

I still don't know what made me climb the stairs to Alice Singer's 57th Street gallery, It was June 1997, New York City, The show was titled, "Crowding the Air – American Drawing 1900-1990", and it seemed impossibly ambitious for her smallish space. Furthermore, the notices of it which I had read in the Times and the New Yorker disdainfully prefigured one's natural prejudices. It was late afternoon, I was hot and I was tired and I wandered past dozens of unremarkable drawings and sketches – a Feininger, a Warhol shoe, a Twombly doodle caught my eye- before I was held and shocked by something I had never expected to see. It was a drawing, 12"x8", in ink, mixed media and collage: *Bridge no, 122*, I did not need to read the printed label beside it to know it was by Nat Tate.

It was undated, but I knew it must have been executed in the early 1950s, part of his once legendary, now almost entirely forgotten series of drawings inspired by Hart Crane's great poem, *The Bridge*.
(...)

Nathwell - 'Nat' – Tate was born on the 7th March 1928, probably in Union Beach, New Jersey. His mother, Mary (née Tager), told him his father had been a fisherman from Nantucket who had drowned at sea before Nat had been born. The regular contradictions and elaborations of Mary Tate's story (Nathwell senior was variously a submariner, a naval architect, a merchant seaman killed 'in a war', a deep sea diver) later convinced his son that he was in fact illegitimate. However, there was in all the versions a link with the sea and, with ominous symbolism, the death was always the same – drowning.

Nat Tate: An American Artist 1928-1960, William Boyd, 1998

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