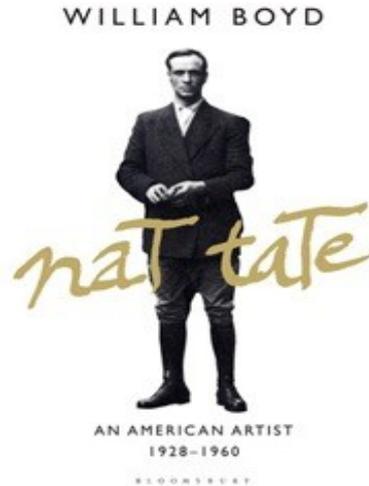
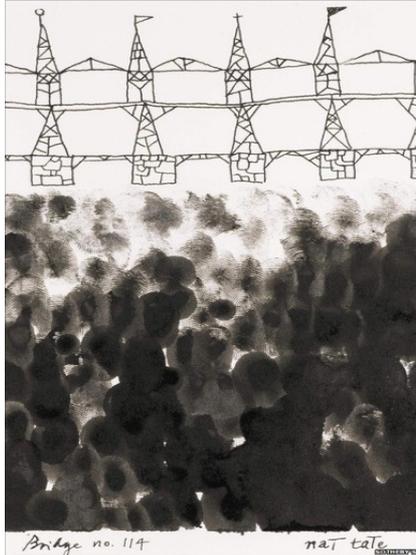




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Superhoax, Supermodels



“Bridge No. 114,” by Nat Tate.

Tomorrow, Sotheby’s will auction off one of the abstract expressionist Nat Tate’s famous “Bridge” paintings. It is a rare offering—one of only eighteen surviving Tate canvases—and is expected to fetch anywhere from three thousand to five thousand pounds, though as Frances Christie, the director of modern and postwar British art at Sotheby’s, told the BBC, “the sky’s the limit.”

If you are not familiar with Tate, you might consider picking up a copy of the British novelist William Boyd’s 1998 biography, “Nat Tate: An American Artist 1928—1960,” which has recently been re-released by Bloomsbury. In just sixty-six pages, Boyd unspools the brief and tragic life of the artist, from his inauspicious birth and his adoption by the timber scion Peter Barkasian to his rise in the New York art scene in the nineteen-forties to his death by suicide, at the age of thirty-one.

If you *are* familiar with Tate, however, you know that the above is **hooy** (save for the book and the painting—they really exist and the auction will actually take place). Nat Tate (derived, it is said, from London’s two big museums, the National Gallery and the Tate) is the invention of Boyd, who twelve years ago attempted to convince the literary and artistic establishment of New York that Tate was a forgotten painter of the New York school. His aim in writing the fake biography, and in painting the pieces attributed to Tate, he told interviewers at the time, was to “play quite consciously with the ideas of reality and fiction. This is pushing the envelope, and taking it possibly as far as you can go. It is conscious and deliberate, almost a manipulation of our verification process.” He hoped that there would be initial belief, followed by “a mounting crescendo of skepticism,” leading to a challenge, and, eventually, to a confession,