses his response as a rebellion against censorship’s corruption of the individual mind. Pollock transmits his active response of resentments and frustrations against society’s war of ideologies that limited the individual’s freedom of expression.

Cultural Significance



Function and Purpose



Effect and repercussions of the Great Depression and socioeconomic crises on the individual

Focus in the effect and the feeling of crisis rather than the real concepts, achieved through a style of abstraction that focuses on the effect that paint produces as a result of the conscious energy and emotion with which it is applied, rather than the depiction of specific shapes or symbols in reality.

Composition overloaded with positive space to represent the overwhelming perception of the context's reality

Representations of the drips that create abstract shapes

Juxtaposition and entwinement of hues and lines and shapes creates an atmosphere of desperation

Rebellion against Red Scare's censure of ideological and artistic expression

Rebellion against society's norms in terms of censorship expressed by refusing to follow against artistic conventions. These include unbalanced composition, line, and shapes in art through abstraction, as proper of **Abstract Expressionism**. Pollock transmits his active response of resentments and frustrations against society's war of ideologies that limited the individual's freedom of expression.

Irregularities in lines and amorphous shapes

Violent mood conveyed through the energy and rage evident in the splattered texture and impact of the dripped paint on the canvas's surface

Personal depression and neurosis, and influence of Jungian psychology as a therapy

His abstract painting is the result of treating the splattering and dripping as the transformation of unconscious impulses into conscious energy but also as a medium of self-reflection.

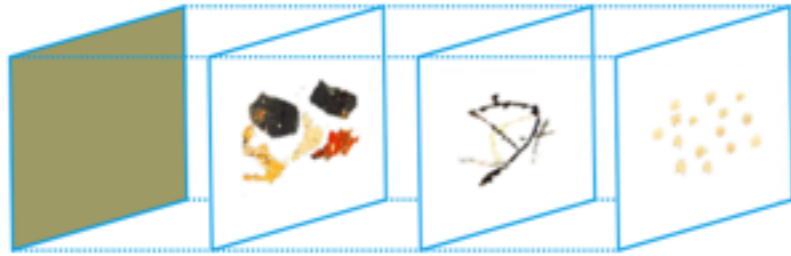
Mental disorder displayed in the movement in multiple direction of traces

Spontaneity in shapes and lines as an unconscious drive

Abstraction allows him to use the painting as an outlet for his unconscious, turning the act of painting as a therapy

Comparison Formal Qualities

Fig. 1 Layered approach to modeling Jackson Pollock's drip style. "Layered modeling and generation of Pollock's drip style". 2014.



Analysis of layers in *Number 8*



Polke's work displays geometrical balance through a perspective that centers the tower to balance both sides. The tower's composition is based on negative space.

Sobel depicts the explosion of the atomic bomb by balancing the number and magnitude of drips throughout the painting. However there is an atmosphere of disorder to portray the devastation of the atomic bomb.

Pollock's work does not display a balanced composition. The shapes and lines of different magnitudes follow different directions to portray a state of disorder. These overload the composition with positive space, to portray instability.

Balance and space in composition

Layers and colors: While Polke's palette is composed of unsaturated colors that add a sense of transparency to the painting, giving an impression of a watercolor's transparency (although using enamel), Polke and Pollock use saturated tones that create solid shapes and lines. The three artworks display a juxtaposition of layers, that superimpose shapes and lines to create an entwinement of the backgrounds and the objects, as well altering the appearance of the proximity of figures in the painting.

Dimensions in Forms, Shapes and Lines

Watchtower depicts the well-known image of a hunting tower with formal three-dimensional qualities that add depth, height, and width to the painting. In contrast, *Hiroshima* portrays a 'semi-abstract' scene, in which the explosion is represented by shapes and lines formed through dripped paint. This is composed of two-dimensional elements that figuratively represent the essence of the explosion and try to recreate the image of an explosion but at the same time representing its moral and social repercussions through the figures that represent the divine and the mortal. On the other end, *Number 8* displays completely abstract two-dimensional shapes and traces that do not recreate any object or shape. Pollock's abstract elements focus in creating an image that provokes sensorial and emotional insights rather than the depiction of natural forms.

Use of the dripped paint:

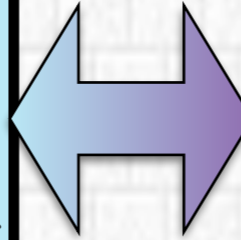
- **Sobel:** Uses linear drips in a perpendicular path as well as random directions to convey crossing ashes and movement in different directions due to an expanding explosion in the environment depicted. The drips add a rhythmic sequence in some sections of the painting.
- **Polke:** Use of drip to add downward movement in the background. However, unlike *Number 8*, the painting does not produce any protruding texture.
- **Pollock:** Use of drip to create irregular linear traces and shapes. The impact of the drips leaves a texture as if it was splattered.

Cultural Significance

Effect of each Cultural Context on the Canvas

Sobel's and Polke's works both are based on historical events. Both contain symbols and motifs that allude to specific elements of history within their culture. While Sobel the drips of the explosion as a motif that corresponds to the explosion and ashes of the 1945 atomic bomb dropped in Hiroshima, Polke uses a central symbol that represents the Nazi subjugation of people in concentration camps, as well as the division of Europe with the Berlin Wall. during the Cold War. Both artworks focus in depicting the scenery and reality taking place within WWII and Cold War Germany (for Polke), and the climax of the antagonism between the US and Japan in WWII.

Although Pollock's work is also influenced by the contemporary reality, the artist does not focus in recreating or directly depicting the reality of the time. *Number 8* portrays the effects of these on the individual. As the Great Depression and the socioeconomic crisis was taking place in the 1930s and 1940s, Pollock depicts the social reaction to this reality, through emotional and abstract artistic connections. Unlike the other two artists, he recreates an artistic response to the crisis and social depression lived in the United States.



Communist trends throughout the 20th Century

Eastern Bloc, separation of Germany, and Soviet (Communist) occupation

Symbolism of a watchtower that serves the connecting unit between the Eastern Bloc and Western Germany

Polke's *Watchtower*

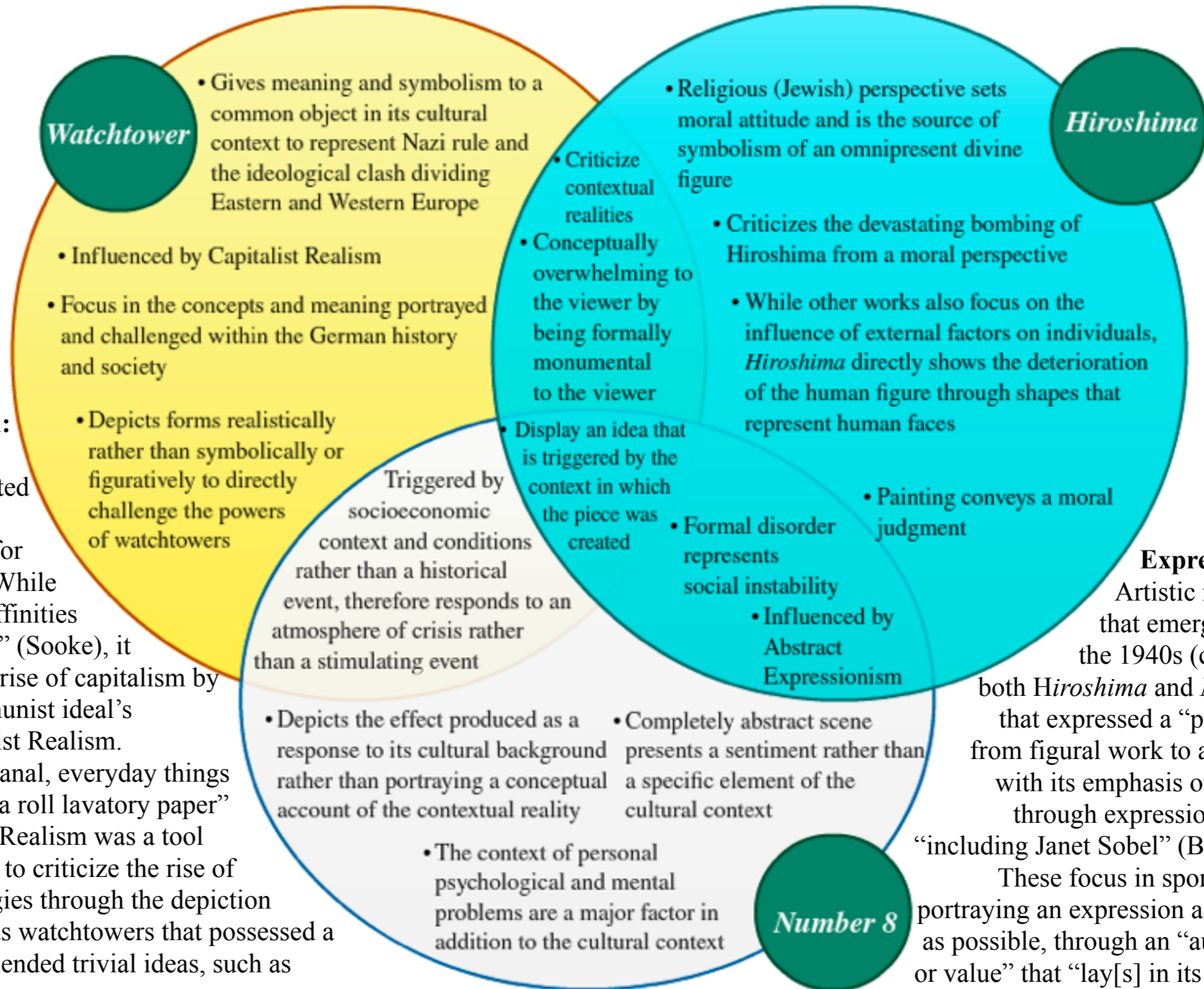
Censorship of Art Projects in America in the 1930s and 1940s claimed to have Communist ideologies, specifically the Federal Art Project in 1939

Use of canvas as a reflection for the psyche and outlet for frustrations due to the limitation of individual freedom

Pollock's *Number 8*

While both Polke's and Pollock's works are linked to Communist trends and uprisings within their own cultural context, these respond differently through their art. Polk focuses on depicting the concepts regarding the Cold War, specifically the watchtowers used to control and mark the separation between the Communist regions and the Capitalist democratic regions. On the other hand, the censorship due to Communist trends triggers the frustrations reflects by Pollock in *Number 8*.

Conceptual Significance and Function



Capitalist Realism:

German artistic movement that started in the 1960s as a countermovement for Socialist Realism. While “[it] shares many affinities with American Pop” (Sooke), it aims to display the rise of capitalism by attacking the communist ideal’s portrayed in Socialist Realism. “Concentrated on banal, everyday things such as a table and a roll lavatory paper” (Sooke), Capitalist Realism was a tool employed by Polke to criticize the rise of Communist ideologies through the depiction of dull items such as watchtowers that possessed a meaning that transcended trivial ideas, such as hunting.

Abstract Expressionism:

Artistic movement that emerged during the 1940s (context for both *Hiroshima* and *Number 8*) that expressed a “progression from figural work to abstraction with its emphasis on process” through expressionist artists “including Janet Sobel” (Burroughs). These focus in spontaneously portraying an expression as naturally as possible, through an “authenticity or value” that “lay[s] in its directness and immediacy of expression” (Paul).

Connections to my artwork



This artwork, composed of enamel paint on two styrofoam panels, explores the concept of individuals' identity and its relation to society. The concept and idea were triggered by the loss of identity within the indigenous ethnicities in Guatemala as a result of historical conditions that trace back to the end of the 20th century.

My artwork:
In-digenous insight. 2016.
Enamel on
styrofoam.

After different attempts with watercolor and oil paint, and different studies of the three artworks, I was able to use the drip art with enamel paint to correspond with my intentions and concepts. Likewise, while I experimented with the different formal effects with movement in lines and shapes, I was able to identify and include symbolisms that are created through formal qualities.

Development of the Cultural Significance



Picture taken by me

In modernity, different ethnicities and social subgroups have undergone a loss of identity due to different external factors in society. These, such as socioeconomic contexts, as well as social inequalities and norms are major causes for the loss of identity today. Growing up as a witness of the evident economic division between social classes during the first decade of the twenty-first century I understood society's undermining of indigenous people in Guatemala, who mainly live under poverty and underdevelopment. This has furthered the deterioration and even elimination of indigenous groups started by Guatemala's Internal Armed Conflict and so-called Genocide that took place between 1990 and 1996.



Hiroshima atomic bomb disaster killed around 150,000 people (reference)

Sobel's *Hiroshima*

Limit of human freedom with the division of Europe during the Cold War

Polke's *Watchtower*

Study of human disasters and limitations imposed on the individual by conventions and political and social divisions

Based on these observations, I focused on the impact that social hierarchies, conventions and attitudes create, such as the ones created within the Guatemalan society, undermining the identity of the indigenous population.

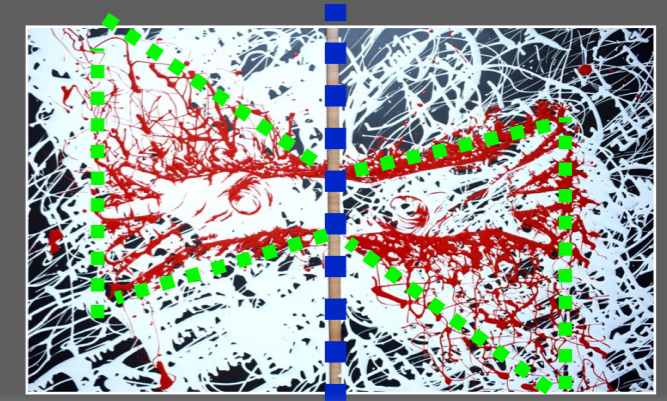
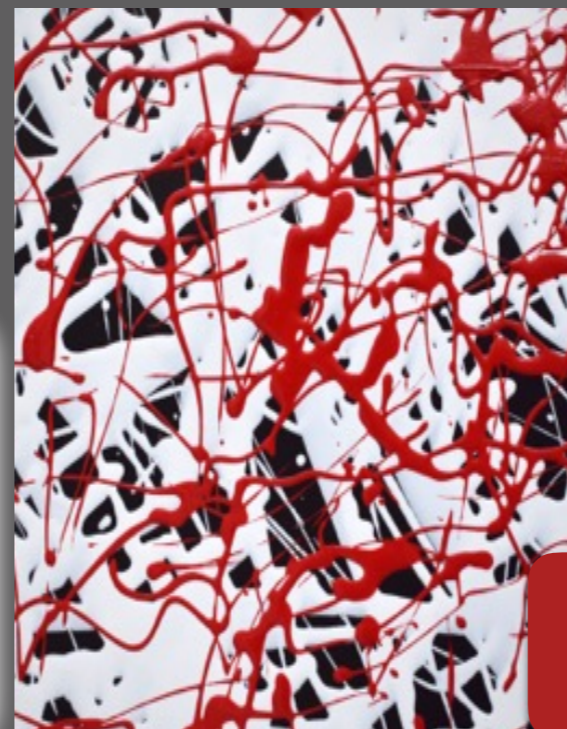
In the same way political and social concepts are symbolized I used parts of the human body, specifically that with which we grasp reality. I focus on individuals' direct contact and exposure to the social environment as the determinant of the actual color and identity. At the same time the portrayal of hands is intended to be representative of a carrier of our identity through its fingertips.



Development and analysis of formal qualities

Lines: I recreated the technique of drip art, to create linear traces of different thickness. The varying thickness creates a sense of different dimensions intertwined. While the lines' irregularity establishes a natural and spontaneous mood, there is a common movement conveyed by the direction of these. For example, the direction of the red drips that originate in the hands gravitates, each towards opposite corners of the composition. In the first layer, the white linear traces create an abstract background that involves a uniform movement of external forces in the direction of each of the palms, as if they were meant to penetrate the hands. The perpendicular movement of the drips, based the drips Sobel includes in *Hiroshima*, create the image of a spontaneous snapshot of an explosive movement. This repeated pattern of intersecting drips creates a general rhythm.

Shapes: The outline and details of both hands are created through the red drips that these radiate. In the way Polke's watchtower is outlined by the white glow surrounding it, the hands are outline by the red drips, yet their inside is composed of negative space. This change in positive and negative spaces in the composition creates a juxtaposition of layers in the shape of the hands.



Composition: As studied in Polke's work, the divisions are used to show the fragmentation of Germany and an ideological division. In this same way, my artwork is composed of two panels that depict two hands broken apart yet maintaining an imaginary link them. This conveys the idea that both hands come from the same origins, however their link is disrupted by their surrounding society. Like *Watchtower*, the composition is geometrically balanced by the size and position of the hands with respect to the center, yet it is not perfectly symmetrical in order to convey a sense of spontaneity (as shown by the dotted lines above).

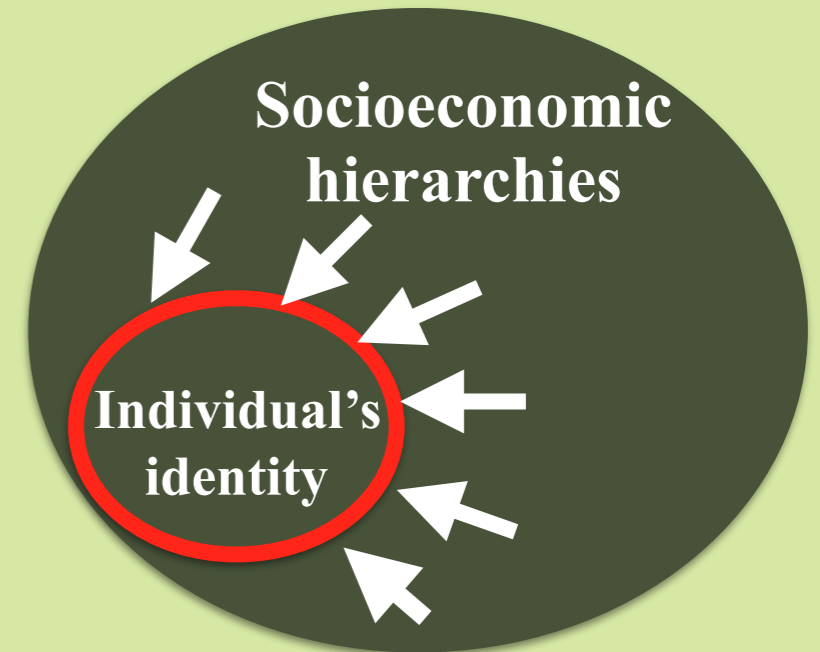
Color: In the way Polke creates a contrast between the bright colors in the background and the white, glow around the watchtower, I used a reduced palette of red, black, and white to show a contrast and opposition between the saturated bright red and the predominantly white background.

Function and Purpose

Symbolism

In the way Polke's *Watchtower* social environment shapes and influences the concept, the social determinisms around different ethnicities and identities have come to shape the form and internal significance of these

While Sigmar Polke creates a symbol out of a seemingly mundane item, which is the a hunting watchtower, I focused on creating symbolism out of a basic and mundane part of the body. In addition to hands' symbolism of identity and carriers of uniqueness in fingerprints, I focused on its universality, just like Polke selected an object to which all the German public could relate.



Motif

Sobel's *Hiroshima* creates a motif that not only recreates the movement created by the ashes and the movement of the Hiroshima bombing's 'mushroom' explosion, but also alludes to the corruption of society on the individual. In this way, I decided to depict an external abstract force of movement and rhythm, which figuratively represents social forces and hierarchies that impact on identity in individuals.

The repeating pattern created by the drips creates a spontaneous and aesthetic pattern. The drips in both panels gravitate in the same diagonal direction that trespasses and intersects the position of the hands.

In the way Pollock portrays a state of disorder through the juxtaposition of layers of drips and the irregular abstraction of this seemingly splattered paint, I tried to capture a snapshot of disorder within the conceptual relationship of society and the individual. Through this, I intend to depict not only the entwinement of these, but also the way these social external forces have come to shape the identity of the individual. It follows to say that individuals' identity becomes a reflection, if not the mere ideas and attitudes in which it is immersed.

After studying the results of spontaneity in *Number 8*, I adapted this mood into my work, through the use of seemingly splattered red enamel around the hands. This mood makes the depicted concept

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