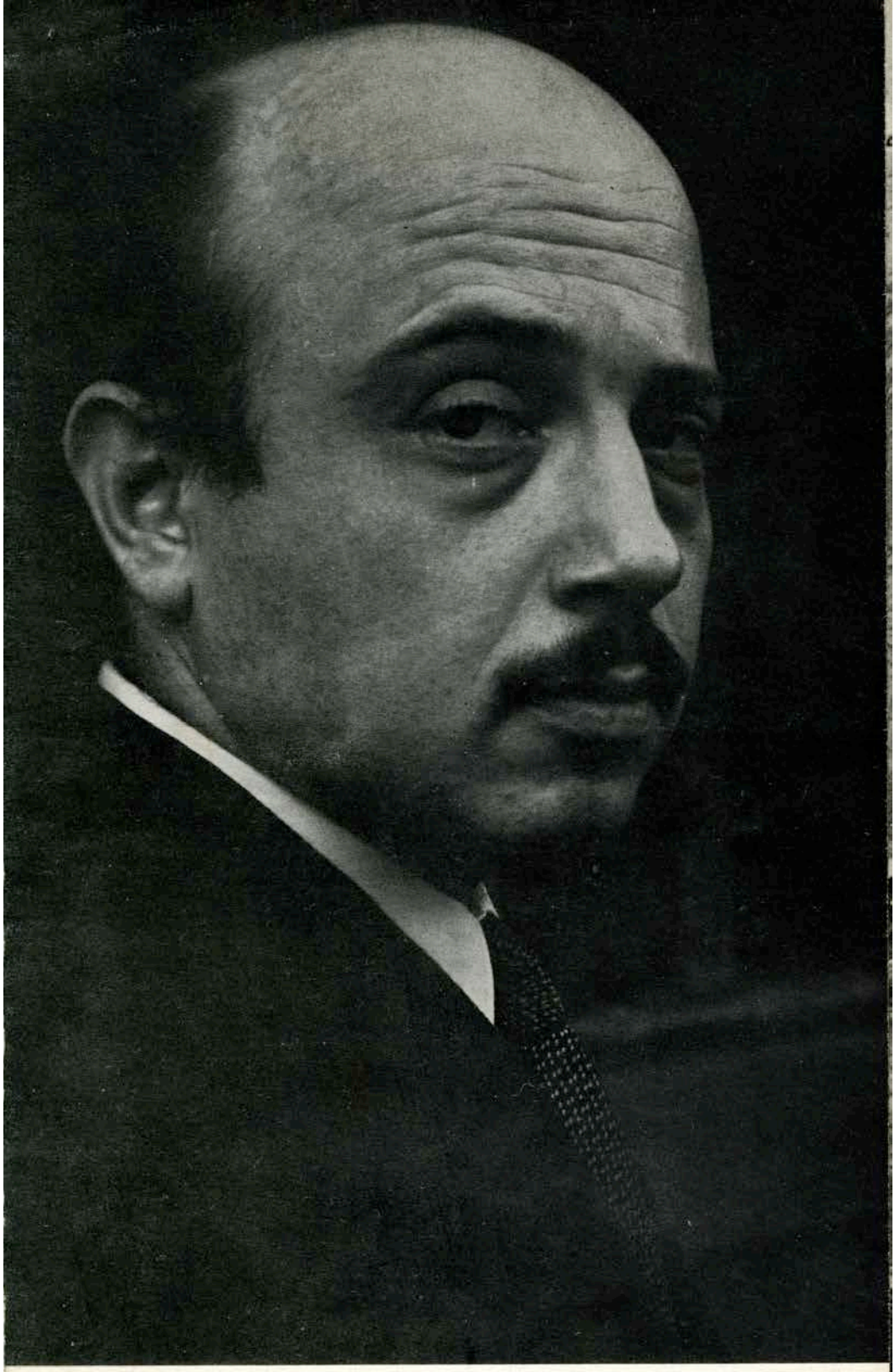

BORIS LURIE
LES LIONS

Everybody hangs girlie pictures on their walls now; not only people working in shops and garages, but even families occupying expertly designed up to date modern apartments. The walls of a child's room is hung with pinups to educate him to meet the menace when he grows up. Why was not my play-den decorated with pinups?

For years I have been buying girlie magazines. I study them with determined thoroughness. I try to figure out what beauty I like best and why. What masterpieces! Who is my Queen Superior? But there are so many different types, and at different times I like different types; or, sometimes, I like several types all at once. It is very confusing. Dressed, undressed, lingerie or bikini, baby doll gown or nothing at all. Do you like them adolescent or mature, the spring, summer, or overripe in the fall? The sporty type or the savage type? But they overlap, interchange, reverse, and compete with each other.

To fight confusion was my supreme aim, but my instinct suggested it was necessary to create more confusion to reach this aim. I cut out hundreds of girlie photos from magazines. The studio walls were covered with them, pinned on and taped on everywhere. I sat down in front of them and observed: what was the use of painting the girls? How could I ever paint all the girls in one painting? What was the use of painting?

LES LIONS
PROMISES UN
NEW ARMS PLAN
New
Shape
PROMISES
APPLEBERRY
PLAN
HEINZ
BEANS
DU COLONEL
TERREUR
An Addict of Agony
Started Her War
On Walking Death
different from
all other dishwa

Then, in the winter of 1959 I became a temporary cripple. Carrying a painting to be exhibited at the St. Marks-on-the-Bowerie Church, I tripped on an ancient stone and fractured my foot. At St. Vincent's Hospital my foot was encased in plaster and I was given a pair of crutches. From then on I left my bed only to hobble to stove or icebox. And gradually the girlies from the studio began to invade my bedroom. I looked at them, I watched them. They watched me. They grew. I longed for that supreme imaginary moment, when I would crown the queen of them all. But the girls increased and blossomed — families, tribes, nations, races. Day and night they were with me. They never left. On my crutches I hobbled from photo to photo, staring and judging and considering and muttering in my head. I tried to select, to eliminate, to discard, to crown. I did not succeed.

And then at last I had to act. Something had to be done to stop this monstrous growth. There was no time to waste. I arose from my bed. I grabbed the girls from the walls. Onto the canvas they went, around them and over them the paint. They were smothered in it, peeled off, new girls replaced the losses and were choked in paint again. Girls were thrown out, girls came back. Gradually it began to happen. Paintings started coming off the walls. At last I was getting rid of the uninvited inhabitants, the curse, the confusion of bodies, my beauties! I exclaimed: 'magnificent!'

In the painting 'Les Lions' it happened:
The stripper becomes a moon shining on the Cadillac. Khrushchev offers the United Nations his long-awaited Appleberry Plan. Colonel Terreur is dead, fallen in combat. 'Les Lions' rest strong and contented in luxurious green. Why is gentle Fragonard being threatened by Man-with-Tommygun? Do they actually can vaporous beauties in bean cans? The red-headed model laid a strange egg. Why is this dishwasher different from all other dishwashers? The museum-director, too, looking through a magnifying glass at a pinup; the New Shape, oh what will it be? Eve eats the apple of knowledge all by herself. This is a sinister band of rebels. Colonel Terreur is dead. 'Les Lions' rest content.

The stray dogs in my back yard are perennially hungry. The Monster makes them act out their frustration through formal well-rehearsed action. The dogs beg: they throw their paws around wildly, they run around in circles. Then the Monster throws them some bones. The meat had been all but completely eaten away, but the dogs devour them greedily and fall asleep. And in their dog-dreams they imagine themselves as superb great masters, far away in time and space, performing never ending ritual gestures. But soon they awaken, and they are as hungry as before, and the yard is as dirty as before.

I have a painting in front of me. Legibly printed on its right side are the words: Liberty or Lice.

April 18, 1960.

Boris Lurie.

Biographical data. Born 1924, Leningrad, Russia. One-man shows, New York City: 1950, 1951, 1952, 1958. Two-men show, New York City: 1958. In group shows, New York City: 1957-1960, Downtown cooperative galleries, various uptown galleries, New York and Houston Museums of Mod. Art.

All photos Charles Rotmil