In 1953, the magazine *Art Digest* published a symposium on the question “Is the French Avant-Garde Overrated?” The three young American painters interviewed, Ralston Crawford, Robert Motherwell, and Jack Tworkov, said they did not find the question relevant to their work, adding that it smacked both of nationalism and provincialism. Clement Greenberg, on the other hand, the sole critic on the panel, found himself completely in his element and was only too happy to answer a question that his own writings had done much to provoke. Yes, he answered, France’s cultural prestige did account in large part for the critical and commercial success of the latest exportation of French abstract painting. Largely dismissive of that success, he went on to articulate a crucial difference between the French and the American versions of Abstract Expressionism: “In Paris, they ‘finish’ and unify the abstract picture in a way that makes it more agreeable to standard taste. They still go for ‘paint quality’ in the accepted sense. They ‘enrich’ the surface with films of oil or varnish, or with buttery paint. The result is softer, suaver. If Abstract Expressionism embodies a vision of its own, that vision is tamed in Paris.”¹ Almost every adjective in Greenberg’s statement points in the same direction: the weakness of the French for *belle peinture*. Such comments also indicate the extent to which the “triumph of American painting” in the 1950s was predicated on the demotion of French painting to the decorative. The culture wars between France and America in the 1940s and 1950s have provided both edifying and engrossing material for art historical writing. One aspect that has been overlooked, however, except for a passing if pointed remark

by Serge Guilbaut in his book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, is precisely the question of the decorative, and, more specifically, the critical link between the desire for large-size pictures in the 1950s and the decorative.²

It is Clement Greenberg who, in two articles published in 1948, described the situation most perceptively:

> There is a persistent urge, as persistent as it is largely unconscious, to go beyond the cabinet picture which is destined to occupy only a spot on the wall, to a kind of picture that, without actually becoming identified with the wall like a mural, would spread over it and acknowledge its physical reality. . . . But it is a fact that abstract painting shows a greater and greater reluctance for the small, frame-enclosed format. Abstract painting being flat, needs a greater extension of surface on which to develop its ideals than does the old three dimensional easel painting. Thus while the painter's relation to his art has become more private than ever before because of a shrinking appreciation on the public's part, the architectural and, presumably social location for which he destines his product has become, in inverse ratio, more public. This is the paradox, the contradiction, in the master-current of painting.³

What Greenberg chose to overlook, however, even though he was writing for the Marxist *Partisan Review*, was the ideological dimension of this so-called "crisis of easel painting," the title of Greenberg's first article. To understand "the situation at the moment," the title of Greenberg's second article, one has to delve into the 1930s. For it is the thirties that had witnessed, both in Europe and in the United States, the revival of mural painting. And it is the 1930s which, politically troubled as they were, cast their long shadow onto the 1950s. After World War II, the desire for mural painting—or rather for a "mural effect" (for technically speaking very few of these images were actually murals)—had persisted. Yet it had now become ideologically tainted. It became imperative to dispel any distasteful hints of an art form whose revival had been so often associated in the 1930s with either Communist or


Fascist indoctrination. Figuration and storytelling in any style that vaguely smacked of either neoclassicism or Socialist Realism were thus categorically forsaken for abstraction. During the 1930s, the requirement that mural painting be integral to the wall and wedded to architecture had been grounded not so much in the fear of the decorative as in the desire for a monumental art that would embody totalitarian regimes’ aspirations to last for a millennium. This is why it became crucial after the war for mural-size images to be related but ultimately distinct from architecture. Murals in the 1930s had been eminently propagandistic in their public mode of address. Hence it was now essential for mural-size works to retreat from the public sphere into the autonomous space of the modern art museum or into the private sphere of the art collector’s apartment. But, as a result of their abstraction, their detachment from architecture, and their retrenchment into a private or semi-private space, large works now ran the risk of becoming “mere ornament,” “little more than pleasing decoration.” Some adjustments had to be made. The works had to become hybrids: somewhere in between the mural and the large easel painting.

While he may have adopted, by the 1950s, a patronizing attitude toward French painting, Greenberg remained faithful to his early loves. He thus found himself having to make a special case in order to “salvage” Matisse. By the time of his 1951 MOMA retrospective, Matisse had recently ventured, with his mural-size paper and textile cutouts, into the most unabashedly decorative phase of his career (Fig. 1):

There is a habit of referring to Matisse as a decorator. The irony is that pure decoration is the area in which he has failed oftenest. His paper cut-outs, his ventures into applied art, and most of what I have seen of his tapestry designs, and even murals seem to me the feeblest of the things he has done. He is an easel painter from first to last: this is obscured—if it really is—only by the unprecedented success of his effort to assimilate decoration to the purposes of the easel picture without at the same time weakening the integrity of the latter. . . . Matisse was flattening his motifs for the sake of a more abstract, purer, and supposedly more soothing effect. But the results amount to much more than decoration.

4. Although none of the essays deal with the 1950s, see the excellent Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture, ed. Christopher Read (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996).
Eight years later, in the exhibition catalog of Joan Miró's MOMA retrospective, curator James Thrall Soby likewise had to make a special plea for the artist's two recent mural commissions in America: one for the Gourmet Restaurant in Cincinnati's Terrace Hilton Hotel [Fig. 2], the other for the dining hall of Harkness Commons in the Graduate Center at Harvard. About the former he wrote: "The mural's gaiety and sweep are most impressive. Here beyond question is a master decorator at work, and if the mural lacks the profundity of Miró's finest easel pictures, it nevertheless fulfills brilliantly its festive purpose." And about the latter: "Doubtless the fact that the mural was planned for an educational institution persuaded Miró to work with a sterner creative impetus than he had for the Cincinnati hotel's dining room wall."

In the eyes of American critics during the 1950s, it was barely acceptable for older French or Paris-based artists to dabble in decoration. When it came to the young artists of the New York School, however, the slightest hint at an interaction between big paintings and the decorative had to be avoided. Thus Mark Rothko, who had accepted in 1958 a commission to paint a group of five mural canvases for the Four Seasons Restaurant at the Seagram Building in New York, refused at the last minute to deliver the work when it was completed a year later. He eventually gave the paintings to the Tate Gallery in London, with the strict stipulation that they always be exhibited on their own in a special room. And even as MOMA was about to send its show *The New American Painting* on a "Grand Tour" to eight European capitals, the critic E. C. Goosen was still busy securing the status of Abstract Expressionist painting in an article entitled "The Big Canvas," written for *Art International* in 1958:

> The size of such pictures is not adjusted to the size of the kind of rooms we currently live in. Even museums are not in love with large pictures. Recently, however, such canvases have forced their way into rooms where they consume the entire wall space, and in turn affect the quality of life in the room pressuring an emotional experience upon those who used to have to stand and peer.  

This kind of rhetorical exercise, stressing the prerequisite "difficulty" of good modern art, had become all the more necessary as disclaimer and antidote. Two richly illustrated books published in New York—


Figure 2. Joan Miró, Gourmet Room, Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, 1947.
Art in Modern Architecture, written by Eleanor Bitterman in 1952, and Art in European Architecture, written by Paul Damaz in 1957—revealed that an unprecedented number of American and European artists had become involved with mural-size paintings, ceramic mosaics, tapestry hangings, and enamels during the 1950s. These were intended not for the walls of government buildings such as town halls and post offices, as had been the case in the 1930s, but for purely recreational settings: restaurants, lounge bars, night clubs, hotel lobbies, and patios, both on land and on ocean liners (Fig. 3). These projects involved mostly second-tier artists. Still, art criticism had to step in to stop the tide and secure the separation of high and low.

French critics, too, made sure to dissociate themselves from the decorative. They did it both for their own sakes and in response to the newly condescending tone of American writing on things French. Thus in 1949, Christian Zervos, the editor of Cahiers d’art, a magazine that had devoted many special issues to Matisse over the years, expressed an even harsher view of the artist’s paper cutouts than Greenberg would two years later when he first saw them at the Musée National d’Art Moderne:

Is it necessary to say that one should pay no attention whatsoever to these paper cutouts that constitute, with the decorative hangings, the big deal at the Matisse exhibition? As far as I am concerned they are totally negligible and nefarious neighbors to the paintings. . . . The best they could do would be to function as a textile or a wallpaper design.9

The painter André Masson took the same route when in 1952 he wrote the first major article on Claude Monet’s Nymphéas since their installation in two specially designed oval rooms at the Musée de l’Orangerie almost twenty years earlier. Masson had spent the war years in the United States in close contact with the future Abstract Expressionists. He knew exactly what it took to bring Monet’s late work, which had just been rediscovered by the younger generation of American painters, back under the French mantle. What Monet had called his “Grandes Décorations” when they were painted in the late 1920s were thus recast by Masson as large easel paintings:

One could dream of a Monet turning toward the use of large canvases, clear and iridescent, the preserve of Veronese and Tiepolo. Do not dream

8. Both were published by Reinhold Publishers, New York.
any more; consider his supreme work, the Nymphéas. Despite their monumental dimensions, they do not have the characteristics of grand Venetian or Flemish decoration. His disposition of spirit appears to me to be that of the great easel painter who decides to yield to his vision a field vast enough—imposing enough—so that it embraces the world. . . . One of the peaks of French genius.10

The major exhibition and book Un art autre: où il s'agit de nouveaux dévidages du réel, written in 1952 by then-influential curator and critic Michel Tapié de Celeyran, was entirely premised on situating peinture informelle—the French equivalent to American Abstract Expressionism—not simply against, but outside of any concern with the notion of tradition and belle peinture.11 Yet is was in an article on the truly mural-size painting produced in France during the 1950s, the work of Georges Mathieu [Fig. 4], that Tapié's refutation of the niceties of belle peinture reached an almost desperate pitch. The article, “Mathieu Paints a Picture,” with photographs by the cinematographer Robert Descharmes, belongs to a series of four photo-essays launched by Art News in 1951 showing both American and European painters [the other essays dealt with Jackson Pollock, Jean Fautrier, and the Italian Alberto Burri, respectively] working in a variety of unorthodox manners in their studios.12 Yet while Fautrier and Burri were shown at work in a quiet and absorbed mood in their studio, it becomes perfectly clear, as soon as one glances at the Mathieu photographs and even more as one begins to read the text, that that article was conceived as a defiant response to two previous essays in the magazine: Robert Goodnough’s “Pollock Paints a Picture,” the first in the photo-essay series, and Harold Rosenberg’s now famous “The American Action Paintings,” published in Art News in 1952. The photographs by Descharmes showed Mathieu wearing a fanciful costume of black silk, white bonnet, and crossed leggings, midway between that of a Japanese Samurai and a French Carolingian knight, squirting paint on canvases measuring over two meters high and six meters across [Fig. 5]. The artist is engaged in a studio performance situated, like his outfit, midway between the sublime and the


11. The book accompanied a show at the gallery Studio Paul Facchetti, and was published by Gabriel Giraud & Fils.

Figure 4. Georges Mathieu, "The Battle of Bouvines," 1954, oil on canvas, 2.5 x 6 meters. Private Collection.
Figure 5. Robert Descharmes, "Georges Mathieu at work in his studio," Art News 53, 1955.
ridiculous, in an attempt to upstage, both in canvas-size and in painting-as-spectacle, Hans Namuth’s memorable photographs of Pollock for Goodnough’s article. Tapié’s text returned again and again, in a heavy-handed Nietzschean voice, to the fact that Mathieu’s gestures were “dictated by the urge for vehemence and violence.” This was meant to outweigh Rosenberg’s idea of the painting as an event and the canvas as an arena in which to act. Yet while Rosenberg had done a perfect job at keeping American action painting safe, at least for a short while, from both theatricality and the decorative (“apocalyptic wall painting”), Mathieu lapsed into both.

It is not in large easel painting, however, but in the medium of tapestry that one finds the most interesting and, it turns out, by far the most ambitious response to the desire for mural-size work in France during the 1950s. Tapestry stood as a warm, consoling vestige of savoir vivre and of grand historical patrimoine at a time when the French were experiencing a massive crisis of confidence in the new world order of the Cold War. Its two leading proponents were Jean Cassou, the first chief curator of Paris’s new Musée National d’Art Moderne, and the painter turned tapestry-maker, Jean Lurcat. The museum’s first exhibition in 1946, after the inaugural unveiling of its permanent collection of painting and sculpture, was dedicated, significantly enough, to La tapisserie française du moyen-âge à nos jours. It was followed by other large exhibitions such as Quatre années de tapisserie française of 1949, La tapisserie française et les peintres-cartonniers in 1957, and Tapisseries, peintures, gouaches de Jean Lurcat in 1958, all curated by Cassou. Meanwhile, the Musée des Arts Décoratifs organized Tapisseries françaises 1949–1952 in 1952, and Tapisseries 58 in 1958 which, like the exhibition Douze tapisseries inédites exécutées dans les Ateliers Tabard à Aubusson at the Gallerie Denise René in 1952, featured tapestries based almost exclusively on the designs of abstract artists.13

In his book Situation de l’art moderne of 1951, published by Les éditions de Minuit, Cassou presented tapestry as one of the most important manifestations of contemporary art. Yet such accolades were already absent in the 1950s from an important magazine like Cimaise, which was devoted to the cause of peinture informelle. Nor has it figured in more recent Anglo-American and French art histories. It went totally unmentioned in the colloquium and book Reconstructing Mod-

13. Cassou was consistent in his taste. He praised Matisse’s late paper and textile cutouts in his catalogues of two exhibitions: in 1949 [reviewed by Zervos], and in 1956.
ernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945–1962 edited by Serge Guilbaut in 1990, in spite of the fact that the book jacket, graced by a Cecil Beaton fashion photograph in which a classic Pollock drip painting acted as backdrop to a model in a 1951 fashion spread for Vogue, promised brave ventures into the realm of the decorative.\textsuperscript{14} Tapestry was hardly mentioned in the catalog of the exhibitions \textit{L'art en Europe. Les années décisives 1945–1953} (curated by Bernard Ceysson at the Musée d’Art Moderne de Saint-Etienne in 1987), and \textit{Les années 50} (at the Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou in 1988), or even in the recent homage by the Centre Georges Pompidou to its first director, \textit{Jean Cassou 1897–1986. Un musée imaginé} (in 1995).\textsuperscript{15} The reason for this omission is clear: tapestry has remained an embarrassment to the master narrative of modernism, not just because it repeatedly brushes up against the problem of the decorative but because it is, intrinsically, a hybrid. The description given by Georges Boudaille, one of the editors of \textit{Cimaise}, in his review of the exhibition \textit{Tapisseries 58} at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, in what appears to have been that magazine’s only reference to tapestry throughout the fifties, makes this point clear:

Tapestry should not just furnish like any sideboard, nor disappear into the wall like wallpaper. Tapestry should not just be decorative. It shouldn’t call attention to itself like a painting or send an overly direct message between the author and the spectator. The role of tapestry situates itself more than ever, it seems to me, midway between painting and decoration.\textsuperscript{16}

It is this hybrid position—midway between painting and decoration—that made tapestry a uniquely critical medium in the French fifties. Jean Lurcat repeatedly spoke about the difference between tapestry and easel painting. The decadence of tapestry, we are told, began at the end of the great French middle ages, during the Renaissance, as soon as it began to try to imitate painting. It reached a nadir with the triumph of easel painting in the nineteenth century. Avoiding the nuanced coloristic effects of the Manufactures des Gobelins and Beauvais,

\textsuperscript{14} “Remember, one should never judge a book by its cover!” Serge Guilbaut quipped, half-jokingly.

\textsuperscript{15} That is, before the split of the collections between the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and the Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou in 1977.

whose palette had escalated by the eighteenth century to the madness of seven hundred different shades, Lurcat restricted himself to forty, and eventually to twenty. Woven framing devices simulating wooden gilded frames were likewise to be eliminated. And so was any trace of three-dimensional trompe-l’oeil effect so as to retrieve, with a truth to materials concordant with the credo of high modernism, the intrinsic two-dimensional properties of the woven medium. Yet it is precisely in its most modern abstract guise—when based on designs by Jean Arp, Auguste Herbin, Alberto Magnelli, Fernand Leger, Le Corbusier, Matisse, and Vasarely, or on cartoons like the one by Mario Prassinos imitating the vignette calligraphic gesture of Hans Hartung or Mathieu (Fig. 6), or even on Lurcat’s own compositions (Fig. 7)—that tapestry came to function as a parergon.

In his long discussion of Immanuel Kant’s treatment of ornament in The Critique of Judgment, Jacques Derrida describes the parergon in the following fashion. The parergon is that thing that may appear at first to be unimportant, accessory, and superfluous, marginal as decoration or ornament, but that is in fact integral to the work or ergon—in our case Parisian painting of the 1950s. The parergon is no mere supplement, Derrida argues, but a “dangerous supplement.” For it “gives to see,” it “causes to be seen,” something about the ergon itself, namely a lack. By revealing a lack in the object it supplements, its supplementarity is subversive. The supplemented object turns out to be knowable only through its supplement. Also, in contrast to the “complement,” the supplement, by making up [supplying] for ultimately stands for, adds only in order to replace. Applying this logic of supplementarity to the French fifties one may say that what tapestry as parergon allowed to be seen is what the champions of contemporary French painting, Michel Tapié, Michel Ragon, Charles Estienne, even Jean Cassou, were all too unwilling to contemplate. And that is that the ergon—Parisian abstraction chaude [gestural abstraction] and abstraction froide [geometric abstraction]—was about to become marginal to Abstract Expressionism during the 1950s: nothing more than belle peinture. The rise to prominence of modern tapestry in France in

the aftermath of World War II revealed how French painting was about to stand in relation to the painting of the New York School as tapestry stood in relation to painting. It is by being put so often on display, not just in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, where one expected to see it, but in the very shrine of modern French art—Paris's Musée National d'Art Moderne—that tapestry was most dangerously allowed to deploy itself as parergon.

Cassou was unaware of the damage he did to contemporary French painting. As a faithful "fellow traveler" of the Left, from the years of the Popular Front, through his fight in the maquis of the Resistance during the years of Vichy, and his membership in the Communist Party until 1949, he was looking for a popular art form. Cassou saw in tapestry an expedient channel for modernism to the masses. As he put it in 1958 in his book La tapisserie française et les peintres cartonniers:

Via this functional and familiar medium, modern art infiltrates, without shocking people, everyday life. By the same token the modern artist reintegrates himself into the social. He puts his genius in the service of the collective. He recovers his role of laborer, worker, and producer. ¹⁹

The emphasis on the words "travailleur," "ouvrier" and "producteur" was aimed at dissociating modern tapestry from three things: from the triumph of bourgeois individualism associated with easel painting, from the domestic, decorative realm of the feminine; and from the nostalgic, feudalist dreams of a medieval society of artisan guilds associated with the craft of weaving during the years of Pétain's regime. Cassou and Lurcat successfully managed to link tapestry to the French myth of Resistantialisme. Thus, as the story goes, while the tapestry manufacturers of the Gobelins and Beauvais were churning out official commissions for the Vichy government, at Aubusson in the Creuse, production, which went on unabated during the 1940s, was first the fruit of independent work in the so-called Free Zone, then went underground once the Germans took over the whole country in 1942.

Key to the revival of tapestry for Lurcat was that it retrieve, in a modern guise, the mural function it had served in the French Middle Ages. Tapestry would thus become once again a woolen wall ("une muraillé de laine") in its own right. To make his point clear, Lurcat repeatedly compared his own Apocalypse: Lady and the Dragon, which was installed in 1951 in the apse of the new church of Notre Dame de

Toute Grace in Assy (Fig. 7), and later his tapestry cycle Le chant du monde, to the Apocalypse d'Angers, a huge ensemble of seven tapestries over 144 meters long and 5.5 meters high woven in the fourteenth century for the Duke of Anjou by Nicolas Bataille. In a desperate bid for the heroic, Lurcat's "woven monuments," as he called them, became larger and larger as the 1950s wore on. Yet they managed to elude the double-bind of the 1930s. They were neither murals-as-Monument with a capital M, nor were they tacked-on decorations. They were what Le Corbusier, himself on the lookout for a new mural concept for the 1950s, coined as Muralnomad. It was in the exhibition leaflet for Douze tapisseries inédites executées dans les Ateliers Tabard à Aubusson in 1952 at the Galerie Denise René that Le Corbusier first aired his concept: "Modern tapestry is not an archaic notion. It is no longer out of fashion. Today's tapestry is and will be the mural of the nomad. The painted mural one rolls and carries under one's arm. We are all nomads living in rented apartments and in future unités d'habitation."

By being described as a warm skin or skein (épiderme) under the caress of the hand, mural tapestry came to function as a tactile corrective in the arguments of those who favored a New Humanism in modern architecture over the increasing optical coldness of the International Style. For Le Corbusier, the Muralnomad went hand-in-hand with the use of sculptural forms and rough concrete ("béton brut") in his buildings during the 1950s.

While art (i.e. painting) magazines like Cahiers d'art, Cimaise, or Verve chose to ignore tapestry, the lay press was ready to wax lyrical at the time of Lurcat's retrospective at the Musée d'Art Moderne in the summer of 1958. The Communist daily L'humanité, eager to distance itself from Socialist Realist painting after the mixed success of Picasso's Massacre in Korea at the Salon de Mai of 1951 and Louis Aragon's devastating dismissal of André Fougeron's mural-size Civilisation atlantique at the Salon d'Automne of 1953, ran an ecstatic review of the show. The article, entitled "L'Épopée magistrale de Jean Lurcat," called Lurcat one of the greatest artists of his time. Intent to revive the glory years of the French Communist Party, when the party took it upon itself at the time of the Liberation to stand for Resistant France as "le parti des fusillés," the reviewer gave a prominent place to a quote from a poem by Robert Desnos woven by Lurcat into a tapestry in 1954.

Desnos, who had perished on 8 June 1945 in the concentration camp of Terezin, had written in his poem entitled *Hommage au morts de la Résistance et de la déportation* (Hommage to the dead of the Resistance and the deportation):

\[
\text{Je vous salue vous qui dormez} \\
\text{Après le dur travail clandestin} \\
\text{Imprimeurs, déboulonneurs de rails} \\
\text{Distributeurs de tracts, contrebandiers} \\
\text{Je vous salue vous tous qui resistez.}
\]

I salute you who sleep
After the hard clandestine work
Printers, railway saboteurs
Tract distributors, smugglers
I salute all of you who resist. 21

The reviewer ended by praising Lurcat for reminding us, in his most recent endeavors, of the ever-looming menace of atomic warfare. The first tapestries in the show were Lurcat’s latest works, *La grande menace, Le grand charnier, L’homme d’Hiroshima, La fin de tout* and *L’homme en gloire dans la paix*, all of which belonged to a cycle entitled *Le chant du monde*. When completed, this tapestry cycle, made out of separate pieces meant to be strung 125 meters across [500 square meters] was obviously designed to compete with Lurcat’s beloved *Apocalypse d’Angers*. In his weekly column in *Le monde*, the well-known Renaissance art historian André Chastel avoided the apocalyptic Cold War rhetoric favored during those years by *L’humanité*. 22 Yet overlooking the staggering size of the works on display, he ended up sounding almost as enthusiastic as the counterpart in *L’humanité*: “Who would have predicted twenty-five years ago that Lurcat would be honored by a major retrospective in the most official sanctuary of modern art?” 23

Once again, it took an American critic, Annette Michelson, reviewing the show in her “Paris column” for *The New York Herald Tribune*, to comment on the lack of proportion between “this minor renaissance of French tapestry” as she termed it, and “the almost grotesque enor-

mity in scale and artistic ambition” that went into it. Pointing to Lur-
cat’s “condescension to a convention that suggests chic illustration
rather than popular imagery,” Michelson began by debunking tape-
stry’s recently earned leftwing credentials:

The scale, the inventive power of the iconography, the craftsmanship
are almost stupefying; they bully one into submission, and one’s con-
sequent cautious resistance must be at least partly understood as a
function of their staggering enormity. Cosmic aspiration of this kind
crops up now and again in Cartesian France. Among Lurcat’s weak-
nesses is a tendency toward a disastrous inflation. This is, of course, the
price that a not quite first rate sensibility will pay for a heaven-vault-
ing ambition.24

Sweeping aside fictions of architectural functionality called forth by
such concepts as the Muralnomad, she squarely repositioned tapestry
within the register of the decorative. “The function of tapestry has
shrunk to that of a static and exclusively visual object. These hang-
ings will never be used like the fabrics of Nicolas Bataille or Baudoin
de Bailleul as battle standards or to shelter chilly clerics from drafts”
[Michelson].

The spectacle of these many tapestries hung on the curved walls of
the Musée d’Art Moderne (a neoclassical building designed in 1937 as
part of the huge New Trocadéro complex) is certainly disconcerting to
imagine. Even more disconcerting is the fact that Lurcat’s tapestries,
with their archetypal figures, mythical beasts, and astrological em-
blems caught in cosmic explosions of acid colors on black grounds,
looked uncannily like Pollock’s webs [Fig. 8]. For it is ironic that Cas-
sou had scheduled Lurcat’s show in his museum on the very eve of the
New York MOMA’s New American Painting. The show landed at the
Musée National d’Art Moderne in January 1959 like a true bombshell,
with Jackson Pollock’s name written all over it.

bune (13 July 1958). Clipping found in the Lurcat file of the Archives de Musée National
d’Art Moderne.