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### A STUDIO IN MY POCKET

by Lawrence Van Gelder

AT the age of 60, the Iranian-born painter Manoucher Yektai can look back on a career in which his art has been exhibited in galleries and museums in such cities as New York, Paris, Washington, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago and Detroit.

In New York, Mr. Yektai's work has been shown at the Poindexter, Borgenicht and Rosenberg galleries, and such critics as Hilton Kramer have praised his elegant pictorial style.

But whatever acceptance and approbation by the world at large these exhibitions represent, it is clear that Mr. Yektai, who lives with his wife and three children in New York and Sagaponack, remains his own sternest critic.

Although known as an Abstract Expressionist, Mr. Yektai resists typecasting, and in Sagaponack as he prepared for a show later this year at the Rosenberg gallery, he said: "I try to be a contemporary painter. By that I mean a new painter - a painter of the time, the kind of painting that you have not seen or experienced before. This can include lots of things. I don't like to be considered part of any group."

Should someone look at his paintings and pronounce them abstractions, he said, "I'll call them figures. If they call them figures, I'll say they're abstractions."

What he has looked for in his work, ever since he began, is improvement. "Improvement means to satisfy myself," he said. During his childhood in Teheran, his birthplace, Mr. Yektai considered himself a poet, but one day, at the age of 18, he met a painter. He looked at the man's work, and they talked until late into the night. "The next morning," Mr. Yektai said, "I did not go to school. From then on, I wanted to be a painter."

He had his heart set on France, but World War II closed it to him. He studied at the University of Teheran, then came to the United States in 1945.

When he left Iran, he said, "I was ready to learn more and more about painting." He added: "I would occasionally paint a painting that amazed me, then a series of total failures. Then a sign would come through that I shouldn't give up, then a sign of failure. I must say that has lasted up to this moment."

Arriving in New York, he studied at various schools, still yearning for France, which he regarded as the center of art. But when he finally reached Paris after the war, he

said, "I realized what a mistake I had made. America was the center." He returned to New York in 1947.

"I really began to paint," he said, "because formal study did not mean much to me. I wanted the sort of concentrated study no teacher would teach you. I went to libraries. I talked to painters. I was not such a master of language to benefit from any kind of teacher. So I was my own instructor."

By the late 40's, his work began to be shown and sold. "I always paint where I live," Mr. Yektai said. "I always have to be with my paintings. I don't keep regular hours. Sometimes a whole day is wasted and when I get ready to go to bed, I feel like painting. So I have to have a studio right in my pocket."

For a time, he turned from painting to write epic poetry in his native language. "When I write, I cannot paint," he said. "When I paint, I cannot write, and I miss poetry. I really wish I had the technique to pay attention to both of them or I had two different lives to spend on both of them, because I love involvement in both of them."

He spoke of the love he feels for many styles of painting - Persian miniatures, Renaissance art, cave paintings. "I want to continue and create work that gives me some sort of satisfaction similar to these experiences," he said. This does not involve fame or being a member of the fashion of the time. If it comes, it comes by itself."