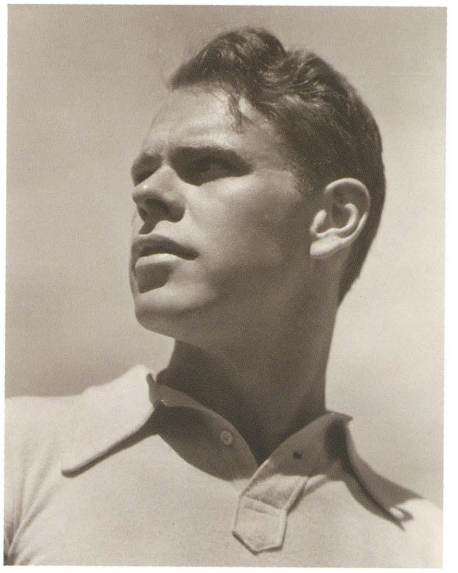


JEROME HILL

LIVING THE ARTS

JEROME HILL

LIVING THE ARTS

Biographical essay by Mary Ann Caws
Jerome Foundation, Saint Paul, Minnesota 2005

For the information on which much of the following is based, I want especially to thank the authors of various articles on Jerome Hill—Francis Brennan, Paul Hume, Malcolm Lein, Jonas Mekas, P. Adams Sitney, G. Richard Slade, Frederick Hill of the Berry-Hill Galleries, among others—and all those who have allowed their interviews to be examined, including members of Jerome's family and many friends. In particular, I am grateful, for their help and encouragement, to Ann ffolliott, Sheila ffolliott, Cynthia Gehrig, Michael Pretina, and Charles Rydell, and to the Jerome Foundation. For those interested in learning more about Jerome Hill, his papers are available at the Minnesota Historical Society in Saint Paul and his films are part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

— Mary Ann Caws
New York, October 2003

(right)
Jerome Hill editing *Film Portrait*, 1971

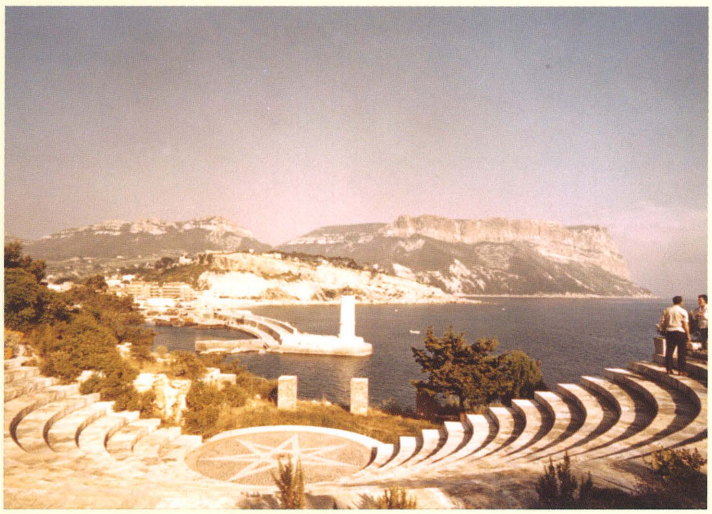
JEROME HILL:
LIVING THE ARTS

"The sense of a world of right proportions..."
— Archibald MacLeish's description of Grandma Moses's life, in Jerome Hill's film, *Grandma Moses*

PRELUDE. Jerome Hill was a polymath, working tirelessly as a painter, filmmaker, photographer, composer, and supporter of the arts and artists in the United States and Europe. He lived in many places—Saint Paul, Minnesota; Paris; Cassis, in the South of France; New York City and Bridgehampton, New York; and Sugar Bowl, California—and created two significant foundations—the Avon Foundation, now the Jerome Foundation, which supports emerging artists; and the Camargo Foundation, a study center in the South of France. Everywhere, he left a heritage of friendship, creativity, and generosity behind him.

I. My own first acquaintance with the Camargo Foundation and with the legendary Jerome Hill, its founder, came about in 1973, when Russell Young, his longtime friend and the first Director of the Foundation, had sent out a general invitation to the residents of Cassis, their guests, and other visitors to the town. We were all invited to come to the Greek theater on the Camargo grounds to see Alain Cuny and Sylvia Montfort playing in Racine's *Andromaque*. My husband and I were staying in the Hôtel Liautaud and accepted the invitation immediately. The seaside theater (Théâtre de la Mer, today known as the Jerome Hill Greek Theater) was staggering in its beauty, as were the buildings around it (Illus. 1). The theatrical space was perfectly filled and perfectly adapted to its surroundings.

And that is what seems to me to be true about Jerome Hill's life. It was perfectly shaped, perfectly suited to his fine talents, and perfectly adapted to the surroundings he was able to find, to construct, and to fill with friends and artistic personalities. What most interested me, in hearing about Jerome—first from Russell Young, and later, from Michael Pretina, the second director of the Camargo Foundation, as well as from other friends of Jerome and his family—was the widespread nature of his interests. Always one senses his enthusiasm. This kind of generous living was, is, itself the



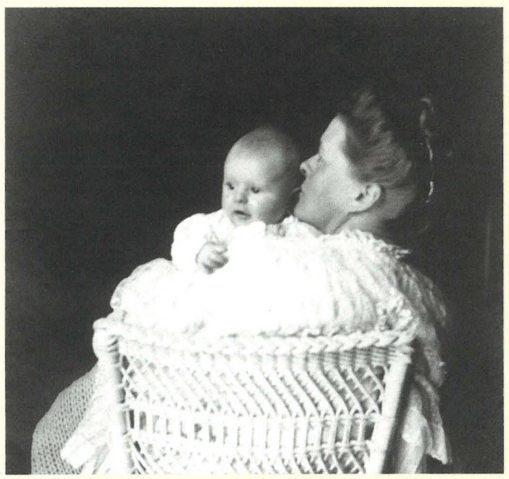
Illus. 1:
Théâtre de la Mer (Jerome Hill Greek Theater), Cassis, France

best sort of gift. Such an enthusiastic receptivity and bestowal of attention, upon others and their talents and upon his own variegated range of interests, seems to me remarkably rare. There was in Jerome, at the beginning and continually to the end, a firm connection between generosity and expansiveness, and this is, along with a certain surprising mystery at the heart of his work and his life, what should most matter in the telling.

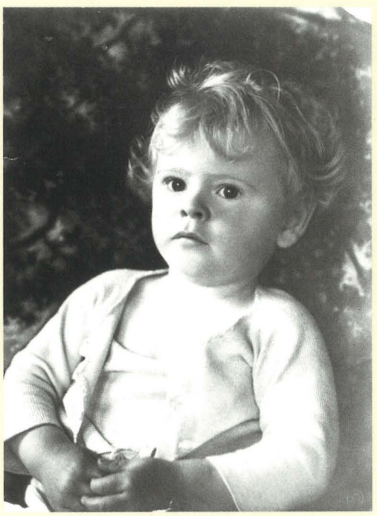
II. Jerome's grandfather James Jerome Hill (1838–1916), for whom he was named, was the creator and developer of the Great Northern Railway and several other entities, including the First National Bank of Saint Paul. He became, after humble beginnings, a multimillionaire and was sometimes called the man who saved the Northwest. Soon after he arrived in Pig's Eye, Minnesota, the name of the city was changed to Saint Paul. The family mansion there, on Summit Avenue, housed a remarkable collection of paintings, including many by Corot (Hill's favorite), and by Daubigny, Delacroix, Puvis de Chavannes, and members of the Barbizon School. Hill's son Louis was himself an amateur painter and had four children: Louis Jr., Maud, Cortlandt, and Jerome. Jerome was born on March 2, 1905, and named after his grandfather. When the grandfather was asked about the future careers of Louis's three sons, his answer was clear and positive: "Three boys—one for the railroad, one for the bank, one for the arts." He had no problem with Jerome's living for and through the arts.

The children grew up in a house next to their grandfather's, and the whole family was very close, educating the children at home when they were young. Louis and his wife, Maud Van Cortlandt Taylor, had films projected at home because the family had a horror of the microbes that might be proliferating in public places, like movie houses. The more creative of the children, Jerome and Maud, would prepare numerous picnics, take long walks, and, most importantly, act out dramas, writing the plays and building elaborate sets for them. Jerome's fantasy world had a solid beginning.

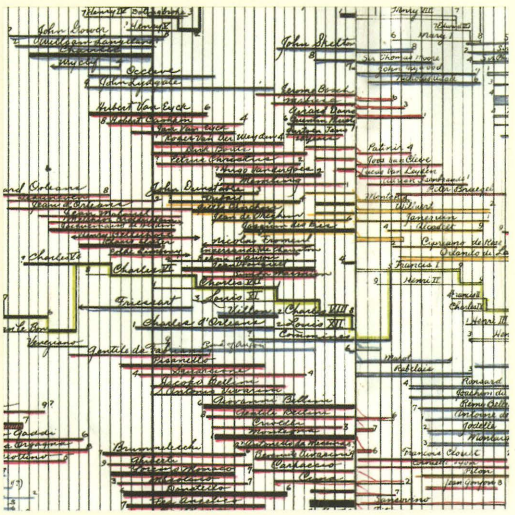
But his fantasy world also had a firm basis in his eclectic knowledge; one of his most interesting and earliest ventures is a grandly conceived "Synoptic Chart of Human History," stretching from the fifth century B.C. until the late 1920s. This gigantic timeline was executed in varied colors and thickness of lines, with pictures cut from magazines and books representing the many historical figures included (Illus. 2). Jerome thought of it simply as a prop to his memory, but those who saw it found it remarkable.



With his mother, Maud Van Cortlandt Hill, May 1905



At 1 year, 1906



Illus. 2:
Detail of "Synoptic Chart of Human History"

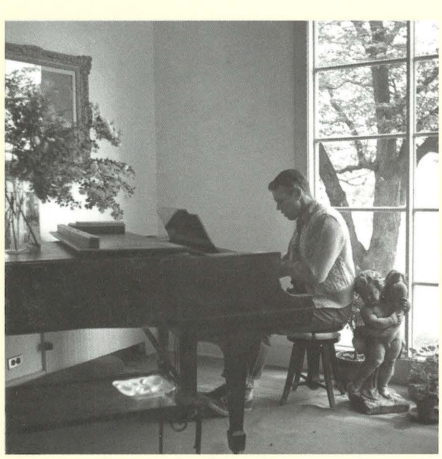
Jerome attended Saint Paul Academy, from which he graduated at 17, leaving a memento of his creative talent in the chemistry laboratory. Given his habitual poor health, he had been excused from physical education and in its place used his developing artistic skills to create a set of murals depicting scientific discoveries, among them Archimedes shouting "Eureka" when he discovered the displacement of the volume of water in his bathtub.

For the next five years he attended Yale, where he was most interested in music, and where the musicologist Bruce Simonds was especially helpful. He spent most of his time reading outside of class the just-published works of T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, and James Joyce; drawing caricatures and cartoons for the *Yale Record*; making sets for the Yale dramatic club (the Dramat); and even filming a two-and-one-half-hour version of *Tom Jones*, starring the neo-Gothic Yale buildings: "The worst film you've ever seen," Jerome quipped, with his usual humor.

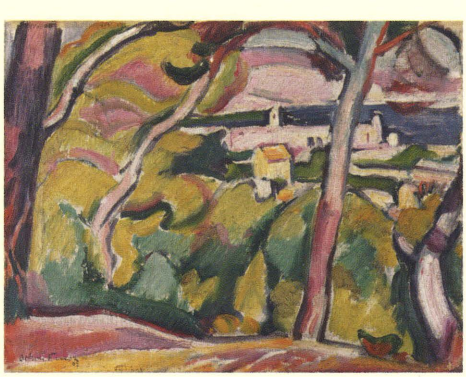
After Yale, he attended the British Academy of Painting in Rome for two years. (He loved that city and its sounds, in particular the nightingales singing in the Borghese Gardens. He would return to Rome each spring, for much of his life, so that he could hear them.) Subsequently he continued his artistic education in Paris, for three years at the Académie Scandinave, where he studied painting with Marcel Gromaire, Othon Friesz, and André Marchand (the latter two, friends of the Bloomsbury group: a painting by each hung on the walls at Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant's retreat—shared also by Clive Bell and Maynard Keynes—Charleston farmhouse in Sussex). Friesz (Illus. 3) assured them that in Cassis they would understand how the skeleton of the earth was constructed. "You will see what is muscle and what is flesh and bone." Cassis has housed the enthusiasms of painters for more than a century, from Paul Signac (Illus. 4) and René Seyssaud, through Georges Braque, William Tryon, and the Bloomsbury group's Roger Fry and Duncan Grant, down to, in our day, Varda.

And indeed, said Jerome, when he saw Cassis for the first time he saw immediately what Friesz had meant when he spoke of:

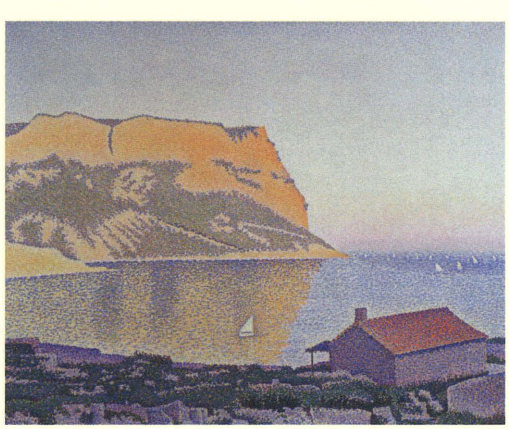
> *the alternation of layers of stony chalk and gravel forms, thanks to the declivities, breaks, and geologic slidings, recognizable silhouettes of all shapes and sizes. What shows up "large" on the slopes of Cap Canaille is repeated on the cliffs of the Château de Cassis as well as on the rocks of the Bestouan. Everywhere there is a single theme, richly varied. From the summit of the mountains (right after Carpiagne,*



At the piano in lifelong friend Jack Barrett's house, Greenwich, Connecticut, May 1952



Illus. 3:
La Ciotat, 1907
Othon Friesz



Illus. 4:
Cap Canaille, Cassis, Opus 200, 1889
Paul Signac
Private Collection

and before the descent into the amphitheatre where Cassis is situated), the immense sweep of waves of stones appears in all its majesty: the Maures, Sainte-Baume, the heights of Toulon, the Crown of Charlemagne, Cap Canaille... These are the final cadences of the symphony of the Alps, which are about to die out on the banks of the Rhône.

He painted in Cassis every summer, and the landscape never lost its appeal for him.

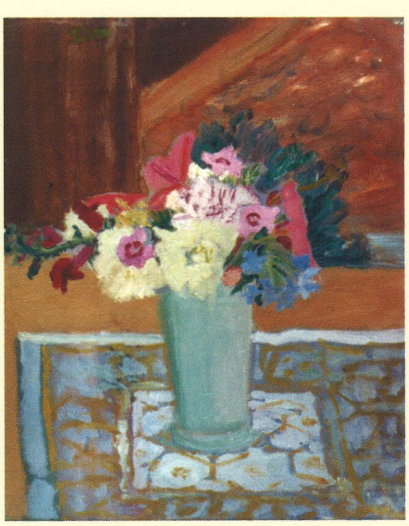
Jerome was no less interested in still photography. Influenced by what he had learned from a close looking at the work of Edward Weston—who took a splendid portrait of him in 1931 (Illus. 5; see cover)—he undertook a photographic essay of a tour of Greece, published in 1937 as *Trip to Greece*. Interestingly, the pages open from the bottom to the top, another example of his imaginative handling of everything he did.

During World War II, Jerome served in Army film units and as a liaison officer with French forces, first in Oran and then in Paris—this was his initial contact with Russell Young. Because Jerome's French was perfect, he would have been wasted in any military situation in which it would not have been used, as Gertrude Gavin, an aunt, pointed out to influential friends. His time in the army greatly changed his way of being and living, from his utter unconcern about clothing to far deeper things. He later wrote to a nephew that his years in the army had been the best years of his life.

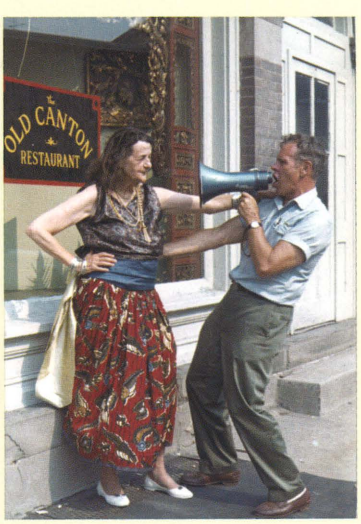
He loved the glamorous occasions in Paris, loved jitterbugging in the old Savoy Ballroom in Harlem, loved creating, loved learning about things and sharing his knowledge. Early on, members of his family had often had occasion to say to one another: "Romie knows." And he did. He had an insatiable curiosity about many things, including all sorts of languages, and was immensely gifted in their acquisition, becoming remarkably fluent in any language he studied and refusing to travel to any country whose language he did not speak. He was glad to go to Russia, knowing Russian well and being equally cognizant of Russian literature, which he read extensively in Cassis. At the end of his life, he was learning Chinese, in order to go to China—the food of which he loved—and spent hours every day upon his study of it. What fascinated him about the country was, in large part, its forbiddenness. At night, he would write a question in Chinese and leave it on the pillow for the Chinese maid, who would answer it and paste new verbs on the mirror for him to learn while he shaved.

His lifelong love of France, especially of Provence and of Paris, always "a rose-colored city" for him, served Jerome

On the set of *The Sand Castle*, circa 1960



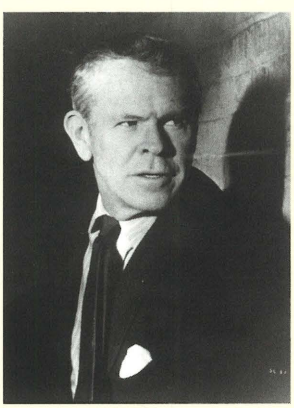
Flowers in a White Vase, 1966
Jerome Hill
Private Collection



Publicity still for the film
Open the Door and See All the People
(Hill with megaphone)
Photograph by William Kennedy

well. Starting in 1934, he leased an apartment at 16 rue de Saint-Simon in the VIIe arrondissement, where he spent a good deal of time and even hung rose-colored curtains. While painting in the South of France, he came across a building on a promontory near Marseille, in Cassis, which had been fortified by a young artillery officer named Napoleon—thus its name of La Batterie. In 1939, he acquired the property. It had once belonged to Madge Oliver, a British painter (1874–1924) who had studied at the Slade School of Art in London alongside Augustus John and had given painting lessons to Winston Churchill—and whose studio is now used by painters who are fellows of the Camargo Foundation. Eventually, the building across the street also became part of the Hill property. Formerly the Hôtel Panorama (so-called because of the extraordinary and wide-reaching views), with a good kitchen and agreeable rooms, it was where Edna St. Vincent Millay had stayed with her mother in the 1920s and where Churchill had stayed with his entourage when he was painting across the street at Madge Oliver's. Jerome designed his own house at La Batterie. He had always been interested in architecture, always sketching buildings and ideas for them wherever he went—even on a pilgrimage to Compostela in Spain. The original house on the property, called Pierrefroide, which is still standing, was said to be haunted, and some of Jerome's close friends and colleagues, like Julia Knowlton—who served as a general assistant and script girl for some of his films, and who often traveled with him—found it a frightening place.

Jerome always loved Cassis, where he went every summer to paint, and it was there that he developed his interest in filmmaking. For his initial short and experimental films, he used one of the first Cine-Kodak-Special cameras. His most crucial experiences as a young man were seeing Jean Cocteau's *Blood of a Poet*, in 1931, and Carl Theodore Dreyer's *Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928). One of his early films, a documentary called *Snow Flight*, starring his friend Otto Lang, was released by Warner Brothers in 1938. It was subsequently rechristened *Ski Flight* because it was first shown at Radio City Music Hall on a double bill with *Snow White*. As the film historian Noël BreDahl points out in his article "Portrait of a Self-Portrait—Jerome Hill as Filmmaker"(found in the first issue of *Millennium Film Journal*) there is a sequence run in reverse (as in Stan Brakhage's film on Joseph Cornell)—it not only makes an "awesome" background of the snowy mountains, but has a backwards sequence in which "Skiers criss-crossing on a long slope keep retracing their slaloms till they eventually erase all the filigreed white-on-white design." Jerome, who had spent



At the opening of
The Sand Castle, 1961
Photograph by
Julia B. Knowlton

Self Portrait, 1961
Jerome Hill
Collection of The Hill Museum & Monastic Manuscript Library
Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota

Hill's house in Sugar Bowl, California, 1952

considerable time in California as a child, also acquired a property in Sugar Bowl, just west of Lake Tahoe, where there remains a ski lift named after him.

After the war, Jerome returned to making film biographies, working mostly in New York. In fact, he is perhaps best known as a documentary producer. With Erica Anderson, a strong-willed Austrian, as cinematographer, he produced and directed a film short, *Grandma Moses*, which was nominated for an Academy Award in 1949. His portrayal of the painter effectively grasps her personality and warmth. It presents her work—its primitive touches and its lasting effect on the viewer—largely through the lyric portrayal of what Archibald MacLeish, author of the film's poetic and very moving lines, calls the duties and simple rituals of life and the "proud and stubborn" living out of them by the painter: "what she paints is what she knows... The seasons change, for a farm woman, not on canvas but in truth." Jerome's documentary about Albert Schweitzer (simply called *Albert Schweitzer*), also with Erica Anderson as cinematographer, presents Schweitzer's life and work in Lambarene and displays his prowess as a musician, playing Bach on the organ. The film received an Oscar in 1957.

Jerome said of filmmaking: "All the arts resemble each other, make use of each other.... But of all artists, the filmmaker must be a man of most varied talents." From 1956 to 1960, Jerome made the semi-narrative film *The Sand Castle*, based on the ideas of Carl Jung. Subsequent films included the full-length *Open The Door and See All the People*, also related to Jung's thoughts; and four hand-painted animation shorts, *Anticorrida*, *Merry Christmas*, *The Artist's Friend,* and *Canaries*. He was a master of painting on 35mm negatives (where you have to paint the complementary color of the one you want: red for green and so on), a technique visible in many of his films. Henry Sundquist, who helped him on the technical side with many works, explains about these films that Jerome would paint on the emulsion-coated side to create a flickery impression that he found appealing. Jerome was also fond of the technique of stop animation, an innovation at the time.

His most famous film is the full-length autobiographical *Film Portrait*, completed in 1972, which was selected as an outstanding Film of the Year for presentation at the 1972 London Film Festival and won the Gold Dukat Prize at the 21st Annual Film Festival in Mannheim.

Jonas Mekas, founder of Anthology Film Archives, speaks of the way Jerome's films and paintings "exploded with little bursts of ecstasies." For him, the enthusiastic reception of *Film Portrait* by the public and critics was "a

Premiere of *The Sand Castle*, at the Nob Hill Theatre, San Francisco, California, March 29, 1961

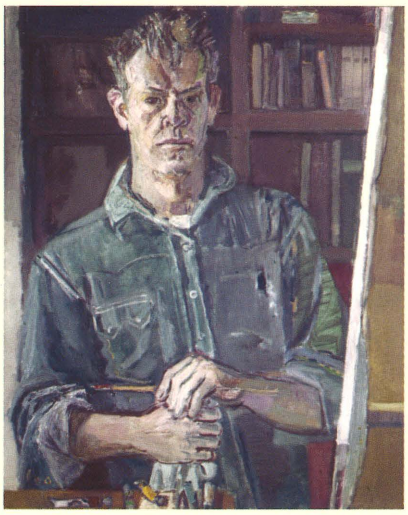
Hill (center) and his cousin Maud Oakes (left) skiing with friends, Sugar Bowl, California

Dancing with his mother on the terrace in Cassis, France, 1949

perfect, beautiful crowning of a very humble life of a very great artist." (It is perhaps worth mentioning that when Jonas Mekas produced, with his brother Adolphus, the film *Hallelujah the Hills*, starring Jerome's cousin, the more than photogenic Peter Beard, a well-known artist, Jerome himself played a supporting role as a convict.) Other avant-garde filmmakers, especially James Broughton (*The Bed*, 1967, and an autoportrait, *Testament*, 1974) and Stan Brakhage (whose "adventures in perception" included transcriptions of hypnagogic visions and who was notorious for his *Dog Star Man*, made during the early '60s), were much marked by Jerome's work, as he was by theirs. Brakhage also hand painted films and both Jerome and Brakhage ran sequences backwards: Brakhage's *gnir rednow* (*wonder ring*) even reverses one of Joseph Cornell's films. Jerome greatly admired Brakhage, who lived in the Colorado mountains, on little money. Broughton compares this admiration to Nietzsche's feeling about Wagner: that he seemed to be high in the mountains above everything else. Jerome sponsored these emerging filmmakers and did it, as he did most things, with little show. Broughton points out that he never distributed his money overtly, simply writing a note or two, and then a letter would arrive for someone from Saint Paul.

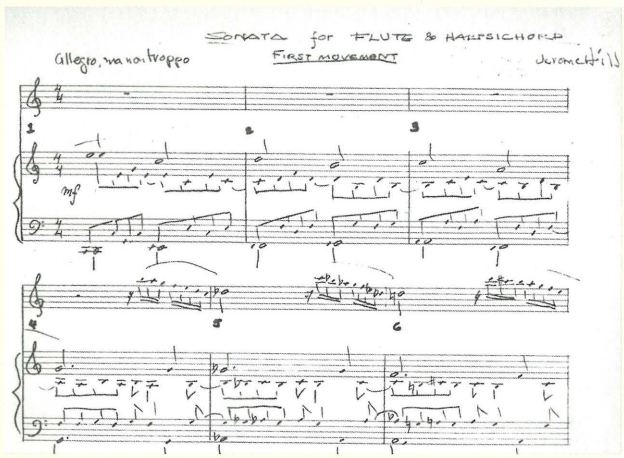
In the late 1960s, Jerome began to compose all of the scores for his films. They were light and lively in general, reflecting his own taste in songs and musical dramas. His music, for his films and in other compositions, was just what it was meant to be: an expression of delight. Always an avid student and creator of music, in later years he was interested in composing works for the harpsichord and small orchestra (Illus. 6). He was always to retain his excitement over compositions, his own and those of others. For example, he arranged for Olivier Messiaen to present one of his own compositions in the Théâtre de la Mer, and once thought of commissioning Messiaen to compose a large piece, epic in scope, with trumpets and bells.

Jerome loved the songs of Broadway—in particular the music of the Gershwins and Rogers and Hart—and helped Alec Wilder (who also lived at the Algonquin) to collect them. He wrote songs for friends like the singer Countess Ophelia de Rougé and compositions for instrumentalists like Paul Wolfe, who played the harpsichord. Jerome himself enjoyed playing; as his sister, Maud Schroll, points out, he had a piano with him everywhere he went. When they arrived at a hotel, the first thing he would see to was the bringing of a grand piano into his room, up through the window if necessary. He would also order, immediately, the flowers he preferred: violets. In New York, in his apartment



Self Portrait, 1961
Jerome Hill
The Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Hill (left) and Jack Barrett (right), in costume



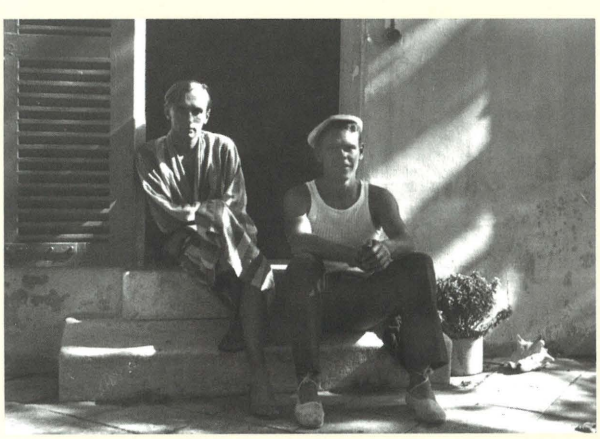
Illus. 6:
Detail of score, Hill's "Sonata for Flute and Harpsichord"

at the Algonquin Hotel, he ordered a piano for Maybelle, his singing teacher, for his lessons.

While traveling, Jerome's baggage was light: he owned several houses, which partially explains how he could travel with so little, but this was also metaphorically important. His letters mention, for example, how he preferred not to travel to Russia with Julia Knowlton and all her suitcases and so took his own private plane. He thought of himself as a light traveler, flexible and able to switch readily between places as he could among his multiple talents. Of course, he did not have to carry much, used as he was to depending on others. What he had to carry always, and this may explain in part a certain always present loneliness in him, was his sense of apartness, in large measure attributable to his sensitivity about his homosexuality.

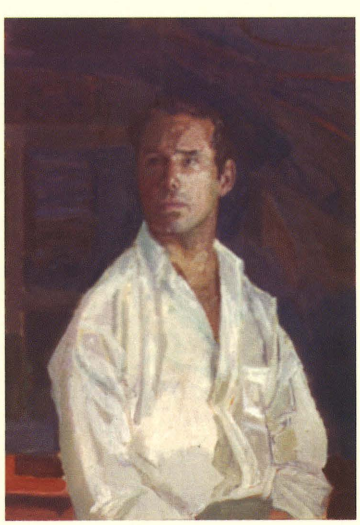
Closely allied to his feeling so very solitary inside himself was a possessiveness that appears in all the conversations with those who knew him best. Seeing a film with a friend starring in it, he would say: "I want X to be an actor for me alone," meaning he did not want to share his intimates with the public. It was as if—as is so often the case with the very privileged—his very privilege rendered him not only vulnerable but also intensely concerned about the moral duties it entailed. Charles Rydell, whose meeting with Jerome twenty-five years before that they had both attributed to what Jerome called "synchronicity," and his partner in the last part of his life, points out how Jerome had exactly the opposite longing from the typical dream of the poverty-stricken person to become rich. His daydream was to become, if not poor, then at least not so well off as to be the envy of so many persons—to live a different kind of life, far more modest than his own—a longing manifest in the film *Open the Door*. He was able to project himself into a situation less spectacularly comfortable by his uncanny ability to sense what others were feeling. He remained even-tempered, even under the most difficult of circumstances. And yet, all his life he suffered both from the haunting by privilege and from his sense of adverse opinions of homosexuality in the world around him.

Jerome's very informality and great unpretentiousness were some of the elements his friends and family most prized in him. His nephews and nieces loved to hang around his New York studio; as Henry Sundquist says: "They would come to New York and see Uncle Jerome. And they liked to hang out there; they liked his *modus operandi* better than anyone's, I think. Well, he was nice to the kids, you know. He was free and easy with them, where their parents were always telling them what to do." In the New York studio,



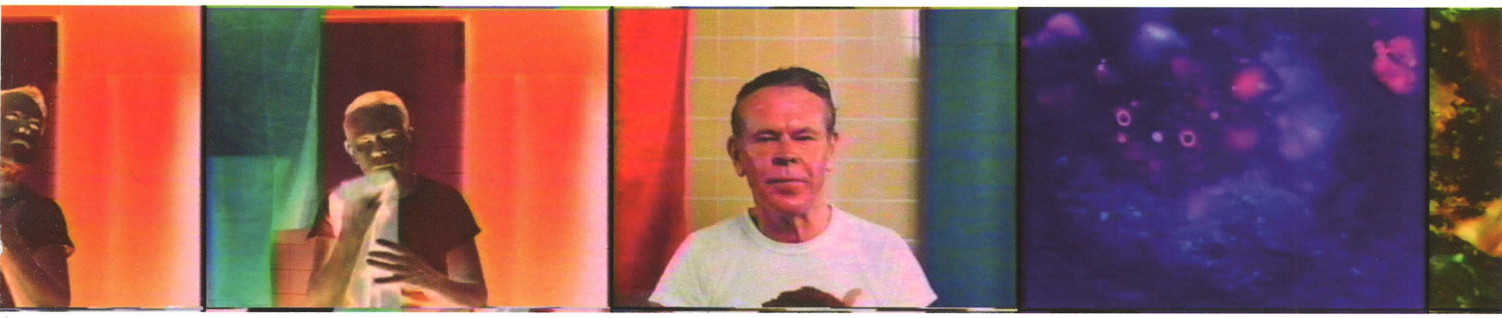
With a friend in Cassis, France

Hill (left) and Charles Rydell (right) with other cast members before a theatrical performance in Cassis, France, 1960



Charles Rydell, 1965
Jerome Hill
Private Collection

Stills from *Film Portrait*



a film by

Jerome Hill

with the assistance and cooperation of:

John D. Barrett
William Hinkle
Lani Ryland
Marie Hersey
Susanna Schroll
Virginia Hood
Grandma Moses
Ernest Borgnine

his favorite lunch was College Inn canned chicken broth, to which he would add grated cheese and sometimes a beaten egg. Sundquist also points out how Jerome treasured his old raincoat, the dirtiest one imaginable, and treasured no less the dent he had made in his car, always a modest brand. Not the sort of person who would drive a Rolls-Royce or a Lincoln, Jerome was in every way the antithesis of the show-off, and in many ways a delightful eccentric—and chose to be one. As for the holes in his blue jeans, some of his friends were slightly irritated, saying he did not earn them. Jerome would never carry any money, trusting that whoever was accompanying him would have some. He would hide, behind all sorts of signs and in the crevices of brick walls in New York, five-dollar bills, which he could pull out, like a magician, to pay a cab fare. This kind of peculiar inventiveness was part of his artistic personality.

Jerome maintained, throughout his life, a vast sense of fun and of fittingness, which he enjoyed sharing with others. Maud Schroll describes the star on the floor of the theater outside in Cassis: "Then there was a mosaic of—there's an emblem, you know the star on the writing paper, and that's all done in pebbles from the beach and he would announce at the beach 'tomorrow will be just red,' and he'd be down there himself with a big basket." Everyone was invited to pick up the reddest pebbles to contribute to the design, so that they were all included in the day's endeavors.

In that theater, he arranged, over the years, for an elaborate Cassis town festival. Over and over, the theater was used, for Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and other spectacles. Jerome found costumes in the most unlikely places, in back streets of Marseille among others. Once he arranged for an appearance by The Living Theatre with Julian Beck and Judith Malina. Jerome's constant support of artistic ventures was remarkable, and there were beneficiaries on both continents. They ranged from institutional—most notably perhaps, the foundation of the Salzburg Seminars and Anthology Film Archives—to the place-oriented.

His support of individuals was in general anonymous. One of the persons he helped for a long period was Jeanne Daour, who had attended the Académie Scandinave in Paris with him. She was a Romanian, a talented violinist as well as a talented painter, and a difficult psychological case, somewhat paranoid, who lived in a tiny apartment in Paris with fifteen cats. Often she had no fixed habitation. Jerome supported her over the years and admired her painting, thinking she had a greater artistic gift than he (Illus. 7).

He also played an important role in the development

Illus. 7
Portrait of Jerome, 1934
Jeanne Daour

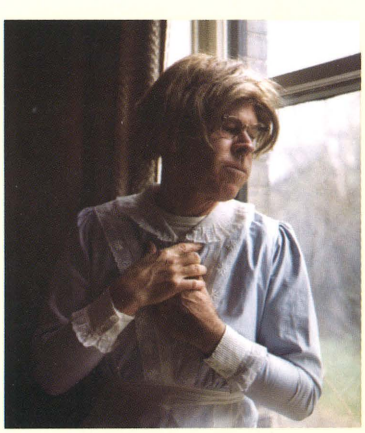
At work on *The Striped Skirt*, 1965

Clover and Lavender, 1967
Jerome Hill, Cassis, France
Private Collection

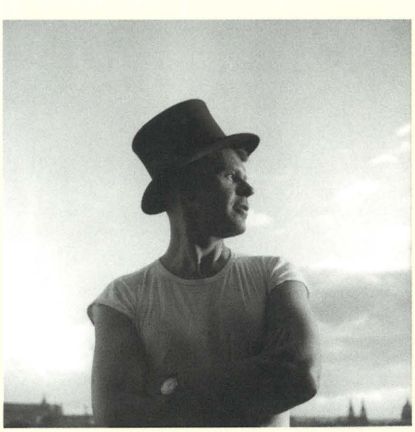
of experimental film in the United States with his support of some of the most significant film artists of his generation, including Stan Brakhage, James Broughton, Peter Kubelka, and Jonas Mekas. In 1964, Jerome organized his philanthropy by setting up the Avon Foundation in Saint Paul; the incorporation papers state that the donor and founder wished to remain anonymous. The Foundation awarded grants to a variety of not-for-profit organizations in the arts and humanities, with most of the funds going to cinematography. In addition to the experimental filmmakers noted previously, recipients included the Film Art Fund/ Anthology Film Archives and the Minnesota Foundation, to support a documentary film of the dance and rituals of the Blackfoot Indians of Montana. Other recipients included the C.J. Jung Institute in San Francisco and the New England Conservatory of Music, to support a definitive study of American popular song by Alec Wilder and James T. Maher. The resulting book was nominated for a National Book Award. After Jerome's death, the Foundation's name was changed to the Jerome Foundation, and, continuing in the philanthropic direction established by its founder, it adopted the support of emerging artists in Minnesota and New York City as its mandate.

Another example of his generosity: Jerome purchased from Fontcreuse, an estate just outside Cassis, some of the Bloomsbury furniture decorated by Vanessa Bell and the Omega Workshop, which Roger Fry had founded and supported. Jerome made the purchase so that the proceeds could provide some comfort—in the asylum where she lived at the end of her life—to Jean Campbell, the British lady who had lived at the Fontcreuse house with Peter Teed, the owner. Teed was formerly a Colonel in the British Army and a friend of Roger Fry, who had spent a great deal of time painting in Cassis. Because of Roger Fry's friendship with Teed, Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and Virginia and Leonard Woolf had all spent periods of time at Fontcreuse from 1928 to 1939, in La Bergère, a small house on the Fontcreuse estate, or in the main house. A table painted by Vanessa remains at the Camargo Foundation. You can feel, in Jerome's work, a warmth akin to the Bloomsbury spirit so visible in their paintings, many of them of Fontcreuse and Cassis. Jerome had read widely in the works of Fry and of Clive Bell, who expanded on Fry's original idea of significant form, and admired both immensely.

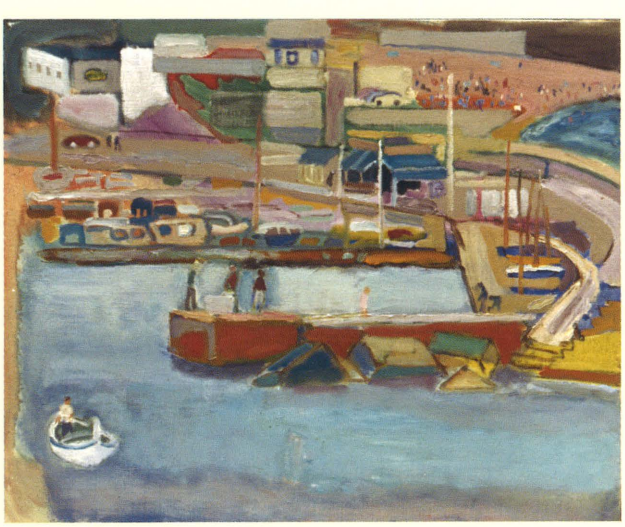
Roger Fry loved the gray and pearly light he found everywhere in Provence, loved the southern coloring, loved the buildings. As he wrote to Vanessa Bell, "Every bit of old wall, every tiled roof seems as though it were exactly



Dressed as a maid, 1965,
Saint Paul, Minnesota



Trying on old clothes from a trunk
at the Hôtel Meurice, 1951,
Paris, France



Jetty No. 1, 1970
Jerome Hill, Cassis, France
Private Collection

right and only needed to be painted." And to his daughter Pamela:

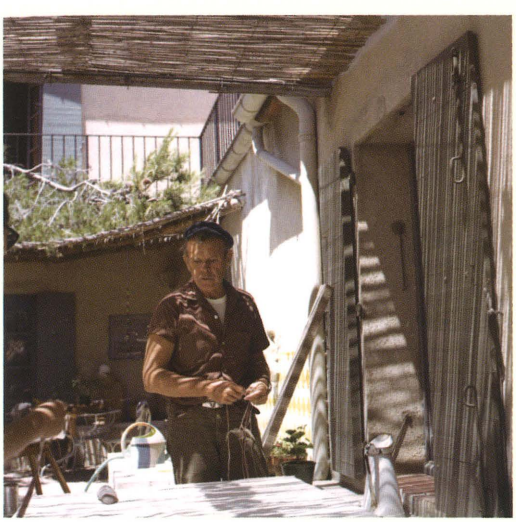
> *The colour is amazing and the secret of it is that there are no bright colours. I find I use almost entirely black, yellow ochre, venetian red, raw umber, burnt umber, indian red and terre verte. Terre verte pure is too bright for the sky and has generally to be toned with black or red and yet the effect is always of colour. It's just the purity and beauty of the greys that make it seems more coloured than England.*

We notice also in Jerome's paintings a kind of pearly light, a never-too-brightness. These works are no less successful in portraying the dramatic landscape for their toned-down colors, which shimmer rather than shout.

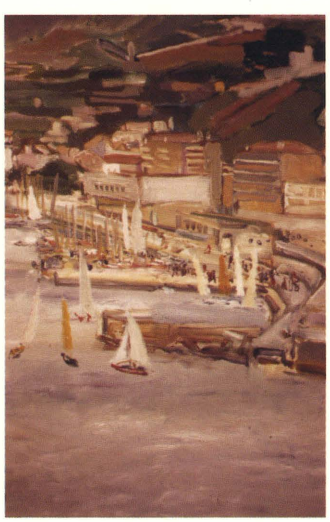
For his part, Duncan Grant found Cassis "beautiful but frightfully impressive," highly "dramatic with these great rocks," and, alas, full of "too much society," by which he meant English society. Jerome, who could choose his own society, had a far more international group about him, and saw them only when he chose. It was assumed that anyone visiting him in Cassis, and joining him for meals (only upon specific invitation) at La Batterie, would be devoting the day to artistic pursuits. Until the end of his life, Jerome worked every day: painting in the morning, composing in the afternoon, having an assortment of guests for dinner. Because his filmmaking passion carried over into his daily life, he would invite all sorts of persons most unlikely to get along, in great part to watch them. He was a constant watcher, a voyeur but in the positive sense. These experiments were profitable to the cinematic eye. And they were fun: no one ever denied that Jerome had a wonderful sense of humor as well as a sharp sense of delight—he enjoyed meeting both celebrities and non-celebrities.

His activities were so numerous and his persistence in whatever he was working at so tireless that his friends wondered if he ever slept. It was as if his whole being were a collage of energies—so many different aspects of one person. The "fragments of reality" he gathered together in his films were a metaphor for his own multifarious preoccupations, and for his relations to his friends and to the outside world. But his world was never devoid of fantasy, of a kind of drama of his own making. He wanted to develop "a new order," in his work and being, and so he did.

He lived in various places throughout his life, switching from one to the other, generally with as much ease as he switched from painting to music, from music to film. He



At work on the terrace of La Batterie, Cassis, France



The Regatta, 1963
Jerome Hill, Cassis, France
Private Collection

Hill (left) grooming dogs in Cassis, France

lived at La Batterie, in a house in Bridgehampton—perfect for Thanksgivings, when he might make a goose stuffed with prunes stuffed with foie gras—and also at the Algonquin Hotel, after he moved out of his family's Manhattan apartment at the Mayfair House, at 65th and Park, in New York. (The move across town made him vastly nervous, and Charles Rydell remembers his crouching on the floor of the taxi, lest the Mayfair doorman catch sight of him in his escape.)

Wherever he was, in Cassis or New York or Minnesota, he would arrange readings of his favorite authors: Shakespeare (Julia enjoyed acting some of the parts, like Mistress Quickly) and, in particular, Proust. His favorite scene from *A la recherche du temps perdu* was the famous one with Bergotte dying in front of Vermeer's *View of Delft* with the glorious "little patch of yellow on the wall" (Illus. 8). Jerome would weep over this, and believed that after his own death, his work would survive him, as Bergotte's books did—open in the bookstore window all night after his death, like angel wings keeping watch. "My work will be out there," Jerome would say.

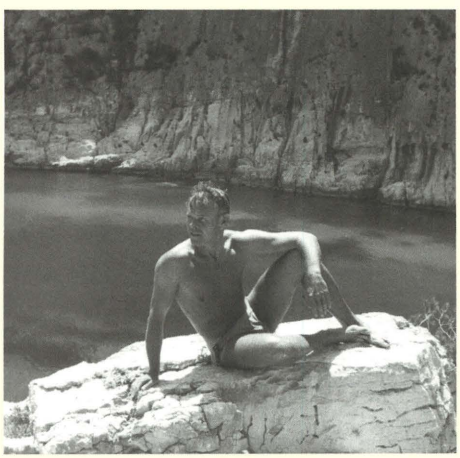
When he left Cassis for the last time, stricken with the cancer that would end his life and mourned in advance by his friends ("He went up the stairs," said one of them, "and we all had to look away so he wouldn't see us weeping"), he had completed his justly celebrated *Film Portrait* a short time before. Pale and thin, he spoke about it in New York, at a screening at the Museum of Modern Art, just four weeks before he died at Saint Luke's Hospital on November 21, 1972, at the age of 67, leaving a priceless legacy of art, philanthropy, benevolent works, and friendship.

Charles Rydell had helped him to the stage for the screening at the Museum that evening. The synchronicity to which they had both attributed their meeting was somewhat like the surrealist concept of the marvelous in everyday life: that is, what comes about by chance and seems somehow to correspond to and resolve an interior tumult. But, says Charles, Jerome had, in changing Charles's way of life, taken away his hunger—his ambition. This must have been true of a number of the people Jerome helped, which was, of course, never his intention. Sensitive to so much, to this he was not. People could lose their way in his surroundings, and when he was no longer there, not retrieve it.

III. Something about his photographic work and his collection of photographs speaks loudly of the complexity of his being. As a collector (he subsequently gave many of his major acquisitions to the Musée Réattu in Arles between

Illus. 8
View of Delft, circa 1660
Jan Vermeer

Charles Rydell on the roof of the Mayfair House, 1950, New York, New York
Photograph by Jerome Hill

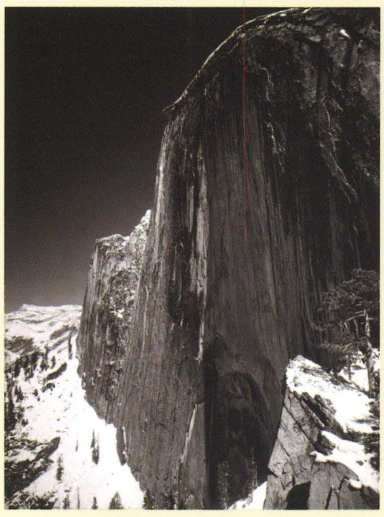


At a picnic in Cassis, France

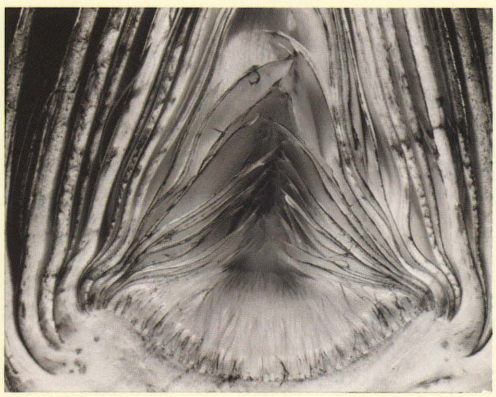
the years of 1965 and 1970), he was particularly sensitive to the subtleties of shadowings, stripes, and folds in the photographs he chose to acquire. When we look at Ansel Adams's "Monolith, the Face of Half Dome," of 1927, at his teacher Edward Weston's "Artichoke Halved" and "Cabbage Leaf" of 1930 and 1931 and "Driftwood Stump" of 1937 (Illus. 9, 10, 11, 12), we detect instantly Jerome's fascination with pleats and twists, with furrows and convolutions. Perhaps it is not reading too much into these works to see there the overlappings and concentrations characteristic of his own perspective on himself and the universe. These forms and patterns never escaped his imagination. We could read this on a more profound level, as the workings of a true artist, in all his own photography, in his own self-portraits and examinations of his own convoluted personality, and in the divisions of his life. He loved working and collecting and gathering—and keeping these things separate, in their various compartments.

Which in no way prevents a kind of lightness and even luminosity in his work. His films often exude a childlike innocence, when the figures he has painted on the negative come dancing and skittering across the surface or a bird soars into the air, when butterflies flitter about above the head of the grownups in their frequently outlandish costumes, when a world of toys takes on a substantial role, and when, as in *Film Portrait*, the protagonist exchanges words with Brigitte Bardot in cartoon balloons. As the green figures of his hand-painted films dart about the solemn world of grownups, we remember how the color green always had such a hold upon him. The lightness is an intimate part of his personality, as a composer and filmmaker and a self.

The loner of a child, taken into the Blackfoot Indian tribe as an honorary member (a "newly baptized brave," as he put it)—his father's work in establishing Glacier National Park had created close ties between the Hill family and the Blackfoot—was already enacting an escape from home. He was delighted, when he received his Blackfoot name, to have at last a name that belonged to no other member of the family, delighted to be someone else. "These people, to whom I belonged," he said of his family, "did not belong to me. Of everything that they did so well I was incapable.... I was living a life apart—a life I shared with no one." So the teller of tales—he would love to spin stories and tell them thrice, so as to remember them—was the Jerome Hill who composed and filmed and painted, often in another land and another language, adopted by choice. This gives another angle to his being, whose apartness he handled



Illus. 9:
Monolith, the Face of Half Dome, 1927
Photograph by Ansel Adams



Illus. 10:
Artichoke Halved, 1930
Photograph by Edward Weston

Illus. 11:
Cabbage Leaf, 1931
Photograph by Edward Weston

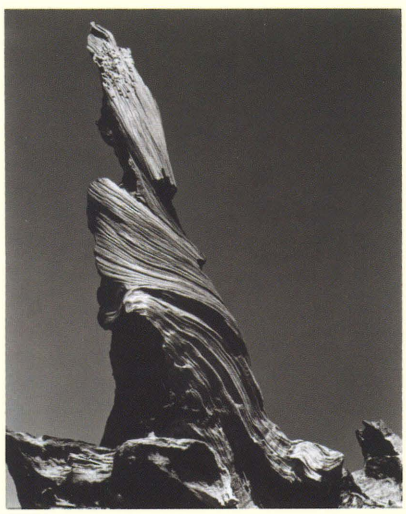
with great delicacy, as he did his homosexuality.

The angle he took upon himself was deeply artistic. It is not by chance that many of his friends were artists and writers and musicians; his feeling for all the arts was intense. He loved the tellers of tales in painting and print; one of the very close friendships that Jerome most cherished was that with Maud Oakes, his cousin and the author of *The Two Crosses of Todos Santos*, volume XXVII in the Bollingen series, about survivals of ancient Mayan religions in Central America, published in 1951, as well as a more popular account, *Beyond the Windy Place*.

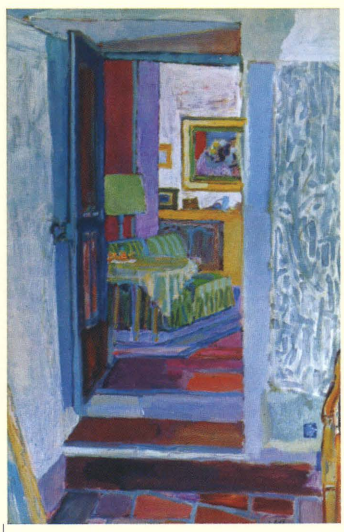
Even in his paintings or watercolors, with their pastel hues and their cheerful morning light, it is the angle of a door or then a set of openings (Illus. 13) that grasp us, particularly when we know the actual things depicted. But somehow we learn to know them from the painting. They create their own space. There is nothing garish or protuberant in his work. Jerome's colors have the flat and subtle washes of a Maurice Denis and the Nabis, along with the mysterious undertones of the Pont-Aven school, of an Emile Bernard or a Ker Roussel. Figures of his friends stretch into the morning light and appear luminously happy (Illus. 14); and again, whether we know them or not, we feel we learn to know them. Comments on his painting frequently cite its hedonism, taken in a positive sense, since there was such firm technique behind it.

His paintings were exhibited in Paris at the Salon des Tuilleries and the Salon d'Automne between 1929 and 1937, and shown in many galleries, including the Galleries Paquereau in Paris and the Carstairs Gallery, the Babcock Galleries, the Grand Central Art Galleries, and the Berry-Hill Galleries in New York (where the owners well remember meeting Jerome's family.) They were gathered by many collectors and by museums, including the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Minnesota Museum of American Art in Saint Paul, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Jerome's genuine enjoyment and constant involvement in something artistic ruled all his days: at hand he had always a sketchbook and a camera, so as not to let things go by without being documented, not to underestimate the joys of the small and daily things. You can see this in his paintings of Cassis, how the morning light enters, how the colors shimmer in the Provençal sun. You can see what it was like to wake, to stretch one's arms into the daylight outside the main house. You can see what it was like to feel the breeze and see the plants stirring slightly. You can see Cap Canaille and Charlemagne's Crown, turning red at sunset. You can see the lighthouse and the blue-green sea



Illus. 12:
Driftwood Stump, 1937
Photograph by Edward Weston



Illus. 13:
Interior, The Open Door, 1964
Jerome Hill, Cassis, France
Private Collection

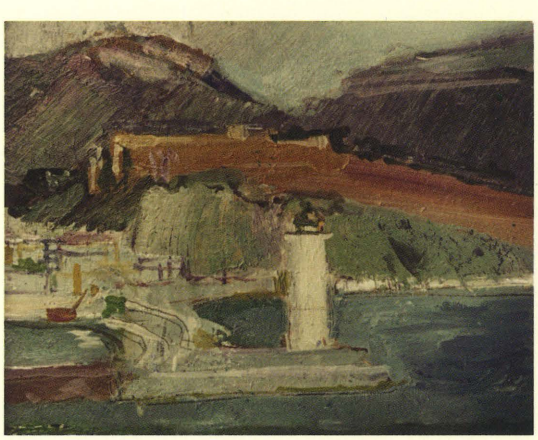
Illus. 14:
Morning, 1964
Jerome Hill, Cassis, France

(Illus. 15). Above all, and everywhere, you can see Jerome's favorite painter, Bonnard, casting his morning light over the paintings and over the life.

No painting ever had such power over Jerome's paintings as the French. In the salon of La Batterie, whose yellows and lavenders (Illus. 16) stick in our mind, works by Jacques Villon and Roger de la Fresnaye echo the lines of Hill's paintings and cast their own illumination over the piano and tapestry and floor. Once upon a time, in his collection, there was a Signac painting of Cap Canaille at sunset, its glow reflected all about, and a large Bonnard, which figured in one of Jerome's own paintings, simply called *Le Grand Bonnard* (Illus. 17).

Of particular fascination to me are Jerome's self-portraits, both in his paintings and in *Film Portrait (*1971), so cogently discussed by P. Adams Sitney in his "Autobiography in Avant-Garde Film," in the *Millennium Film Journal* (Vol. I, No. 1, Winter 1977–78, the same issue that included Noël BreDahl's piece). A further personal remark: this was my first acquaintance with Jerome's film work—after having admired his paintings upon my initial visit to La Batterie. I had a piece in the same journal and, thumbing through the pages, was instantly gripped by the reproduced still frame of the narrator shaving and how the viewer is forced to confront it. The more challenging issues of time unfolding in the film and in our re-reading and re-viewing of it were to remain in my imagination (Illus. 18). As Sitney says of this opening, it is one of Jerome's techniques for "questioning the status of the present image: he switches between color positive and color negative film stock. By intercutting the swirls of shaving lather in the water of the sink, in color negative, so that the forward and reversed motion of the same strip of film can evoke both clockwise and counterclockwise spirals, he invents another metaphor for the reversal of time" (Illus. 19). The entire film is an examination of the unfolding of time, of the self portrayed, and of the development of the cinema, which was growing up at the same time he was: thus the references in Jerome's portrait to George Meliès and to the Lumière brothers, those cinematic geniuses from the turn of the century, in whose film of a train approaching, motion first appeared. (They were from La Ciotat, near Cassis.) Visible here, as in his other films, is his deliberately "handmade" approach, in which he wanted to exercise "the same centralized control which I had found essential as a painter."

He collaged into this film, on which he started work in 1965, other earlier films, his own or those of other filmmakers, such as *The Magic Umbrella* of 1927 and



Illus. 15:
Cassis, the Lighthouse, Blue Sea, 1960
Jerome Hill, Cassis, France
Private Collection

Illus. 16:
Yellow Rose in Lavender Vase, 1968
Jerome Hill
Private Collection

Illus. 17:
Le Grand Bonnard, 1969
Jerome Hill, Cassis, France

Fortune Teller of 1932. The very extent of the range of possible fates he pictures for himself in *Film Portrait* shows the wide reach of his imagination, even as the humor and the pathos intertwine, like the folds and intertwinings of the photographs he most loved. The film seems to speed by, reflecting one of Jerome's tenets for vitality in his work: for him, everything that flutters seems full of life, as opposed to what is static. All the different aspects of his life, some filmed by others, some by himself, compose this portrait. It is clearly not meant to be an autobiography of the usual sort, in which the moments would be presented in a more chronological order. It is a portrait of himself in a moment, and at moments—more than an evolution of a personality. In this experimental film, which is widely accepted as a masterpiece of the avant-garde, the avant-garde filmmakers with whom he associated, in particular Brakhage and Broughton, were highly influential. And in return, it influenced their future work.

As for the art of the self-portrait, there is a way in which every one of Jerome's paintings of himself manifests a self-inquisitiveness combined with an interrogation of our gaze at the narrator/painter gazing at himself. It is an extraordinary experience, for which all our staring at the self-portraits of Rembrandt and Chardin and our contemporaries may have prepared us—for that searching gaze, for that sideways look and the straightforward one-on-oneness of the scene. What are we supposed to be seeing? Jerome Hill's willed complexity here shows an almost baroque fascination with the angles of looking, with the angles of representation. We might think of the poet Paul Valéry's "the eye that sees the eye that sees"...looking turns circular.

IV. I think it was looking that gave the clue to his being and his aliveness. What Doogie Boocock, a lifelong friend at whose apartment the reception after Jerome's funeral was held, says of him rings true: "He was totally unlike anybody else I've ever known. He had an enormous simplicity about him. With all his knowledge, there was no pretense. You always thought he was terribly alive." As his self-portraits betray a self-watchfulness, as he sees us seeing him seeing himself and his own good looks—in *Film Portrait* and in his paintings of himself painting—there is this guardedness in his eyes and his manner that speaks loudly of a contradictory personality. That very contradictory self is what comes over so clearly in the myriad interviews conducted after his death with those who knew him well, and less well.

Illus. 18 and 19:
Stills from *Film Portrait*, 1972
Jerome Hill

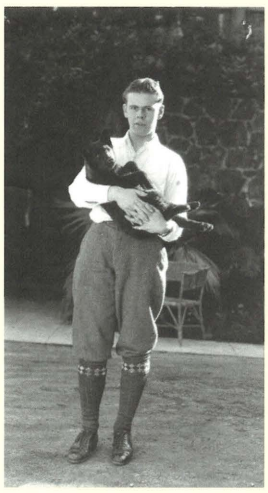
Working on Cassis Festival backdrops, Cassis, France

Dining with friends, 1951

Jerome was the subject of a certain bafflement to his friends and associates. He was at once joyful, particularly when he worked; yet, as many who knew him have thought, his personality was marked by an inner sadness. He was at once gregarious, just as he was so deeply generous—and a loner always. Indeed, something about the glorious and constant suffusion of light in his paintings permits a sense of mysteriousness, a dark undertone to the brightness. This undertone is what the friends around him detected, a combination contradictory and all the more appealing. He was always, from the beginning, open about his own divergent desires. Even one of his earliest creations, a letter he wrote to Santa Claus when he was five, was full of generosity for others: "Mother wants a new hat and veil and daddy wants some neck ties and a banjo." Continuing with what all those around him wanted, he asks for himself "a gun and a pistol and a bullet box. Then I want a doll."

This sense of opposite impulses goes some way toward explaining his fascination with the psychology and philosophy of Jung, who had analyzed a number of Jerome's friends and whom he visited, planning to make a documentary about him—it was never completed. Jung was a major influence on his thinking, particularly in saying that one should not "conform too rigidly to the last" and must leave oneself free. Jung's thinking was equally an influence on his films—particularly on *The Sand Castle*, which explores the inner consciousness as well as the workings of the self in relation to the group and to the world, in various states of reality and dream. Jung had given Jerome the idea, as he explained to Jonas Mekas, of opposites reconciled, and destinies turned upside down. The very idea of the castle, with all its turrets and its mysterious construction, is reminiscent of Jung's tower, which Jung called a place for transformation and for the integration of his imaginative self with the more practical one.

The film pictures a nine-year-old boy constructing his castle little by little, near the ocean, alternating shots of him hard at work and of other persons and situations: an elderly lady making her own construction, a shelter against the sun, with various contraptions and an umbrella (recalling Jerome's *The Magic Umbrella*); a sunbather—the lady's opposite in every way, youth against age, seeking the sun and not a shelter from it; and, most important, a group of others, playing differently and collectively. Their interactions with the castle, marveling over it and wanting to join in its construction, and with the boy, are the central node of the film: the self and the other(s). Another group, a flock of nuns playing ball (foreshadowing the ball that will



Hill with a family dog, 1920s

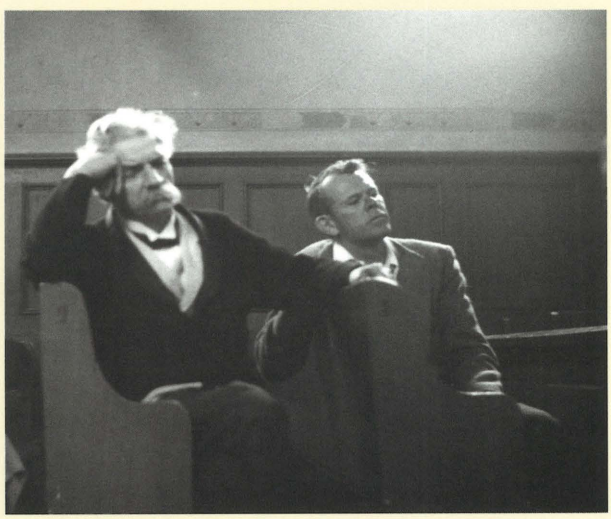
In front of a poster announcing a concert of his music, Rome, 1971

Painting a theatrical set

"ruin" the castle), is reminiscent of Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel's surrealist film *L'Age d'Or* of 1930, which provoked a major scandal for its anti-religious connotations, just as the man wearing a diving suit in Jerome's film reminds us of Dalí's own diving suit costume, which he donned for a surrealist exhibition, and in which he was suffocating until he was helped out of it. In this film, as in the others, Jerome's own family members and friends are recognizable, down to the dog, Pepper. Jerome was of the firm and unshakable belief that everyone should have a dog, as Charles Rydell told me.

In the dream sequence, photographed in color after the black and white beginning—as surprising a change as that from black and white to color in Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Andrei Roublev* (1969), about the Russian icon painter—the castle takes on its own life, as a fortress and a place for refuge against the world. Just as Dalí's dream sequence in Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) forms the lyric center of that film, here the dream sequence—quite as full a story as the rest, for Jerome believed in "the authenticity of dream" just as the surrealists did—leads to the very heart of the film's construction, and, metaphorically, the heart of the castle. For the princess of the castle presents the boy with a seashell, the true treasure of everything that has been constructed, on the beach and in the dream. The shell, given him by the princess, contains the essence of mystery and of the life of the soul. This is "the spirit of the shell," which retrospectively penetrates the spirit and the essence of the film itself. For those who knew surrealist films as Jerome did, this recalls—as do the nuns—a film Antonin Artaud made with Germaine Dulac in 1928, *The Seashell and the Clergyman*, as well as one that Robert Desnos made about a starfish, *L'Etoile de mer*. Indeed, for the lover of surrealist poetry, the boy's calling out for someone to get him more seaweed for his castle recalls the first line of a Desnos poem in which the narrator brings a piece of seaweed to his beloved. The seaweed contains, like the spirit of the shell, the secret to life and the mystery of the universe. Everything is, metaphorically and finally, focused on this mysterious object, in which the sea lives, just as does the sky. In Jerome's discovered seashell, at the heart of his castle and his life, in some interior Theater of the Sea, there endured a sense of magic. He had designed this theater with its strange shell at its heart, and invited his guests to contribute their pebbles to the spirit he so believed in. Here was what mattered—the real richness, the real religion of art, which counted above all for Jerome Hill. The art of living and the living of the arts he practiced and encouraged in others.

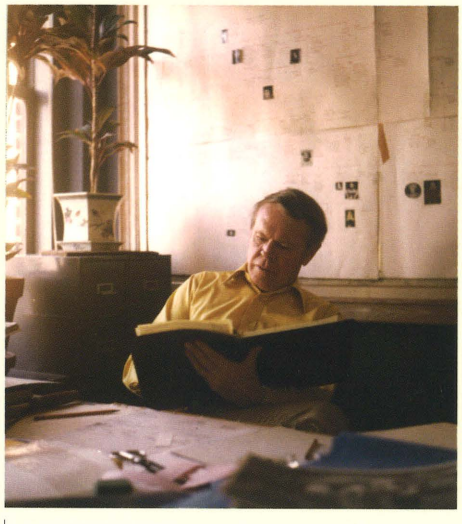
Picture Within a Picture, 1966
Jerome Hill
Private Collection



Dr. Albert Schweitzer and Hill in the church at Gunsbach, Alsace, 1951

This is what matters about his life and his many forms of creation that he lived in and through. Above all, they were compartmentalized, given their own space and time, as were his friends—so different each of them, not unlike the different aspects of his own personality. The undertone to the brilliance of the light in his paintings, and to the sparkle of society in his life, gives a depth one might not have suspected to the entire picture of the man. Here is what endures. When the castle is destroyed, by the outer elements, there remains exactly the heart of the construction, the shell and all it contains of radiance. I see this as the most important discovery made by this little loner of a rich boy, this greatly generous and somewhat lonely man: that what mattered was what was to be believed in, not expressible in words, but to be sought in all the ways of creation, every day and all one's life, in work and relationships and love—some kind of enduring magic. And even some kind of joy.

Standing in front of a wall of snow just outside the door of his house in Sugar Bowl, California, 1952



At work on a storyboard for *Film Portrait*, New York, 1971

NOTE:
A French version of this essay, translated by Nathalie Fouyer and Michael Pretina, may be found on the Camargo Foundation website (www.camargofoundation.org).

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