

this unpremeditated method tapped his unconscious. Initially, though, Hofmann was put off by this seemingly thoughtless spontaneity.

"But you do not work from nature, and this is no good," Hofmann said. "You will repeat yourself." To which Pollack replied: "I am nature."

Soon though, Hofmann was painting automatically. In fact, he had done a "drip" painting several years before Pollack did, which only illustrates Miz Hofmann's description of him as a "creature of contradiction." Stimulated also by the surreal biomorphic shapes of Juan Miro whom he knew in New York, and the paintings of Kandinsky who he had known in Munich, Hofmann evolved into an abstract expressionist.

Abstract expressionism was born in New York in the 1940's. Artists like Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell, Clifford Still and Pollack were creating new ways to paint based on gesture and the unconscious, and their collective inheritance from the cubists and surrealists. Hofmann never taught any of them; he was one of them. But like these other "action painters," he was not understood by the critics who disparaged his 1944 show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery.

Until that show, most of Hofmann's students hadn't even seen his paintings. He kept his own work private, showing it only to his closest friends.

"He said he did not want students to copy him," said Bultman. "But it was also, I feel, to avoid any critical confrontation."

Also in 1944, Hofmann abruptly lost his lease on the Jawthorne studio. The following summer he taught in Bultman's still unfinished studio just down the hill. But in 1946 Hofmann had bought an outsized white house on Commercial Street in the West End that became the school's permanent home.

The end of World War II brought a flock of younger artists to Hofmann's school. It was always the Provincetown school that financially carried the one in New York, but now both were filled and solvent. Hofmann had finally begun to emerge as one of the foremost teachers of modern art in America. Artists like Myron Stout and Paul Resika studied with him at this time, as did photographer Bill Witt who painted to better grasp how to compose with his camera.

One of Witt's photographs shows a Friday criticism session in which students would bring in work for Hofmann's scrutiny. They are crowded around the teacher as he gesticulates toward a painting, while up in the gallery, visiting artists and the curious look down. On this day only, anyone was allowed into the studio to watch Hofmann judge and illuminate art.

By the mid-1950's, abstract expressionism was flourishing and had become the dominate style of painting. Provincetown was New York's alter ego and many of the best showed in galleries along Commercial Street, particularly in the one owned by Samuel Kootz and Nat Halper. The Kootz Gallery exhibited artists such as Adolph Gottlieb and Motherwell, as well as Hofmann.

Hofmann kept a studio in Days Lumberyard (now the Fine Arts Work Center) as a world apart to which he'd go to paint and concentrate.

"At one point I went over to his studio," said Halper, "and on the easel there was a series of five drawings. The

first was clearly realistic, the second more abstract, and the next more abstract than that, until by the end you couldn't recognize the object."

The object was a still life, and from his most abstract drawing of it, Hofmann was doing a painting. He always returned to nature, in this case a still life, for visual stimulation. By the late 1940's, though, Hofmann no longer painted outside. A hernia operation had left him without the stamina for this, yet he would drive with Miz Hofmann through the countryside, then return to paint.

"I bring the landscape home in me," he said.

Hofmann's paintings, on exhibit at the Provincetown Art Association through October 12, evince one of his principal theories of composition, which he called "push and pull." Within the closed system of the picture frame there is a tension among all the planes of an object and the negative space in which they exist. It is up to the artist to balance these forces.

"He created an appetite, an enthusiasm," said William Freed.

At age 78, desiring only to paint, Hofmann closed both his New York and Provincetown schools in 1958. Bultman notes a new serenity in the Hofmanns' lives at this time. They seemed closer to each other than ever before. When Hofmann finally died of a heart attack eight years later, his insight and teachings had helped many of the town's now well-known artists. They are his legacy.