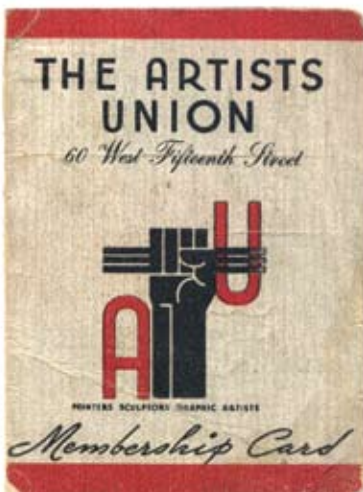


## FROM THE DIRECTOR

*This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Archives of American Art Journal. What started as a modest pamphlet for announcing new acquisitions and other Archives' activities soon blossomed into one of the signature publications for the dissemination of new research in the field of American art history. During its history, the Archives has published the work of most of the leading thinkers in the field. The list of contributors is far too long to include, but choose a name and most likely their bibliography will include an essay for the Journal.*

*To celebrate this occasion, we mined the Journal's archive and reprinted some of the finest and most representative work to have appeared in these pages in the past five decades. Additionally, we invited several leading scholars to prepare short testimonies to the value of the Journal and to the crucial role that the Archives has played in advancing not only their own work, but its larger mission to foster a wider appreciation and deeper understanding of American art and artists.*

*I'm particularly grateful to Neil Harris, Patricia Hills, Gail Levin, Lucy Lippard, and H. Barbara Weinberg for their thoughtful tributes to the Journal. Additionally, I'd like to thank David McCarthy, Gerald Monroe, H. Barbara Weinberg, and Judith Zilczer for their essays. And I would like to make a very special acknowledgement to Garnett McCoy, who served as the Journal's editor for thirty years. As our current editor Darcy Tell points out, the Journal's vigor and intellectual rigor owe much to Garnett's stewardship and keen editorial eye, and this anniversary issue is a tribute to his talents and commitment to this organization.*



*Endpapers inspired by the Artists' Union logo.*

*John W. Smith*

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Lucy R. Lippard** is the author of twenty books on contemporary art and cultural criticism, most recently *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* and *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place*. Her forthcoming book, *Down Country: The Tano of the Galisteo Basin, 1250–1782*, will be published in June 2010. Lippard has curated some fifty exhibitions and edits her community newsletter in the village of Galisteo, New Mexico.

**Gail Levin** is Distinguished Professor of Art History, American Studies, and Women's Studies at Baruch College and the Graduate Center of The City University of New York. Her publications include *Edward Hopper: A Catalogue Raisonné*, *Hopper's Places*, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, *Becoming Judy Chicago: A Biography of the Artist*, and many other books and essays. Her biography of Lee Krasner is forthcoming in 2011.

**Patricia Hills**, a professor of art history at Boston University, has published books, catalogue entries, and essays on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American art, African American artists, and art and politics. Her recent books are *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the Twentieth Century* (2001), *May Stevens* (2005), and *Painting Harlem Modern: The Art of Jacob Lawrence* (2009).

**Neil Harris** is Preston and Sterling Morton Professor of American History and Art History, Emeritus, at the University of Chicago. His first book, *The Artist in American Society*, was published in 1966; his most recent book, *The Chicagoan: A Lost Magazine of the Jazz Age*, appeared in 2008. His interests have centered on the evolution of American cultural life and the formation of its supporting institutions.

**H. Barbara Weinberg**, the Metropolitan Museum's Alice Pratt Brown Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture, has co-curated many exhibitions, including "American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765–1915" (2009–2010). In addition to exhibition catalogues, she has published *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century American Painters and Their French Teachers* (1991). She is Professor Emerita at Queens College and the CUNY Graduate Center. In 2007, she received the Lawrence A. Fleischman Award for Distinguished Scholarship in American Art History from the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art.



Cover: *Painting palette and brushes, ca. 1890s.*

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# 50 YEARS

In early 1961 E. P. Richardson, one of the founders of the Archives of American Art, published his goals for the year. First, to expand collecting he called for repositories across the continent to lend papers for microfilming and appealed to artists, their descendants, and heirs to contribute papers “systematically.”

His second aim both restated the Archives “basic” and overarching goal—“describing and interpreting the story of the arts in America”—and asked his staff and supporters, in uncharacteristically emphatic italics, “*to turn the information we are gathering into people at work . . .*” By the end of the decade, Richardson’s charge was becoming a reality, helped greatly by the Archives’ house publication, founded fifty years ago this year, in 1960.

I can think of no better way to mark the *Archives of American Art Journal’s* anniversary than to reprint part of a short history of the magazine written in 1990 by Garnett McCoy, our curator emeritus. Garnett was the magazine’s guiding presence from 1963 until his retirement in 1993, and along the way his active cultivation of scholarship played a central role in our work.

The *Archives of American Art Journal* began publication at a time when American art history attracted little scholarly attention and had even less academic standing. Now, thirty years later, all that is changed. Dissertations on American subjects pour out of the PhD mills and into publishers’ offices, curators preside over American art departments at most large museums and at several commercial galleries, and major private collections of the work of American painters and sculptors abound. Yet so recent is this explosion of serious interest and professional respect that the Archives’ *Journal* stands today as one of the oldest publications in its field.

*Opposite: Garnett McCoy.*



The Journal of the Archives of American Art offers the opportunity to publish new research based on the use of the vast resources in the Archives' collections. It represents a wide variety of approaches on diverse subjects and is a welcome venue for new scholarship that need be neither commercial nor trendy. —GAIL LEVIN

The Archives of American Art itself came into being in the summer of 1954 as a small independent research institution loosely attached to the Detroit Institute of Arts.

After six years of slow and decidedly underfunded growth, a very substantial Ford Foundation grant aroused a fresh sense of vitality in the board of trustees, who promptly engaged a full-time director and staff, established an efficient fundraising and membership apparatus, and took on that primary requisite of a struggling organization, a public relations consultant. Acting on the sound principle that a membership institution must be able to tell its supporters how well it is doing, the trustees approved the consultant's recommendation to publish a newsletter. At the board meeting of 28 April 1960, he displayed "a dummy of a *Bulletin* planned for the Archives, including articles on letters by Mrs. Saarinen, Edward Hopper, and Feininger sketches. . . . At the present time the *Bulletin* is only four pages long. It is hoped that it may be enlarged at a future date." A few weeks later several hundred members, institutional libraries, and potentially interested individuals received the first issue of what would eventually become the *Archives of American Art Journal*.

As it happened, a separate means of communication to the art history profession already existed. Immediately after the Archives took shape, reports on its acquisitions began appearing in the *Art Quarterly*, the publication of the Detroit Institute of Arts. . . . Over the period from 1954 to 1964 the *Art Quarterly* served as a form of cowbird's nest for the future *Archives Journal*.

The *Bulletin* too carried a running commentary on Archives collections, but its chief element comprised notes and pictures covering social activities and a series of conferences organized under the Ford Foundation grant. The impression it produced of society as a patron of scholarship was reflected in a remark by a columnist in the magazine *Manuscripts*. The Archives, he wrote, "appears to be a fashionable but worthy organization." News of one of the most important acquisitions ever received came to the attention of a leading art historian through the *Bulletin* rather than the *Art Quarterly*. In 1962 Milton Brown, who had long sought Walt Kuhn's Armory Show records, was planning a book on the great 1913 exhibition. "I began work in June," he wrote, "and almost immediately learned from the June *Bulletin* of the Archives of American Art that the Kuhn papers had come to light." This revelation sent him to Detroit forthwith and the records he found there made possible his definitive history of the Armory Show.

Peter Pollack, the public relations consultant, resigned in 1962, and thereafter the *Bulletin* began to evolve into a different kind of publication. Over the next few years social notes and catchy headlines diminished as attention to the Archives' substance grew. The membership secretary, Effie Morse, took on editorial responsibility and I, as the new Archivist, contributed documentary items and descriptive pieces about the collections. We were tentatively moving towards a more scholarly approach, acknowledged in 1964 by a change in title from *Bulletin* to *Journal*. At an early stage in

this transition from newsletter to professional journal it became clear that the Archives staff would provide most of the content. The reports on new collections previously prepared for the *Art Quarterly* were easily transferred to the *Journal*, but with twelve, sixteen, and then twenty pages to fill, we needed articles to replace the notes on membership and fundraising activities. Fortunately there was no lack of material to exploit. Beginning in 1963 and continuing into the 1970s a series of extended accounts of individual collections of papers were written with an eye to promoting the research potential in each. It was a useful exercise, both as a means of drawing attention to Archives resources and, since I wrote most of them myself, as a forced draft method of achieving a thorough knowledge of the holdings. The papers of Walt Kuhn, Elizabeth McCausland, David Smith, Rockwell Kent, William Page, Kenneth Hayes Miller, Jervis McEntee, and the Macbeth Gallery were among those I immersed myself in.

Another early expedient was the publication of documents, either singly or in series. Letters, reminiscences, diaries, and oral history interviews have their own intrinsic appeal, and with a brief introduction to set the context they offer information and insights in the most direct possible manner. At their best they have an animated or intimate style in welcome contrast to some of the dry if more analytical prose of professional scholars. What began then as a partial solution to the problem of finding enough interesting copy became one of the *Journal's* most useful features.

When the Archives joined the Smithsonian in 1970, it established a series of regional offices, which brought an immense increase in the flow of new collections. The *Journal* expanded as well, with a separate department devoted to regional reports and, because production could no longer be handled on an in-house basis, with articles from university and museum scholars. More and better quality illustrations were used, design conspicuously improved, and the cover, previously a battleship grey, burst forth in color. Illustrated covers first appeared in 1981 and a book review section in 1984. . . .

### Garnett McCoy

From reading this extract, you would never know that the man who wrote it made a rather large, if uncelebrated, contribution to scholarship on American art.

This is partly due to his personality and generation. In 1963, scholarship (and the accumulation of papers and microfilms that attended it) was still a gentlemanly pursuit admired as an end in itself. Staffed by men like E. P. Richardson, William Woolfenden, and Garnett—knowledgeable, unhurried (Garnett used to say that a gentleman never hurries), self-possessed, and single-minded—the journal was a simple means to report on the young organization's progress.

Soon, though, as Garnett's sly and understated history tells in greater detail, an unstoppable momentum took hold, and the *Journal's* role expanded. As the collections came in—and what collections!—the membership was kept informed. Descriptions and characterizations of





the waves of important materials being donated drew interested scholars; and those scholars (and their friends) began to widen and deepen their studies of American art. The *Journal*, happy both to plug the Archives' holdings and further scholarship, published their efforts.

During his tenure Garnett shaped the *Journal* and marked it with his own easygoing but deliberately pitched voice. Not much given to declarations of any kind, he gave his readers real substance, based on primary documents, presented with clarity and precision. Deeply committed to political engagement, for example, he expressed his interest not by editorializing, but by publishing, over decades, his own writing and writing by other scholars, many of whom were guided by Garnett to undiscovered subjects, materials of study, and new ideas. Along the way he cultivated qualities that are now out of fashion: literary grace, a finely judged sense of historical context and appropriateness, subtlety, and a complete absence of braggadocio.

Since Garnett wrote his history, the *Journal* has been redesigned and relaunched as a full-color publication, and we wanted to celebrate our past by republishing some of our favorite pieces in the new format.

Rereading the run of the *Journal*, it was absolutely impossible to choose eight or ten "Best" articles. Instead, we chose five pieces that were representative of subjects to which the *Journal* has made lasting contributions: postwar painting in America; artists and politics; the history of collecting and museums; the history of modernism in the early twentieth century; and American art and artists in the nineteenth century.

Several of the articles are favorites of Garnett's, but space limitations have prevented us from including some of his own pieces. These are well worth looking up, especially for anyone interested in artists and politics in the United States, friendships between artists, or the history of American artists during the nineteenth century.

Finally, we asked some noted experts and long-time users of the Archives to comment on the occasion of the *Journal's* birthday. Their responses to what was a rather loose assignment have been personal and general, but they all testify clearly to the Archives'—and *Journal's*—continuing success at turning information into scholarship.

As Garnett described, a healthy infrastructure to support American art scholarship is now well established. Today, the Archives of American Art is the world's preeminent repository of collections on the history of the visual arts in America, with approximately 4,500 collections—over 16 million items and 2,000-plus oral histories.

Technology is playing a greater role in our mission. We now make available to our users something like 852,000 digital files, a number that is increasing at a rate of 3,000 each week, and—moving farther and farther away from a four-page bulletin and some microfilm readers—we now match people not just with documents, but with images and, increasingly, sound, film, and video. 🎧

## DARCY TELL

*Opposite: The Archives' first publication, a four-page bulletin, 1960.*



*A sample of felt that Bob Morris used in one of his works, 1967.*

# 50 YEARS

## The Open Drawer: Archives for Archives' Sake

Lucy R. Lippard

*Starting an archive is like raising rabbits. No one is truly prepared for the numbers or the ramifications. Pandora's Box was an archive. I have initiated a couple of archives—on women artists, now at the Rutgers Douglass College library, and the PAD/D (Political Art Documentation/Distribution) Archive at MoMA—and am now involved in one focusing on art and the environment at the Nevada Museum of Art. At a recent meeting about the latter, someone called an archive a “cultural core sample,” comparing it to ice cores and hydrological soil cores (we were meeting at the Desert Research Institute in Reno). The word archive is in fact related to archaeology, to the cultural layers that are bulwarks against forgetting and being “forgotten by history”—the great fear of artists expecting posterity to remember them. The Archives of American Art goes deep into another mountain of data that forms our visual culture, and you never know what might come up from the depths.*

*Although institutional memory is usually selective and/or rejective, an archive is most valuable for its multiple values and viewpoints. Archivists must aspire to the ultimate impossibility of being “democratic” or all-inclusive, even*

*reserving deliberately (con)temporary or “disposable” artworks (many of them made with short-term political goals in mind). Archives are tucked away for the future, and some see little use for them. But few can resist their riches once the drawer has been opened.*

*The Archives of American Art (I can vouch for this) has accepted a lot of material that at first glance seems to be relatively meaningless—at least until the match is made, until the person interested in that one insanely specific detail is let loose in the collection and finds what she or he is looking for. That researcher's eureka moment validates all the time and space devoted to archiving “ephemera” (as my librarian mentor, Bernard Karpel of the Museum of Modern Art, called all that pretty much uncategorizable stuff that frames an artist's or artworker's life).*

*Dada and Conceptual art were my own crucial influences. When text and art merge, or at least meet on the same page, they revive an interest and respect for the encyclopedic, the snapshot, the odd bits of images and information that add up to new perspectives. Pioneer Conceptualist Douglas Huebler aspired to making art “about everything.” In *Archive Fever* 1996 (pp. 20, 23), Jacques Derrida describes the archive as “the cupboard, the coffin, the prison cell, the cistern, the reservoir . . . enlisting in the infinite.” Someday soon, however, “everything” will be online and truly “ephemeral.” It remains to be seen how archivists will deal with that situation.*

*Nudists Swimming,  
Gymnos Magazine  
(September 1960), p. 7.*



*First published in the  
Archives of American Art Journal  
38, nos. 1–2 (1998), 28–38.*

# Social Nudism, Masculinity, and the Male **Nude** in the Work of William Theo Brown and Wynn Chamberlain in the 1960s

Among the circuitous routes American painters traveled in the early sixties to revitalize the nude, perhaps the most interesting, because the least anticipated, was the brief infatuation with nudist magazines found in the work of William Theo Brown and Wynn Chamberlain. Both turned to nudist magazine photographs in an attempt to find pictorial sources for a liberated male body. Often capturing the spontaneous, the unexpected, and the supposedly natural activity of naked people, nudist photographs, both painters found, could be appropriated to depict divergent masculinities. Brown appropriated images of bathers from a series of Scandinavian magazines to revive Arcadian themes that gave him an acceptable thematic cover for paintings that celebrated homosexual desire. Within a natural environment of sea and sand, Brown posited an ideal world outside postwar

**DAVID MCCARTHY**

In Germany, social nudism was a utopian experiment in organized, alternative, communal living, where consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and meat was discouraged.

proscriptions against male sexual bonding, a world that invited a fondly nostalgic, yet erotically charged, gaze to play across the bodies of young men engaged in such physical activities as swimming and wrestling. In contrast, Chamberlain used photographs of adolescents from a Southern California publication as models for a series of portraits of his friends—including the poets Allen Ginsberg and Frank O'Hara and the artist Ruth Kligman. Clearly staged in a studio setting, the portraits offered a playfully humorous construction of male camaraderie that extended to women as well. When taken together, the paintings by Brown and Chamberlain provided their audiences with a frank celebration of the undressed male (and sometimes female) body through the putatively conventional model of the nude.

What I wish to argue in this essay is that Brown's and Chamberlain's appropriation of photographs from nudist magazines was something more than either an amusing anomaly in the history of postwar American painting or a Pop colonization of mass culture. The desire to celebrate the undressed body, particularly the male body, through painterly representation was conceived at a moment when the narratives of containment in cold war America—including that of the closet—were beginning to fracture.<sup>1</sup> Brown and Chamberlain produced their alternative images of men at the beginning of the breakup of many all-encompassing and supposedly normative masculine codes, which were tracked by several sociologists in the fifties and criticized by Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown. As we shall see, the artists found that by appropriating imagery from nudist magazines they could produce nudes that contributed to this postwar revision of male identity.

Social nudism dated to the earliest years of the twentieth century. Founded in Germany before World War I by Richard Ungewitter, the movement was a utopian experiment in organized, alternative, communal living, based on the theory that shedding one's clothing had therapeutic and hygienic benefits that would help to alleviate, if not eradicate, many social ills.<sup>2</sup> In his book *Die Nacktheit* (1905), Ungewitter proposed a society in which nudism would be practiced by all people, regardless of age or gender. Clothes would be worn for comfort or decoration, not out of shame. The first nudist camp in Germany was organized at the same time by Paul Zimmerman.<sup>3</sup> Members were expected to participate in organized calisthenics early each morning under the guidance of a professional instructor, and the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and meat was discouraged. Following the war, nudism, newly designated "Freikörperkultur" (FKK) or "free body culture," dramatically increased in popularity. Numerous camps opened across Germany with organized gymnastics as the common mode of exercise.

As practiced in the United States, social nudism was more informal and less athletic than its German counterpart. The first permanent nudist camp in the United States, Sky Farm in Millington, New Jersey, opened in 1932 under the guidance of Kurt Barthel, a former FKK member. Because Barthel was neither vegetarian (he

later claimed that “vegetarians are lunatics”) nor particularly interested in gymnastics or other regimented physical activities (he also smoked), the variant of nudism that emerged in the United States lacked the regimented utopianism of its German prototype.<sup>4</sup> This reorientation is evident in the American nudist magazines, which often featured individuals participating in a variety of leisurely activities that advertised the wholesomeness of social nudism. They frolic in swimming pools, play volleyball, line up for tanning and beauty contests, and as often as not they eat. Family groupings were common, with attention given to the traditional unit of mother, father, and child. Photographs of nudists barbecuing over large grills, eating breakfast, and mowing the lawn insisted that these people were not too different from most suburban Americans on a warm weekend afternoon.

Through different eyes, however, nudist camps could look less than wholesome, a point well demonstrated in an unpublished photographic essay by Diane Arbus, begun in 1963.<sup>5</sup> Her essay revealed the paradoxical and conflicted nature of American social nudism, which encouraged display of the body while attempting, often unsuccessfully, to deny its full erotic life. Strict rules of behavior were enforced in the camps, and Arbus noted that “the two grounds for expulsion . . . are staring too hard and getting an erection.”<sup>6</sup> Dancing, drinking, touching, and unauthorized photographing were also grounds for expulsion, as was membership in the Communist Party, although how one identified a red out of uniform was never explained. At first Arbus rather flatly declared social nudism to be “a good life. You turn one color all over in the sun and the water feels fine. Everyone leaves their cares behind. It’s a little like heaven.”<sup>7</sup>

However, Arbus also found that the rhetoric of nudism was out of sync with her actual experience of it. She seemed to recognize, as did the painters, that the curious result of nudism’s proscriptions was that the ostensible liberation of the body came at the cost of a severe curtailment of other, very human, behaviors. The movement was apparently less open than the magazine photographs suggested, and it was not in any way associated with a desire to foster social or sexual freedom. When William Theo Brown visited a nudist camp in the early sixties, he found it hopelessly repressed.<sup>8</sup> Wynn Chamberlain, who encountered some aging nudists in Old Lyme, Connecticut, where he rented a house each summer in the early sixties, found social nudism to be “dumb” in its naiveté and obtuseness, as if Americans who wished to liberate themselves and their bodies could only do so in a literal, and typically American, way.<sup>9</sup>

While working in Southern California in the early and mid-sixties, William Theophilus [Theo] Brown (b. 1919) used several



*Family with Kite (detail),  
Nudist Sun 1, no. 3  
(December 1964), p. 38.*

Scandinavian nudist magazines as an important source for a series of bather paintings. Cultivating social nudism's emphasis on physical vitality, his nudes articulated a lyrical sensibility that was later echoed in the countercultural emphasis on the reunification of body and nature. Brown's depictions of the male nude also suggested a

homoerotic response to the sources, and it is therefore possible to read his paintings as something like an open closet, a safe space into which he could project his fantasies in the years before gay liberation provided gay men and women with an acceptable forum for stating their desires directly. If we interpret his paintings as deliberately crossing the boundary between a familiar archaicism and a plea for picturing gay desire, we can also understand them as profoundly utopian in the sense that they envision a place in which postwar proscriptions against homosexuality might disappear, if only momentarily. For the artist, these paintings of a mostly male paradise represented "my idea of what I'd like to be doing; the kind of life I believe in."<sup>10</sup>

Such a life, or rather such a sustained representation, was the product of over a decade's work in which Brown attempted to make the figure the central motif of his paintings.<sup>11</sup> As a student of Amédée Ozenfant in New York and Fernand Léger in Paris in the late forties, and later at the University of California, Berkeley, where he earned an M.A. in art in 1953, Brown was well trained in modernist abstraction, but he also had a deep sympathy for figuration. Brown lived in New York City intermittently for six years before he settled in 1952 in the Bay Area, where he quickly became an integral part of the figurative movement and often participated in a drawing group that included Richard Diebenkorn, David Park, and Elmer Bischoff. The group, which first began meeting to draw from life in 1955, wished to reject academic poses for the models in favor of something more informal.<sup>12</sup> At the time, Brown was producing gestural paintings of football players and other athletes, derived from photographs in newspapers and magazines. Talking about the sports paintings in 1957 with the art historian Paul Mills, but equally valid for the later nudes, Brown announced, "I wanted to do figure compositions but I was tired of the classic kind with everybody just standing around, so I used photos in sports magazines as a starting point."<sup>13</sup>

To avoid poses that evoked the ambience of "art"—"the classic kind"—Brown turned to nudist magazines when he began producing nudes. Most often, the figures, either singly or in groups, appear outdoors and are almost always engaged in some physical action. Typical of the paintings is *Muscatine Diver*, in which the action of two men, seen wading and diving in the water, shows Brown's concern for rendering the human body in motion—a concern that first surfaced in his sports paintings of the preceding decade.<sup>14</sup>



William Theo Brown, *Muscatine Diver*, 1962–1963. Oil on canvas, 60 x 40 in., The Oakland Museum of California.



Brown repeatedly used nudist magazines as sources for his nudes.<sup>15</sup> Images of families bathing in the surf, such as *Orange Bathers* (1963, present whereabouts unknown), *Adam and Eve* (1963, present whereabouts unknown), or *Family Bathing* (1964, destroyed) express a belief in reintegrating the body with nature.<sup>16</sup> They also revise traditional bather imagery because they lack either a mythological or a consistently and overtly heterosexual justification. The sensibility evident in such works is clearly erotic, particularly in the possibilities for male touching, but at the same time the erotic drive seems diffused throughout the scenes. Here, Eros is conceived as a force of sociability shared in the light of day in spaces that seem open to everybody (even if the nudist camps where the photographs were first shot were limited to members only).

Critics recognized that Brown's imagery evoked deep-seated arcadian themes from past Western art. By 1966 the art critic E. M. Polley noted that "Brown has developed the Bay Area style of figurative painting into a near-classic idiom."<sup>17</sup> The playwright William Inge, who wrote an appreciation for Brown's solo exhibition at the Felix Landau Gallery in Los Angeles in 1967, articulated the relationship between Brown's recent painting and its explicit celebration of arcadianism, stating:

*It is easy to identify William Theo Brown as a Western [Californian] artist. His paintings appear to have grown out-of-doors, like plants. And there is a freedom of form and color that seems, like Western scenery, to know no boundaries. And the human figure takes its place as a natural part of the landscape, unseparated from it. . . . Man is not portrayed against a physical world that serves him as a mere background. He is an integral part of that world.*<sup>18</sup>

The issue of an unbounded nature identified by Inge allows us to see just how important these paintings were to Brown in conceiving the "kind of life" he believed in. Unboundedness in the works seems to be a metaphor for lack of sexual containment. The obvious potential for sexual freedom implied—although not stated directly—within Inge's response, may have been affected by his own, largely closeted, homosexuality. Freedom without boundaries, perfect integration of men and nature, this seems to be an ideal fictional world in which men enjoyed their bodies openly.

In the postwar years, as the historian Thomas Waugh has argued, sports, art, and nature provided a convenient veil for articulating gay desire within domains more acceptable to a hegemonic, heterosexual society.<sup>19</sup> This was done mainly through physique magazines, although Waugh also noted how important nudist magazines had become by the mid-sixties for an emergent gay visual culture, even if nudist photographs were not intended to elicit gay desire. Nudist magazines were legal, they were more readily available than more explicit materials, and therefore they could be used by gay men, Theo Brown included, to help them to represent their desires, even if only obliquely.

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By the late sixties, when Inge wrote his appreciation, Brown was moving further away from the photographic roots of his nudist-inspired paintings of the early and mid-sixties toward a generic arcadianism. Often, anonymous individuals freely occupied the natural world in an easy, uncomplicated existence, celebrated through physical activity, as, for instance, in a painting from 1967, *Icarus*. Here, framed against the vast blue expanse of sky and sea, a male figure momentarily hangs, as if suspended, in mid-air. By this time Brown had completely transformed and transcended the banalities of nudist imagery from which he doubtless took inspiration for this painting. Gone is the ersatz pretence of desexualized sameness, and in its place is a frank celebration of the male body unhampered by the strictures of postwar civilization. At a time when in the hands of many other artists, Philip Pearlstein or Tom Wesselmann for example, the nude was presented as inert or ironically objectified, Brown celebrated the human body as lyrical, vital, and ecstatic. More importantly, he demonstrated that gay desire could be announced in a public, if still coded, language.

While Theo Brown was appropriating nudist magazines to paint male nudes in natural settings, Wynn Chamberlain (b.1928) was using similar sources to very different effect. A brief announcement in *Women's Wear Daily* for Friday, 15 January 1965, tantalizingly announced the opening of Chamberlain's "Naked Nude" exhibition. In slightly salacious terms, viewers were invited to review the paintings:

*Coming up at the Fischbach Gallery . . . a one-man show of the painting of Win [sic] Chamberlain. It opens Feb. 2d, and features realistic portraits of all of the artist's friends standing very naked and waving. If you happen to be able to arrange an invitation to the opening, the subjects will all be present, which should make for some rather amusing conversation to say the least.*<sup>20</sup>

Chamberlain's friends included a number of poets, among them Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara, and Diane di Prima, who were sympathetic to his attempt to present the body frankly and joyously. The exhibition presented Chamberlain's attempts to paint a contemporary nude that addressed topical issues relating to the human body.

Like many artists of his generation, Chamberlain came to his characteristic treatment of the nude after trying out several subjects and styles. For most of the fifties he lived on the periphery of the New York art scene.<sup>21</sup> His magic realist paintings of classical and Christian subjects were known to a small circle of artists and collectors and had received positive reviews in the leading art magazines.<sup>22</sup> In his exhibitions at the Hewitt Gallery in 1954 and 1957 and at the Gallery G[rippi] in 1959, he showed some nudes, but they were often part of a larger narrative or allegorical composition. His interest in egg tempera and in detailed figuration kept him separate from the predominant interests of the Abstract Expressionists and the second generation of the New York School.



Before moving into the style of figure painting shown at the Fischbach Gallery in 1965, two things shaped Chamberlain's approach to the nude. In the late fifties he attempted to paint nonobjectively, but with a strong debt to natural forms. For subject matter he turned to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), the story of which he found analogous to his own struggle as an artist.<sup>23</sup> After finishing the series, which was characterized by expressionistic facture and color, he found that he was happier with at least some figurative armature for his paintings.<sup>24</sup> In late summer 1963, Chamberlain, Andy Warhol, the underground actor Taylor Mead, and the poet Gerard Malanga drove cross-country for an exhibition of Warhol's work at

*William Theo Brown, Icarus, 1967. Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 in., The Oakland Museum of California, gift of the artist.*

the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles.<sup>25</sup> While there, Chamberlain found several nudist magazines, including the recently released first issue of *Teenage Nudist*. Challenged by these photographs, he returned to figure painting. With great anticipation and excitement he wrote to the critic and photographer Carl van Vechten, "My work is coming out of a state of long transition, about four years and I hope to be able to show it soon. . . . The new work is figurative and wild."<sup>26</sup>

His first paintings of nudes were inspired directly by the nudist magazines, as in an untitled painting included in the "Arena of Love" exhibition at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles in 1965. Chamberlain adopted the basic pose of the figures, slightly adjusting the arms of the two women who flank the man in between. All three appear to be striding happily and confidently toward the camera.

Chamberlain sought to retain the conviviality and joy of the prototypes in his copies while also making significant changes that reveal the distance between his paintings and their sources. His nudes smile, walk, interact, exercise, and enjoy their communal



Above: Wynn Chamberlain, *Untitled*, 1963. Oil on canvas (destroyed).

Right: *Nudists Walking*, *Teenage Nudist 1*, no. 1 (September 1963), p. 20.



nakedness, but the effect of the paintings shown at the Dwan Gallery is different from that of the photographs, largely because the surrounding environment is reduced to two color planes—one green, one blue. The alterations help to define Chamberlain's attitude toward the nude and its importance in American society in the mid-sixties. He explained in a statement released in 1966:

*The nude for me is not an exercise in classic form, rather it is a medium for showing certain subversive joy I feel the naked body expresses. . . . These figures are placed in a sort of abstract space environment which suggests but does not conform to nature because that is the space we are living in now—one which becomes increasingly manmade and less natural.*<sup>27</sup>

By eliminating all spatial references except a horizon line, and by reducing the variety of the natural world to two simple areas of green and brown, Chamberlain schematized the natural world to make his point about creeping civilization and the need to reassert the body's importance. The simplified background places all pictorial emphasis on the three naked bodies and thus transforms the nudist insistence on the integration of body and nature into a strikingly direct encounter between the beholder of the painting and these youthful, energetic people.

When Chamberlain felt he had exhausted the material from the nudist magazines, he began a series of portraits. The progression from nudist source to portrait nude was quite logical. He maintained the celebration of the body and the informal, snapshot qualities of the original photographs by posing his subjects in his studio and then photographing them. However, the fact that the portraits are of recognizable people in the New York art world substantially alters our response to the paintings. Rather than being anonymous nudists who were chosen to promulgate the nudist way of life, the poets and painters are specific New Yorkers. Their willingness to appear naked was a public manifestation of their attitudes toward both their bodies and societal norms about displaying the body.

The first people to pose for Chamberlain were the painters Mike Goldberg and Allan D'Arcangelo and the filmmaker Naomi Levine. Levine was particularly sympathetic to Chamberlain's proposed series of portrait nudes because she had recently had copies of one of her movies destroyed by a New York film-processing lab because it included nudity.<sup>28</sup> In *Figures*, the poet John Giorno appears to the left of the artist Ruth Kligman, while Chamberlain himself stands to her right. In other portraits, such as the diptych *The New York Poets* (Collection of Earl and Camilla McGrath), Chamberlain featured Joe Brainard, Frank O'Hara, and Joe LeSueur, with Frank Lima standing behind them. In the first painting they appear clothed, in the second nude. *Allen and Peter* depicts the Beat poets-polemicists-celebrities Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky posing for Chamberlain's benefit. Other poets who appeared in the portraits are Tony Towle and Bill Berkson. Most

The alterations help to define Chamberlain's attitude toward the nude and its importance in American society in the mid-sixties.

often the poets and painters appear fully frontal and acknowledge our gaze by waving and maintaining eye contact.

The poets understood Chamberlain's desire to paint the nude, supported his attempt to introduce the body as both innocent and vital, and often celebrated the erotic life of the body in their



Wynn Chamberlain, *Figures*, 1964.

own work.<sup>29</sup> Ginsberg was an ideal choice for inclusion in the *Naked Nude* series. The historian Morris Dickstein has noted that "Ginsberg argued for greater sensuality, a kinder, gentler, even effeminate sexuality to temper American machismo. . . . Ginsberg enmeshed sexuality in spiritual, political, even cosmic complications."<sup>30</sup> His [Ginsberg's] public disrobing, no matter how exhibitionistic or calculating, was similar in motivation to Chamberlain's desire to force public awareness of the body through the medium of his painting. At the same time Chamberlain was producing the series, Ginsberg wrote that the Beat revolution was involved in creating a "social space for the soul to exist manifested in this world," with the soul defined as "feeling bodily consciousness."<sup>31</sup> Significantly, in the announcement Ginsberg wrote for the exhibition he equated Chamberlain's "naked" with the ecstatic poetry of Blake and the celebration of the body by Whitman, writing:

*I'm interested in nakedness, no I love my own nakedness, I love my old love's nakedness, I love anyone's nakedness that expresses their acceptancy of being born in this body in this*

*flesh on this planet that will die. This flesh is only an episode, what will we do, reject it because of liver complaints? Some people misinterpret Eastern texts to say the body is shit, Blake and Whitman interpret gnostic texts to say the body is the only body in eternity, better live in it while it exists. The feelings that play in the body are its spirit, and without the body there's no place to play.<sup>32</sup>*

By presenting the poets and painters frontally nude and by recording their idiosyncratic anatomies, Chamberlain also frankly acknowledged the male and female body as it actually existed. The portraits are a celebration not simply of the body, but of specific bodies—bodies in the here and now. Even the title of the exhibition, "The Naked Nude," was an acknowledgment of Chamberlain's desire to conceive of specific, unidealized bodies as worthy of the status normally accorded more traditional nudes. Kenneth Clark's classic definition—that the nude was "a balanced, prosperous, and confident body: the body reformed," while the naked was the body

merely deprived of clothing—provided Chamberlain a reference point for framing the issues.<sup>33</sup> He was interested in the dichotomy established by Clark and wished to explore it in the series, attempting in his paintings to blur the differences between the two.<sup>34</sup> In the press release for the exhibition, Colin Clark, son of Kenneth, reiterated Ginsberg's central point about liberation, insisting that "Chamberlain's figures radiate a feeling which all of us would like to experience—the liberation of the body personifying the liberation of the soul."<sup>35</sup> Referring to the two Clarks, the critic Nicolas Calas, writing for the *Village Voice*, found Chamberlain's figures to be more nude than naked.<sup>36</sup>

Even though Chamberlain did not pursue the portraits after the exhibition at Fischbach (and in fact gave up painting in the later sixties to begin a career in writing), his series demonstrated his seriousness of purpose.<sup>37</sup> He shared with Theo Brown the faith that painting could present the human body in situations that could be construed as potentially liberating. By representing the body, both painters depicted a world that was just coming into view, a world in which the body was free and male play and affection might be an alternative to restrictive standards of masculinity. It is to this broader world that we now turn, because Chamberlain's paintings, like Brown's, gain their cultural valence when measured against the dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality that suffused postwar American culture.

When we review the activities pictured in Brown's and Chamberlain's paintings, we see men swimming and splashing in the water at ocean's edge, or lining up, sometimes with women, to have their photographs taken in an artist's studio on the Bowery, walking toward the artist as if the simplest and happiest way for them to interact with the world was without the hindrance of clothing. All of these activities are playful, and I would argue that the concept of play is central to the nudist-inspired nudes.<sup>38</sup> We can see that in the early and mid-sixties Brown and Chamberlain were playing with the traditions of the nude, crossing from the domain of painting into that of nudist photography and then back again, to suggest how the male, and sometimes female, body might perform. These paintings easily slide from the realm of art, which in the early sixties was still viewed as autonomous, into the realms of sexuality and gender, thereby suggesting another field of play.<sup>39</sup> Brown's and Chamberlain's emphasis on play as both a pleasurable activity and type of performance was conceived in opposition to specific postwar discourses on painting and the body that defined "proper" masculinity narrowly.

For instance, Harold Rosenberg's idea of painting as a form of virile action, analogous to the drama of a sporting event enacted in an arena or ring, became a well-worked trope in critical formulations about American painting—specifically Abstract Expressionism—in the postwar period.<sup>40</sup> With its dual emphasis on the mastery of unwieldy materials and flight into the unknown, Abstract Expressionism carried with it the promise of existential

profundity, of one man's lonely quest for meaning. The test of any painting's success was its seriousness in confronting the difficult task of transforming experience into expression.

In its emphasis on vigorous performance as a necessary precondition for successful production, Rosenberg's idea of action painting was in accord with broader concepts about the body and masculinity that were, by the early sixties, under critique.<sup>41</sup> In particular, the Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse and the literary scholar Norman O. Brown called for a polymorphous re-sexualization of the body in order to transform it from an instrument of labor into one of play.<sup>42</sup> For both theorists, play was not so much a return to a mythic or idealized prelapsarian state before the acquisition of sexual difference—such a return was impossible anyway—so much as it was a way to dissolve, if only momentarily, the rigid boundaries that marked difference. They hoped that something sexually ambiguous, and therefore more exciting in its possibilities, might emerge through play. For Brown, additionally, play was the “essential mode of activity of a free . . . humanity,” and because it is like art in conforming to the pleasure principle, it could “seduce us into the struggle against repression.”<sup>43</sup> Art was essential for human liberation because it was the product of conscious volition and it could provide a forum for articulating one's desires for how the world should be. Play might serve to counter the performance principle, which, as David Riesman, William H. Whyte, and other sociologists argued in the fifties and early sixties, found its manifestation in the ethic of corporate capitalism; an uncritical acceptance of commercial consumption within the affluent society; and the necessity of subordinating individual desires and sexual identity to the needs of the state in its cold war with the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup>

Norman O. Brown's view of play, which found an echo in Theo Brown's and Wynn Chamberlain's treatment of the body, particularly the male body, was considerably more than utopian fantasy. It was an important means of resistance to postwar concepts of sexual behavior as strictly reproductive and heterosexual, and of gender as rigidly defined.<sup>45</sup> Both artists were more than familiar with sexual repression from their experiences in the postwar years.<sup>46</sup> Brown lived in San Francisco from 1960 to 1961, a period that witnessed brutal police crackdowns on gays and lesbians following two widely noted scandals that drew attention to the large gay community in North Beach.<sup>47</sup> Gay bars were raided and closed, patrons were arrested, gay films, and pulp fiction were confiscated. Brown's move to Southern California in late 1961 must certainly have been affected by the recent public intolerance in the city he had called home for nearly a decade. Within this history, his growing use of nudist magazines can be framed as a safe cover for advocating male camaraderie and as a public protest against sexual repression.

Chamberlain's experiences were somewhat different from Brown's. As a bisexual, he moved between gay and straight communities, although by 1962 his studio on the Bowery was a popular meeting place for gay artists and writers such as Andy Warhol and



William Burroughs. Chamberlain's own sexual proclivities, as well as his association with and support of others who, like Allen Ginsberg, challenged the sexual status quo, undoubtedly affected his choice to make the male body the focus of his *Naked Nude* series.

Whereas through most of the fifties gender and sexuality were subjected to stultifying control as part of cold war paranoia, by the dawn of the following decade there were signs that the narrative of sexual containment was fracturing. It was a moment that witnessed a surge in publication of erotic magazines and books for straight and gay audiences as well as an increasing amount of attention given to the nude in American painting.<sup>48</sup> The introduction of the Pill in 1960 unhinged heterosexual intercourse from its putatively reproductive function and effectively transferred it to the realm of recreational pleasure. Hugh Hefner had already parlayed his heterosexist fantasies of male consumption into a formidable financial empire. Throughout the late fifties and early sixties, the Supreme Court cleared several important, sexually explicit, literary texts, including works by Henry Miller, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs. At the same time, the Supreme Court also cleared nudist magazines for distribution through the mail, arguing that social nudism constituted a viable system of belief and therefore was defensible under the First Amendment.<sup>49</sup>

This general opening in American culture found resonance in paintings that celebrated the male nude instead of closeting it and frankly acknowledged the erotic life of the body. Allen Ginsberg's refrain "that a new kind of man has come to his bliss/to end the cold war he has borne/against his own kind flesh/since the days of the snake" served to announce the radical shift in masculinity that took place in these years.<sup>50</sup> For Ginsberg, as for Brown, Chamberlain, and many other "cultural radicals" in sixties America, playfulness was altogether less dangerous, less serious, and less involved with macho bravado than the models previously deemed acceptable for masculine behavior, whether in the realm of postwar painting or in American culture generally.<sup>51</sup>

Figure painting in the sixties was not a simple instance of revivalism—of individual talent negotiated and legitimized within a living tradition—but an ambitious and challenging project. Brown and Chamberlain undertook the difficult, but historically necessary, task of bringing into view, and thereby into public discourse, the possibility and necessity of redrawing the boundaries of gender and sexual identity. In so doing, they suggested that cultural change might be enacted not through the action of painting but through a joyous act of representation, in which the human body could enjoy a wider realm of pleasure and public display than was previously thought possible. ♣



*William Theo Brown, On the Rocks, n.d.*

- 1 Alan Nadel identifies several discursive fields within which the narrative of containment operated. They include "corporate production and biological reproduction, military deployment and industrial technology . . . the cult of domesticity and the fetishizing of domestic security, the arms race and atoms for peace," and they were ostensibly marshaled to contain the spread of communism (see Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age [Durham: Duke University Press, 1995], 3). He also notes the similarity between the narrative of containment and that of the closet in the fifties and early sixties; *ibid.*, 28–29. Like Nadel, my definition of the closet as an active metaphor for denying and controlling homosexual desire within heterosexual culture while also negotiating heterosexuality as a putatively stable phenomenon derives from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
- 2 Historical information on social nudism is taken from Fred Ilfeld, Jr., and Roger Lauer, Social Nudism in America (New Haven: College and University Press, 1964), 21–40; and William Hartman, Marilyn Fithian, and Donald Johnson, Nudist Society: An Authoritative, Complete Study of Nudism in America (New York: Crown Publishers, 1970), 15–39.
- 3 Ilfeld and Lauer, Social Nudism, 26.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 5 See "Notes on the Nudist Camp" in Diane Arbus: Magazine Work, Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel, eds., (New York: Aperture, 1984), 68–69.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 69.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 His few experiences with social nudism were not particularly pleasant because he found the camps repressive, and even the photographs advertising the nudist life style struck him as fatuous because they seemed to celebrate a fake healthiness devoid of all erotic interest. He preferred the environment of the nude beaches around Malibu, California (where he lived in the mid-sixties), which he found to be less repressed (letter to author, 20 November 1989; and interview with author, San Francisco, 5 June 1993).
- 9 Wynn Chamberlain, interview with author, Quogue, New York, 5 and 6 December 1989.
- 10 Quoted in Yvette Friedli Shaak, "The Bay Area School of Figurative Painting: An Analysis" (master's thesis, California State College at Long Beach, 1967), 47.
- 11 Biographical information on Theo Brown is drawn from Caroline Jones, Bay Area Figurative Art, 1950–1965 (Berkeley: University of California Press and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1990), 86–98; and from interview with author, San Francisco, 5 June 1993.
- 12 Noreen Mary Richeda noted the impact of Bischoff and Diebenkorn on Brown's figure paintings in the fifties and sixties (see "The San Francisco Bay Area 'New-Figurative' Painters, 1950–1965" [Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1969], 138–144).
- 13 Quoted in Paul Mills, Contemporary Bay Area Figurative Painting (Oakland: Oakland Art Museum, 1957), 16.
- 14 Critics recognized and applauded Brown's emphasis on action. For instance, Knute Stiles argued in relation to such paintings that "the nude here is not posing: he is wrestling, diving, playing volley ball . . . always actively engaged" (see "William Theo Brown," Artforum 3 [December 1964], 50).
- 15 In a letter to the author, Brown explained his interest in nudist magazine photographs as twofold: first, they were available and inexpensive, especially as compared to model's fees; second, they provided him with groups of individuals interacting in three-dimensional configurations. He purchased the magazines in adult bookstores in San Francisco and Los Angeles (letter to author, 20 November 1989).
- 16 For photographs of the paintings see the William Theo Brown Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., microfilm reel 921, frames 108–318.
- 17 E. M. Polley, "East Bay," Artforum 4 (May 1966), 57.
- 18 William Inge, "William Theo Brown," in William Theo Brown (Los Angeles: Felix Landau Gallery, 1967), n.p.
- 19 See Thomas Waugh, "Gay Male Culture in North America During the Fifties: Emerging from the Underground," Parallelogramme 12, no. 1 (1986), n.p.
- 20 Ted James, Jr., "Art," Women's Wear Daily (15 January 1965), n.p., clipping in Wynn Chamberlain File, Fischbach Gallery Records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Fischbach Gallery Records).
- 21 The following biographical information on Chamberlain is drawn largely from my interview with him, 5 and 6 December 1989.
- 22 See Frank O'Hara, "Reviews and Previews: Wynn Chamberlain," Artnews 53 (May 1954), 62; and Robert Rosenblum, "Wyn [sic] Chamberlain," Art Digest 28 (1 May 1954), 22.
- 23 See Chamberlain's statement in Elwyn Chamberlain: Paintings for 'Pilgrim's Progress', exh. cat. (New York: Nordness Gallery, 1961), n.p., (Vertical File, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution).
- 24 In 1962 he wrote: "Nature is the starting point. My reverence for it keeps me from being a non-objective painter . . . I don't want to reform or protest in my painting, nor do I wish to withdraw into a world where I paint about painting" (quoted in Lee Nordness and Allen S. Weller, eds., Art USA Now 2 [New York: Viking Press, 1962], 445).
- 25 The event is recounted in Victor Bockris, The Life and Death of Andy Warhol (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 135–136; and in Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, Popism: The Warhol '60s (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1980), 35–36.
- 26 Wynn Chamberlain to Carl van Vechten, 3 September 1963, Carl van Vechten Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
- 27 Wynn Chamberlain, "Statement," in Rolf-Gunter Dienst, "Artists Say: 'Nudes Now,' Ten Painters: Contemporary Approaches to the Figure," Art Voices 3 (Summer 1966), 43.
- 28 Warhol and Hackett, Popism, 43–44.
- 29 Ginsberg was perhaps the most explicit of the postwar poets in his treatment of sex. His poems, including "Howl," "This Form of Life Needs Sex," and "Who Be Kind To," are reprinted in Ginsberg, Collected Poems 1947–1980 (New York: Harper and Row, 1984). One should also consult the poetry published in the little magazines, particularly Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts, edited by Ed Sanders, which tended to include explicit poetry not reproduced elsewhere.
- Ginsberg's activities were often calculated to promulgate his views and to outrage a public hostile toward homosexuality and bohemianism. He was known to disrobe publicly, and as early as 1958 he envisioned an anthology of contemporary poetry with accompanying photographs of the contributing poets naked (see Barry Miles, Ginsberg: A Biography [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989], 215–216, 243). When his and the other portraits were shown in the "Naked Nude" exhibition at the Fischbach Gallery, the poet Ted Berrigan commented wryly, "It was disappointing not to have the police close the show, but everyone's seen Allen and Peter so often with their clothes off that I guess even the police know by now that it only means love or a poetry reading" (see "Art Chronicle," Kulchur 5 [Fall 1965], 29).
- Chamberlain did run afoul of the Comstock laws because of the male nudity in the exhibition. Some of the flyers announcing the show were impounded by the Post Office because the painting Figures was reproduced on the front (with a statement by Ginsberg on the back). The exhibition was reviewed by New York police, who decided not to close the show after heated discussion with the director of the gallery. Most of the portrait nudes in the exhibition were of men presented frontally (interview with author, 5 and 6 December 1989).
- 30 Morris Dickstein, Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 20.
- 31 Quoted in Richard Candida Smith, Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 151.
- 32 "Chamberlain's Nudes," announcement for the "Naked Nude" exhibition at Fischbach Gallery Records, Wynn Chamberlain file. Chamberlain agreed with Ginsberg's assessment of the portrait nudes, and Blake and Whitman were two of his favorite poets. The importance of Whitman for helping anti-Cold Warriors such as Ginsberg to counter the machismo of American culture in the postwar years is a subject beyond the scope of this essay. A generative study that situates Whitman's constructions of masculinity and gay desire within the context of anti-militaristic paradigms is Michael Moon's essay "Disseminating Whitman," in Ronald R. Butters, John M. Clum, and Michael Moon, eds., Displacing Homophobia: Gay Male Perspectives in Literature and Culture (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 238–244.
- 33 Kenneth Clark, The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 3.
- 34 Sally Chamberlain recalled that while Wynn was at work on the series of portraits, they would frequently review the plates in Clark's book and discuss whether the paintings were of nudes or not. Interview with author, 5 and 6 December 1989.
- 35 Colin Clark, "Press Release: Wynn Chamberlain and the Naked Nude," Wynn Chamberlain file, Fischbach Gallery Records. Looking back, Chamberlain felt the idea of spiritual liberation through liberation of the body was a misconception (interview with author, 5 and 6 December 1989).
- 36 Nicolas Calas, "Art Journal: Chamberlain's Nudes," Village Voice 10 (4 February 1965), 11. Critical reaction to the nudes was often dismissive, at least in the mainstream art press. For example, see Barbara Rose, "Filthy Pictures: Some Chapters in the History of Taste," Artforum 3 (May 1965), 20–25. For a sympathetic response, see Ted Berrigan, "Art Chronicle," 29 December 1989).



Poster for "An Homage to Thomas Eakins," on view at the Fischbach Gallery, 19 April–17 May 1966. Fischbach Gallery Records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

37 Following the exhibition at Fischbach in 1965, Chamberlain wrote to the painter John Wilde about two series of nudes he wanted to produce: one would have been based on a series of photographs of men wrestling by Thomas Eakins; the other would have presented several New York School poets with their wives (see letter to John Wilde, 14 March 1965, John Wilde Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., microfilm reel 1157, frames 661–664).

38 My reading of the concept of play as a type of performance is shaped by Roland Barthes's essay "From Work to Text," in Brian Wallis, ed., Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 169–174.

39 Judith Butler has argued persuasively that gender is a form of performance that involves constant acting or role playing; see Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990).

40 Harold Rosenberg formulated this idea in his famous essay "The American Action Painters" (1952), reprinted in The Tradition of the New (New York: Horizon Press, 1959), 23–39.

41 In this regard it is probably no coincidence that the first exhibition of Chamberlain's nudist-inspired paintings came in the "Arena of Love" exhibition at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles, 5–31 January 1965. One of the earliest attempts to document contemporary erotic art in the sixties, the show was deliberately conceived by John Weber as a parody of Rosenberg's arena of masculine action (John Weber, telephone conversation with author, 2 November 1989).

42 The pivotal texts are Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955) and One-Dimensional Man (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964); and Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1959). The philosophical differences between Marcuse and Brown are too extensive to discuss here. A good starting point for examining these differences is Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counter-Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), 103–120. Brown's interest in literary theory, myth, and, eventually, an ecstatic, Blakean body symbolism, brings his work closer to that of Wynn Chamberlain and Theo Brown, both of whom were well read, than does Marcuse's heavy debt to Marx and German philosophy in general. Hence, I spend more time discussing Norman O. Brown than Marcuse.

43 Brown, Life Against Death, 34, 64.  
44 For instance, see David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney, The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); and William H. Whyte, Jr., The Organization Man (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956).

45 The historian Morris Dickstein has drawn attention to the importance of Brown's thinking in helping to break down the boundaries proscribing masculinity in the fifties and early sixties (see Dickstein, Gates of Eden, 80–88). See also Sally Banes, Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 236, 242–243, 254.

46 Most recently, Maurice Berger has drawn attention to the intense repression directed against Beat culture in the late fifties and early sixties, particularly to all aspects of Beat sexuality (see "Libraries Full of Tears: The Beats and the Law," in Lisa Phillips, ed., Beat Culture and the New America: 1950–1965 [New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995], 123–137).

47 On the history of gay life in postwar San Francisco, see John D'Emilio, "Gay Politics, Gay Community: San Francisco's Experience," in Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University (New York: Routledge, 1992), 74–95. The scandals involved accusations of homophilia during the mayoral campaign in 1959 and the revelation of systematic police extortion of gay bars in the spring of 1960.

48 On homophilic publications see John D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 129–148. I track the surge of interest in the nude in American painting in the postwar years in The Nude in American Painting, 1950–1980 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

49 On the clearance of nudist magazines in the late fifties, see James C. N. Paul and Murray L. Schwartz, Federal Censorship: Obscenity in the Mail (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 152–153; Morris L. Ernst and Alan U. Schwartz, Censorship: The Search for the Obscene (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 259; and Gay Talese, Thy Neighbor's Wife (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 110–111.

50 From "Who Be Kind To," in Ginsberg, Collected Poems, 362.

51 The term "cultural radicals" comes from Stanley Aronowitz, who uses it to draw a distinction between the political counterculture that emerged from the Old Left and those writers, artists, and musicians who understood the erotic revolution as a political movement for greater individual rights (see "When the New Left Was New," in Sohny Sayres, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz, and Fredric Jameson, eds., The 60's Without Apology [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984], 24).



*Walter Pach. Walter Pach Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.*

# 50 YEARS

## Researching at the Archives of American Art

Gail Levin

*Somewhere along my journey from art history graduate student to museum curator to biographer, I developed a curiosity about artists' lives. Understanding more of what went on became my goal. I wanted to understand their courage to embark on an economically uncertain career in a profession that most of American society views as marginal. I sought to comprehend how social forces affected their lives and looked at how the circumstances of an artist's life might inform the art created at a particular time and place.*

*As I have watched theoretical fads come and go, nothing has proven as crucial to my research as getting the basic facts. The availability of primary sources at the Archives of American Art has made it an invaluable and unparalleled treasure. The Archives offers a chance to fill in blanks in a field where many unanswered questions remain. One has easy access to a wide variety of papers from artists, critics, dealers, and arts organizations. There, for the conscientious researcher, are unpublished letters, diaries, scarce brochures, obscure reviews,*

*photographs of lost art works, and a wealth of information detailing how galleries function.*

*The Archives exemplifies American democracy. Not only does it open its resources to all free of charge, but it collects the histories and papers of artists both famous and obscure. After focusing on all of the art works of Edward Hopper to compile a catalogue raisonné, for example, I began to examine his life as one context for his art. In researching, I find that often it's the obscure sources that surprise us most, and this was certainly true as I worked on my biography of Hopper. Hopper's personal papers never made it to the Archives (and are still accessible only in the copies that I obtained and assembled at the Whitney Museum). As it turned out, though, most of the papers I needed to recreate the larger context of his life (from his best friend Guy Pène du Bois's diary to the papers of the teachers, colleagues, collectors, dealers, and curators who affected his life and work) were easily available at the Archives.*

*Unlike some institutions, the Archives of American Art has always emphasized accessibility, creating regional branches and affiliated research centers. Now, prompted by new technologies, the Archives has begun to put key materials online. For the first time, we can search for names and terms around-the-clock and even from remote locations around the globe. It's an unparalleled convenience and a workaholic's dream.*

# HENRI MATISSE'S LETTERS TO WALTER PACH

JOHN CAUMAN

*Opposite: Henri Matisse, Portrait of Walter Pach, 1914. Etching plate: 6<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.; sheet: 10<sup>9</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. Stephen C. Clark Fund. © 2010 Succession H. Matisse / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art, licensed by SCALA/ Art Resource, New York.*

In the twelve years that they corresponded, from 1912 to 1924, Henri Matisse wrote eight letters to Walter Pach, the tone of which progressed from formality to friendliness. During this time Matisse was solidifying a special relationship with American artists and collectors that was to prove beneficial both to Matisse's career and to the development of American modernism. He had a valuable ally in the young American painter, who in his capacities as critic, exhibition organizer, and catalyst, helped bring the aesthetic consciousness of his country into the twentieth century.

The two men met in Italy in the summer of 1907. There can be no doubt that Matisse made a deeper impression on Pach than Pach made on Matisse. Pach, who had just celebrated his twenty-fourth birthday, was one of a number of aspiring American painters in Europe; Matisse, at thirty-seven, was the leading painter of the Parisian avant-garde.

Pach, the son of a prosperous German American photographer, had attended City College, New York (class of 1903), and the New York School of Art, where he had studied with Robert Henri and William Merritt Chase. As Chase's student he made periodic visits to Europe, and by 1907 he had decided to live abroad; that fall he settled in Paris, where he remained until 1913.<sup>1</sup> Like many other American artists in Paris (among them Alfred Maurer, Max Weber, and Patrick Henry Bruce), Pach had gravitated to the avant-garde and to the Stein circle. On Saturday evenings, at two households in Montparnasse—Leo and Gertrude's at 27 rue de Fleurus, and



Henri Matisse  
12/18

**"THAT SUMMER THE MATISSES CAME TO ITALY. MATISSE DID NOT CARE ABOUT IT VERY MUCH, HE PREFERRED FRANCE AND MOROCCO BUT MADAME MATISSE WAS DEEPLY TOUCHED."**

Michael and Sarah's at 58 rue Madame—one could meet with artists and writers, engage in spirited discussions, and view the Steins' magnificent holdings of modern art and Japanese prints.

Pach and Matisse met at the Casa Ricci, the Steins' rented villa in Fiesole, in the Tuscan hills overlooking Florence. Pach later recalled that on their first meeting, Matisse displayed an infectious enthusiasm for Tuscan art. By contrast, Gertrude Stein remembered Matisse as having been less than enthusiastic about his Italian adventure:

*That summer the Matisses came to Italy. Matisse did not care about it very much, he preferred France and Morocco but Madame Matisse was deeply touched. It was a girlish dream fulfilled. She said, I say to myself all the time, I am in Italy. And I say it to Henri all the time and he is very sweet about it, but he says, What of it.<sup>2</sup>*

In Paris, in late 1907 or early 1908, Pach renewed his acquaintance with Matisse while interviewing him for a prospective newspaper article. Matisse gave him a studio tour, with explanations of his development as a painter; Pach, though respectful and attentive, was baffled by the artist's most recent work.<sup>3</sup>

Pach visited, but, to his lasting regret, never joined, the Matisse Academy, which opened in 1908 (he later confessed to having been put off by the other students, whom he perceived as being of "the wild-eyed type").<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, an informal student-teacher relationship developed between the young American and the French master. The following year, Matisse moved to the suburb Issy-les-Moulineaux, where he received students on Monday afternoons. For some years thereafter Pach was an occasional visitor, and it seems likely that Matisse critiqued his work on some of those occasions.

Between 1907 and 1912 Pach found himself immersed in the art life of Paris. In addition to attending the Stein gatherings, he was a frequent visitor to Puteaux, where the three Duchamp brothers met with artists and writers on Sunday afternoons.<sup>5</sup> In 1908 he interviewed Monet at Giverny and wrote a pioneering article on Cézanne; in 1912 he wrote on Renoir. All three articles were published by *Scribner's Magazine* and were widely read in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Pach played a central role in assembling the Armory Show. When the event's organizers, Arthur B. Davies and Walt Kuhn, arrived in Paris in autumn 1912, they made use of Pach's extensive contacts, and in a ten-day whirlwind tour the three men selected the core of the European section of the exhibition.

The first letter of the Matisse-Pach correspondence dates from this period. Eager to view Roger Fry's Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, Kuhn and Davies left Paris for London. When they visited the exhibition at the Grafton Galleries, they were particularly impressed by the works by Matisse that they saw there.<sup>7</sup> Urged by his American colleagues, Pach wrote to the artist, requesting works for the Armory Show. Matisse, then on his second visit to Morocco, replied from Tangier on 6 December 1912 offering seven paintings then on show in London.<sup>8</sup>





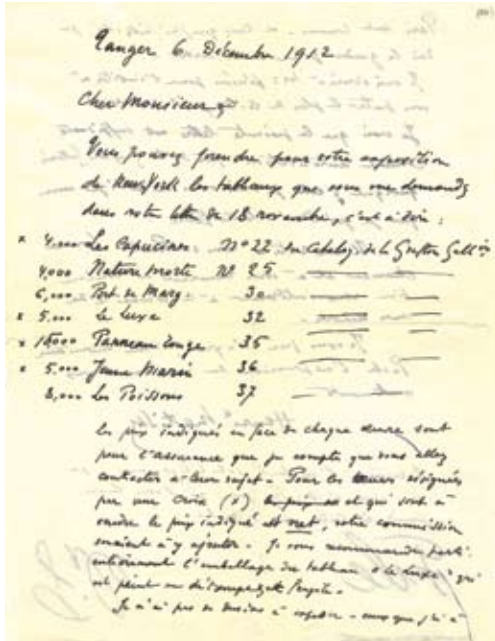
*Henri Matisse, The Red Studio*  
Issy-les-Moulineaux, 1911. Oil on  
canvas, 71¼ x 86¼ in. Mrs. Simon  
Guggenheim Fund. © 2010 Succession  
H. Matisse / Artists Rights Society  
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Pach returned to America in early 1913 to act as an administrator, publicist, and lecturer for the Armory Show. In March he accompanied the exhibition to Chicago; there his fate and Matisse's were bound together once again when reactionary students at the Art Institute, where the exhibition was housed, announced their plans to burn the two men in effigy.<sup>9</sup>

In October 1914, after war had broken out in Europe, Pach returned to Paris to arrange for two New York exhibitions: a group show of contemporary European art for the Carroll Gallery and a one-man show of Matisse for the Montross Gallery. Upon arrival he wrote to Michael Stein, letting him know in a general way of his intentions for exhibitions; Stein replied:

*Certainly nothing could have surprised me more than the receipt of your letter from Paris, nor do I gather what you are there for. What kind of an exhibition are you gathering stuff for? I last heard from Matisse about three weeks ago. He had heard nothing from his brother, who lives near St. Quentin. He wrote me that the house*

in Issy-les-Moulineaux was occupied by French officers. . . . Should you get into communication with him, don't fail to impress on him that he must now look to America for a market for his art for some time to come and he might as well send all the things that are at Issy, especially the older and smaller things, black and whites etc. etc. and not to put the prices too high, as now is the time to have the Americans begin to own Matisse. They have read about him, discussed him, seen him in exhibitions ad infinitum. It is about time he were ranked among the accepted classics and bought freely.<sup>10</sup>



Pach needed little encouragement: he was eager to promote Matisse's work. During his frequent visits to the artist's studio on the quay St. Michel, he and Matisse made plans for the show at the Montross Gallery. Matisse's portrait etching of Pach documents their friendship at this time.<sup>11</sup>

The Montross exhibition, "composed of fourteen paintings, eleven sculptures, and a large number of etchings, lithographs, and wood-engravings," ran from 20 January to 27 February 1915.<sup>12</sup> During its run, an article by Pach entitled "Why Matisse?" appeared in the February issue of *Century Magazine*. Pach's article, as Alfred Barr noted years later, "might have served as a preface to the catalog of the show."<sup>13</sup> Intended for the general reader, it emphasizes Matisse's academic training and his continuity with artists of the past, and tells of his decision to simplify art by omitting anecdotal content and "the bag and baggage of surface realism."<sup>14</sup>

By the time of the Montross exhibition, Pach had become a trusted adviser to John Quinn, the Irish American collector who had been an ardent booster of the Armory Show (as lawyer for the organizing committee, and as the single biggest lender to, and buyer from, the exhibition).<sup>15</sup> Quinn, who became a major collector of Matisse, made his first Matisse purchases from the Montross show. Toward the end of 1915, Pach wrote to Matisse on behalf of three New York dealers—N. E. Montross of the Montross Gallery, Harriet Bryant (whose Carroll Gallery was backed by Quinn), and Stéphane Bourgeois, a Frenchman who had opened a New York gallery. For Bourgeois, Pach was organizing a group show of modern European and American artists, to be held the following spring. Pach wrote not only on behalf of the dealers, but also to solicit Matisse's criticisms of his own work. The following letter finds Matisse enthusiastically aiding Pach's plans, while generously dispensing artistic advice. As the best teachers often do, Matisse initially addresses the work of his pupil, then meditates on his own artistic process.

20 Nov. 1915

Dear Mr. Pach,

It is only today that I got your letter, which had been at the quai St. Michel post office for a week. . . . I am delighted by what you say about prospective exhibitions of French art. I hope that you will have the large Seurat that you want. I will do everything I

can for that in regards to the collector. I thank you for arranging to show my monotypes as part of your exhibition at Bourgeois, and since you still wish to add one or two paintings (one or two?) of small dimensions, plus a few drawings, I am overwhelmed. I accept with great thanks—you will probably receive them together with the shipment of the Seurat, which will probably be done through the Bernheim company.<sup>16</sup>

The next letter, written in spring 1916, finds Matisse responding to Pach's news of developments in New York.<sup>17</sup> . . . Matisse then discusses the recent purchase of one of his paintings by the collector Walter Arensberg, to whom Pach was a friend and adviser. The painting, *Portrait of Yvonne Landsberg* (1915), had been featured in the Matisse exhibition at the Montross Gallery, where Arensberg purchased it.<sup>18</sup>

28 April 1916

Dear friend,

Your letter gave me great pleasure. I wrote a note at once to Miss Alice Klauber, whom I remember seeing with you in Florence—almost 10 years ago.<sup>19</sup> I am glad that the exhibit pleases you and I hope it is a great success. A passage in your letter I don't understand: "One of my friends has lent a painting, and this way I could get it into the collection of Mr. Bourgeois, where the paintings are concealed. It is he who bought it and I am glad, for I believe that it is one of his most . . . works (I am speaking of the drawing)."<sup>20</sup> Your friend who bought the drawing—why did he lend his painting to place it in the collection of Mr. Bourgeois, where the paintings are concealed?

I am glad to have been honored by your friend Mr. Arensberg, and I trust in his greatest discretion regarding the price, which is extremely reduced. You have to admit that I was anxious to please you. For this painting the price had already been reduced due to these times of war. You don't speak about your work, yet I hope that you have made some progress—that satisfies you.

Dear friend, give my regards to Mrs. Pach, and believe me, your devoted

**Henri Matisse**

Someone assured me that Max Weber had a large art gallery (sales establishment). Isn't this a mere invention?<sup>21</sup>

In the fall Matisse wrote again to Pach. Acting as an intermediary for a family "constrained by the events" (i.e., the war), Matisse describes a portrait by Ingres of the composer Luigi Cherubini, which he hopes Pach will be able to sell in New York. From this and from subsequent letters, it becomes apparent that Matisse was supplementing his income by arranging sales of works by Old Masters.

Dear Mr. Pach,

When I wrote you my last letter, I was so preoccupied by my work

Opposite: Letter from Henri Matisse to Walter Pach, 6 December 1912, itemizing paintings for the Armory Show. *Walter Pach Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.*

Below: Henri Matisse, *Le Luxe II (Le Luxe)*, 1907. Casein on canvas, 82 x 54 in. *Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, J. Rump Collection.* © 2010 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



**"A MODERN PAINTING  
HAS NO NEED FOR A  
FRAME: IT SHOULD  
HAVE A SIMPLE  
BORDER AT MOST."**

*that I forgot to tell you about a painting of which the York ladies have sent you a photograph. I am speaking of the portrait of Cherubini by Ingres . . . I viewed the painting yesterday—it is very beautiful and in splendid condition, without the least little crack. I find it far superior from several points of view to the one of the same subject at the Louvre . . . [F]rom the point of view of aesthetics, the mingling of allegory and realism is unworkable—the two sets of ideas are totally different; from a compositional point of view, the muse, although accessory, overwhelms the main figure. . . .*

*The Steins are about to leave for America.<sup>22</sup> I don't know when you will see them, however, for even though they are staying in a hotel, and all are packed and ready to go, they still do not know when they will leave—the events will decide for them.*

*I hope that you work to your satisfaction, and that I will see some photos of your work soon. Business in Paris is going very well—and the dealers will be out of paintings soon. The Swiss and the Norwegians buy a lot—but the war is very long.<sup>23</sup> I look forward to hearing your news.*

*Believe me, yours truly*

**Henri Matisse**

6 Nov. 1916

Pach was a founding member of the Society of Independent Artists, which was in its planning stages in late 1916. Modeled after its French counterpart, it was to hold annual nonjuried exhibitions in New York, beginning in 1917. Matisse submitted two paintings to the first exhibition.<sup>24</sup>

It was in part to inform Matisse of his plans for the new Society that Pach wrote again to the artist. He also sought to elicit Matisse's opinion on a suitable frame for the portrait of Landsberg.

Pach, seeking a buyer for the Ingres portrait, requested further information about the painting, which Matisse does his best to supply. The artist, in contact with other owners wishing to dispose of their pictures in the American market, now presented a list of twelve Old Master paintings in a letter dated 14 December 1916 in which he also responds to Pach's inquiry for Arensberg about his purchase.<sup>25</sup>

14 December 1916

*Dear Mr. Pach,*

*It was a great pleasure to receive your two letters: the first one mentions Mr. Bourgeois—I am glad that you have understood my scruples. What you tell me about him makes me hope for a good exhibition at his gallery next year.<sup>26</sup> The second one is about several things. First about the York ladies—I thank you for them. Then about Mr. Bourgeois and a letter from Mr. Crotti that I expect.<sup>27</sup>*

*As for the frame of Mr. Arensberg's portrait, I must tell you that I am very much opposed to frames, and particularly to heavy frames that surround the paintings with a yellow color, stopping all expansion. A modern painting has no need for a*

*frame: it should have a simple border at most. I can very well see the portrait in question against a matte white wall with a simple golden rod—acting like a 3 cm. wide string around the painting—but without concealing any part of it: a well-polished, golden wooden rod properly nailed around the stretchers. I am glad that Mr. Arensberg is pleased with his painting. As for your Society of Independent Artists, I wish you the best. . . .*

*All the paintings are absolutely pure, very well preserved—and of very good quality. Some other interesting ones which did not have the desirable frankness and condition have been rejected, so that you won't be surprised.*

*They come from honorable milieux and from sound owners [scribble], so this erasure shouldn't worry you.<sup>28</sup> I meant to say, c'est la guerre. But do not give this reason, which I have no right to give. I told you all that I could about them, often even the last owners, whom you may choose not to name—do as you please. In some of the photos I have noted the color of the different areas on the reverse side. You just have to view them in transparency and look at the back to see the words on each area.*

*Dear Mr. Pach, this will keep you busy—I wish you good luck, and I hope that the transactions that you will no doubt make with this lot will bring you the peace to work on your art. Best wishes to your family for the year 1917. Please believe me, yours truly*

**Henri Matisse**

Pach and Matisse corresponded less frequently after the war. If Pach was less active on Matisse's behalf, it was in part because Matisse was now more widely accepted. One measure of this acceptance was the prominent place given to his works in the Metropolitan Museum's first exhibition of modern art, a loan exhibition of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings, in progress at the time of the following letter.<sup>29</sup>

Pach and Matisse both admired Odilon Redon, visionary artist of the Impressionist generation. Pach had written on Redon at the time of the Armory Show, and again in 1919.<sup>30</sup> Matisse had been moved by an 1899 exhibition of Redon's at the Durand-Ruel Gallery in Paris, and in subsequent years had made purchases of Redon oils and pastels, which he had given to his parents. After his mother's death in 1920, he sent the Redons to Pach to sell on behalf of the estate.

In the summer of 1921, Pach and his wife Magda visited the Matisse family at Issy, before touring the south of France. At this time Matisse was spending most of the year (excluding summers) in Nice.

7 Sept. 1921

*Dear Mr. Pach,  
I am glad that you had a delightful trip in the south of France. Unfortunately, when it is dry, nature always has something unhappy about it; one should see Provence in the spring.*

**"I HOPE HE WILL  
FIND YOU IN GOOD  
HEALTH AND HAPPY,  
WITH PAINTINGS UP  
TO YOUR EARS."**

*Knowing it so well during that charming season, I suffer to see it turned all brown by the sun and the drought.*

*As for the Redons, I agree to your terms—but I must tell you that I didn't want to separate the torn papers of the one called "Radiant Flower" because (at the moment in Paris) I don't have anyone capable of doing it.*

*I have resumed my work after three weeks of laziness; it is the first time in 30 years of painting that such a thing has happened to me. I hope I didn't lose too much—on the contrary—but it seems to me as if I had never painted before. It's as if I have to start over from the beginning.*

*Dear Mr. Pach, I thank you for your visit, which was a great pleasure for us all; I hope that you two will return soon, that you and Mrs. Pach have a good trip back, and that when you arrive you will have a good resumption of your work.*

*Please give my regards to Mrs. Pach and believe me, yours truly*

**Henri Matisse**

*I have good news from my wife and daughter, who are at Aix-les-Bains. I will soon send you a drawing to include in your book.<sup>31</sup>*

A year later Pach, having not yet sold the Redons for the Matisse family, suggested that they lower the prices, and Matisse, wishing to close his mother's estate, agreed (some of them were purchased by John Quinn).<sup>32</sup>

In the summer of 1922 Matisse returned to lithography, a medium in which he had worked very little since 1914. Over the next four years he produced some fifty plates, all of which were done from the model, ranging from the contour studies of 1922 to finished compositions in chiaroscuro.

*My dear Mr. Pach,*

*I have done a series of lithographs this summer and I had a copy of each plate sent to you, thinking that it would please you. Regarding the mail, I had to do 2 mailings. The first must have reached you already; the second will be sent to you at the end of the month. As for the mailings of Redon, if you think that the prices have been set too high, let me know what offers you got for them and how much we would have to lower them to find a buyer this winter, considering that it is an inheritance. I hope that you are satisfied with your work, and you are all in good health in the country. After two months spent in Paris I am back in Nice, where I have resumed my work for one month.*

*All the best to you and Mrs. Pach from all my family.*

*Yours truly*

**Henri Matisse**

*1 Place Charles Felix, Nice*

*2 Sept. 1922*

In the twenties Pach's support was less crucial for Matisse. The artist's reputation had shifted: no longer the rebel, he was now seen as an

upholder of the grand tradition in French painting. Furthermore, he had other supporters in New York. Marius de Zayas was exhibiting Matisse works at the De Zayas Gallery. Joseph Brummer, who like Pach had visited the Matisse Academy in Paris, opened a New York gallery and in 1924 presented a Matisse exhibition, the artist's biggest since the Montross show of 1915.

In November 1924 Matisse wrote to Pach on behalf of his younger son Pierre, who was about to depart for New York to seek a job in an art gallery. His solicitude on his son's behalf belies the frequent claim that he was aloof from, or hostile to, his son's aspirations. Matisse's next letter establishes the fact that Pierre went to America on his father's advice, and not on Pach's, as has been claimed.<sup>33</sup>

Nice, 18 Nov. 1924

1 Place Charles Félix

My dear friend,

My son Pierre, who has been a seller at the Hodebert-Barbazanges Gallery<sup>34</sup> for the last year, is leaving for America on my advice and going to New York to find a position in a painting establishment, preferably a modern one. Although he is very satisfied with his position in Paris and well considered by his employer, I feel that he should travel while he is young and get acquainted with the active life of New York. The Steins approve of it and they share my belief that if you allow it he would benefit a great deal from your advice. That is why I am sending him to you. Could you please do whatever you can to help him? I am also thinking of writing to Brummer on this matter, but I don't have his address and I am thinking of sending you my letter so that you can forward it to him. I hope he will find you in good health and happy, with paintings up to your ears.

**Henri Matisse**

This is the last letter of the Matisse-Pach correspondence. When Pierre moved to New York, he took over Pach's role as his father's eyes and ears and business representative in New York. He soon began working for the Valentine Dudensing Gallery, where he arranged exhibitions of modern French art; prominent among them was a 1927 retrospective of his father's work. In 1932 he opened his own gallery on Fifty-seventh Street, where he had a long and successful career representing School of Paris artists until his death in 1989.

Pach wrote about his friendship with Matisse in his 1938 memoir *Queer Thing, Painting*. He never abandoned the modernist cause, continuing to write and lecture on modern art until his death in 1958. ♡

**Matisse's letters to Pach were handwritten in French. A transcription and preliminary version of the translation were provided by Chantal Combes. I am responsible for the final version, and any error that may appear is mine. I thank Jack Flam and Francis Naumann for their help and encouragement on this project. I also thank Leigh Cauman, Judith Cousins, Arthur Danto, Lesley Doyel, Irene Gordon, Ellen Hirschland, Marie Keller, Beatrice Kernan, Billy Klüver, Julie Martin, and John Rewald for their generous assistance.**



Henri Matisse, Variation on a Still Life by de Heem (Nature morte d'après "La desserte" de Jan Davidsz de Heem), 1915. Oil on canvas, 71¼ x 87 in. Gift and bequest of Florene M. Schoenborn and Samuel A. Marx. © 2010 Succession H. Matisse / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art, licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York.

Matisse's letters to Pach are preserved in the Walter Pach Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and are published with the kind permission of Claude Duthuit. They are available for study on microfilm roll 4217; for frame numbers consult the Calendar Index to the Pach papers, p. 146 of the Walter Pach Papers Finding Aid. This collection has been digitized and can be consulted online at <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collectiononline/pachwalt/>.htm.

1 Details of Pach's life were derived from Pach, Queer Thing, Painting: Forty Years in the World of Art (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1938); Sandra S. Phillips, "The Art Criticism of Walter Pach," Art Bulletin 65 (March 1983), 106–122; William C. Agee, "Walter Pach and Modernism: A Sampler from New York, Paris, and Mexico City," Archives of American Art Journal 28, no. 3 (1988), 2–10; Discovering Modernism: Selections from the Walter Pach Papers (Archives of American Art, New York Regional Center, 1990), with essays by William C. Agee and Nancy Malloy; Exhibition of the Art of Walter and Magda Pach (Youngstown, Ohio: Butler Institute of American Art, 1988), with an essay by Bennard B. Perlman; and a chronology, biographical note on Pach, and a list of publications by Pach compiled by Nancy Malloy for the Archives of American Art.

2 Gertrude Stein, Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (New York: Random House, 1933), 54; Jack Flam, in Matisse: The Man and His Art (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 206, suggests that "Matisse's apparent lack of enthusiasm . . . may have been due more to the friction that had grown up between him and the Steins [i.e., Leo and Gertrude] than to his reaction to Italy." Flam also notes Gertrude's error in stating that Matisse "preferred . . . Morocco." Matisse had been to Algeria, North Africa, in 1906, but he was not to visit Morocco until 1912. Although careless with facts, Gertrude was perceptive about people. In 1909 she composed word "portraits" of Pach and Matisse. Pach was portrayed as "a young one," both "lonesome" and "wise"; Matisse was portrayed as "a great one" who was "clearly expressing something" and who was "struggling." See Two: Gertrude Stein and Her Brother and Other Early Portraits, 1908–1912 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 338–340, and Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 329–333.

3 Pach, Queer Thing, 118–119. Pach had written about his "stirring days" with Matisse and the Steins to Guy Pène du Bois, the painter and art critic for the New York American who had been a student with Pach at the New York School of Art. Pach wrote with such enthusiasm that Pène du Bois commissioned him to write an article on Matisse for the newspaper. The article was ultimately rejected when the editor saw the accompanying illustrations—such "insanities" were too shocking even for the sensation-loving readers of the Hearst newspaper.

4 Pach, Queer Thing, 119.

5 On Pach and Marcel Duchamp, see Francis Naumann, "Amicement, Marcel: Fourteen Letters from Marcel Duchamp to Walter Pach," Archives of American Art Journal 29, nos. 3–4 (1989), 36–50.

6 Walter Pach, "At the Studio of Claude Monet," Scribner's, June 1908, 765–767; "Cézanne: An Introduction," Scribner's, December 1908, 765–768; and "Pierre August [sic] Renoir," Scribner's, May 1912, 606–615.

7 Kuhn arrived in Paris on 25 October 1912; Davies arrived on 6 November; on 12 November Kuhn and Davies left for London; on 16 November they saw the Grafton exhibition. Pach wrote to Matisse just two days later, on 18 November. Details of Pach, Kuhn, and Davies in Europe are derived from Milton Brown, The Story of the Armory Show (New York: Abbeville Press, second edition, 1988), 67–76; see also Brown, "Walt Kuhn's Armory Show," Archives of American Art Journal 27, no. 2 (1987), 3–11.

8 Les Capucines, Nature Morte, Portrait de Marguerite, Le Luxe, Panneau Rouge, Jeune Marin, and Les Poissons.

9 Although this burning never took place, on the closing day of the exhibition in Chicago a mock trial was held for one "Henri Hair-mattress," whose effigy was subsequently "stabbed, pummeled and dragged about the terrace" of the Art Institute. Imitations of Blue Nude and Le Luxe II were then burned. See Brown, Armory Show, 209–210.



Henri Matisse, Goldfish and Sculpture. Issy-les-Moulineaux, spring–summer 1912. Oil on canvas, 46 x 39% in. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Hay Whitney. © 2010 Succession H. Matisse / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art, licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York.

10 Michael Stein to Pach, 19 October 1914, Pach Papers, Archives of American Art, microfilm roll 4217, frames 197–198.

11 For the circumstances surrounding the making of this etching, see Pach, Queer Thing, 219–220.

12 Walter Pach, "Why Matisse?," Century 59 (February 1915), 633.

13 Alfred Barr, Matisse: His Art and His Public (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1951), 179. The catalogue Henri Matisse Exhibition (New York: Montross Gallery, 1915) contains a color plate, fifteen monochrome illustrations, and Steichen's portrait of the artist, but no explanatory essay.

14 Pach, "Why Matisse?," 634.

15 Judith Zilzer, "The Noble Buyer": John Quinn, Patron of the Avant-Garde (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978), 27.

16 The group exhibition for the Bourgeois Galleries was held in April 1916. The catalogue, Exhibition of Modern Art Arranged by a Group of European and American Artists (New York: Bourgeois Galleries, 1916), listed two paintings, three drawings, and seven monotypes by Matisse, as well as eight works by Pach; I thank Francis Naumann for bringing this catalogue to my attention. The unnamed "collector" with whom Matisse offered to intercede was probably Félix Fénéon, who was both a collector of Seurat and Matisse's dealer at Bernheim-Jeune.

17 A consular declaration dated 10 February 1916, now in the Pach Papers, lists three drawings by Matisse, Foliage, Still Life, and Head of a Little Girl, valued at 500, 350, and 300 francs respectively. They are listed in the 1916 Bourgeois catalogue as nos. 55, 56, and 57.

18 The Portrait of Yvonne Landesberg is the only painting by Matisse to remain in the Arensberg collection. In a conversation with me, Francis Naumann has suggested that Arensberg purchased this Futurist-influenced portrait to compensate for his failure to buy Marcel Duchamp's Nude Descending the Staircase (1912) at the Armory Show (he bought that work much later); the two paintings are of similar sizes and formats. See Francis Naumann, "Walter Conrad Arensberg: Poet, Patron, and Participant in the New York Avant-Garde, 1915–20," Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin 20 (Spring 1980), 328.

19 Pach's friend Alice Klauber, a painter and exhibition organizer from San Diego, had been a fellow student in Chase's class in 1907. Pach's letters to her can be found in the Alice Klauber Papers in the Archives of American Art, microfilm roll 583.



- 20 The sentence that Matisse cites from Pach's letter is indeed cryptic. I suggest that Pach's unnamed friend was John Quinn, who may have lent a Matisse painting (unlisted in the catalogue) to the 1916 exhibition at Bourgeois. If so, the loan was probably Marguerite in a Hat with Roses (1914), which Quinn had purchased from Montross in 1915; it is illustrated in Pierre Schneider, Matisse (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), 325. Pach probably meant that the owners' identities, and not the paintings themselves, were concealed.
- 21 Matisse was understandably skeptical. His former pupil would have been temperamentally unsuited to such an enterprise. See Percy North, "Turmoil at 291," Archives of American Art Journal 24, no. 1 (1984), 12–20. Perhaps the rumor came about because Weber had recently been given a major exhibition at Montross. For an account of Weber's activities at this time see Max Weber: The Cubist Decade, 1910–1920 (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1991).
- 22 Michael and Sarah Stein did not leave for America, but remained in France throughout the war at various addresses outside Paris. I thank Irene Gordon for this information.
- 23 In neutral Switzerland and Norway there were flourishing art markets during the war years.
- 24 The two entries, listed in the catalogue Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists (New York: 1917) as M45, The Leather Hat, and M46, Still Life, were submitted by the Bourgeois Galleries. The first entry, and possibly the second as well, had been in the group exhibition at Bourgeois the previous year.
- 25 The twelve paintings described in the letter are: François Watteau's Military Camp; Louis David's Portrait of the Count of Turenne, Jean-Baptist-Camille Corot's View of the Forest of Fontainebleau, Claude Lorrain's Landscape, Morning, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' Angelica, Jacopo Tintoretto's Portrait, Agnolo Bronzino's Lady of Rank, Jordan and Fyt's Gentlemen Hunting, David Teniers' The Smoker, Thomas Gainsborough's Portrait, John Constable's Landscape, and Sir Thomas Lawrence's Portrait of Miss Farleigh.
- 26 Matisse participated in two group shows at Bourgeois in 1917, one at the beginning (10 February to 10 March 10), and one at the end of the year (11 November to 11 December). See Judith Zilczer, "The Aesthetic Struggle in America, 1913–1918: Abstract Art and Theory in the Stieglitz Circle" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1975), 255–259.
- 27 The painter Jean Crotti was a member of the Arensberg circle, and with Pach, Duchamp, and Arensberg was an active participant in preparations for the 1917 Independents' Exhibition.
- 28 Matisse has crossed out a word on the page, and then reassured his reader by adding the phrase, "pour que cette rature ne vous inquiète pas."
- 29 The exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum was held from 3 May to 15 September 1921. See Judith Zilczer's selective checklist "Modern Art and Its Sources: Exhibitions in New York, 1910–25," in Avant-Garde Painting and Sculpture in America 1910–25, ed. William I. Homer (Delaware: Art Museum, 1975), 169.
- 30 Walter Pach, The Art of Odilon Redon (New York: Association of American Painters and Sculptors, 1913); "The Significance of Redon," Dial 66 (22 February 1919); and Odilon Redon (Chicago: Albert Roulliers Gallery, 1919). Both Pach and Matisse knew Redon personally.
- 31 Pach's book Masters of Modern Art (New York: Huebusch, 1924) is not illustrated with a Matisse drawing, but rather with a 1923 lithograph. See Margrit Hahnloser, Matisse: The Graphic Work (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), 74–75, where this lithograph is published under the title Odalisque with Magnolia.
- 32 Pach, Queer Thing, 166.
- 33 See Margrit Hahnloser-Ingold, "Collecting Matisse of the 1920s in the 1920s," in Matisse: The Early Years in Nice (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1986), 247: "Pierre Matisse . . . [came] to America in 1924 on the advice of Walter Pach." Pierre was reluctant to admit that his father had a hand in his success. At the age of eight-five, he told an interviewer, "My father didn't like it at all that I became an art dealer. . . . He thought it was a distasteful profession. In fact, he wanted me to change my name so that the name Matisse would not be associated with such a profession" (John Gruen, "Pierre Matisse, Master Dealer," Architectural Digest 43 [April 1986], 100, 104, 108). Pierre's claims seem exaggerated in the light of his father's extensive art dealing during the First World War. John Russell's New York Times obituary of Pierre Matisse (11 August 1989) contains the statement: "In 57 years at 41 East 57th Street he never had a Matisse exhibition." In fact, Pierre gave his father seven one-man shows and included him in numerous group shows in the thirties and forties. See the Pierre Matisse Gallery exhibition catalogues, on microfilm at the Archives of American Art, microfilm rolls N442, NPMI, and BR15.
- 34 The correct name of the gallery is Audebert Barbazanges.

# THE ARTISTS UNION

*60 West Fifteenth Street*



PRINTERS SCULPTORS GRAPHIC ARTISTS

*Membership Card*

# 50 YEARS

## Art and Politics in the Archives of American Art Journal

Patricia Hills

*In the 1960s many mainstream critics held a dim view of the art produced by socially concerned American artists on the government projects of the 1930s. In her influential text book American Art Since 1900: A Critical History, 1967 (p. 127), for instance, Barbara Rose offered her opinion that “the WPA is a unique but crucial chapter in American art. This is so despite the fact that, outside of a few murals . . . the WPA programs produced almost no art of any consequence that has survived.” She did acknowledge that the WPA had had some positive impact—by providing opportunities for artists to develop skills in classes, to paint full time, to show their work in exhibitions, and to develop an esprit de corps that would carry them into the 1940s—but tellingly in her companion anthology, Readings in American Art Since 1900: A Documentary Survey, 1968, she included readings from none of the New York political artists, except for Stuart Davis.*

*For those of us resisting such dismissals about 1930s art, the extensive holdings of the Archives of American Art and the Archives of American Art Journal provided us with both a resource to investigate and a scholarly forum to engage in a discourse about the lives of socially concerned artists, their art, and the institutions supporting them. Archivist Garnett McCoy had realized that a generation of neglected but first-rate artists were eager for scholars to hear their stories; because of his collecting efforts (and those of the regional offices), many of us began to respond to this growing wealth of archival material.*

*In the 1960s and 1970s the AAAJ helped us to share our research and to point us toward new directions. With Gerald Monroe’s “Art Front” of 1973 and “Artists on the Barricades: the Militant Artists’ Union Treats with the New Deal,” of 1978, we realized that the Archives of American Art held a complete run of Art Front, the Artists Union’s monthly, which was a treasure trove of opinion and information about artists, exhibitions, and contemporary views on the state of the government projects. We started to publish. Kendall Taylor first published her Evergood research for the AAAJ. Another scholar, Helen A. Harrison, wrote “Subway Art and the Public Use of Art Committee,” that drew on the articles in Art Front.*

*One always sensed archivist McCoy’s enthusiasm and guiding hand as he worked with editors Paul Cummings—who with tact and insight conducted interviews that were published in the Journal—and Virginia Field. McCoy shrewdly assigned book reviews to those scholars with both knowledge of the publication under review and objectivity, and he encouraged them to bring in their own scholarship with endnotes and illustrations. At times he wrote his own articles based on important collections donated to the AAA, such as his edited compilation of the letters of Margaret Palmer, published as “Letters from Spain, 1936–1939,” of 1986.*

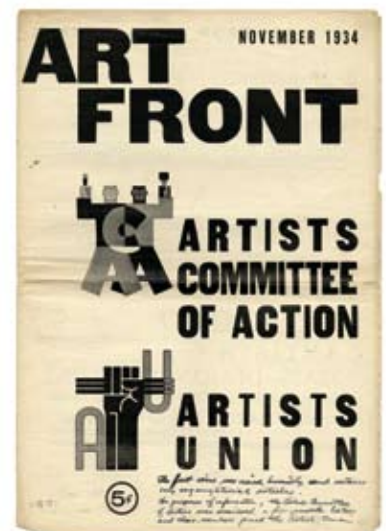
*In the days before the internet, the published lists of new donations were the only public notices of recently acquired papers. At one point regional directors began writing lengthy descriptions with illustrations of the donations; these reports whetted our appetites and drove us to explore anew the AAA microfilms available in the regional offices. Any number of books about politically and socially concerned artists in the 1930s could not have been written without the AAA papers of Louis Lozowick, Stuart Davis, Jacob Lawrence, Rockwell Kent, Ben Shahn, the Downtown Gallery, the ACA Gallery, Holger Cahill, Francis O’Connor, and many others. So I conclude: “Thank You and Happy Anniversary!”*



# ARTISTS AS MILITANT TRADE UNION WORKERS DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION

The artist of modern times has generally functioned in alienation from the mainstream of prevailing society. During the period of the Great Depression of the 1930s, however, artists rushed forward in large numbers to respond to the devastating economic and political crisis. After a period of stunned inaction, artists gradually realized that their economic and professional needs could only be obtained through massive government patronage. Influenced by socialist ideology and inspired by the growing labor movement, artists organized themselves as “cultural workers,” and turned to militant trade union tactics to effect their goals.

In the summer of 1933, a small group of artists began to meet informally at the John Reed Club, an organization of radical artists and writers, to discuss the possibility of promoting government support. About twenty-five of them jointly issued a manifesto declaring “The State can eliminate once and for all the



Above and opposite page (detail):  
The first issue of Art Front, 1934.

Previous page: Harry Gottlieb's Artists'  
Union membership card, 1935–1936.

**GERALD M. MONROE**

unfortunate dependence of American artists upon the caprice of private patronage.”<sup>1</sup> The New York artists referred to themselves as the Unemployed Artists Group (UAG); among its early leaders were Max Spivak, Phil Bard, Boris Gorelik, Bernarda Bryson, Ibram Lassaw, Balcomb and Gertrude Greene, Michael Loew, Joseph Vogel,

**“THE STATE CAN ELIMINATE ONCE AND FOR ALL THE UNFORTUNATE DEPENDENCE OF AMERICAN ARTISTS UPON THE CAPRICE OF PRIVATE PATRONAGE.”**

and James Guy. Frequent demonstrations by the UAG attracted hundreds of followers and were effective in securing a variety of city, state, and federal programs that supplied the artists with occasional work. During the winter of 1933–1934, the federal government initiated the Public Works of Art

Project, a large-scale patronage program that was intended to last only three months but actually remained in effect about six months. Juliana Force, the patrician director of the Whitney Museum, was appointed head of the New York region with a budget providing work for approximately six hundred artists. After requesting a list of needy artists from the major professional organizations, she ignored the entreaties of the UAG, informing them that there were relief agencies to which they might apply. The angry artists held mass protests, mounted picket lines on the narrow sidewalk in front of the Whitney, then located on 8th Street, and sent numerous delegations to her office. The pressure was overwhelming, and Force gradually made concessions. She also closed the museum on 27 March—six weeks early—presumably out of a fear of vandalism!

In February 1934, the name of the organization was changed to the Artists Union; it became a trade union of painters, sculptors, printmakers, and allied artists. Although the union professed to be nonpolitical, many of the leaders were Communists or fellow travelers. Control of the leadership by members of the Communist Party was maintained primarily because they were eager to do the (unpaid) work. However, the union was run on generally democratic lines, and non-Communists who were active became officers and were influential in the union's affairs. During this time of pressing humanitarian issues and political idealism, liberals and radicals were often able to work effectively together.

The union's first president was Balcomb Greene, a former English instructor at Dartmouth who had become a painter. When he resigned, his term was completed by Michael Loew, who in turn was succeeded by Phil Bard, surely the most popular of the union's leaders. He was a dedicated Communist who always seemed anxious to demonstrate that he was more radical than anyone else, but he was not so dogmatic as to be unable to work closely with those with whom he disagreed ideologically. Bard was also much admired as a draftsman; he had published political cartoons in *New Masses* when he was nineteen and was a regular contributor to the *Daily Worker* and *Freiheit*, the Communist English and Yiddish daily papers. Bard was followed as president by Murray Hantman, former member of

the Los Angeles John Reed Club and exhibitor of a painting of the Scottsboro boys in court. Right wing “critics” broke into the exhibit and shot bullet holes into the heads of the Negroes in the painting.

The willingness of [Artists Union] artists to turn out for demonstrations earned them the nickname “fire brigade,” and they were frequently called upon to assist other unions or left-wing organizations in picket lines and demonstrations. A substantial number of young radical artists considered picketing for fellow unionists or participating in “anti-facist” demonstrations, a legitimate activity on behalf of their union, but the leadership never made it an obligation for the rank and file—they didn’t have to; all that was needed was a suggestion from the executive board or a request by a member or a visitor during a Wednesday night meeting.

Wednesday night meetings started at 8:30 and often continued beyond midnight. Usually two to three hundred members attended and a crisis meeting could draw up to six or eight hundred. Most of the artists probably lived in Greenwich Village, Chelsea, or the Lower East Side, but the union also had constituencies in both the Bronx and Brooklyn, many of whom would often arrive at meetings with wives and children in tow. While debate was often lively and contentious, most of the rank and file respected and supported the leadership.

After meetings, the artists would drift off to their favorite cafeteria or bar with their friends in a cafe spirit to continue heated discussions on union matters, art, or politics. Deep concern and an easy gaiety were united in an exquisite sort of comradeship. Robert Cronbach recalls that never before or since had he been in contact with so many committed people. He could always count on seeing his friends at union meetings. Artists arriving in New York would automatically head for the union, often finding lodgings through the members as well as a warm welcome. Remo Farrugio recalls meeting an artist from

*Artists’ Union picketing, n.d.*



the South at the union and having difficulty understanding his drawl. The southerner also had a problem comprehending Farrugio's rapid slurred speech, but they were both aware of sharing a very special fellowship. It was standard procedure during demonstrations and the occasional subsequent lock-ups for the artists to bolster their

spirits by singing "revolutionary" songs. Herb Kruckman remembers marching on a picket line, singing, "Phil Bard is our leader; we shall not be moved," when a policeman said to his superior, "Give us the word, Sergeant, and we'll move 'em!"

With the creation of the Works Progress Administration under Harry Hopkins in the spring of 1935, a historic commitment was made to the principle of work-relief as a solution to mass unemployment in preference to the dole. Special projects were created in music, theater, writing, and art. All were represented by craft unions but the Artists Union was the most aggressive and imaginative in its tactics in promoting job opportunities and in preventing mass dismissals. At its peak in 1936, the Federal Art Project employed about five thousand visual artists and the union was the de facto bargaining

agent. In the fall of 1936, President Roosevelt ordered the WPA administration to pare its rolls in keeping with the expected absorption of workers by industry during an apparent upturn in the economy. The cultural workers, who would be the last to benefit from such a lift, were determined to battle any cuts in federal support; mass demonstrations and sit-in attempts were continued throughout the fall. At a 30 November rally, attended by twelve hundred workers from the various Arts Projects, Boris Gorelick, an organizer for the Artists Union, defined its position in unequivocal terms: "We say we are going to resist any and every effort by the government to take our jobs. We say that our resistance will take on such a character as to smash any efforts to institute dismissals regardless of protest. . . . These projects cannot be curtailed. On the contrary, they must become a permanent feature of our social and national life. From now on we are on the offensive. Our defensive is vigorous counter attack."<sup>2</sup>

On 1 December 1936, the union assembled over four hundred of its members to storm the lower Fifth Avenue Art Project offices in an effort to force the administration to forestall planned mass firings. About 225 members succeeded in occupying the offices, announcing their intention to sit in until concessions were won. The police were summoned and a bloody battle ensued. Twelve demonstrators were wounded and 219 were carried off in eleven patrol wagons—the largest police bust in New York City history. Paul Block, the chief organizer and spokesman for the action, was severely beaten when he stubbornly resisted eviction by the police. Although trained as a sculptor,



*Boris and David Margulies picketing with the Artists' Union.*

*Opposite: Cover of Art Front, June–July 1937. Artists' Union, New York, N.Y.,*



# ART FRONT

10

JUNE • JULY



**ARTISTS-  
STOP  
THOSE  
CUTS!**

*Chaplin*

Block had decided that, during those troubled times, he would devote his life to political work. Shortly after the demonstration—along with other union members—he volunteered to fight for the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War; he died a hero's death in a churchyard in Belchite, Spain, while leading the Lincoln Brigade's Third Company, of which he had become commander.



Artists in Yorkville Court,  
3 December 1936.

On Thursday, 3 December 1936, the 219 demonstrators were arraigned in two groups, because the Yorkville Court could not process that many persons in one sitting. A week later the artists, having been unsuccessfully defended by Congressman Vito Marcantonio, were found guilty of disorderly conduct and given suspended sentences. Appalled by the brutal beating of some of the demonstrators, Mayor LaGuardia ordered the police not to arrest strikers on WPA projects unless they were violent or destroying property. The tough regional administrator of the WPA, Colonel Brehon Somervell, declared that the mayor's decision was a "new concept of law and order."<sup>3</sup> An editorial in the *New York*

*Herald Tribune* deplored the artists' attitude that "society not only owes them a living but a living by the talents which each happens to fancy," and suggested that the WPA's pruning should begin with the "fancier projects."<sup>4</sup> The belligerent actions of the union and other organizations of WPA cultural workers did appear to frustrate the government's desire to decrease the size of the Arts Projects; while average employment on the WPA as a whole decreased 11.9 percent from January to June 1937, employment on the four Arts Projects increased 1.1 percent.

In April 1937, the President and Congress agreed on the necessity for a 25 percent reduction in WPA funds—a cut from which the cultural workers could not be exempted. During May, the leadership of the organized cultural workers met to plan a defense campaign, and Chet LaMore of the Artists Union was elected chairman of the Joint Strategy Committee. A month of demonstrations, work stoppages, visits to congressmen, and negotiations with top WPA officials were to no avail. On Tuesday, 27 June the pink slips (dismissal notices) were issued and the Joint Strategy Committee responded with the precision of a military campaign: Wednesday, sixty workers barricaded themselves in the payroll offices of the New York City Arts Project; Friday, LaMore and a delegation of fifty journeyed to Washington, sat in at the WPA headquarters, and asked to see Hopkins. That same day in New York City, six hundred artists, writers, and musicians invaded the newly consolidated offices of the Federal Arts Projects, now located on East 42nd Street, while another one hundred remained outside to demonstrate. Harold Stein, a sensitive New Dealer who had recently been appointed administrator of the Arts Projects in New York, was ordered by his captors to call the Washington WPA officials

to transmit the strikers' demands. Artists Union leader Moe Neuwirth announced that Stein would be held captive until those demands were met—by President Roosevelt, if necessary. The switchboard operator was told to answer "Artists Union" to all incoming calls. Every inch of the floor was covered by demonstrators; the air was stifling. The police were warned if they took action and a riot ensued the floor might collapse.

During the night, Stein negotiated an agreement with the strikers; he was released Saturday morning, fifteen hours after the invasion of his office. In Washington, LaMore met with Hopkins' assistant, Aubrey Williams, who seemed to make some significant concessions. However, Williams later announced that he had been misinterpreted; he reaffirmed the administration's position to reduce the number of persons employed on the Arts Projects.

As early as the spring of 1935, the Artists Union had sought affiliation with the AFL on the assumption that its political leverage for expanding and stabilizing government patronage would be strengthened, but the AFL representative had difficulty reconciling the role of fine artists with a trade union and complained about their unorthodox demonstrations. It is likely that the conservative labor organization was not anxious to bring a "radical union" into its fold. The AFL did grant a charter to the Commercial Artists and Designers Union (CADU), most members of which had been in the Artists Union and still retained close ties with it.

By 1937, the CIO was challenging the AFL as the major spokesman for American labor and welcoming labor organizations dominated by radical leaderships. A plan was evolved designating the Artists Union, the CADU, and the tiny Cartoonists Guild as a local of the United Office and Professional Workers of America, and, in December, Artists Union President, Philip Evergood, announced that beginning in January 1938, the union would be known as the United American Artists, Local 60 of the UOPWA. Lewis Merrill, a left-wing trade unionist with an extensive background in organizing white collar workers, was president of the UOPWA. Primarily a union of bookkeepers, stenographers, office workers, and insurance agents, the UOPWA originally had been the Office Workers Union of the Communist-run Trade Union Unity League.

After the merger was formalized, the union moved its headquarters uptown—a shock for many of the artists who loved the village character of the downtown location. Now dues were paid at a cashier's cage; there were partitions, offices, and small rooms for committee meetings. No longer were there the large open loft spaces in which artists could congregate as they had in the past; the expensive dropped ceilings were a dubious improvement, intensifying the impersonality of the new offices. Also, at the suggestion of the UOPWA, membership meetings now took place monthly. Merrill, who never really understood the special needs of the artist[s], thought the frequent meetings were an unnecessary extravagance for a poor union. He did not realize that, for the artists who worked alone in

## **FOR THE ARTISTS WHO WORKED ALONE IN THEIR STUDIOS, THE MEETINGS WERE SOCIAL EVENTS.**



Cover of *Art Front*, July 1935. Artists' Union, New York, N.Y.

their studios, the meetings were social events. Merrill was brilliant, a highly effective speaker, but brash, even arrogant in his handling of others. He took seriously his charge to usher the artists into the ways of trade unionism, although he apparently had little sympathy for their generally different lifestyle. The flamboyant manner in which the Artists Union members usually demonstrated was abhorrent to the UOPWA president, and he forced them to give up the clenched fist and brushes emblem along with the red banners made famous during the street demonstrations.

By the spring of 1939, congressional foes of the cultural projects were primed for the liquidation process, and although the Art Project continued for an additional four years, it was on a steadily diminishing basis. The erosion of patronage coupled with the pressure of the congressional witch hunts of 1938, 1939, and 1940 made inevitable a shrinkage in the membership and a deterioration in the power of the union.

In January 1942, Merrill was insisting that the union hire an organizer to try to establish some sort of base in private industry. Both the UOPWA president and the leaders of Local 60 were aware that there was no justification in attempting to maintain a trade union without prospects of employment, but both sides were reluctant to make the apparently unavoidable disassociation. Finally, during the first week of March, three members of the union executive board entered into discussions with Merrill about the future of the artists' organization. An agreement was reached whereby the artists had the option of converting to a professional organization and, if they wished, retaining a formal relationship with the UOPWA, although Merrill agreed that there was little he could do for them. The artists decided to seek fraternal connections with both the CIO and the AFL; a meeting was called for 7 May 1942, at which the artists were asked to ratify the executive board's recommendation to disaffiliate from the UOPWA. It was not a happy meeting. The enthusiasm that might normally accompany a new beginning was dampened by the unavoidable recognition that an era had come to its end and that a stubborn dream was being interred. That evening the membership voted to create a new organization, later named the Artists League of America.

The rest of the story is an epitaph. Not informed that the union would vote on disaffiliation at the May 7 meeting, Merrill was furious. On 13 May, he dispatched an angry letter to the executive board demanding the immediate return of the charter, seal, and other properties of the UOPWA, including the per capita assessment in which the union was, as usual, in arrears. On the same day, a letter was also circulated to all the union artists offering them membership in the American Advertising Guild, Local 20, UOPWA. The executive board was surprised and upset by Merrill's reaction. Rockwell Kent, the distinguished painter and illustrator who had been president of the artists' union since its inception as a local of the UOPWA, hopeful that the artists might yet achieve a friendly and useful relationship with Merrill and the CIO, wrote a long letter of apology. It

was through no fault of their own, Kent declared, that the artists were unable to “keep pace with labor’s army.” He asked Merrill to consider the artists “guerilla fighters . . . or a lost battalion separated temporarily from the main army, but don’t for one minute do them the injustice of holding them renegades and treating them as such.”<sup>5</sup> Merrill replied that “guerilla fighters are noted for their exceptional discipline under fire and preservation of a unity of command under difficult circumstances. Neither had been present here.”<sup>6</sup> He also informed Kent, now president of the new Artists League of America, that fraternal affiliation with the CIO would be impossible.

If the last days of the union were characterized by a sense of despair and futility, the members could recall with pride the history of an organization that had served them well. Certainly there was nothing in the history of the United States that indicated a significant commitment to the arts nor did the government’s determination to assume responsibility for the economic survival of its citizenry through work programs imply any special interest in the arts. But as “cultural workers,” represented by a trade union, the artists had finally obtained a share of the federal largess provided for the traditional trades. The union had also fulfilled other fundamental needs. With the possible exception of the WPA payroll line, the union headquarters had no competition as the paramount meeting place for artists. Working hermetically in the solitude of their studios, the artists’ need to interact socially and professionally with their colleagues had been satisfied; they had also benefited from the union-sponsored lectures, symposia, and exhibitions.

Although the union was to exist for almost a decade, the first five years were clearly the most exciting and productive. The vigorous and imaginative tactics of the militant artists forced revolutionary concessions from the government. Many believed that they were riding the wave of the future and that a more humane society would arise from the chaos of capitalism. But when the promise of permanent federal patronage began to fade, the foundation of the union began to crumble. The transition from the free-wheeling, spontaneous Artists Union to the bureaucratic, efficient United American Artists could have little effect on the government’s determination to shrink the Arts Projects. The serious sophisticated artists, who had been ostensibly the justification for the existence of the union, lost interest and began to think more intensely about their own careers and investing their energies in artistic problems. Only those artists for whom political and economic challenges were more absorbing than professional concerns were able to plunge into the organizational problems of the United American Artists. ●

#### A NOTE ON THE DOCUMENTATION

**The article is abstracted from my dissertation, “The Artists Union of New York” (NYU, 1971). Sources for the data—in addition to books, periodicals, journals and newspapers with material relevant to the study—include in-depth interviews with over fifty persons who were participants in or witness to the pertinent events. Generous use was made of the documents and private papers in the collection of the Archives of American Art. The dissertation, which is fully documented, is available on microfilm at the Archives. Notes for this essay have been restricted to sources of specific quotations.**

1 Manifesto of the “Artist Group” given to the author by Max Spivak.

2 Boris Gorelik, “The Artist Begins to Fight!,” Art Front, January 1937, 4.

3 “Mayor Seeks End of Lay-offs on WPA,” New York Times, 3 December 1936.

4 “The Essence of Cheek,” New York Herald Tribune, 3 December, 1936.

5 Letter, Kent to Merrill, 23 May 1942, Rockwell Kent Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter cited as Kent Papers).

6 Letter, Merrill to Kent, 26 May 1942, Kent Papers.

*John Quinn. Aline and Eero Saarinen  
Papers. Archives of American Art,  
Smithsonian Institution.*



# 50 YEARS

## American Art Collecting

Neil Harris

*My one venture into writing an Journal article concerned a subject with rich Archives sources: the history of American art collecting. For all the attention given, over many decades, to the connoisseurs, brigands, philanthropists, and tycoons who have stocked our art museums with so many masterpieces, the character of collecting in this country as a social and civic activity remains only tentatively explored.*

*The great collectors, Morgan, Gardner, Havemeyer, Mellon, Kress, Widener—and there are dozens of others who can be quickly added—have been addressed by popular and scholarly biographers alike. Their names are recognizable, their fortunes impressive (or notorious), and their benefactions considerable; but as men and women of some fame and achievement, their special life histories naturally dominate efforts to understand the collecting urge and its broader impact. More than that they are largely confined, geographically, to the seaboard strip that runs between Boston and Washington. There are exceptions—Henry Huntington, for example—but midwestern, southern, and far western collectors are poorly represented in the broader national narrative.*

*That was one reason why I found the papers of Los Angeles collector Preston Harrison,\* the first art donor of significance to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, so fascinating. Harrison's was a story of internal migration. His family fortunes moved from Virginia to Chicago—where his father served as a five-term mayor—and on to California, and he carried with him museum ideals that were linked to the Art Institute of Chicago. There his brother, another Chicago mayor, served as a trustee. Harrison's Los Angeles letters—self-aggrandizing,*

*disputatious, complaining, pleading, argumentative, idealistic—were all available to me on Archives microfilm.*

*The scope of the Archives collections, their juxtaposition of curators, museum directors, dealers, and collectors, alongside the artists at the center, make for an international and regional, as well as a national story. Harrison's goals were frankly boosterist, like those of collectors in many other cities. He fought with administrators, met and competed with other art lovers, bargained hard with the relatively modest fortune he had available, and sought to convince others to hunt and gather in the interests of the museum. His own purchases were governed by opportunity as much as by taste, and most of them ended up dispersed rather than on the walls of his favorite institution.*

*Learning how collectors shared information or taught one another, why their special enthusiasms varied from place to place and time to time—Impressionism and Surrealism in Chicago, Japanese art and Egyptian relics in Boston—how they interacted with curators and specialists, where they resisted and where they welcomed being organized, requires examining patterns of local community and municipal history as well as individual biography. Buried in museum journals and catalogues and occasional monographs are remarkable accounts of competitions and collaborations that formed the holdings of our art museums. Dependent on the kindness of friends for their art, rather than endowments and purchase funds, the museums that are so cherished today returned the favor by providing collectors with forums for display, sites for gathering, and opportunities for instruction. Future historians of American collecting will be able to piece all this together in good part through the impressive diversity—geographical and categorical—of the Archives' holdings.*

*\*William Preston Harrison was the subject of my 1983 article.*

Continued



*Constantin Brancusi, The Kiss, ca. 1916. Limestone, 23 x 13¼ x 10 in. Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950.*



THE

DISPERSAL

OF

THE

JOHN

**JUDITH ZILCZER**

The dispersal by private sales and public auctions of the legendary Quinn collection marked a significant phase in the evolution of American taste. At his death John Quinn (1870–1924), a New York attorney and patron of contemporary arts and letters, left a collection of more than 2,500 paintings, prints, drawings, and sculpture. Ranging from notable examples of Post-Impressionism and Cubism to sculptural masterpieces by Constantin Brancusi, Raymond Duchamp-Villon, and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, his was the most important modern art collection assembled in the United States before 1930.

QUINN

That Quinn's collection might have formed the nucleus of a museum of modern art prompted regretful speculation as to why the man whom Jack Yeats dubbed "The Noble Buyer" had made no provision to preserve his carefully accumulated hoard. Quinn's biographer B. L. Reid made the astute observation that, "It would have been asking too much to expect John Quinn to die without a quarrel."<sup>1</sup>

COLLECTION



*Constantin Brancusi and John Quinn, n.d.*

*Opposite: John Quinn at The Sleepy Hollow Club, Westchester, New York, n.d. Aline and Eero Saarinen Papers. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.*

At Quinn's death in 1924 the fate of his collection was the subject of heated debate among his friends and within the New York art world.

By the terms of his will and an appended instrument drafted in 1918, Quinn had provided that his art collection (with the exception of Seurat's *Circus*, and a few lesser works) be liquidated for the benefit of his sister and principal heir, Julia Quinn Anderson. Quinn's sensitivity about questions of illness and mortality may have accounted for his failure to revise the 1918 instrument and to include in his will more explicit instructions regarding the collection. Of still greater significance was his sense of familial responsibility which overrode other factors in his decision to dispose of the collection. Quinn wished to assure his sister's financial security. Moreover, Quinn believed that neither the Metropolitan Museum of Art nor any other American institution would accept, much less appreciate, a bequest of contemporary art. Even had he been inclined to establish an independent museum or gallery in the United States, he lacked adequate financial means to realize such a plan. Although Quinn and his art advisor Henri Pierre Roché had discussed the possibility of presenting a group of School of Paris works to the French nation, Quinn never developed this plan further than to bequeath Seurat's *Circus* to the Louvre.

In order to comply with the provisions of Quinn's will, his executors directed that an inventory of the collection be compiled from Quinn's financial records immediately after his death. The executors included Quinn's personal assistant, Thomas J. Curtin, his friend and fellow lawyer Maurice Léon, and the National Bank of Commerce. Curtin knew his employer's collection most intimately, but his untimely death six months after Quinn's further complicated matters for the estate. The remaining executors were less than sympathetic to modern art. Artist and critic Walter Pach, Quinn's longtime friend, later recalled that a National Bank officer once remarked, "Say Pach, we don't want Wall Street laughing at us as the Cubist Bank. We've got to be careful."<sup>2</sup>

While the executors sought to comply with the vague terms of Quinn's will, they were besieged by inquiries and suggestions from Quinn's friends and by published criticism in the New York press. Journalist Frederick James Gregg, for example, favored one huge public auction not only as the best means of liquidating the collection, but also as an historic tribute to Quinn. In direct opposition to such a scheme, Mrs. Jeanne Robert Foster, Quinn's devoted companion, wrote an impassioned plea to the executors. She urged them to defer any precipitous sales or auctions. Instead she advised that the collection be sold slowly over a period of time by private dealers. She believed such "piecemeal" sales would in the long run yield greater returns for the estate. As for the wisdom of dismantling the collection, Mrs. Foster, who regretted this provision of the will, suggested that an exhibition be organized as a public memorial to both the man and the art he had admired. "Since we do not love art sufficiently in this country to preserve the collection intact as a memorial to [Quinn]," Mrs. Foster urged, "let us not go down in art history as eternally disgraced by our method of its disposal."<sup>3</sup>

Confused by conflicting opinions, the executors turned to another renowned American collector for expert advice. On 18 October 1924, Thomas Bowers, a vice-president of the National Bank of Commerce wrote to Duncan Phillips, founder of the Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington:

*Perhaps you have heard of the late John Quinn of this city. Mr. Quinn was a lawyer, a counsel for this Bank . . . [and] it has . . . become our duty to superintend the disposition of his very important collection of art, mostly modern . . . and to consider particularly whether it shall be sold and if so how and when. . . . While plenty of experts are willing to advise us many of them are not altogether disinterested and furthermore we are not fully informed as to their ability. It will be a source of great satisfaction to us if we could have an opportunity to discuss this matter with you and to get the benefit of your experience and skill.<sup>4</sup>*

Later that month Duncan Phillips met in Washington with Mr. Gersten, another of the bank's vice-presidents.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the substance of their discussions is not known, nor can it be determined whether Duncan Phillips' advice proved decisive for the executors.

In any event, Gregg's idea of a single great auction was abandoned. Instead the executors authorized private sales of the collection to begin in 1926. Quinn's friends Walter Pach and the art dealer Joseph Brummer advised and assisted the executors in conducting the sales. At the same time a fraction of Quinn's vast collection was displayed in a memorial exhibition at the New York Art Center, where more works were sold. With funds from the collector Mrs. Meredith Hare, Pidgeon Hill Press published a partially illustrated "catalogue" of the collection on the occasion of the exhibition and sales.<sup>6</sup> In October of 1926 the executors arranged for a select group of French paintings to be auctioned at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris. The remainder of the collection was sold the following year in an auction at the American Art Association in New York. In essence the executors appear to have heeded a number of Mrs. Foster's suggestions. Nevertheless, the complete liquidation of the collection in less than three years was contrary to Mrs. Foster's recommendation of a gradual dispersal over a longer period of time.

Of the three modes of dispersal, the private sales were the least fully documented. Apparently, Quinn's Central Park West apartment was opened to interested parties who were free to select works during and after the 1926 Memorial Exhibition. One collector whose parents acquired works through private sales of the collection, recalled that Quinn's apartment was "completely bare of all rugs, furniture, curtains. . . . Against the wall were stacked dozens of canvases—perhaps in preparation for the Auction Sale."<sup>7</sup> Many of the choicest works were dispersed in this manner. For example, the Parisian dealer Paul Rosenberg bought en bloc fifty-two works by Picasso together with a group of Seurat's drawings.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Henri Pierre Roché and Marcel Duchamp with the assistance of



Mrs. Charles C. Rumsey acquired Quinn's entire Brancusi collection.<sup>9</sup> Critics such as Frederick James Gregg regretted that private sales resulted in the "loss" of important modern master works to European collections.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that American collectors, notably A. Conger Goodyear and the Cornelius Sullivans, acquired significant examples of modern art from the private sales which preceded the public auctions. In fact, Goodyear even persuaded the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo to acquire Picasso's *La Toilette*. The proceeds from these private sales probably exceeded \$200,000.<sup>11</sup>

Ironically, Duncan Phillips was among the few progressive American collectors to refuse to participate in the private sales. Although Walter Pach and Joseph Brummer offered him "first refusal" on items in the collection, Phillips declined their invitations to inspect Quinn's treasures.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps he felt that having advised the executors, he could not take a personal interest in the subsequent liquidation of the Quinn collection. In addition, his financial commitments may have precluded further large investments in modern art during the period of the Quinn sales. Finally, Phillips apparently refused Brummer's offers in part because he would have preferred to see Quinn's collection preserved as a museum of modern art.<sup>13</sup>

Ten months after the memorial exhibition closed, the Paris auction conducted by Bellier with the advice and expertise of Joseph Hessel attracted considerable interest on both sides of the Atlantic. Paris and New York papers reported that the Hôtel Drouot sale

*Henri Matisse, Blue Nude: Memory of Biskra, 1907. Oil on canvas, 36¼ x 55¼ in. The Baltimore Museum of Art: The Cone Collection, formed by Dr. Claribel Cone and Miss Etta Cone of Baltimore, Maryland, BMA 1950.228. Photograph by Mitro Hood.*



yielded 1,650,000 francs or approximately \$308,000 for the Quinn estate. About one-third of that total derived from dealer Henri Bing who acquired Rousseau's *Sleeping Gypsy* for 520,000 francs or about \$102,900. Not only was Bing's bid the highest price paid for any work from the Quinn collection, but also the *Sleeping Gypsy* set a record for the modern market in the late twenties. In his introduction to the auction catalog, Jean Cocteau singled out Rousseau's painting as the most fascinating work in Quinn's collection.<sup>14</sup>

Ironically, it was at the Paris auction that the American collectors Claribel and Etta Cone acquired Matisse's *Blue Nude* for 100,000 francs (\$19,800), the second record-setting bid at the Hôtel Drouot sale.<sup>15</sup> Eventually, French collectors Paul Guillaume and Baron Gourgaud and the Japanese Baron Shigetaro Fukushima enlarged their collections with works that French dealers had acquired at the Paris auction as well as at the earlier private sales in New York.

By far the greatest publicity surrounded the final auction at New York's American Art Association in February 1927. Auctioneer Thomas Kirby conducted the five-session sale of the remaining 819 works in the Quinn collection over a three-day period. The auction realized a total of more than \$91,500 for the estate. Of these proceeds, \$14,111 accrued from the fifth session devoted to modern sculpture and African and Oriental art objects.<sup>16</sup> Twenty-four private collectors, sixteen dealers or galleries, and three artists (Patrick Henry Bruce, Marcel Duchamp, and Louise Hellstrom) participated in the bidding. American collectors who acquired significant works included Alexander Bing, A. Conger Goodyear, Ferdinand Howald, Dr. A. Levene, Samuel Lustgarten, publisher Donald Friede, and socialist labor leader Morris Hillquit. The British collectors John Hope-Johnstone and Richard Wyndham were among the most active bidders.<sup>17</sup> Of the dealers and galleries, Ralph Chait, Ferargil, Kraushaar, J. B. Neumann, Marie Sterner, Scott & Fowles, and E. Weyhe dominated the auction.<sup>18</sup>

Given the widespread interest in the auction of 1927, it is hardly surprising that art critics regarded the final public sale of the residue of Quinn's collection not only as a measure of Quinn's taste, but also as a symbolic test of the commercial and aesthetic merits of modernism. To a considerable extent, such critical expectations were unfair because many of Quinn's most important treasures already had been sold before the New York auction. Although the sale did not prove to be the "slaughter" Mrs. Foster had feared, neither was it as successful as the Parisian auction of 1926. For example, Puvis de Chavannes's *Beheading of St. John the Baptist* (now in the Barber Institute, Birmingham) sold for \$8,000, while Matisse's *Apples* brought \$1,225. Ironically, the record-setting prices represented a substantial devaluation of Quinn's original investment, since he had acquired the former in 1912 for \$12,000 and the latter in 1920 for \$3,200. In general, most of the items, particularly Cubist, Vorticist, and other abstract work sold for a fraction of their original worth. One of the few exceptions to this pattern of devaluation was the work of the American painter Maurice Prendergast. His paintings

**24** PRIVATE  
COLLECTORS,  
**16**  
DEALERS OR  
GALLERIES,  
AND **3** ARTISTS  
PARTICIPATED  
IN THE BIDDING.



Pierre Puvis de Chavannes,  
*The Beheading of St. John the Baptist*,  
 1869. © The Barber Institute of Fine  
 Arts, University of Birmingham,  
 The Bridgeman Art Library.

[including *Promenade*] consistently realized record-setting prices well above Quinn's initial investment.<sup>19</sup>

The disparity between auction proceeds and Quinn's expenditures for modern art went unnoticed in critical commentary on the New York auction. Newspapers announced the results of each session with such headlines as "Big Prices Keep up in Quinn Art Sale."<sup>20</sup> The *American Art News* published an editorial proclaiming the auction a qualified success:

*The buyers at the Quinn Sale included critics, dealers, admirers, and bargain hunters. The latter class was perhaps the only group that met disappointment, for the expected bargains were few and far between. . . . Nor was it a cruelly commercial audience, although in the final analysis it passed judgment. The artists, judging from the list of purchasers, had considerable friendly support. The patriotic Irish rallied around the standard of Yeats and George Russell; the friends of the abstractionists tried their best to uphold a dying cause, embodied most notably in Gleizes and Metzinger, while the conservative moderns of the English and American schools had their own little group of serious appreciators in the auction room. It was due, no doubt, to this composite quality of the audience, quite*

as much as to Quinn's fame as a collector, that the paintings realized such excellent prices.<sup>21</sup>

Quinn's executors would hardly have agreed with the judgment of the *Art News* editor. In assessing the 1927 auction in New York, the executors would compare the results with proceeds from the private sales and the Parisian auction which had yielded net profits beyond Quinn's expenditures for contemporary art. A typical example from the private sales was Matisse's *Music* (sketch) now in the Museum of Modern Art. Quinn had acquired the painting in 1920 for \$1,100. Six years later, A. Conger Goodyear spent \$1,800 to purchase *Music* from Quinn's estate.<sup>22</sup> By comparison the New York auction was hardly a financial windfall for the Quinn estate.

If the New York auction was less than profitable, its historical and psychological ramifications more than compensated for the fiscal imbalance. The final sale of the Quinn collection represented the most important and financially lucrative public auction of modern art to be held in the United States before 1930. While the estate may have suffered a net loss for that portion of the collection liquidated in 1927, the proceeds still exceeded records set at three significant modern art sales which had preceded the dispersal of the Quinn collection. These were the A. L. Rosenberg sale at the Anderson Galleries in 1918, the Dikran K. Kélékian collection sale in 1922, and the sale of Marius de Zaya's collection in 1923.<sup>23</sup> Quinn had distinguished himself as one of the few enthusiastic bidders



Above: Henri Matisse, *Apples*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 46 x 35 in. Gift of Florene May Schoenborn and Samuel A. Marx 1948.563, The Art Institute of Chicago. © 2010 Succession H. Matisse / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photograph © The Art Institute of Chicago.

Below: Maurice Brazil Prendergast, *Promenade*, 1914–1915. Oil on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts, USA, City of Detroit Purchase, The Bridgeman Art Library.





Henri Matisse, *Music* (sketch),  
*Collioure, spring–summer 1907*.  
Oil and charcoal on canvas, 29 x 24 in.  
Gift of A. Conger Goodyear in honor  
of Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (78.1962) © 2010  
Succession H. Matisse / Artists Rights  
Society (ARS), New York. Digital image  
© The Museum of Modern Art/licensed  
by SCALA/Art Resource, New York.

at these earlier auctions. By the time his own collection was liquidated in 1927, the ranks of American modern art enthusiasts had grown to include more than two dozen individuals, many of whom participated in the bidding at the Quinn sale.

When the first sales of the collection began in January 1926, the conservative critic Royal Cortissoz had warned in the pages of the *Herald Tribune*:

*Modernism governs. It does so purely, as it seems to us, by virtue of the crass aggressiveness of exacerbated egotism. Not even with the sanction of John Quinn can it affirm more than the sensationalism of a passing craze.*<sup>24</sup>

The liquidation of Quinn's collection between 1926 and 1927 proved Cortissoz wrong. The combined proceeds from the private sales and two auctions exceeded \$600,000.<sup>25</sup> Both private and public sales evidenced the vitality of the modern art market in New York. Moreover, the dispersal of Quinn's collection enabled other pioneering American collectors to build and enlarge their own modern art collections with Quinn's riches. Many of these "second generation" modern art collections would form the nuclei of museum collections. The Arensberg collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Goodyear Collection of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, and the Howald Collection of the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts are among the notable public collections which owe part of their fame to masterpieces originally acquired by John Quinn. Other major works from the Quinn collection eventually entered such important institutions as the Museum of Modern Art which now owns two dozen works from the Quinn collection. Another two dozen items are distributed among the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Fogg Art Museum each of whose holdings include eight works from the Quinn collection.<sup>26</sup>

Although the dispersal of John Quinn's collection ultimately enriched major public institutions in the United States, the dismantling of so large and daring a collection had several unwelcome consequences. The surviving evidence suggests that the immediate impact of the Quinn sales was far from disastrous. Contrary to the fears voiced by Quinn's friends, the public and private sales demonstrated that a small but active group of modern art patrons had emerged in America. Nevertheless, the dissolution of Quinn's collection destroyed the embodiment of one of the most lively and important careers in the history of modern art patronage. Quinn's collection reflected more than one man's aesthetic taste, however prescient. With the dispersal of John Quinn's collection, a unique, historical cross section of an artistic generation vanished. Perhaps the most telling effect of the Quinn sales has been the disappearance of approximately three-quarters of his collection. Today little more than five hundred works from Quinn's rich holdings can be identified with certainty. Therein lie the tragedy and mystery of John Quinn's art collection. ●



- 1 Ben L. Reid, The Man from New York: John Quinn and His Friends (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 639.
- 2 Walter Pach, cited by Aline Saarinen, in notes of an interview, February 1956, Aline Saarinen Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Saarinen Papers).
- 3 Jeanne Robert Foster, letter to Thomas Curtin, 18 October 1924, Collection of Thomas F. Conroy; published in Judith Zilczer, "The Noble Buyer": John Quinn, Patron of the Avant-Garde (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978), 60. Frederick James Gregg published his opposing views in his article "Europe Raids the John Quinn Collection," The Independent 116 (27 February 1926), 240–241. The noted critic Henry McBride shared Gregg's regret over the fate of the collection. In his article "Modern Art" in The Dial 80, no. 2 (February 1926), 133, McBride dismissed Mrs. Foster's proposal as sentimental.
- 4 Thomas Bowers, letter to Duncan Phillips, 18 October 1924, Phillips Collection Archive, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Phillips Collection Archive). I am grateful to Sareen R. Gerson for bringing this correspondence to my attention.
- 5 Mr. Scully, telegram to Duncan Phillips, 22 October [1924]; Duncan Phillips, telegram to Thomas Bowers, 22 October 1924, Phillips Collection Archive.
- 6 "Book Review: John Quinn, 1870–1925 [sic]," Art News 24 (20 March 1926), 6.
- 7 Mrs. Francis L. Blewer, letter to the author, 4 December 1977, Hirshhorn Museum Archive, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- 8 "52 Picasso Paintings Sold," New York Times, 10 January 1926.
- 9 Aline Saarinen, notes of an interview with Marcel Duchamp, February 1956, Saarinen Papers. See also Pierre Cabanne, Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 73. Frequent references to subsequent disposition of the sculpture appear in Henri Pierre Roché's correspondence with Brancusi and Duchamp (Roché Papers, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin).
- 10 Gregg, "Europe Raids the John Quinn Collection."
- 11 "Quinn Show Opens at the Art Center," New York Times Magazine, 10 January 1926, 16–18; "Art Sale Nets \$120,000," New York Times, 9 January 1926; Forbes Watson, "The Quinn Collection Revives Art Center," New York World, 10 January 1926.
- 12 Joseph Brummer, letter to Duncan Phillips, 28 December 1925; and Walter Pach, letter to Duncan Phillips, 15 May 1926, Phillips Collection Archive.
- 13 In acknowledging Phillips's refusal, Brummer replied, "I agree with you that the whole Quinn collection should have been kept intact as a museum of modern art." (Joseph Brummer, letter to Duncan Phillips, 11 January 1926, Phillips Collection Archive).
- 14 Jean Cocteau, introduction, Catalogue des tableaux modernes provenant de la collection John Quinn, (Paris: Hôtel Drouot, 28 October 1926); "High Prices in Paris for Quinn Collection," New York Times, 29 October 1926.
- 15 Luc Benoist, "Les Ventes," Beaux-Arts 4 (1 November 1926), 288; "520,000 Francs for Rousseau in Paris," Art News 25 (6 November 1926), 3.
- 16 "Quinn Sale Brings \$91,570," New York Times, 13 February 1927; "John Quinn Art Brings \$91,571 in Four-Day Sale," New York Herald Tribune, 13 February 1927.
- 17 See "Appendix II: Index of Buyers from the Sale of the Quinn Collection, New York, 1927," in Zilczer, "The Noble Buyer," 193–194. According to Walter Michel, the buyer erroneously identified in the auction records as Wyndham Lewis was Richard Wyndham. See Michel, Wyndham Lewis: Paintings and Drawings (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971) 151, n. 60.
- 18 Zilczer, "Index of Buyers," "The Noble Buyer," 193–194.
- 19 All prices cited are published in "Appendix I: Partial Checklist of the Quinn Collection," of Zilczer's "The Noble Buyer."
- 20 "Big Prices Keep up in Quinn Sale," New York American, 11 February 1927.
- 21 "The Quinn Sale," Art News 25 (19 February 1927), 8.
- 22 Zilczer, "The Noble Buyer," 116.
- 23 The Alexandre-Rosenberg Collection, New York: Anderson Galleries, 3 May 1918; "Modernist Art Sells Badly," Art News 16 (11 May 1918), 6; Modern French Pictures Belonging to Dikran Khan Kelekian, New York: American Art Galleries, 30–31 January 1920; The Collection of Marius de Zayas of New York City, New York: Anderson Galleries, 23 March 1923.
- 24 Royal Cortissoz, "The John Quinn Collection and Some Other Episodes," New York Herald Tribune, 17 January 1926.
- 25 This figure is based on combined press accounts. Milton Brown estimated that the sales realized \$700,000. See his American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), 95. Although Brown's figure may be slightly inflated, his conclusions about the effect of the sale coincide more closely with the published press reports, notably the article "Estate Gains \$210,000 by Rise in Art Values," New York Times, 25 May 1927. Reid's hypothesis that the liquidation of the collection resulted in a loss of \$100,000 is not supported by the extant records (The Man from New York, 660–661).
- 26 Zilczer, "Appendix I: Checklist," "The Noble Buyer."

The camp was too salt. - + so we had it -

+ now with coffee  
was the other being  
really very sorry  
or was very sorry  
so - its all small  
to happen as  
a funny bell.



There comes the  
cave to ask

ask me something - as she borrows me to  
death - I shall be glad to give it up - there  
and some duties - she wants to know - whether  
the camp might to have some of the land - but  
I today yes or no - yes I guess not -  
well I suppose I've learned something - but  
I have given myself away plus in this way  
away - as when I explained to the fish  
woman that I thought 15 cows - too much for  
each of the 10 fish - she had meant 150 cows for

# 50 YEARS

## What's American about American Art?

H. Barbara Weinberg

Note: This introduction is adapted from a speech that Dr. Weinberg gave in October 2007, when she received the Archives of American Art's Lawrence A. Fleischman Award for Distinguished Scholarship in the Field of American Art History. The article on Robert Reid that she refers to appeared in the *Journal* in 1975; the article reprinted here appeared in 1983.

*There is no credible American art scholar who hasn't relied on the Archives of American Art, a unique resource that is the only such gathering of documents—letters, diaries, account books, oral histories, and other such materials—in any field of art history.*

*Let me tell you briefly how essential the Archives has been to my work.*

*I was fortunate to study American art as both an undergraduate and a graduate student—a rare privilege in the 1960s—and I was nurtured in the habit of seeking what was American in American art. During my graduate studies, I relied, of course, on the Archives for materials relating to my dissertation and other projects. By 1975, though, I had thoroughly mined my dissertation for articles and was seeking a new subject for research.*

*One day I was working at the Archives, then located on the unprepossessing top floor of an elegant townhouse at 41 East 65th Street, sitting as usual in the modest room that housed the card catalogue and four huge microfilm readers. As I was thumbing through the catalogue, a card pertaining to the student correspondence of Robert Reid, later an American Impressionist, literally popped up. Reid's letters, written to his family from Paris in 1887, recounted his experiences at the Académie Julian, of which I had then never heard. Reid also expressed his desire to earn the good opinion of his academic teachers, Boulanger and Lefebvre, and his urgent wish to have his paintings accepted in the Paris Salon. As someone who had been pursuing what was American in American art, I was surprised to discover how important Parisian study and success had been to a young American painter. And I also began to see how the American Impressionists' academic training could explain their stylistic restraint.*

*These were revolutionary ideas in 1975. From that point, my research, publications, and teaching focused on the connections between American painters and their French teachers, the lessons the Americans brought home, and their efforts to emulate and re-create French styles and standards on these shores. So because a catalogue card popped up at the Archives of American Art, I have helped to spearhead an appreciation of the fact—which, by 2010, we take for granted—that what was American in late-nineteenth-century American art was that it wasn't very American at all.*

## LATE-NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN PAINTING:

# Cosmopolitan Concerns and Critical Controversies

H. BARBARA WEINBERG

In 1837, Ralph Waldo Emerson produced the following well-known words in his address “The American Scholar” to the Harvard Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa:

*Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves.*

By contrast, a little more than a quarter of a century later, the critic James Jackson Jarves counseled Americans to enjoy the full bounty of foreign harvests. In *The Art-Idea*, published in 1864, he advised:

*... if America elects to develop her art wholly out of herself, without reference to the accumulated experience of older civilizations, she will make a mistake and protract her improvement.*

*... To get artistic riches by virtue of assimilated examples, knowledge, and ideas, drawn from all sources, and made national and homogeneous by solidarity of our own, is our right pathway to consummate art.*

The radically differing prescriptions of independence from or affiliation with foreign culture offered by Emerson and Jarves’s reflect a major shift in American attitudes within a crucial period of less than thirty years. Emerson’s call for detachment from Europe is quintessentially Jacksonian in its chauvinistic self-confidence. By contrast, Jarves’s advocacy of creative eclecticism, made precociously toward the end of the Civil War, reveals a different sort of confidence, a



belief in American ability to benefit from full participation in the international cultural arena.

The attitudes of Emerson and Jarves are paralleled by essential differences in the art of their respective generations. Jacksonian painters had tried to rely on nature to paint the best part of the picture, and had abided by Emerson's recommendation, advanced in 1841 in his essay, *Art*, that "pictures must not be too picturesque."

By contrast, late-nineteenth-century American painters asserted themselves as stylists as never before, mediating between images encountered and their viewers' experiences of them in pictures. Typically in landscape painting after the Civil War, the heroic is deflated, and description gives way to more generalized and meditative images, filtered through the artist's temperament, celebrated as stimuli to subjective speculation, or simply studied as motifs.

The artist unabashedly paints the best part of the picture, as in George Inness's *Sunset in the Woods*, 1891 (The Corcoran Gallery of Art), rather than nature, as he might have done in Frederic Edwin Church's *Twilight in the Wilderness*, 1860 (The Cleveland Museum of Art). Antebellum encounters with barely tamed nature, lovingly recorded in meticulous botanical detail and overwhelming in scale in comparison with those who enjoy its pleasures, as in Cole's *The Pic-Nic*, are supplanted by leisurely reflections on nature tamed, domesticated, and kept at bay by the Brooklyn backyard hortus conclusis of William Merrit Chase's *Open Air Breakfast*. Depicted with a bravura that derives from Chase's training in the advanced

*Previous spread: Robert Reid's letter to his sister Sara Bigelow Reid, 14 August 1887. Robert Lewis Reid Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.*

*Opposite: Thomas Cole, The Pic-Nic, 1846. Oil on canvas, 47 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 54 in. Brooklyn Museum 67.205.2 A. Augustus Healy Fund B.*



tendencies of Munich in the 1870s, later freshened by his assimilation of French Impressionism and his experiments in pastel—this work typifies the cosmopolitanism of its author, who vividly captured the aspirations of his generation when he reportedly remarked in 1872: “My God, I’d rather go to Europe than go to heaven.”

Heightened awareness and absorption of contemporary European artistic ideals—especially the French—radically altered late-nineteenth-century American Painting, promoting a growth of artistic self-consciousness and professionalism, and a desire to serve art, rather than merely to record nature and to celebrate the American scene. Late-nineteenth-century American landscapes were of course, deeply influenced by the aesthetics of the Barbizon School and the Impressionists, who enjoyed considerable critical sympathy and patronage in the United States in the period after the Civil War.

But American landscape painting was altered in an even more important way by late-nineteenth-century American artists’ assimilation of foreign—especially French—artistic ideals. It declined as American painters’ predominant subject, yielding primacy of place to figure painting, which took on an unprecedented importance. Not only did more American artists engage in figure painting than during the Jacksonian period, but they did so in a new, more cosmopolitan, less nationalistic way. The domestic and bombastic in history painting, exemplified by Emanuel Leutze’s *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, 1851 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), yield to a range of more sophisticated, universal, and “artistic” subjects, reflecting the influence of European, especially French, academic ideals. Thomas Hovenden, for example, a student of Alexandre Cabanel at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in the mid-1870s, explores with a genre painter’s sensibility the history of the uprising in the Vendée region in the late 1790s and produces his successful Salon painting of 1880, *In Hoc Signo Vinces*. Returning to the United States after six years of study and painting abroad, especially in Brittany, Hovenden easily shifts from the sort of “genrefied”



Opposite: William Merritt Chase, *The Open Air Breakfast*, ca. 1888. Oil on canvas, 37<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 56<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. Toledo Museum of Art. Purchased with funds from the Florence Scott Libbey Bequest in memory of her father, Maurice A. Scott, 1953.136. Photography Incorporated, Toledo.

Left, Thomas Hovenden, *The Last Moments of John Brown*, 1882–1884. Oil on canvas, 77<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 66<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Stoeckel, 1897 (97.5) Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Above: Thomas Hovenden, *In Hoc Signo Vincas*, 1880. Oil on canvas, Detroit Institute of Arts, USA/Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harold O. Love/The Bridgeman Art Library.

history endorsed by contemporary French academics to American history, producing such sentimental works as *The Last Moments of John Brown*, (which commemorates Brown's touching farewell to a black child who is held up as if to receive his blessing as Brown is led to execution), rather than Brown's heroism at Harper's Ferry. From genreified French or American history, Hovenden easily shifts to American genre, re-dressing the characters who appear in such tableaux as *In Hoc Signo Vincas* to act out the sentimental moment of *Breaking Home Ties*, 1890 (Philadelphia Museum of Art).

Similarly, George de Forest Brush will imitate, as well as domesticate, his French teacher's works. Jean-Léon Gérôme's genreified—neo-Grec—images of classical antiquity, such as his *Diogenes*, are recycled by Brush for such works as *Orpheus*. Gérôme's meticulously studied and lucidly rendered "semi-barbaric" North African types provide the model for Brush's North American Indians, with whom he lived during the 1880s: Gérôme's *The Prisoner*, 1863 (Louvre) generates such a "domestication" as Brush's *The Moose Chase*, 1886 (Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.). And some of Gérôme's favorite subjects, including that of the artist in his studio, a theme with a long history in nineteenth-century French painting, provide the impetus for similar explorations by Brush: Gérôme's *Michaengelo Examining the Belvedere Torso*, 1850 (New York Art

Jean-Léon Cérôme's genrefied images of classical antiquity, such as his **Diogenes**, are recycled by George de Forest Brush for such works as **Orpheus**.



Market), for example, is transformed in Brush's *The Sculptor and the King*, finished 1888 (Portland [Maine] Museum of Art).

While such late-nineteenth-century American academics as Hovenden and Brush experimented with genrefied history painting and expanded the range of genre subjects, others created another equally important change, a new type of American Genre painting that is consistent with the generalized and suggestive mood of the landscape painting at which we looked earlier. Although Thomas Dewing was trained at the Julian Academy in a mode similar to that internalized by Hovenden and Brush, and could produce such a refined *académie* as *The Sorcerer's Slave*, 1876 (National Academy of Design, New York), as a result of that training, he renounced investigative academicism in favor of a more generalized, subjective, and personal style, one that is figurative analogue of the American tonalist landscapes of Tryon or Inness. Dewing's painting, *The Recitation*, is a paradigm of subjectivity, suggestiveness, timelessness, and placelessness—a genre that resists the term and is more aptly labeled merely a figure painting—offering a vivid contrast to the literal, anecdotal specificity of Richard Caton Woodville's *War News From Mexico*.

The notion that a painting is a painting in its own right—not necessarily a record of events, appearances, or ideals—also affected much late-nineteenth-century American portrait painting, as is evident in a comparison of the Samuel F. B. Morse commemorative image of *The Marquis de Lafayette*, 1825 (City Hall, New York) with James McNeill Whistler's *Arrangement in Flesh Color and Black: Portrait of Theodore Duret*, 1883 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Whereas the props introduced in the Morse—the busts of Washington and Franklin, who join Lafayette in a heroic trinity—are essential to the idealistic, democratic message—those that Whistler chose for his arrangement—a lady's evening cloak and fan—are irrelevant to any purpose but enlivening the otherwise monochromatic palette. Although, to be sure, we emerge from our encounter with Duret with a sense of his appearance and confident personality, he has only been the raw material for the making of a painting, rather than the embodiment of any set of ideals.

While I might go on to point up other contrasts between pre- and post-Civil War American painting—comparing, for example, Jacksonian still lifes that celebrate the succulent products of American nature with the sumptuous man-made objects that Harnett lovingly recorded—I would like to propose a final pair of works, which when compared, summarize the differences between antebellum and post-Civil War paintings: Asher B. Durand's *Kindred Spirits* and Thomas Eakins's *William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River*. As an image of the artist in his studio—that is, in the untamed nature from which much antebellum inspiration flowed in American painting—the Durand lovingly records that raw nature in meticulous detail, letting it dwarf Cole and Bryant, who seek nature as a source of inspiration. Derived in all likelihood from Dutch landscape prototypes, the painting also exemplifies antebellum





Opposite, top: Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Diogenes*, 1860. Oil on canvas, 29<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 39<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland. Photograph © The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland.

Opposite, bottom: George de Forest Brush, *Orpheus*, 1890. Oil on panel, 12 x 20 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of JoAnn and Gillian Ganz, Jr. 1995.767. Photograph © 2010 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Left: George de Forest Brush, *The Moose Chase*, 1886. Oil on canvas 37<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 57<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of William T. Evans 1909.7.9.

American artists' relationships with European sources. Such artists as Durand traveled abroad, usually after their styles were formed, and (rather than seeking formal training) derived generalized inspiration from Old Master works preserved in European galleries, or from the friendly counsels of their foreign contemporaries.

By contrast, the Eakins is a paradigm of the late-nineteenth-century American artistic experience. Like thousands of others, Eakins sought formal European training early in his career, entering the *École des Beaux-Arts* in 1866 for two and a half years' study under Gérôme, and studying briefly with the *École* sculptor, Augustin Dumont, and with the independent portraitist Léon Bonnat before his return to Philadelphia in 1870. His *William Rush* exemplifies attitudes that pervade late-nineteenth-century American painting and include elements of history, genre, portrait, and still life painting. It is, in fact, a typical late-nineteenth-century American painting even because of the fact that it is not a landscape. Personal circumstances seem to have suggested the subject to Eakins: his admiration for Rush, a Philadelphia sculptor; the appeal of the legend of a nonprofessional model posing for the sculptor; the interest in American history stimulated by the Philadelphia Centennial; his coincident appointment as professor of the life classes at the Pennsylvania Academy; and the recent exhibition at the newly reopened Academy of John Lewis Krimmel's *Fourth of July in Center Square*, Philadelphia, 1810–1812 (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts), which depicts Rush's figure in place. Even more important, the work was generated by, and reflects, things that Eakins, and so many other late-nineteenth-century American painters, learned in Paris:

- » They learned that art can be about art, and artistic themes, and not necessarily nature.
- » They learned that art is a studio enterprise, a product of invention and not a description of nature.

**They learned high regard for the Old Masters in general, and they celebrated the accomplishments of the Old Masters whom they admired.**

- » They learned an appreciation of history painting, especially of the genre-fied sort explored by French academic teachers.
- » They learned traditional academic technique, including lucid composition, stage-like space, and careful linear definition of form.
- » They learned, if they wished, a variety of techniques including painterly modes such as that practiced by Bonnat, and those of Bonnat's heroes Velázquez and Ribera, whose work Eakins examined in Spain before his return home; moreover, they learned to be eclectic in stylistic commitments as they were eclectic in subject matter.
- » They learned high regard for the Old Masters in general, and they celebrated the accomplishments of the Old Masters whom they admired, just as their teachers did.
- » Generally, they learned figure painting, and more specifically, in Paris, painting of the nude, which was the central concern of French academic training.
- » They learned to “hire properties” and study carefully to capture accurate settings. (Eakins studied costume plates for the clothes on the chair; sought out Rush's sculpture and made wax models for inclusion, sacrificing historical accuracy to show the range of Rush's interests; visited wood carvers' shops on the Philadelphia waterfront; interviewed people who recalled Rush's shop; and took Rush's face from a self-portrait and his costume from Krimmel's painting).
- » They learned an interest in all media—painters, for example, studied sculpture and with sculptors. Like Gérôme, Eakins worked as a sculptor, encouraged his students to study sculpture, and combined the two media in a single work of art, as in Gérôme's *Michelangelo*.
- » They learned eclecticism in general, learned to be free to borrow styles and subjects from the best of the past and the present, even to borrow from oneself, as Eakins did in two later versions of his *William Rush* painting.

Whereas Thomas Cole, departing from Europe in 1829, had been urged by his friend William Cullen Bryant to gaze on “Fair scenes . . . till the tears shall dim thy sight, But keep that earlier, wilder image bright,” his successors and their supporters reveled in their cosmopolitanism. And the more cosmopolitan and genteel, the better. Typically, John Singer Sargent, an American born in Florence and trained in Paris—who was said to have looked like a German, spoken like an Englishman, and painted like a Spaniard—enjoyed the comparisons of his portraits with those of Velázquez that his friend, Henry James, noted, and the compliment proffered by Auguste Rodin, that he was “the Van Dyck of our times.” He also enjoyed far more popularity and patronage as an artist than did the Philadelphia-bound Eakins.



Sargent's friend and host at Broadway, Worcestershire, in the late 1880s, Francis Davis Millet, was complimented by George H. Sheldon for "rivaling Alma-Tadema himself" in themes such as *A Hand Maid (The Water-Carrier)*, and enjoyed immense professional and personal popularity during his lifetime. This is attested by his having been designated Director of Decorations at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, his receiving numerous major mural painting commissions thereafter, and his being widely and profoundly mourned after his death on the *Titanic*.

Of the thousands of cosmopolitan, genteel, late-nineteenth-century images, I have obviously chosen the Millet for its analogies of pose with Eakins's nude model, for the contrasting stylistic approaches of each artist, and for the contrasting reputations that each enjoyed or suffered. While Millet's ideal, genteel, and euphemistic works (much more typical of his era), such as his paintings of the Pompeian water carrier were lauded for their grace and their relation to the popular art of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Eakins's realism generally excited controversy.

The closely studied, discarded costume in the *William Rush*, for example, along with the unidealized anatomy of the nonprofessional model who Eakins himself used and described in the painting, prompted the critic for *The New York Times* to remark when the painting was seen at the Society of American Artists in 1878: "What ruins the picture is much less the want of beauty in the nude model (as has been suggested in the public prints), than the presence in the foreground of the clothes of that young woman, cast carelessly over a chair. This gave the shock which makes one think about nudity—and at once the picture becomes improper."



Top: Thomas Wilmer Dewing, *The Recitation*, 1891. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit Museum of Art Purchase Picture Fund/The Bridgeman Art Library.

Above: Richard Caton Woodville, *War News from Mexico*, 1848. Oil on canvas, 27 x 25 in. Courtesy Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas.

**As late-nineteenth-century American art was so intensely cosmopolitan, it was of little use to writers pursuing a “usable” American past.**



I would like to suggest some reasons why you may feel thoroughly familiar with Eakins, despite the fact that contemporary critics tended to ignore or condemn his painting during his lifetime, and why a well-known work by a widely known late-nineteenth-century painter such as Frank Millet may seem so obscure. American art history has been extremely selective. Its earliest energetic development was stimulated by and coincided with a period of culturally nationalist and, ultimately, isolationist thinking between the First and Second World Wars. Searching for a “usable” American past to abet native impulses in twentieth-century American art, culturally nationalistic commentators understandably concentrated on antebellum accomplishments, including Hudson River landscape and colonial portraiture, which, despite its heavy dependence upon English Baroque prototypes, was yet reassuring for its links with the formative phase of the United States.

As late-nineteenth-century American art was so intensely cosmopolitan, it was of little use to writers pursuing a “usable” American past. Seeking what was American in American art, these writers confronted an art that was American in its lack of Americanness. Condemning the cosmopolitan and the genteel as effete and “feminine,” cultural critics and historians such as George Santayana, Van Wyck Brooks, Vernon L. Parrington, Malcolm Cowley, and others associated with the journals *The Seven Arts* (1916–1917), *Poetry* (1912– ), and *New Republic* (1914– ), and such selective commentators on the Gilded Age as Lewis Mumford, invited us to associate late-nineteenth-century American cosmopolitanism with a putative loss of self-confidence in the wake of the Civil War, with an imagined neocolonialism that paralleled the cultural insecurities of the late eighteenth century.

They appear to have ignored the extensive testimony of late-nineteenth-century observers, including critics such as S.G.W. Benjamin, George William Sheldon, Charles Henry Caffin, Mariana van Rensselaer, Samuel Isham, and artists such as John La Farge, Kenyon Cox, Edwin Blashfield, and Will H. Low, that art was [an] inevitable civilizing agent for post-Civil War America; that internationalism on creative fronts was just as realistic and desirable a goal as was the developing internationalism on industrial, technological, scientific, and financial fronts; that Europe was more accessible for travel and study; and that the European academies were simply the best places to learn the skills necessary to attract newly affluent and sophisticated patrons.

Reinforced by concurrent modernist disdain of European academicism, which relegated teachers whom the Americans had sought out to shadows cast by the progenitors of the twentieth-century avant-garde, culturally nationalistic critics and art historians filtered the cosmopolitan and eclectic art of the late-nineteenth century across their own biases. Thus, they lauded those who had seemed least susceptible to European influences, such as Winslow Homer, who had sought no foreign training, and paired him with Walt Whitman, another great late-nineteenth-century American

isolatio. They ignored the most avid of the cosmopolites, such as Millet, Sargent, Whistler, or Frederick Bridgman, another expatriate, one with a durable commitment to Gérôme, his Parisian teacher.

Finally, these critics rescued a few late-nineteenth-century American painters from the cosmopolitan context in which they had been trained and to which they maintained artistic allegiances by emphasizing native inclinations, such as subject choice. Thus, Eakins had been billed as purely American artist, and his *William Rush* had been imprinted on our consciousness as a very American image. His *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*, 1871 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), has been linked to the tradition of luminist genre rather than to its more likely source: the aesthetic of Gérôme, whom Eakins liked, admired, relied on, and whose works we know he saw.

During the past fifteen years the cultural nationalist point of view has maintained its hold in the more popular interpretations of the history of nineteenth-century American painting. Many scholars, however, have thought about the national relevance of the cosmopolitan American art of the late-nineteenth century, calling our attention to *American Art in the Barbizon Mood* (1975) by Peter Bermingham, *The Color of Mood* (1972) by Wanda Corn, and *American Impressionism* (1980) by William H. Gerdts, and to numerous long-neglected cosmopolitan painters. To my mind, one of the most provocative and influential revisionist studies—a very intentionally revisionist study—is Michael Quick's catalogue of an exhibition of *American Expatriate Painters of the Late Nineteenth Century*, held at the Dayton Art Institute in 1976, which convincingly refutes the cultural nationalist notion of American insecurity as prompting Parisian study after the Civil War. Quick notes, for example, that even Germany, which had every right to feel self-confident after its victory in the Franco-Prussian War, reflected the standards of the Paris Salon in the 1870s and 1880s at least as extensively as did the allegedly insecure United States.

The present exhibition ["A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting, 1760–1910," Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1983], bringing to light the works of a large number of cosmopolites and examining them in terms of the general cultural sensibilities of the period, is certainly a contribution to a broader understanding of the art and aspirations of late-nineteenth-century America. It is interesting, of course, that so many fine late-nineteenth-century American works—many of which enjoyed critical approbation at the great fairs of the period—could be assembled here for exhibition at the very moment when what is said to constitute a collection of "Masterpieces of American Painting" has been assembled in Boston for exhibition in Paris. Curiously, the exhibition now in Boston and that on the walls of the Detroit Institute of Arts interlock rather nicely, one still seeking to define what is American in American art, and the other to acknowledge that what was American in late nineteenth-century American art was the fact that it was not very American. ♻



Above: Thomas Eakins, William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River, 1876-1877. Oil on canvas (mounted on Masonite) 20<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 26<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches. Made in: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Mrs. Thomas Eakins and Miss Mary Adeline Williams, 1929.

Opposite: Asher B. Durand, Kindred Spirits, 1849. Oil on canvas, 44 x 36 in. Courtesy Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas. Photography by The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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*Watch for Bohemians, the theme of the next Journal, in December 2010.*



*John Singer Sargent (attr.), caricature, 1885–1886. Francis Davis Millet and Millet Family Papers. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.*

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