

JASON MCCOY GALLERY

The New York Times

Review: December 9, 2011

American Letters 1927-1947: Jackson Pollock & Family

By **ROBERTA SMITH**

Jason McCoy Gallery, 41 East 57th Street, Manhattan, Through Dec. 21

This sweet yet clear-eyed exhibition revisits the early life of Jackson Pollock (1912-56), the youngest of five brothers, three of whom became artists. The oldest, Charles Pollock (1902-88), led the way, moving to New York from Los Angeles in 1926 and studying with Thomas Hart Benton at the Art Students League. He was followed shortly by Sanford McCoy (1909-63), who reclaimed the original family name at the request of their father, Leroy Pollock (1878-1935), who, as a child, had been adopted by a family named Pollock. Then Jackson, who seems to have been perceived as the most talented and the most fragile, even then, followed in their footsteps.

This exhibition, organized by Jason McCoy, Sanford's son, in collaboration with the Charles Pollock Archives in Paris, combines letters, photographs, family memorabilia and artworks on the occasion of the publication of "American Letters, 1927-1947: Jackson Pollock & Family" (Polity), and, like the book, conveys a close-knit, ambitious clan.

The show's catalog quotes a letter that Leroy wrote to his "Dear son Jack" in 1928, advising him that "the secret of success is concentrating interest in life" and encouraging him "to be fully awake to everything about you."

The show includes small, early works on paper and board by Charles and Sanford that mostly adhere to Benton's turbulent brand of American Scene painting. It also has works by Benton and a small sketch by each of the Mexican artists José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera, whose murals Charles admired and recommended to Jackson.

The sense that Jackson Pollock could not have been Jackson Pollock without his family is encapsulated here and undoubtedly elaborated on in the book. But the immensity of his gift is equally apparent in small paintings, drawings and engravings that range in date from 1934 to 1947, and a small, intense head carved in dark stone from the early 1930s.

In the material on view, the work that holds up best to Pollock's originality is an earthenware bowl painted with flowing abstract forms from around 1935, by Rita Piacenza Benton, Benton's wife.