

The Road Trip as Artistic Formation in DeFeo's Work

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Abstract: In her article "The Road Trip as Artistic Formation in DeFeo's Work" Frida Forsgren discusses previously unpublished photographic material documenting Jay DeFeo's road trip in Europe and North Africa in the 1950s. Forsgren argues that the Beat road trip is by no means an exclusively masculine enterprise and quest: DeFeo's journey helped open the door to her emancipation as a female artist and propelled her artistic development. Moreover, the global experience represented by the trip helped shape her local Beat milieu upon her return to San Francisco. While European, Medieval, Italian Renaissance, and Hebrew influences in DeFeo's oeuvre have been studied, Forsgren traces the North African and particularly Moroccan influences in DeFeo's work.

Frida FORSGREN

The Road Trip as Artistic Formation in DeFeo's Work

"I have such a nice room to paint in—large and white. That's the most important thing that Florence sold me on. Everything in Paris is so cramped up—impossible to work there—and I have reached the point where I simply must paint. After all, that's what I've been looking at all these things for!" (Miller 284). These are the words of Bay Area artist Jay DeFeo on her arrival in Florence June 1952 after having spent nearly eight months "on the road" in the US, Europe, and North Africa. She had reached the point where she needed to digest the impressions of the paintings, sculptures, churches, buildings, and people encountered during her trip, and simply wanted to paint. This article argues that DeFeo's road trip is an important point of departure for her formation as an artist. How did the experience on the road form DeFeo as a central Beat artist in the countercultural milieu of San Francisco in the 1950s? And how do the experiences on the road manifest themselves concretely in her work in the 1950s and 1960s? I introduce and discuss some of the images taken by her fellow traveler Ron DuBois, and present her own reflections on encountering Europe. In particular, I explore a selected group of works she produced in her Fillmore Street apartment between 1958 and 1965 to explain how, by going global, she contributed to forming the local Beat movement in California.

Travel, from the great historical European "Grand Tour" to Kerouac's novel *On the Road* (1957), is an important part of the cultural formation of any artist or writer. In Beat culture the road trip is seen as the ultimate experience and a requirement for self-realization and personal development. In *Restless Nation: Starting Over in America*, James M. Jasper states that: "'The Road' was more a character than a setting for Kerouac's novels, and much of his work dealt with this peculiar suspended place where the point was adventure" (211). In the great array of studies focusing on the road in Beat culture, Kerouac's remains the central text, from David Laderman's "What a Trip: The Road Film and American Culture," which sees *On the Road* as a formative literary source for the road film genre, to Michael J. Prince's article "'Whither goest thou, America?': Deterritorialization, Identity, and the Fella-hin Ideal in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*," which discusses how the identities of the novel's characters develop on the road. And just as, in Kerouac's novel, Dean and Sal drive off in search of a new life and new adventures, so photographer Robert Frank travelled from state to state on a Guggenheim grant shooting pictures of everyday Americans, and visual artists such as Michael Bowen, Arthur Monroe, Michael McCracken, George Herms, Bruce Conner and Jean Conner migrated to Mexico and remote places in California in search of new haunts.

The road trip is often seen as a masculine Beat construction, with active life "on" the road opposed to domestic life "off" the road, as depicted by Carolyn Cassady in her well-known autobiography *Off the Road: My Years with Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg* (1990). In "'Adventures in Auto-Eroticism': Economies of traveling masculinity in *On the Road* and *The First Third*," Mary Panizza Carden has, for example, argued that the books by Kerouac and Neal Cassady both "construct economies of masculinity in which male travellers negotiate and trade the markers of manhood encoded in Cassady's 'auto-erotic ideal'" (78). But the theme of the road also appears as a distinct part of female Beat experience: in Joyce Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance* (1961), the main character Susan's promised trip to France represents freedom from the established and conventional rules of bourgeois constraints; Ruth Weiss visited Mexico during an extended road trip in 1958-59; Diane di Prima criss-crossed the United States in 1967 in a Volkswagen bus on an epic 20,000-mile journey, reading poetry at dance halls, bars, storefronts, colleges, and galleries, and, Joan Brown spent several months traveling in Europe, visiting Spain, Italy, France, and England in 1961 (Tsujimoto and Baas). Hettie Jones put forward a feminine perspective on the male Beat road trip in her *Drive* poems, stating in "Hard Drive" that she is both "woman enough to be moved to tears / and man enough / to drive my car in any direction" (on the re-negotiations of gender boundaries in Joyce Johnson's *Minor Characters* and Jones's *Drive* poems, see Gillian Thomson's article, "Gender Performance in the Literature of the Female Beats"). By placing the female beat behind the wheel, Jones invites the inclusion of the female into the foreground of Beat culture. In a similar manner, DeFeo's road trip was instrumental for introducing the road trip as a natural part of the female beat artist's experience as the following discussion shows.

It was in 1951, after receiving her MA from the University of California, Berkeley, that DeFeo went on the road. She was awarded the Sigmund Martin Heller Traveling Fellowship, and received a grant of 1,000 USD to travel in Europe (see Miller). DeFeo was the first female artist to be awarded this grant and her road trip of some 18 months would prove particularly rewarding for her development as an artist, influencing her topics and visual style. In what follows, I outline the central moments of her trip, based on the chronology presented in Miller (283-84) and the interview DeFeo made with Paul

Karlstrom for the Archive of American Art, and present photographs by Ron DuBois, before I discuss these in relation to two works she made in San Francisco upon her return in 1952.

In New York in September 1951, DeFeo boarded an ocean liner bound for Le Havre, France, traveling with her Berkeley friends Lynne Brown and Paola and Dick Seaton. She continued with Brown to Paris where she was introduced to other American expatriates and to bohemian continental living. In Paris, she particularly noticed the Gothic churches, with their impressive stained glass windows, as well as the time-worn aspects of the city's buildings and its grey light. She later remarked: "When I got over there to Paris, I was very impressionable about everything. Even just the old crumbly walls—all that kind of stuff. They looked like ready-made abstract expressionist paintings. The old buildings and everything. The whole atmosphere of the town. The grayness impressed me a great deal" ("Oral History" <<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-jay-defeo-13246>>). And comparing Paris to California, she explained: "the atmosphere was so entirely different there. Everything is so vivid and so bright here. I was very taken with this kind of softness—a grayness, a blueness about the atmosphere. And it seems that after Paris, I absolutely responded to that very low key—I could understand how the Impressionists became Impressionists. It struck me as being very much that way" (47). It is interesting to note that DeFeo saw Paris impressionistically and how these impressions also find their way into her own work. Particularly in the paintings she produced when she came home to California, a soft blurring visual style is evident. In *Origin* (1956), the strokes are diaphanous and elongated, resembling grass bending in the wind. The textural quality increases in force at the upper level of the painting forming thick lumps of blotches on the canvas. The same kind of painterly impressionism is present in the *Annunciation* (1957/58) from the same period. Here the winged torso of the angel is dissolved in soft patches of paint that both obscures and unveils the image. In both paintings we also note how DeFeo uses different tonalities of grey and blue, the very same colors she highlights in her description of the Parisian atmosphere.

After almost three months in Paris, DeFeo and Brown headed for London in December 1951. In London, DeFeo spent time viewing the prehistoric drawings at the Victoria and Albert Museum, as well as contemporary work at galleries and museums, being particularly impressed by the striking color of Nicolas de Staël. After returning to Paris, she and Brown joined up with their Berkeley classmate Ron du Bois, who had been studying under André Lhote, and Thora Asgeirson. In order to experience more of Europe, they bought an old Renault with du Bois as driver. They first headed for Tours to look at the various châteaux and Romanesque paintings, traveling on to view the prehistoric cave paintings in the French Pyrenees. Crossing into Spain, DeFeo was intrigued by the Spanish music in Madrid, and in Barcelona, a bullfight made a lasting impression. In Portugal, Lisbon, with its detailed, colorful tilework, seemed a "stage-set" to DeFeo. After leaving the Iberian peninsula, and upon arriving in Tangiers, DeFeo regretted not getting to this mesmerizing place sooner as she thought it by far the most exotic location of their trip. In a postcard to her parents, dated May 12 or 18 1952, she wrote: "This is really the most exotic land of all—better than National Geographic! Ladies in veils and handsome dark Arabs in red fezes. Going insane over the native dress. The tea! The sweet tea & mint leaves. Murph [her stepfather]—have sampled hashish—it's terrific (but tell mother not to worry.) Bought a lovely pair of blue pantaloons. Should have come to Morocco [*sic*] ages ago" (Corr0025, © 2015 The Jay DeFeo Trust/Artists Rights Society, New York). In a later postcard (undated), she said: "Leaving North Africa in an hour, but I'd like to stay here forever—Didn't have a dull moment in this beautiful colorful country and we were going to Italy via Algeria & Tunisia—but for several vague reasons everyone decided to go back via Spain. I'd give anything to come back here—if only for a few weeks before leaving. Maybe. Plan on being in Florence June 3 or bust. Guess I won't be seeing as much of Italy as I had planned—but Africa was worth it. Tetuan—Tangiers—Casablanca—Meknes—Fez wonderful places" (Corr0025, © 2015 The Jay DeFeo Trust/Artists Rights Society, New York). DeFeo did not specifically mention places she visited in Morocco, or offer her reflections on the atmosphere and space as she did extensively with the European places she visited. But Ron du Bois took photographs documenting the trip, an invaluable visual record included below. We see DeFeo seated in a traditional Moroccan building, the various people she met, Moroccan salesmen, and snake charmers, the textures of curtains, carpets and pillows in a traditional Moroccan interior. On returning to Europe, the group journeyed through France and Monte Carlo, with stops at the Musée Picasso in Antibes and Matisse's newly built chapel in Vence. They then ventured into Italy, exploring the museums, churches, and other famous sites in Rome and Venice. At the end of the road trip, DeFeo decided to remain in Italy, in Florence, while her traveling companions returned to Paris.

In Florence, DeFeo rented a classic white-painted room with a marble floor at the Pensione Bartolini by the river Arno. The only decoration in the room was a simple crucifix on the wall. As she later told Paul Karlstrom: "I absolutely fell in love with the floor plan of the city. Just as a total piece of

architecture. I daily bicycled around the place—the streets, the buildings, the architecture itself impressed me terribly" ("Oral History" <<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-jay-defeo-13246>>). When Karlstrom asked her if she could recall any specific monument, museum, or painter that made particular impact, she mentioned the fascination of seeing works by Leon Battista Alberti, Filippo Brunelleschi, and Sandro Botticelli in situ—works she had studied in her art history classes at UC Berkeley. But, above all, she saw the town and its places as one immense space—without necessarily differentiating between the churches, museums, and other sites. To her all seemed to be one vast visual space into which she could enter and move freely about. And, as she had done with Paris earlier, she stressed the softness of the city and its buildings: "in contrast to our country there was a lack of garishness there, even in the architecture. There was a mellowness, a worn look. And all of the surfaces that one's eyes encountered. And again I have to get back to that architectural thing. Having studied art history a great deal, but not having seen it firsthand until I got there, I realized how entire cities looked like they were part of the terrain. They belonged there. The contrast made me see this country with a whole new perspective in that sense" ("Oral History" <<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-jay-defeo-13246>>).

Thus the visual impact of cities such as Paris and Florence opened her eyes to her own native cities, making her see her home with new eyes. Her time in Florence was one of the most prolific periods of her career; she created more than 200 works in three months (Miller 284). Moreover, the body of work she made while in Florence is different than much of her later work. The most striking feature in the Florence series is her vivid use of color. Whereas most of her mature work is characterized by subtle variations of black, white, and gray, the Florence series explodes in color. She explained how she experienced color in a totally new way on her travels: "I got into a thing about color. I associated it with a kind of laid-on look in this country—kind of an artificial thing. And so the colors that I used, although I did use a good bit of brilliant color when I was still at the university, they became much softer in tone, much more low-key while I was over there" ("Oral History" <<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-jay-defeo-13246>>).

A second characteristic feature of the series is their spontaneous execution: free-flowing movements, with drips and intersecting layers of paint, reveal the artist's work process and experiments with form. In some places the white paper shines through, and the strokes vary from thin and flowing, to denser and more tactile and massive. The parallels to the cave art DeFeo experienced in the French Pyrenees seem clear, as well as to the worn ochre texture of traditional Florentine buildings. A third feature we may observe is these works' abstract vocabulary. DeFeo is more interested in capturing shapes, lines, and expressions, than in giving form to any concrete object from reality. Most of the works are non-figurative, concentrating on rhythm, line, color, and texture. It seems that the crumbling walls, the frescoes, the ancient cave paintings, the mosaics and floor tiles, the patina of age, the atmosphere, and the texture she saw during her months of travel came to life on the paper.

In the images taken by DeFeo's fellow traveler Ron DuBois we clearly see the kind of mellowness, and that worn look that DeFeo is describing in her interview. DuBois was the only one in the travel company who had a camera and he documented the various sites they visited on their trip as they went along the way. One of the images from France shows DeFeo standing in a street with two travel companions. The high sun shines brightly down on the empty Sunday street and the grayness of the buildings stand out sharp. The picture is taken on the Left Bank, Montparnasse, Paris, in 1951, where Brown and DeFeo shared an apartment, probably one of the two seen above in the background building with the shuttered windows. The same kind of mellowness and grayness is seen in a similar photograph of a church in a different part of France. We see DeFeo and her companions posing in the grass in front of a small Romanesque church of grey stones that shows the patina of old age. In a different image from Morocco, DuBois photographs a traditional bazaar scene: rolls of carpets, silverware and men sitting on the street guarding their merchandise. Still another shot from Morocco is a close-up of mattresses, different kinds of cloth, a mirror, and wooden shelves. These foreign and exotic textures and colors are those highlighted by DeFeo in the postcards from Morocco sent to her mother and stepfather. The most fascinating of these images from the road-trip are the ones of DeFeo on a beach in Portugal before the company departed for Morocco. DuBois has photographed her standing on a promontory gazing out over the vast ocean. Her tiny figure is dressed in an orange summer dress that contrasts the white fuming and deep blue waves of the ocean. It is very suggestive of an adventurous young girl with her whole life in front of her.

The reflections made by DeFeo upon experiencing Europe and North Africa stress how she observed "a mellowness, a worn look," a "grayness" and "a kind of softness"—a grayness, a blueness about the atmosphere. She talks about how "cities looked like they were part of the terrain" and that they were "like ready-made abstract expressionist paintings" ("Oral History" <<http://www.aaa.si.edu/>

[collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-jay-defeo-13246](#)>). In the following I argue that these elements become important features in the art she begins to make when she returns to San Francisco in 1952, particularly in the work she produced in the Fillmore Street apartment between 1958 and 1965, which corresponds to her years as a Beat artist. I particularly consider her diptych *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* and *The Rose*. But first a few words about the contemporary art scene in San Francisco.

Art in California in the post war period was infused with an intense feeling of energy and freedom, with spontaneity and ease, as if everything was possible and as if everything might be open for exploration. Artists were eagerly embracing non-figurative language, at the same time as others again were abandoning non-figuration and embracing the figurative language, yet others made collages, assemblages, light-sculptures, food art, political art, or organized quirky happenings. Kenneth Rexroth has compared the San Francisco art scene to Barcelona before the war due to the pulse and the energy of expression (*Lyrical Visions* 41). It was in the air to look at everything anew and to re-invent art, its forms, its colors, its message, and its potential for expression. After the Second World War, the shared feeling was that one needed to start over again, and that one started with a blank canvas. The goal was—in painter Elmer Bischoff's words—to create a "visual Esperanto," a new form of expression, which could communicate with everyone regardless of background, and with no explanations provided (Williams 26). Moreover, the San Francisco art scene was a clearly global scene. The political and social situation in post-war Europe had led to an influx of artist immigrants entering US art milieus. Central expressionists such as Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, Clyfford Still, and the Picasso pupil Jean Varda taught at the California School of Fine Art. The avant-garde expressionist Hans Hofmann had taught summer school classes at the University of California, Berkeley, in the early 1930s. Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera stayed in the city in the early 1930s and the latter executed frescos at the California School of Fine Arts. The surrealist Marcel Duchamp lived in Los Angeles and the Dadaist Clay Spohn had shown his installations at the California School of Fine Arts in 1949.

Moreover, California was open to the oriental influences of Asian cultures from across the Pacific, mixing the quiet reflections of zen culture with the energy and pulse of expressionism seen for instance in the energetic pottery art of the time. And at the newly founded San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, students were exposed to the most advanced work of Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Wassily Kandinsky, Joan Mirò, Paul Klee, and Henri Matisse. The student crowd in the art schools was dominated by war veterans who had used their Servicemen's Readjustment Act, the so-called GI Bill, to enter art school free of tuition. They were a tough crowd with serious life-experience from the battle fields in Poland or the Pacific Jungle, and they had a great urge for expression, substituting guns for brushes, so to speak. Among these ex-soldier artists we find John Grillo, Richard Diebenkorn, Ernest Briggs, James Budd Dixon, and George Stillman, who all became central forces in the new, Californian abstract style. The art style in California at the time groups itself in two major directions: American Abstract Expressionism and California funk. American Expressionism on the West Coast was characterized by strong colors, hefty brushwork, tactile surface and a non-figurative subject matter (Williams 21-39). Beat artists such as Michael Bowen, Michael McCracken, and Arthur Richer often included found objects and/or sand and cement into their painted work to make them even more tactile and gritty (Forsgren 33). The California funk movement on the other hand was a reaction to the nonobjectivity of abstract expressionism, and consisted of assemblages and collages made of found objects, a mixture of materials and techniques. The most well know example of funk from the beat underground is Joan Brown's assemblage *Fur Rat* which was made of raccoon fur, wood and nails to evoke the presence of a rat Brown had seen in a nightmare (Tsujiyamoto 21). The mix of sophisticated European avant-garde artists, ex-soldiers bursting with energy, and the intense hunger for new expressions, turned the art milieu in San Francisco into a veritable powerhouse of creativity. This energy was furthermore clearly fueled by the Beat movement, which was an active agent in the city from the beginning of the 1950s with its underground galleries, poetry readings, performances and art happenings. It was into this creative setting that DeFeo settled when she returned to San Francisco in 1952, and where she later set up her studio at her home in 2322 Fillmore Street, where the works I discuss below were made.

The Wise and Foolish Virgins is a diptych made at the Fillmore studio in 1958. It consists of two large-scale paintings of flowers: a rose and a lily (328.3 x 108cm). A flowering white rose is mounted on a delicate stem. It protrudes from a white background painted with black, grey and white paint, and its flower opens in concise spiral-like movements. The lily is its contrast. Its shades and outlines are darker and its flower buds are blurred and uneven. Both paintings are made on paper with black chalk, oil, and house paint and they boast a brittle and tactile quality. The paint forms crusts on the thin, plain paper and gives the composition a fragile touch despite its monumental size. The two flowers form a striking dualism. The perfection and harmony of the white rose, contrasts the darkness and

dynamism of the black lily making them function as a traditional *memento mori* piece: light versus darkness, perfection versus decay, life versus death—a dualism which is underscored both by the figurative subject matter and by the style of the execution. *The Wise Virgin* exudes perfection and beauty with its classical, harmonious structure, while the lily communicates friction and tension with its ragged texture and hectic pencil strokes. It is here in the strokes that we may find signs of the "mellowness," the "worn look" and the "grayness" that DeFeo observes on her travel. The structure of *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* resemble crumbling walls and decaying texture on a micro level. The blotches of paint and the torn look of the canvas surface makes one think of a crumbly wall structure.

The subject matter of *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* is clearly sexual: the white rose with its long and delicate stem resembles the thighs of a woman's legs and her vagina before it is de-flowered as it were, while the lily can be seen as her sexually aroused genital. Both flowers are strong symbols of love and sexuality; the rose with its intense association with love and feminine beauty, while the lily is held as a symbol of high eroticism and sexuality, the long pistil of the flower suggesting a phallus and the pollen symbolizing fertility. Thus, both feminine and masculine sexuality is present in DeFeo's work. The theme of virginity underscores this interpretation and its stress on the "wise" versus the "foolish" virgin, the chaste versus the unchaste. The title is derived from the parable in Matthew 25:1-13 where we read of the ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom, but where only five of them who were prepared and had extra lamp oil, came with the bridegroom to the wedding. It is a parable which stresses the importance of being prepared. Originally DeFeo had planned to make ten flowers in all, but decided to keep only two in contrast, resulting in one wise and one foolish virgin. The ten virgins theme was a popular iconographical motif in medieval and Gothic art that DeFeo would have noticed on her travel, for instance at the portal of Notre Dame de Paris, during her three months stay in the city.

In 1958 DeFeo started work on *The Rose*, which was to become an all-consuming project for the next seven years. *The Rose* is a large rectangular painting that consists of rays emerging or disappearing from a central focal point. It is light whitish-gray in the center and turns gradually grayer towards the edges of the painting. The painting is made by oil and mica on canvas and is a monumental structure: 327.3 x 234.3 x 27.9 cm weighing close to a ton. The painting took form in the bay window of the Fillmore flat and underwent various stages during its history of creation, from an archaic phase, via a baroque, to a classical phase, so in many respects it mirrors the formal evolution in Western painting from antiquity to modernity (Green and Levy 70). During its creation the title changed from *Deathrose* to *The White Rose*, and finally to *The Rose*, a process from determinate darkness towards a more open and symbolic clarity. The most striking element of *The Rose* is its centricity. In a dense, compact composition of rocks, crevices, texture, the center and focal point suggests the eye of a storm. About the process DeFeo stated that what she wanted was to make "the notion of an idea that had a center to it" ("Oral History" <<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-jay-defeo-13246>>). The structure of the painting has deep affinities with classical imagery and traditional symbols. We may associate *The Rose* with the mandala, the circle, or with something less ordered such as an explosion, or genesis. On a concrete symbolic level, the center may resemble the Albertian Renaissance perspectival construction DeFeo observed in Florence in domes, religious paintings or church plans; on another level, it may echo the centrality of the Gothic rose windows of the French Medieval churches she had studied. In her reflections about her travel she stresses how the cities she visited were "like ready-made abstract expressionist paintings" ("Oral History" <<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-jay-defeo-13246>>). The organic, rock-solid quality of *The Rose* resembles the very elements that the earth is made of, whether a mountain, a rock, or the crumbling stonewall of a church or a Parisian apartment building. It is a painting that aims to contain the world, seemingly constructed of the materiality of the world. And it is the painting's combination of a highly classical visual vocabulary combined with the hands-on, physical quality of the San Francisco art movement in the 1950s that makes it a unique combination of both global and local qualities. These qualities were, as we have seen, formed during DeFeo's travels in 1951-1952, and subsequently developed when she came home to the vibrant Beat community in San Francisco.

Both these two works influenced the local Beat community to a large extent. *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* were exhibited at the Dilexi Gallery from July 6 to August 31, 1959 during a one-person show DeFeo had at the gallery. And *The Rose* in many ways became the hub of the visual Beat community in San Francisco from 1958-1965. *The Rose* was made at the famous Fillmore Street 2322 apartment, a meeting place for many of the central people connected to the Beat milieu. Michael McClure, Robert Duncan, Jess, Bruce, and Jean Conner, Wallace and Shirley Berman, Joan and Bill Brown, Wally Hedrick, Stan Brakhage, George Herms, John Wieners, and Kenneth Rexroth are among those who made their home either in the apartment or in the neighbourhood at some point in the 1950s. Every-

body in the community knew *The Rose* and followed its process at close hand; it was the protagonist in Bruce Conner's film *The White Rose* (1967) and the object of a photo series by Wally Berman that was published in the *Semina* magazine. The mythology of *The Rose* is inextricably linked with Beat culture in San Francisco, to the extent that the removal of *The Rose* from DeFeo's studio is seen as the end of Beat culture in 1965. DeFeo employs a distinctly more classical and traditional artistic vocabulary, compared to many of her contemporaries in San Francisco. Although she did work both as a funk, assemblage and collage artist, and the body of sketches from Florence was largely abstract, she had a propensity to infuse her subject matter with a more traditional western art historical perspective apparent in the works discussed above, and as in works such as *The Annunciation*, *The Veronica* and *Daphne*. Rebecca Solnit has commented that the difference between DeFeo and her contemporaries lies in her "concentration on a central form" while most abstract-expressionism "relates to a landscape-like field of color or gesture" (50). This becomes particularly clear if we compare her work to the main production of her contemporaries, artists like John Grillo, Richard Diebenkorn, Ernest Briggs, James Budd Dixon, and George Stillman, who all worked with bright colors and a predominantly abstract subject matter. This is also evident if we compare her work to those of the artists in the Beat underground like Keith Sanzenbach, Michael McCracken, and Artie Richer who concentrated on paint being essentially colored textures on the canvas

For DeFeo, too, painted texture was essential. In both *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* and *The Rose* we see how pigments form lumps, crevices, and structures both on paper and canvas. Her subject matter is nevertheless strongly informed by classical iconography and forms. This is something DeFeo herself was highly conscious of as we see in the following passage: "It was during the Florence period, and it really started in Paris, that I came into my own as an abstract expressionist. Even in this isolated place that really had little bearing on that movement stylistically. I was absorbing my environment but it didn't come out in my own work until much later, when I sort of integrated spontaneous feeling for abstract expressionism with something of the refinement of the Renaissance period" ("Oral History" <<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-jay-defeo-13246>>). Here she is clear that she saw her abstract expressionist works as a logical result of the input she had on her travels, here precisely the experience of Renaissance art and architecture in Florence. So in response to my initial question: "How did the on-the-road experience form DeFeo as a Beat artist in the countercultural milieu in San Francisco in the 1950s?" we may conclude that her road trip to Europe and North Africa greatly helped form the artist she became. The constant exposure to canonical sites such as the French Gothic cathedrals and churches, lit by large stained glass windows, the Tours châteaux and Romanesque paintings, the prehistoric cave paintings in the French Pyrenees, the prehistoric drawings at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and her fascination at seeing works by Leon Battista Alberti, Filippo Brunelleschi, and Sandro Botticelli in situ provided intense visual experiences and a high repertoire from which to draw. So did the possibility to see contemporary work in galleries and museums, and she was particularly impressed by the striking colors in the work of Nicolas de Staël at the Matthiesen Gallery and the chapel at Vance by Matisse. Moreover, the very materiality of the cities she visited influenced her immensely. She talked of the "grayness," the "mellowness," the "worn look" of the buildings she saw, a materiality she managed to transport into her own abstract expressionist work, which is evident in both *The Rose* and *The Wise and Foolish Virgins*. Much as experience on the road affected such Beat artists as Jack Kerouac and Robert Frank, DeFeo's travels, with their bohemian flavor, went beyond the conventional grand tour to open up new vistas, freeing her artistic imagination. And her trip exemplifies that the Beat road trip is by no means an exclusively masculine enterprise.

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