SMARTHISTORY OF ART IXB- MODERNISM 1945 TO 1980



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10: SmartHistory of Art IXb- Modernism 1945 to 1980

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1.1: Latin American art, an introduction

by DR. MAYA JIMÉNEZ

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Figure 1.1.1: Jorge González Camarena, *Presencia de América Latina*, 1964-65, acrylic, 35,2 x 6 m (Universidad de Concepción, Chile) (photo: Farisori, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Why is it important to study Latin American art today?

The study of Latin America and Latin American art is more relevant today than ever. In the United States, the burgeoning population of Latinos—people of Latin American descent—and consequently the rise of Spanish (and Spanglish) speakers, Latino musical genres, literature, and visual arts, require that we better understand the cultural origins of these diverse communities. Even beyond our borders, Latin American countries continue to exert influence over political and economic policies, while their artistic traditions are everyday made more and more accessible at cultural institutions like art museums, which regularly exhibit the work of Latin American artists. In many ways, Latin American and Latino culture is an inescapable reality, thus it is up to us, for the benefits of appreciation and integration, to tackle the difficult question of what it means to be from Latin America.

For many of us Latin America is not an entirely foreign concept, in fact our knowledge of it is most likely defined by a particular country, food, music, or artist, and sadly, it is also sometimes clouded by cultural stereotypes. What many of us often overlook, is the diversity of what it means to be Latin American and Latino. Interestingly, Latin America is not as different from the United States as we tend to think, since we both share in the history of conquest and imperialism, albeit from different perspectives. Thus the study of Latin American art should not necessarily be thought of as a narrative that is entirely separate from that of the United States, but rather as one that is shared.



Figure 1.1.2: Félix Parra, *Episodes of the Conquest: Massacre of Cholula*, 1877, oil on canvas, 65 x 106 cm (Museo Nacional de Arte (INBA), Mexico City)

What do we mean by Latin America?

Latin America broadly refers to the countries in the Americas (including the Caribbean) whose national language is derived from Latin. These include countries where the languages of Spanish, Portuguese, and French are spoken. Latin America is therefore a historical term rooted in the colonial era, when these languages were introduced to the area by their respective European colonizers. The term itself, however, was not coined until the nineteenth century, when Argentinean jurist Carlos Calvo and French engineer Michel Chevalier, in reference to the Napoleonic invasion of Mexico in 1862, used the term “Latin” to denote difference from the “Anglo-Saxon” people of North America. It gained currency during the twentieth century when Mesoamerican, Central American, Caribbean, and South American countries sought to culturally distance themselves from North America, and more specifically from the United States.



Figure **1.1.3**: Meso and South America

Today, Latin America is considered by many scholars to be an imprecise and highly problematic term, since it prescribes a collective entity to a conglomerate of countries that remain vastly different. In the case of countries that share the same language their cultural bond is much stronger, since despite their potentially different pre-conquest origins, they continue to share collective colonial histories and contemporary postcolonial predicaments. Spanish-speaking countries are therefore known as Spanish America or Hispanoamérica, while those that were colonized by the Iberian countries of Spain and Portugal, fall under the broader category of Iberoamérica, thus including Brazil. In addition to these Latin-derived languages, indigenous tongues like Quechua, spoken by more than 8 million people in South America, are still preserved today. When discussing countries such as the French-speaking Haiti and Spanish-speaking Mexico, the similarities become much harder to articulate.



Figure **1.1.4**: Oswaldo Guayasamín, *The Workers*, oil on canvas, 1942, oil on canvas, 170 x 170 cm (Fundación Guayasamín, Quito, Ecuador)

That said, the collective experiences of the conquest, slavery, and imperialism—and even today, those of underdevelopment, environmental degradation, poverty, and inequality—prove to be an undeniable unifying force, and as the artworks of these countries demonstrate, the idea of both a collective and local experience exists among the selected countries. For the purposes of clarity, the term Latin America is used loosely, whether referring to the pre- or post-conquest era. At the same time however, this term will be challenged in order to demonstrate both the limitations and benefits of thinking of Latin American art as a shared artistic tradition.

It is anachronistic to discuss a Latin American artistic tradition before independence, and as a result pre-Columbian and colonial art are discussed according to specific regions. However, it is best to approach the art of the 19th and 20th centuries as a whole, in large part due to the emergence of Latin Americanism and Pan-Americanism (a twentieth-century movement that rallied all American countries around a shared political, economic, and social agenda). Contemporary artists working in a globalized art world and often times outside of their country of origin give new meaning to what it means to not necessarily be a Latin American artist, but rather a global one.



Figure **1.1.5**: Figure (Zemi), c. 1000, Dominican Republic, wood, shell, 68.5 x 21.9 x 23.2 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Geography

While the countries of Latin America can be categorized by language, they can also be organized by region. Before 1492 C.E., the regions of Mesoamerica, the Isthmus (or Intermediate) Area, the Caribbean, and the Andes shared certain cultural traits, such as the same calendars, languages, and sports, as well as comparable artistic and architectural traditions. After colonization, however, the borders shifted somewhat with the creation of the viceroyalties of New Spain, Peru, New Granada, La Plata, and Brazil. After independence (and still today), the countries stretching from Mexico to Honduras form part of the region of Mesoamerica (also known as Middle America since the Greek word “meso” means “middle”). Parts of Honduras and El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama, which lie to the south of Middle America, make up Central America, while all the countries to the south of Panama form part of South America. The Caribbean is sometimes considered part of Central America or at times entirely excluded. The United States also factors into this discussion of Latin American art—through the work of Latino, Chicano, and Nuyorican artists.

Lastly, it is important to note that when discussing specific Latin American countries, the geographical scope in question will correspond to the current, rather than former borders. While these linguistic and geographical parameters lend clarity to the study of Latin American art, they often obscure cultural differences that are not border specific. The coastal cultures of Colombia and Venezuela for instance, are closer to those of the Caribbean than to their mainland counterparts. This is reflected not only in the similar climate, diet, and customs of these particular areas, but also in their artistic production. The islands of the Caribbean, however, are also a geographical region (delineated by the Caribbean Sea), thus the distinction between regions depends on how and where you draw the borders—reminding us of the flexibility and variety of labels that can be employed to describe the same region.



Figure **1.1.6**: Our Lady of Cocharcas Under the Baldachin (Cuzco School, Peru), 1765, oil on canvas, 198.8 x 143.5 cm (**Brooklyn Museum**)

A similar distinction occurs in South America, where cultures vary greatly not necessarily across countries, but rather according to geographical landmarks, the two most prominent of which are the Andes Mountains and the Amazon Rainforest. Stretching from Chile to Venezuela, the Andes traverse the western portion of South America. At impressive heights and in snow-covered peaks, the Andean cultures of South America share irrigation techniques, textile traditions, and native languages, such as Quechua, the former language of the Incas that is today spoken by millions, that continue to this day. The Amazon, the world's largest tropical rainforest, is contained mostly in Brazil, although it stretches into the bordering countries of Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. Just these two landmarks, without mentioning the Pacific and Atlantic coastal cultures of South America, reveal the geographical, and thus cultural diversity of the area.Latin America is a useful, but by no means perfect term to describe a vast expanse of land that is historically, culturally, and geographically diverse.

From networks of exchange to a global trade network

From as early as the pre-Columbian era, there existed networks of exchange among the early civilizations of Latin America, through trade networks that stretched from Mesoamerica to South America. Limited by technology and transportation, forms of indigenous contact were mainly restricted to the American continent. With the arrival of European conquistadores (Spanish for "conquerors"), the panorama changed entirely. Starting in the sixteenth century, and now exposed to Africa, through the Atlantic Slave Trade, and Asia, through the trade network of the Manila Galleon, Latin America entered into an era of global contact that continues to this day.



Figure **1.1.7**: The Manila Galleon trade brought Japanese screens to Mexico inspiring locally made objects like this. Folding Screen (biombo) with the Siege of Belgrade (visible) and Hunting Scene (reverse), c. 1697-1701, Mexico, oil on wood, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, 229.9 x 275.8 cm (Brooklyn Museum)

With the nineteenth-century struggles for independence, collaborations across countries increased, not to mention alliances were formed, that although unsuccessful, nevertheless tried to articulate the idea of a collective Latin American entity. During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, namely as a result of socio-political transformations, migration, exile, and diaspora (the dispersion of people from their homeland), travel became a trademark of modern art, further contributing to the internationalism of Latin American art. As a result of these networks of exchange, which began before colonization and continue to this day, Latin American art is difficult to categorize. It is in fact hybrid and pluralistic, the product of multi-cultural conditions.

"Non-Western" art?



Figure **1.1.8**: Alfredo Jaar, *A Logo for America*, as installed in 1987 (reprised 2014) Digital animation commissioned by The Public Art Fund, Times Square, New York, April 1987 © Alfredo Jaar

It is critical to also consider the negative impact of the artificial insertion of Latin American art into Western and non-Western narratives. While the term "Western art" refers largely to Europe and North America, whose artistic tradition looks back to the Classicism of the ancient Greeks and Romans, the term "non-Western art" includes everything else. This distinction has plagued Latin American art, since—except for pre-Columbian art—it mostly fits in the category of Western art history. This categorization however, is debatable, with some scholars positing that Latin American art is a non-Western artistic tradition that owes more to its pre-Columbian roots, than to its European influences. Often, when Latin American art is discussed in a Western context, it is usually presented as derivative of European or North American art, or simply treated as the "other," meaning different from the artistic mainstream.



Figure 1.1.9: Frida (Frieda) Kahlo, *Frieda and Diego Rivera*, 1931, oil on canvas, 100.01 x 78.74 cm (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

This notion can be countered by exposing the many ways that artists adopted, rather than imitated, these outside influences, and by demonstrating the manner through which these forms of exchange were reciprocal—rather than unilateral—as is usually discussed. A case in point can be seen in the work of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo (right), who are usually included in textbooks on either Western or Modern art, but whose presence is marginalized in comparison to their European and North American counterparts.

A survey of non-Western art would surely include indigenous Latin American art, but it might not include any artworks from the sixteenth century (conquest) onwards. As a result—and depending on the context in which you study Latin American art—one can end up with an entirely different and fragmented view of its artistic tradition. This is even made more complicated when considering the artistic selections in the pre-Columbian and Colonial sections versus those in the Modern sections, as evidenced by the number of ritual objects (considered artworks as a result of their aesthetic qualities and craftsmanship). Only from the broader perspective of Latin American art can individual artistic traditions be better appreciated. The plurality of meaning and the inability to neatly title or categorize Latin American art is precisely what makes this area of study so unique, and therefore interesting. A living and constantly evolving field of study, Latin American art will continue to surprise you with its multifaceted and multilayered history.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

1.2: Early vanguards

1.2.1: Francisco Goitia, Tata Jesucristo

1.2.2: Luis Nishizawa and mexicanidad

1.2.3: Amelia Peláez del Casal, Fishes

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1.2.1: Francisco Goitia, Tata Jesucristo

by **DR. LAUREN KILROY-EWBANK** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

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Video **1.2.1.1**: Francisco Goitia, Tata Jesucristo, 1926–27 oil on canvas, 85 x 107 cm (MUNAL, Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City) Speakers: Dr. Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank and Dr. Steven Zucker

Additional resources:

This painting at the Museo Nacional del Arte in Mexico City

Goitia on Google Arts & Culture

Hayden Herrera, “Francisco Goitia, Tata Jesucristo,” in *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries*; reproduced in *Readings in Latin American Modern Art*, ed. Patrick Frank (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008)

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- **2.3: Ancient Egypt** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

1.2.2: Luis Nishizawa and mexicanidad

by **DR. MEY-YEN MORIUCHI**

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Figure **1.2.2.1**: Luis Nishizawa, *Los juderos*, 1952 (Colección Andrés Blaisten, Mexico)

At first glance, if one is unfamiliar with Mexican popular culture, this painting may cause some bewilderment. What are the oversized skeletons doing? Who is the giant, stiff figure in the background? This artwork, titled *Los juderos* (*The Judas Figures*), was painted by the Japanese Mexican artist Luis Nishizawa in 1952. The unique subject is a product of cultural encounters—it depicts the Mexican custom of constructing large scale papier-mâché Judas figures to commemorate the biblical story of the Burning of Judas. The creation and the subsequent burning of the papier-mâché figures that represent Judas (the apostle that betrayed Christ) are symbolic of religious purification and rejuvenation. Its intriguing subject matter reflects a Christian Easter ritual that was transformed into a popular Mexican tradition. Playing with proportion and scale to depict the scene, Luis Nishizawa creates a work of art that makes what is traditional modern, and what is European in origin, Mexican.



Figure **1.2.2.2**: The volcano Iztaccíhuatl (White woman) is on the left, recognizable by the shape of a sleeping woman and Popocatépetl (Smoking mountain) is on the right. Luis Nishizawa, *Sunset*, c. 1990, suiboku ink on paper, 37 x 73 inches

Nishizawa's landscapes (discussed more below) also demonstrate cultural encounters, synthesizing Japanese aesthetics with a Mexican subject. In the 1960s, Nishizawa began to focus on painting the Mexican countryside as he traveled around the country, recalling his early childhood memories and his personal and spiritual connections to the natural world. In *Sunset*, Nishizawa

utilizes *suiboku* (also called *sumi-e* ink) to depict the Valley of Mexico. The Japanese art of sumi-e combines calligraphy and ink painting to show gradations contrasting density and lighting, and is one that he used often in landscape paintings.

Nishizawa's work conveys the convergence of the diverse cultures that constitute what it means to be Mexican. Many Mexican modernists like Nishizawa were keen to represent Mexican culture, traditions, and landscapes as a way of expressing national identity. The term *mexicanidad* (Mexicanness) describes this endeavor and reflects what it means to be Mexican embracing Mexican history, traditions, and culture. For the modernists, it was important to distinguish themselves from the Mexican elite society that had so often emulated European culture in the past. Nishizawa's understanding of *mexicanidad* was complicated and enriched by his mixed-race background. For Nishizawa, *mexicanidad* encompassed the confluence of many cultures, not just European and Indigenous, but also Asian. Nishizawa's genre and landscape paintings demonstrate various facets of these cultural convergences. This is reflected in his choice of subject matter as well as artistic materials.

Mestizaje and modernism



Figure **1.2.2.3**: In family portraits from 1965 and 1967, Nishizawa depicts his aging parents with tenderness and simplicity. Luis Nishizawa, *Mi madre* (left), 1967, mixed media on canvas and wood, 70 x 48 cm; *Mi padre en sus largos dias* (right), 1965, mixed media, 64 x 51 cm

Nishizawa was born in Mexico to a Japanese father and Mexican mother. Relations between Japan and Mexico date back to the 1610s, when Japanese missions were sent to colonial New Spain (which included present-day Mexico) via the Manila Galleons (Spanish trading ships that sailed from the Philippines to the New World). Though a small number of Japanese settled in New Spain in the 17th and 18th centuries, it was not until the 19th century when more widespread migration of peoples occurred from East to West prompted by an opening up of trade and commerce. The first real phase of Japanese migration began during the Meiji era (1868–1912) when Emperor Meiji transformed the country from an agrarian economy to one that was industrial and capitalist.

Luis Nishizawa's father, Kenji Nishizawa, arrived in Mexico in 1908 during this period, just a few years before the Mexican Revolution (1910–20). He soon married Luis's mother, María de Jesús Flores, and the couple settled in San Mateo Ixtacalco, Mexico where Luis was born.

Nishizawa moved to Mexico City as a young boy and later trained at the Academy of San Carlos in the 1940s alongside the Mexican modernists, such as José Chávez Morado, Julio Castellanos, and Alfredo Zalce. He embraced the Mexican modernists' passion for representing local customs and traditions in innovative ways. In his early career, Nishizawa admired the political spirit of the Mexican muralists, such as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, and was captivated by social realism. Social realism is a term used to describe artwork that represents the socio-political conditions experienced by the working classes. Social realists were critical of the power structures that enabled and sustained social and racial hierarchies. For example, in *Los Juderos*, Nishizawa purposefully portrays the Indigenous artisans industriously constructing the effigies emphasizing the labor behind the tradition, not the fanfare of the ceremony itself.



Figure 1.2.2.4: Luis Nishizawa, *Los juderos* (detail), 1952 (Colección Andrés Blaisten, Mexico)

The Burning of Judas

Nishizawa's *Los juderos* celebrates the popular Mexican transformation of a European Christian ritual. Nishizawa met the famous Mexican muralist Diego Rivera while shopping for Judas figures at the Mercado Abelardo Rodríguez, a traditional public market. Both Nishizawa and Diego Rivera were fascinated by the Burning of Judas tradition and had a mutual respect for each other's work. Today, visitors can see Rivera's collection of Judas and Calavera figures at his former house and studio that he shared with his wife Frida Kahlo, now known as the Museo Estudio Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo.

The Burning of Judas ceremony is celebrated at Easter when effigies of Judas Iscariot are burned. Judas Iscariot was a disciple of Jesus Christ and one of his twelve apostles. According to the New Testament, Judas betrayed Christ, which led to Christ's Crucifixion. The Burning of the Judas effigies is a symbol of cleansing oneself of evil and starting anew spiritually. The ritual is practiced in many Christian countries around the world although specific traditions have developed unique to distinct countries and cultures.

The "Quema de Judas," as it is known in Mexico, is a particularly special event that dates to Spanish colonization. It was used as a tool to evangelize the Indigenous people, representing the triumph of good over evil. The tradition may also have origins in the executions during the Spanish inquisition that sought to eradicate heretics (people who did not conform to Catholicism). The ritual takes place on Sábado de Gloria or Holy Saturday, the Saturday before Easter Sunday. Initially, Judas figures were created out of hay and rags and then burned. Later, as new materials became available, the Judas figures were built out of cardboard and papier-mâché and stuffed with fireworks. They were paraded throughout towns, hung in public plazas, and burned to much fanfare. Other effigies besides Judas, such as devils, skeletons, and even political figures, were also constructed. This lively tradition continues to this day where artisans compete for the best Judas figures and theatrical reenactments of the biblical story are performed throughout Mexico.

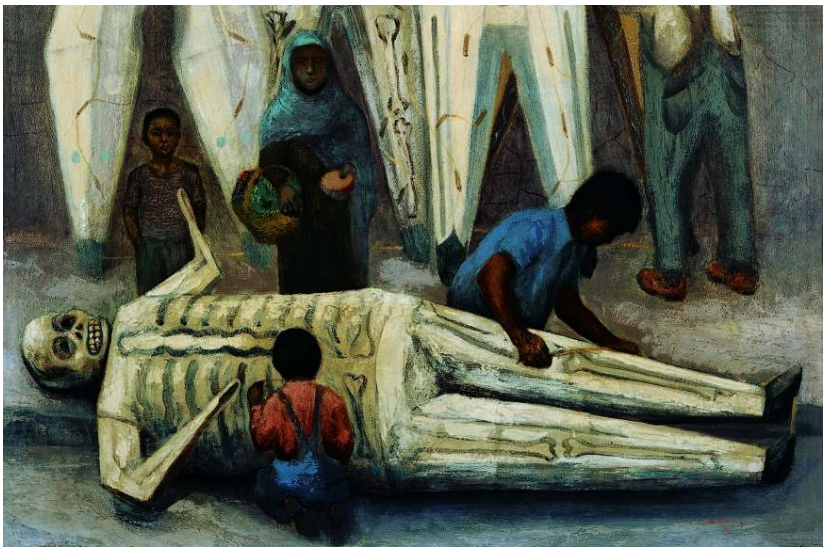


Figure **1.2.2.5**: Luis Nishizawa, *Los juderos* (detail), 1952 (Colección Andrés Blaisten, Mexico)

In *Los juderos*, Nishizawa portrays five Judas effigies, including four oversized skeleton figures with masked faces and a large male figure, in the background. Three of the skeletons are standing upright, while the fourth is laying on the floor. Although the four oversized skeletons in *Los Juderos* share affinities in their body shapes and stiffness, Nishizawa gives them unique features, diverse masked faces, hats, and design details. The composition stands out for the varying and disproportionate scales of the figures. Although oversized themselves, the Judas skeletons are overshadowed by the enormous Judas figure in the background who mimics their rigid poses and saluting arm gestures. The standing Judas gazes directly outwards, inviting the viewer into the composition. The smallest figures are the Indigenous people working on the effigies. A mother and child walk among the them and seem to share the viewer's role as spectators. The other three Indigenous figures are portrayed in action, bending over, fixing, and attending to the making of the effigies. Nishizawa honors their artistry by including them in the scene. By depicting the Mexican workers in the act of building the effigies, Nishizawa highlights the labor behind the tradition, a subject that had often been invisible and unrecognized, and was an important social realist theme.

The turn to the Mexican landscape



Figure **1.2.2.6**: Luis Nishizawa, *Sunset*, c. 1990, suiboku ink on paper, 37 x 73 inches

In addition to genre paintings with social realist themes, Nishizawa also painted portraits, still lifes, and landscapes. He was outspoken about his mixed heritage, and the diverse cultural influences present in his work. Despite having a Mexican mother, being raised on a Mexican hacienda, and having studied at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City, Nishizawa was especially impacted by Japanese aesthetics and artistic techniques. He spoke frequently of how much he revered his Japanese father and how his father affected his artistic outlook. In the 1960s, Nishizawa traveled to Japan and worked with Japanese artists. He experimented with and embraced various Japanese artistic methods, such as ink wash painting and calligraphy. In the many art forms that he worked, including drawing, painting, printmaking, and ceramics, Nishizawa combined antique and modern elements, Indigenous, European, and Japanese techniques.



Figure **1.2.2.7**: Dr. Atl, *View of Popocatepetl*, 1934, tempera and atl color on masonite, 100 x 125 cm (Colección Blaisten)

Dr. Atl, *View of Popocatepetl*, 1934, tempera and atl color on masonite, 100 x 125 cm (Colección Blaisten)

In the 1960s, Nishizawa turned to representing Mexico's countryside, producing a large body of landscapes. Important influences include the 19th-century landscape painter **José María Velasco** and the 20th-century modernist, Dr. Atl. In several of his landscapes, such as *Sunset*, Nishizawa features the two volcanic mountains of Popocatéptl (Smoking Mountain) and Iztaccíhuatl (Sleeping or White Woman) which overlook the Valley of Mexico. The tragic love story of Popocatépetl and Iztaccíhuatl is sometimes referred to as the Aztec Romeo and Juliet. Aztec legend has it that the princess Iztaccíhuatl fell in love with one of her father's warriors, Popocatépetl, but her father was against their marriage. Popocatépetl was sent away to battle and while fighting, Iztaccíhuatl was given the false news that Popocatépetl had died. Upon hearing this terrible news, she died of grief. When Popocatépetl returned to the village and found that Iztaccíhuatl had died of a broken heart, he buried her body on the great mountain surrounding the valley. He then knelt beside her and also died of sadness. The gods touched by the young couple's love for one another, turned their bodies into volcanoes. Iztaccíhuatl's mountain is sometimes called Sleeping Woman or White Woman because the shape of the mountain resembles a reclining woman and is often covered in snow. Popocatépetl's mountain is called Smoking Mountain because it regularly emits smoke to show he is still watching over his beloved. Together they are a symbol of everlasting love and *mexicanidad*.



Figure **1.2.2.8**: Monochrome landscape. Sessō Tōyō, *Haboku-style landscape*, hanging scroll, 15th century, Muromachi period, Japan, 63.5 x 31.7 cm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Monochrome landscape. Sessō Tōyō, *Haboku-style landscape*, hanging scroll, 15th century, Muromachi period, Japan, 63.5 x 31.7 cm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

In utilizing *sumi-e* (ink painting) to create this landscape, Nishizawa emphasizes brushwork and texture. He creates the soft mountain peaks without firm outlines, instead contrasting brushstrokes, from gentle to rugged, to convey powerful expression. *Sumi-e* painting is a contemplative art form based on the principle that less equals more. It is a highly regarded Japanese painting style as the artist requires adept technical skill to control the brush and maintain the delicate balance between water and ink. The practice is demanding and meditative, necessitating discipline, persistence, and imagination. Departing from a traditional *sumi-e*

monochrome black ink palette, Nishizawa infuses the composition with translucent blues and greens, invoking the Mexican valley's essence and vitality.

Commitment to his communities

Nishizawa consistently and thoughtfully portrayed Mexican culture and traditions, such as *juderos* and Mexico City's volcanic mountains, throughout his lifetime. At the Museo-Taller Luis Nishizawa, the museum dedicated to Nishizawa that was founded in Toluca, Mexico in 1992, museum staff continue to hold Judas competitions and actively participate with the community in parades throughout the city. The Burning of Judas ceremonies are important Mexican rituals that are still celebrated with great passion and fervor today. Until Nishizawa's death in 2014, the jury that evaluated the Judas effigies was led by the artist himself, demonstrating his commitment to popular traditions and his community.

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1.2.3: Amelia Peláez del Casal, Fishes

by **DR. TAMARA DÍAZ CALCAÑO**

Page ID
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Figure **1.2.3.1**:Amelia Peláez del Casal, *Fishes*, 1943, oil on canvas, 115.6 x 89.2 cm (MoMA)

What exactly are we looking at in this painting? We can clearly see a plate of fish in the center, but it is hard to discern the rest at first glance. The stark, thick lines of black paint define both the forms and the composition in this 1943 painting by Amelia Peláez. The black lines contrast with the solid fields of yellow, green, and red that activate the canvas and recall the stained-glass windows typical of colonial Cuban houses, especially those constructed in the 19th and early 20th century. As the lines and forms come together, we can better identify the scene: a plate of fish on a table in the interior of a home.



Figure **1.2.3.2**:Amelia Peláez Del Casal, *Fishes*, 1943, oil on canvas, 115.6 x 89.2 cm (MoMA)

Peláez turned to the domestic sphere to explore her modern Cuban identity soon after her return to Havana from Paris in 1934. Her still life paintings in Cuba, including *Fishes*, often employ exuberant colors and compositions dominated by decorative patterns and floral motifs. The rich primary and secondary colors recall tropical flora but within a sumptuous modernist composition that utilizes flat and simplified geometric forms. In Peláez's work, *cubanidad* is found in the everyday, at home—in the welcoming

interior of her house, in the food and drink offered to guests, in the flowers that adorn the table—a setting for long conversations with friends and family.

The artist has set a plate of fish upon a table in the center of a domestic interior. The lower half of the composition is completely filled by the table and its elaborate, abstract, and brilliantly painted tablecloth. Even the fish at the center of the canvas are wildly colorful.



Figure **1.2.3.3**: Amelia Peláez Del Casal, *Fishes* (detail), 1943, oil on canvas, 115.6 x 89.2 cm (MoMA)

The upper half of the painting opens onto the room and an iron grille or perhaps a large stained-glass window. Above it, the elaborate crown molding adds even more opportunity for abstract pattern. These simplified repeating lines and shapes create a visual rhythm that contrast with the dynamic curves and more varied motifs of the tablecloth below. The black outline of a doorway can be seen in the yellow field on the right side of the composition.

Peláez plays with multiple perspectives. She foreshortens the tabletop, providing an overhead view of the fish, while using fields of color and pattern to flatten the interior as a whole. Her use of solid colors gives the painting a decorative quality that emphasizes the juxtaposition of geometric and curvilinear shapes. While the interior and the objects are easily identifiable, the simplification of the patterns and forms creates a powerful sense of abstraction all centered on a plate of fish.

Looking inward for a modern nationhood

Fishes brings together many of Peláez's formal and stylistic interests. She was born into a well-to-do Cuban family who supported her artistic interests early on. She enrolled in 1916 at the San Alejandro Academy in Havana, where she received a conservative art education. Despite this training, she embraced the European avant-garde, an association made possible when she was awarded funding to study in Paris. [1]

While Peláez began her studies in Paris in traditional venues such as the ***Ecole de Beaux Arts***, she soon sought out a more radical education. She entered the *Académie Moderne*, run by cubist painter **Fernand Léger**, where she met the Russian **constructivist**, Aleksandra Ekster who would become both a friend and mentor. The characteristics of cubist and constructivist works—including the simplification of geometric forms, the rejection of traditional perspective, and experimentation with abstraction—were foundational to Peláez's artistic development. Peláez remained in France for seven years, becoming part of new artistic movements while participating in collective and solo exhibitions.



Figure **1.2.3.4**:Amelia Peláez's house, Calle Estrada Palma N° 261 in Santos Suárez, Cuba (photo: César O.Gómez López, with permission)

The hostess's home



Figure **1.2.3.5**:Interior view of Amelia Peláez's house in Havana, Cuba (University of Miami Library, Cuban Heritage Collection)

Peláez moved back to Villa Carmela, her family home in Havana in 1934. Villa Carmela became her studio and the inspiration for many of Peláez's compositions including her still-lifes. As a member of the Cuban upper class, Peláez led a sheltered life in Havana, a tradition that sought to protect female virtue and a family's racial purity by limiting the free movement of women outside of the home. [2] Nevertheless, Peláez became an active figure in the emerging Cuban *vanguardia*, participating in national exhibitions of modern art organized by the Cuban government. In the 1944 her work was included in "Modern Cuban Painters," an exhibition held at The Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Peláez returned to Cuba a year after the U.S. backed government was overthrown. Nevertheless, U.S. corporate interests continued to exert immense influence on Cuba's politics and fuel dissent. Peláez and other members of the Cuban *vanguardia* were influenced by Grupo Minorista, a dissident collective of intellectuals and artists who called for the protection of workers, the arts, and who rejected dictatorship and U.S. involvement in Cuban affairs. Instead, the Cuban v*anguardia*, of which Peláez was a part, sought to develop a new national image for a modern Cuba distanced from the Spanish colonial past and the U.S. control that defined the present.

A distinctive style

Amelia Peláez's approach was deeply personal, and focused on the domestic realm that had defined women of her class for centuries. Still, her paintings became daring modern explorations at a moment when the Cuban *vanguardia* was imagining a possible new future for Cuba.



Figure **1.2.3.6**:The space of the creole home. Amelia Peláez del Casal, *Fishes* (detail), 1943, oil on canvas, 115.6 x 89.2 cm (MoMA)

Peláez's use of simplified shapes, multiple perspectives, and color blocks clearly borrows from the cubist and constructivist art she encountered in France, but instead of representing café tables or scenes of the modern city, she takes these methods and applies them to her private world in Havana. Her fine home, with its high ceilings, iron grilles, and colorful stained-glass windows define the interior surrounding the fish on the table.

Pelaez's work was a negotiation, a reckoning of past traditions and modern perspectives. Her life, centered around intimate family space, guided her in her search of what was distinctively Cuban.

Notes:

[1] Sponsorship for study abroad were awarded in 1927 by the San Alejandro Alumni Association. Gaztambide, María C.P. "Amelia Peláez and the Insertion of the Female Sphere: The Cuban Vanguardia Reconsidered." *Athanor 20* (2002), 86.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

1.3: Mexican Muralism

Celebrating the Mexican people's potential to craft the nation's history was a key theme in Mexican muralism.

c. 1920 - 1960

1.3.1: Mexican Muralism- Los Tres Grandes David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, and José Clemente Orozco

1.3.2: Diego Rivera

- 1.3.2.1: Diego Rivera, first and second floor murals of the Secretaría de Educación Pública
- 1.3.2.2: Diego Rivera, Stairwell and Third Floor "Court of Labor" at the SEP
- 1.3.2.3: The History of Mexico- Diego Rivera's Murals at the National Palace
- 1.3.2.4: Sugar Cane
- 1.3.2.5: Man at the Crossroads
- 1.3.2.6: Man Controller of the Universe
- 1.3.2.7: Detroit Industry Murals
- 1.3.2.8: Calla Lilly Vendor (Vendedora de Alcatraces)
- 1.3.2.9: Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park

1.3.3: José Clemente Orozco, Dive Bomber and Tank

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1.3.1: Mexican Muralism- Los Tres Grandes David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, and José Clemente Orozco

by DR. DORIS MARIA-REINA BRAVO

Page ID

188331



Figure **1.3.1.1**: David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Dates in Mexican History* or the *Right for Culture*, National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), 1952-56, (Mexico City, photo: **Fausto Puga**)

Siqueiros and Mexican History

At the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in Mexico City visitors enter the rectory (the main administration building), beneath an imposing three-dimensional arm emerging from a mural. Several hands, one with a pencil, charge towards a book, which lists critical dates in Mexico's history: 1520 (the Conquest by Spain); 1810 (Independence from Spain); 1857 (the Liberal Constitution which established individual rights); and 1910 (the start of the Revolution against the regime of Porfirio Díaz). David Alfaro Siqueiros left the final date blank in *Dates in Mexican History* or the *Right for Culture* (1952-56), inspiring viewers to create Mexico's next great historic moment.

The Revolution

From 1910 to 1920 civil war ravaged the nation as citizens revolted against dictator Porfirio Díaz. At the heart of the Revolution was the belief—itself revolutionary—that the land should be in the hands of laborers, the very people who worked it. This demand for agrarian reform signaled a new age in Mexican society: issues concerning the popular masses—universal public education and health care, expanded civil liberties—were at the forefront of government policy.

Mexican Muralism

At the end of the Revolution the government commissioned artists to create art that could educate the mostly illiterate masses about Mexican history. Celebrating the Mexican people's potential to craft the nation's history was a key theme in Mexican muralism, a movement led by Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, and José Clemente Orozco—known as *Los tres grandes*. Between the 1920s and 1950s, they cultivated a style that defined Mexican identity following the Revolution.

The muralists developed an iconography featuring atypical, non-European heroes from the nation's illustrious past, present, and future—Aztec warriors battling the Spanish, humble peasants fighting in the Revolution, common laborers of Mexico City, and the mixed-race people who will forge the next great epoch, like in Siqueiros' UNAM mural. *Los tres grandes* crafted epic murals on the walls of highly visible, public buildings using techniques like fresco, encaustic, mosaic, and sculpture-painting.

One of the earliest government commissions for a post-Revolution mural was for the National Preparatory School, a high school in Mexico City affiliated with UNAM. During the 1920s *Los tres grandes* and other artists completed works throughout the school's expansive exteriors and interiors.

Destruction of the old order



Figure **1.3.1.2**: José Clemente Orozco, *Destruction of the Old Order* (detail), 1926 (National Preparatory School, Mexico City)

Orozco painted nearly two dozen murals at the school including Destruction of the Old Order, 1926. It depicts two figures in peasant attire who watch nineteenth-century neoclassical structures fracture into a Cubist-like pile, signaling the demise of the past. Just as Siqueiros' UNAM murals anticipate an unrealized historic event, the "new order" implied in Orozco's work is the world these men will encounter once they turn to face the viewer. These anonymous men are unlikely heroes given their modest attire, yet they represent a new age where the Revolution has liberated the masses from centuries of repression.

Murals for the Palace of Fine Arts

In 1934 the government inaugurated the Palace of Fine Arts Mexico City, which soon became the nation's most important cultural institution. The Palace's Museum, Mexico's first art museum, opened the same year with works by two of *Los tres grandes*: Rivera's *Man, Controller of the Universe*, 1934, a recreation of *Man at the Crossroads* (painted at Rockefeller Center and destroyed the year before), and Orozco's *Catharsis*, 1934.



Figure **1.3.1.3**: José Clemente Orozco, Catharsis (partial view), 1934 (Museum of the Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City, photo: **ryan griffis**)

The title of Orozco's painting dates to 1942, when an art historian speculated that the fire at the top of the composition symbolized catharsis, and thus "the only possibility of saving and purifying civilization" as it succumbed to the excesses of moral depravity. The laughing central figure jerks the viewer into an immoral world, where the malevolent aspects of modern life—senseless warfare, destructive technology, and prostitution—run rampant.



Figure **1.3.1.4**: David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Torment and Apotheosis of Cuauhtémoc* (detail), 1950-51 (Museum of the Palace of Fine Arts, photo: Jaontiveros)

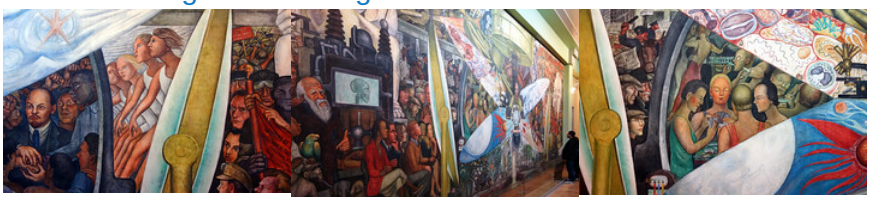
In T*orment and Apotheosis of Cuauhtémoc*, 1950-51, another mural at the Museum of the Palace of Fine Arts, Siqueiros explores the violent period of the Conquest. In this mural Spanish soldiers torture the Mexican tribal leader for information on the location of the treasure they seek. The Mexican motherland, symbolized by the blood-stained female figure, stretches her arms protectively over his still figure. Siqueiros' penchant for sinewy limbs, showcased in the UNAM murals and exemplified here in the bodies of Cuauhtémoc and his praying companion, underscore the tension in this encounter.

The Mexican Revolution was a watershed moment in the twentieth century because it marked a true break from the past, ushering in a more egalitarian age. With its grand scale, innovative iconography, and socially relevant message, Mexican muralism remains a notable compliment to the Revolution. The way the muralists reoriented history, recovered lost stories, and drafted new narratives continues to stir audiences and inspire artists, like the Chicano muralists that emerged in the U.S. Southwest. The fact that their in-situ masterpieces can still be seen publicly in Mexico and beyond is a testament to their relevance, popularity, and the power of their didactic message.

Additional resources:

For instructors: related lesson plan on Art History Teaching Resources

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1.3.2.1: Diego Rivera, first and second floor murals of the Secretaría de Educación Pública

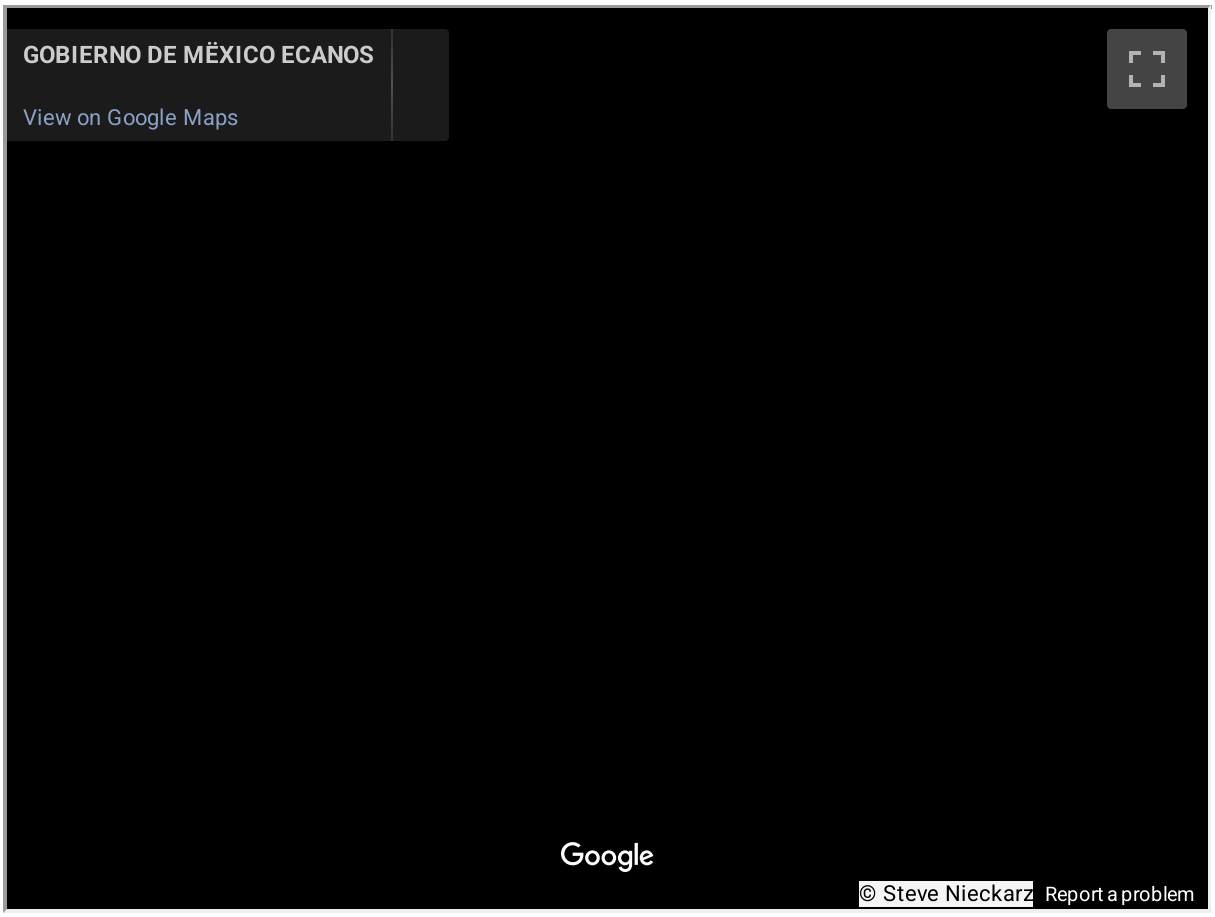
by **MEGAN FLATTLEY**

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Figure **1.3.2.1.1**: Diego Rivera, murals of *The Market*, Court of Fiestas, north wall, first floor, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1923–24, Mexico City (photo: Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Urban market scenes bustle with activity and seem to burst out of the picture plane. The colorful festivities at the Canal at Santa Anita draw us in with the vibrant colors of their flower vendors. Scenes of industry depict the labor and heroism of the worker. These are but a few of the subjects that cover the walls of Mexico City's Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP)—the federal government building that houses the Ministry of Public Education. The enormous mural cycle celebrates Mexico: its festivals, its industries, and its people in over 100 panels. After the ten-year revolutionary conflict (1910–1920, which ousted the dictator Porfirio Díaz), the Mexican state sponsored the creation of a mural movement in an effort to express and consolidate a Mexican national culture—in contrast to the previous regime's adulation of European culture. As writer Carlos Pellicer wrote at the time, with the SEP, "Mexico has begun its Mexicanization." [1]



The murals were painted from 1923–1928, primarily by Diego Rivera. Many consider the murals to be the foundational work that established the aesthetic of the Mexican Mural Renaissance. The murals address thematic issues of nation-building, *indigenísmo*, modernization, and socialist politics—themes that Mexican muralists continued to address and that were important in post-revolutionary Mexico.

Revolutionary change

While the panels reflect individual scenes of Mexican life, the theme of the cycle as a whole is revolutionary change in Mexico. As Rivera later wrote "It was my desire to reproduce the pure, basic images of my land. I wanted my paintings to reflect the social life of Mexico as I saw it, and through my vision of the truth to show the masses the outline of the future." [2] Though the SEP cycle spans three floors, this essay primarily addresses the first floor (and to a lesser extent the second floor), painted between 1923–1924.



Figure **1.3.2.1.2**: Diego Rivera, panels showing *Weavers*, *Dyers*, and *Tehuanas*, Court of Labor, first flour, north wall (or south-facing murals) in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: Megan Flattley)

Education in the post-revolutionary context

The SEP cycle was Rivera's second mural commission after his return to Mexico from Europe where he had lived and studied for 13 years. During his time away, the Mexican Revolution had occurred, after which the Mexican state sponsored cultural works to present a particular image to the world about its stability following ten years of revolutionary conflict. Minister of Education José Vasconcelos wanted to create an aesthetic and educational campaign throughout Mexico to unify the country under a shared cultural heritage. The mural paintings of the colonial missions (where Spanish friars had employed mural paintings to assist in the conversion of Indigenous peoples who often could not read or speak Spanish) were an important model for Vasconcelos as he formulated his vision of a unified Mexico.



Figure **1.3.2.1.3**: An aerial view of the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (underlying map © Google)

The building

The Secretaría de Educación Publica (SEP) was built originally as the Convento de Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación (Convent of Our Lady of the Incarnation) in 1639 when Mexico was part of the viceroyalty of New Spain until 1821. In 1921, architect Federico Méndez Rivas (with input from Vasconcelos and Rivera), designed renovations and additions to host the new Ministry of

Public Education, which oversaw not just education at the national level, but the sponsorship of cultural works and festivals. The three-story building is built around two large open courtyards. The painted walls line a continuous corridor that faces inward towards the courtyards, which Rivera divided thematically as the “Court of Labor” and the “Court of Fiestas.” These thematic divisions inform all three levels of the cycle.



Figure 1.3.2.1.4: Diego Rivera, Court of Labor, murals in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: Megan Flattley)

Due to the constraints of the architectural setting, Rivera designed the scenes to be viewed through the archways that open onto the courtyard, and from various angles as people walk along the corridors. This presented a new challenge for Rivera, whose first mural, *Creation* (at the National Preparatory School), was executed on a single wall and in encaustic. At the SEP, Rivera had to create an integrated mural cycle that spread across three levels, two courtyards, and nearly 17,000 square feet of wall.

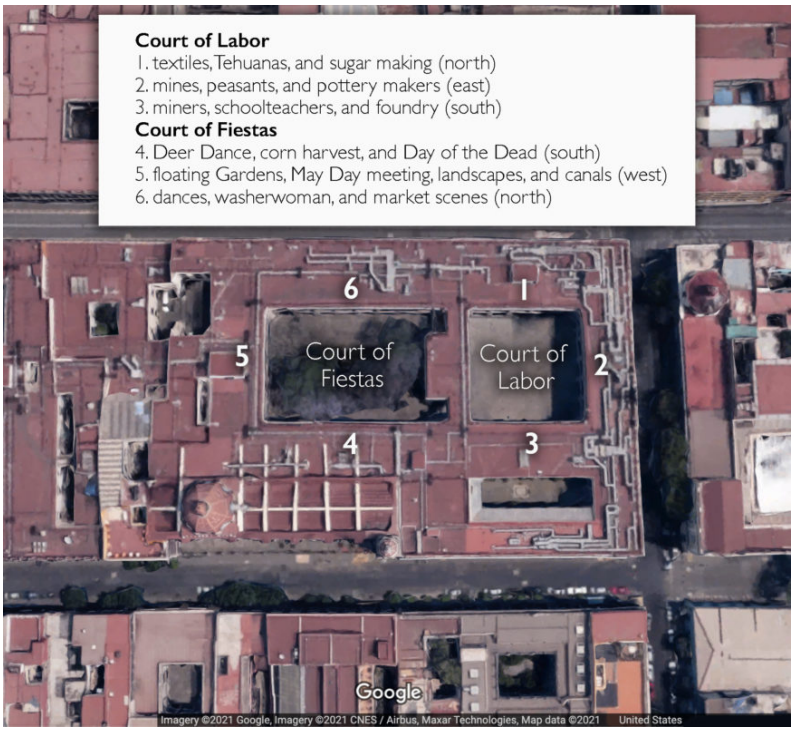


Figure 1.3.2.1.5: Diagram of the first floor mural program for the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (underlying image © Google)



Figure 1.3.2.1.6: Jaguar blowing a conch, c. 1st century, mural from the Palace of the Jaguars, near the Plaza of the Moon, Teotihuacan, Mexico (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Mexican artists had to determine the best manner of painting on walls in response to these commissions. With the SEP cycle, Rivera and the artists Jean Charlot and Xavier Guerrero worked in true fresco *(buon fresco*, a manner of painting directly on wet plaster, which then dries and becomes part of the wall). Charlot had studied fresco in 15th-century Italian texts such as Cennino Cennini's *Il libro dell'arte*. Guerrero had also taken frequent trips to the Mexican archeological site of Teotihuacan to study the fresco paintings executed by the Teotihuacanos almost 2,000 years earlier. He claimed to have "discovered" their secret in the use of nopal cactus juice as a binding agent, and this technique was used on several panels in the Court of Fiestas, such as "Dyers." However, the organic matter deteriorated quickly, and Rivera reverted to a more traditional fresco technique that enabled his monumental work to endure.

Rivera said that at the SEP, he initiated the "true novelty of Mexican painting" in making "the people the heroes of mural painting." [3] His representation of labor and anonymous workers in a monumental style on the walls of a government building was radical, and reflects his Marxist politics. At the time Rivera was a high-ranking member of the Mexican Communist Party, as well as a founding member of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors (begun in 1922), reflecting his belief that "the artist is a worker, and unless he expresses his work as a worker, he is not an artist." [4] Members of the Syndicate also wrote a manifesto in which they repudiated "so-called Salon painting and all the ultra-intellectual salon art of the aristocracy and exalt the monumental expression of art because such art is public property." The more than 100 panels at SEP embody these ideas.

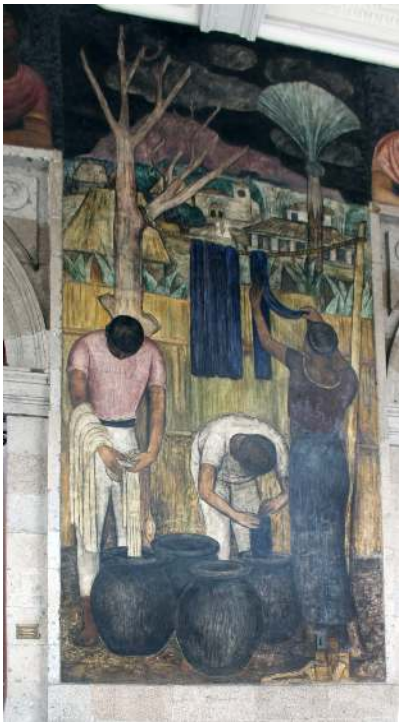


Figure 1.3.2.1.7: Diego Rivera, *Dyers*, 1923–24, first floor, Court of Labor, north wall/south-facing mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: Megan Flattley)

Court of Labor

In the Court of Labor, Rivera represented traditional economic activities such as mining and sugar harvesting. These industries had been prevalent in Mexico throughout the colonial period (prior to the revolution), and were largely controlled by foreign interests. Rivera organized his painted scenes of labor to reflect the Mexican regions where they took place. The south-facing wall depicts the weavers and dyers from Tehuantepec and the sugar cane harvesting that occurred in Yucatán (both southern regions). The northern region of Mexico is represented on the opposite wall by workers at steel foundries, as well as farmers and a rural school teacher. The west-facing wall panels depict mining, farming, and the creation of pottery that occurred primarily in the western region of Jalisco.



Figure **1.3.2.1.8**: Diego Rivera, *Entrance to the Mine*, 1923–24, first floor, Court of Labor, east wall/west-facing mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: Garrett Ziegler, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

In *Entrance into the Mine* (on the west-facing wall) workers carry lumber, shovels, and pickaxes as they descend into the opening of the mine. The mine's arches suggest eyebrows and its opening a mouth that allude to the Mexica (Aztec) "earth monster" deity Tlaltecuhtli who is often depicted with a gaping mouth and crocodile skin, and who represented the surface of the earth. According to Mexica mythology, Tlaltecuhtli demanded human blood for nourishment—a debt owed because the gods had created life. By showing the workers disappearing beneath the surface of the earth, Rivera suggests that they are the new sacrifice.



Figure 1.3.2.1.9: Diego Rivera, *Leaving the Mine*, 1923–24, first floor, Court of Labor, east wall/west-facing mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: Megan Flattley)

The next panel *Leaving the Mine* provides another visual evocation of sacrifice by alluding to depictions of the Christian martyr Jesus Christ. This scene depicts a worker being searched upon exiting the mine at the end of his work day. He is cloaked in white and with his extended arms resemble the crucified Christ. In these two scenes, Rivera has made clear that capitalism requires the continual sacrifice of workers.



Figure 1.3.2.1.10: Diego Rivera, *The Liberation of the Peon*, 1923–24, first floor, Court of Labor, south wall mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: Kgv88, CC BY-SA 3.0)



Figure 1.3.2.1.11: Lamentation. Giotto, Scrovegni Chapel, 1305–06, Padua, Italy (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Lamentation. Giotto, Scrovegni Chapel, 1305–06, Padua, Italy (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

In one of the most recognizable scenes from the cycle in the Court of Labor, *The Liberation of the Peon*, Rivera once again draws on imagery of Christ's martyrdom. Here he links the worker (a farmer) to the martyred form of Christ as a way of glorifying him.

These evocations of Christ demonstrate Rivera's recent study of early Italian renaissance fresco painting, particularly Giotto's Arena Chapel. For *The Liberation of the Peon*, he borrows from the scene of the *Lamentation* in the Arena chapel. There were precedents for the contemporary use of Christian iconography in earlier murals at the National Preparatory School and even earlier in the colonial mural tradition that focused on religious narratives.

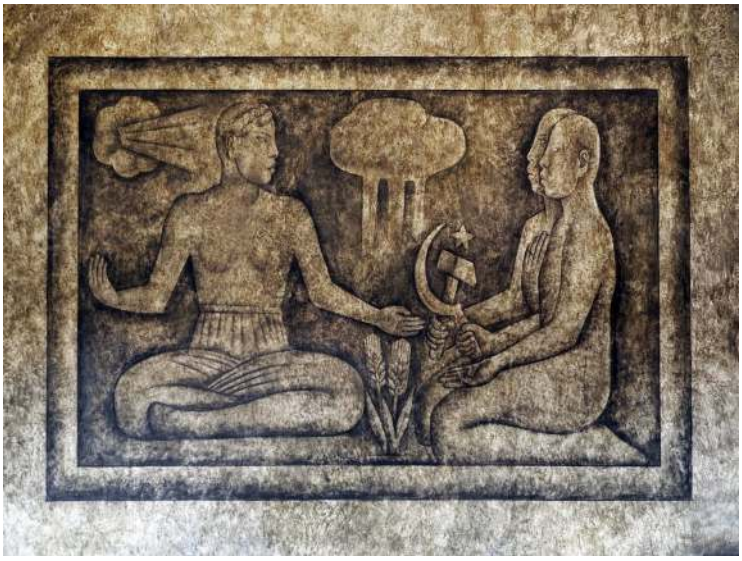


Figure 1.3.2.1.12: Diego Rivera, *Symbol of Farming*, second floor, Court of Labor, mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank)

As the Court of Labor proceeds upwards, the second floor features twenty symbolic representations of intellectual work in the sciences and the arts executed in *grisaille* to emulate architectural bas-relief. The representation of intellectual work on the second floor builds on the base of labor that Rivera depicted on the ground floor, formally establishing that the work of everyday laborers forms the foundation for the successes of the post-revolutionary state.



Figure **1.3.2.1.13**: Diego Rivera, Court of Fiestas, 1923–24, first floor, south wall murals in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: FlyingCrimsonPig, CC BY 2.0)

Court of Fiestas

While the Court of Labor draws heavily on renaissance imagery, the first floor of the Court of Fiestas looks to Indigenous (specifically, pre-Columbian) and popular forms. In *Fiesta del Maíz*, the influence of Mexica stone sculpture can be seen in the way that a man and corn seem unified into a single form, aligning the farmer with the grain.



Figure **1.3.2.1.14**: Diego Rivera, *Fiesta del maíz*, 1923–24, first floor, Court of Fiestas, south wall murals in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: Megan Flattley)



Figure **1.3.2.1.15**: Maize Deity (Chicomecoatl), Mexica culture, 15th–early 16th century, basalt, 35.6 x 18.1 x 8.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

This formally echoes stone sculptures of the Mexica maize deity Chicomecoatl, who is often depicted frontally with maize and a blocky headdress that grants the sculpture a rectangular shape that is echoed in the shape of the farmer with maize on his back. An emphasis on the pre-Columbian heritage of the nation was important in the post-revolutionary moment, as the Mexican state sought to promote a new national identity that was not rooted in the imitation of European art forms. Archaeological excavations unearthed new sites and objects. Upon his return to Mexico, Rivera took a state-sponsored tour of the southern region, including stops at the Maya site of Chichén Itzá and the isthmus of Tehuantepec. Rivera described this tour as producing “an esthetic exhilaration which it is impossible to describe.” [5] He called Mexico “the very center of the plastic world” and attributes his artistic maturation to his discovery of the natural beauty of his homeland. [6]



Figure **1.3.2.1.16**: Diego Rivera, Court of Fiestas, with panels showing day of the Dead, first floor, south wall murals in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)



Figure **1.3.2.1.17**: Diego Rivera, Dance of the Deer (detail), first floor, Court of Fiestas, south wall mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City

Like the Court of Labor, the direction of the walls informs the regional celebrations displayed. On the first floor, the Tehuanas (women from Tehuantepec) are a prominent motif of the south-facing wall. Various festivals and celebrations are depicted, including the Mexican holiday Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), the floating gardens at Xochimilco, and dances such as the Dance of the Deer and La Zandunga. Rivera locates the origin of the revolutionary spirit of the Mexican people in these unique celebrations.

Rivera dedicated a number of panels to Día de los Muertos, a Mexican holiday that honors those who have died and reflects the mixing of Catholic and Indigenous religious practice.



Figure **1.3.2.1.18**: Diego Rivera, *Day of the Dead—City Fiesta* (detail), Court of Fiestas, south wall mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City

In *Day of the Dead—City Fiesta*, Rivera represents a worker, a farmer, and a soldier (the triumvirate of revolutionary heroes) in three puppet *calavera* figures with guitars (a Mexican artistic representation of a skeleton inspired by late 19th-century printmaker José Guadalupe Posada). For Rivera and others, when the worker, farmer, and soldier united, they would continue the project of the Mexican Revolution—here Rivera ties the scenes of celebration of this holiday back to the political context of a post-revolutionary Mexico. Rivera included a self-portrait in the crowded street scene. He looks out at the viewer, from amidst the various classes of people represented, indicating his role as observer.



Figure 1.3.2.1.19: Diego Rivera, *The Market*, first floor, Court of Fiestas, north wall mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Diego Rivera, *The Market*, first floor, Court of Fiestas, north wall mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

We see the impact of Rivera's earlier Cubist training in these images. In the panel titled *The Market*, Rivera represents a busy urban scene through a crowded, compressed composition. The repeated forms of the many sombreros recalls the Cubist technique of stacking geometric forms. *The Market* reflects how Rivera adapted this Cubist training to create large-scale, architecturally integrated paintings.



Figure 1.3.2.1.20: Jean Charlot and Amado de la Cueva, left: escutcheons of the states of Mexico (photo: Kvg88, CC BY-SA 3.0); center: escutcheon of the state of Mexico (photo: Kvg88, CC BY-SA 3.0); right: escutcheon of the state of Campeche (photo: Kvg88, CC BY-SA 3.0)

The Syndicate

We also find on the second floor of the Court of Fiestas the escutcheons of the states of Mexico painted by Jean Charlot, Amado de la Cueva, and other members of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors. The SEP mural commission was originally to be completed by multiple artists. An important tenet of Mexican muralism was the advocacy of a collective artistic production and reception. However, despite his membership in the Syndicate, Rivera eventually managed to secure the entire commission for himself and had panels painted by Charlot and others torn down. He claimed that the difficult task of creating a unified aesthetic work could not be completed by artists who had individual styles. Only four main panels painted by Charlot and Amado de la Cueva remain today.

Embracing Mexican culture

The first and second floors of the SEP mural cycle reflected the post-revolutionary government's embrace of uniquely Mexican culture and popular traditions, and served as a critical origin site for Mexican Muralism. At the SEP, Rivera and others developed a true fresco painting method, a narrative of national regeneration, and a new aesthetic. The SEP murals also reflected the muralists' embrace of socialist politics that glorified the worker. These views evolved over the course of the five years that Rivera painted at the SEP.

Notes:

[1] Carlos Pellicer, "El pintor Diego Rivera," *Azulejos* Tomo II, no. 2 (Dec. 1923), **ICAA record ID: 735311**

[2] Diego Rivera, *My Art My Life: An Autobiography*, New York: Dover Publications, 1991, p. 79.

[3] Alfredo Cardona Peña, *Conversations with Diego Rivera: The Monster in His Labyrinth*, New York: New Village Press, 2018, p. 109.

[4] Cited in Craven, David. *Diego Rivera as Epic Modernist*, p. 80.

[5] Rivera, *My Art My Life*, 72.

[6] Rivera, *My Art My Life*, 72.

Additional resources

Learn more about Latin American modernisms in a *Reframing Art History* chapter.

Alejandro Anreus, Robin Adèle Greely, and Leonard Folgarait, eds. *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

Jean Charlot,*The Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920–1925* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1979).

Mary K. Coffey, "'All Mexico on a Wall': Diego Rivera's Murals at the Ministry of Public Education," in Anreus, Alejandro et.al, *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

David Craven, *Diego Rivera As Epic Modernist* (New York; London: G.K. Hall; Prentice Hall International, 1997).

Leonard Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico*, 1920–1940 (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge UP, 1998).

Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993).

Ida Rodríquez Prampolini, *Muralismo Mexicano, 1920–1930: Catalogo Razonado I* (México, D.F.: Universidad Veracruzana: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012).

This page titled 1.3.2.1: Diego Rivera, first and second floor murals of the Secretaría de Educación Pública is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Megan Flattley, "Diego Rivera, first and second floor murals of the Secretaría de Educación Pública," in Smarthistory, June 6, 2021, accessed January 5, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/rivera-murals-ministry-public-education/..

1.3.2.2: Diego Rivera, Stairwell and Third Floor “Court of Labor” at the SEP

by **MEGAN FLATTLEY**

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Figure **1.3.2.2.1**: Diego Rivera, *Fraternity* (detail), third floor, Court of Labor, mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: Megan Flattley)

Do you think that art can change the world? If so, what would that look like? Artists in Mexico had a particular vision of how their art could shape the world after the Mexican Revolution (1910–20). They believed that art had a unique role to play in restructuring their society after ten years of civil war. Many artists in postrevolutionary Mexico believed that revolutionary art should be public, collective, and not just for the elites, aligning their artistic goals with their socialist political goals. In two mural cycles at the Secretaría de Educación Pública (Ministry of Public Education, or SEP), muralist Diego Rivera not only represented the achievements of the Mexican Revolution, he also made a case for the importance of artists in furthering the revolutionary project.



Figure 1.3.2.2.2: Diego Rivera, Court of Labor, murals in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: Megan Flattley)

The Mexican Revolution



Figure 1.3.2.2.3: Diego Rivera, *The Liberation of the Peon*, 1923–24, first floor, Court of Labor, south wall mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (photo: Kgv88, CC BY-SA 3.0)

The Mexican Revolution was an armed struggle that lasted ten years, from 1910–20. The fighting began as a response to the unpopular 31-year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. The Revolution resulted in the current constitution of Mexico, which was written in 1917 and was then one of the most progressive documents in the world and would influence the drafting of the Soviet Constitution of 1918 and the Weimar Constitution of 1919. One of the most important articles of the 1917 constitution is article 27, which says that "all land and water within national territory is originally owned by the Nation." This was a response to the pre-Revolutionary status quo wherein foreigners owned a majority of the land and resources. The Constitution also established the post-revolutionary emphasis on education by stipulating, in article 3, the basis for a free, mandatory, and secular education in Mexico.

This resulted in the post-revolutionary establishment of the Ministry of the SEP that would oversee schools as well as festivals and cultural production. The SEP also commissioned Mexican artists to paint murals on the walls of government buildings as part of a nationalist effort to create art that was Mexican, rather than influenced by Europe or the Spanish colonial heritage. These artistic works frequently featured imagery of the Mexican Revolution such as the revolutionary trio of the worker, the farmer, and the soldier, which allegorically represent the basic pillars of the revolution and its fight against land owners and foreign influence.



Figure 1.3.2.2.4: An aerial view of the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City (underlying map © Google)

Diego Rivera was one of *los tres grandes* (the three great ones) that received many commissions from the Mexican state. In 1923, Rivera began to paint a mural cycle in the building that houses the Ministry of Public Education. Rivera painted 117 panels at the SEP building that covered two courtyards and three levels. The courtyards were divided thematically into a "Court of Labor" and a "Court of Fiestas." On the first floor of the mural cycle in both courts, Rivera painted scenes of Mexican laborers, festivities, and cultural celebrations, while the second floor featured symbolic depictions of various types of intellectual labor (read more about the first and second floor murals). On the third floor, in the Court of Fiestas, after his return from the Soviet Union in 1928, Rivera depicted a "Corrido of the Agrarian Revolution" and a "Corrido of the Proletarian Revolution."

In the stairwell as well as in the "Court of Labor" on the third floor of the SEP cycle, however, Rivera was more interested in the role of the artist in the revolutionary process.



Figure 1.3.2.2.5: Diego Rivera, *Water Goddess*, stairwell, mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City

Stairwell

Unlike the scenes across both Courts on each of the three floors, which were separated by archways and other architectural divisions, the stairwell offered Rivera an uninterrupted expanse of space to paint and experiment with different compositions and perspectives. The murals in the stairwell offer an expansive view of Mexico's topography that begins at the sea-level tropics and ascends to the volcanoes and mountains of the central plateau. In emphasizing the beauty of the natural environment of Mexico, the mural reflects the post-revolutionary project of centering Mexican culture and the Mexican landscape. Along the ascension of the stairwell, the Mexican people are similarly shown rising above the exploitation of the pre-Revolutionary status quo. Climbing the

stairs, the viewer emerges on the third floor of the Court of Labor amidst the mural cycle known as *The Apotheosis of the Mexican Revolution*, echoing the Mexican people's journey towards the social promises of the Revolution.



Figure **1.3.2.2.6**: Diego Rivera, *Marine*, stairwell, mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City

The first scenes in the stairwell depict the sea and imagery of abundance and innocence. Rivera depicts nude figures emerging from the sea in a classical treatment of the female form that recalls the art historical tradition of the *Birth of Venus* such as that by the Italian Renaissance artist **Sandro Botticelli**. Prior to his return to Mexico in 1921, Rivera had traveled around Italy to study the mural paintings of the Italian Renaissance.



Figure **1.3.2.2.7**: Diego Rivera, *Xochipilli*, stairwell, mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City

The continuous scene transitions into that of the tropics then to the jungle where Rivera shows two nude figures seated before Xochipilli, the Aztec god of flowers. Rivera looked to a recently discovered statue of the deity in his first direct citation of a **pre-**

Columbian figure. This is consequential because Rivera would increasingly study, cite, and collect pre-Columbian art work over the course of his career.

The embrace of Mexico's pre-Columbian heritage was another critical cultural dimension of the post-revolutionary period and informed Rivera's theory of revolutionary art. He wrote that it was through his understanding and incorporation of pre-Columbian art that he became "the first revolutionary painter in Mexico." [1] Further, the representation of nude figures in an idyllic jungle scene recalls work such as Henri Rousseau's *The Dream*. This reference demonstrates Rivera's familiarity with the advances of the European avant-garde at the time and also demonstrates his skill in integrating multiple artistic traditions. By citing works of the European tradition within a mural that reflects the landscape of Mexico, Rivera demonstrates the unique contributions of his mural work—and by extension of Mexican Modernism—to an international discourse on modern art.



Figure **1.3.2.2.8**: Diego Rivera, *Hacienda*, stairwell, mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City

As the viewer ascends the staircase the jungle transitions to an hacienda scene where sugar cane cutters can be seen in the distance, overseen by a mounted *hacendado*, or owner. Recall that one of the primary motivations of the Mexican Revolution was the demand for land reform. Here, Rivera shows the pre-Revolutionary status quo of *campesinos* (peasants) made to work the land of a wealthy (and often foreign) landowner.



Figure **1.3.2.2.9**: Diego Rivera, *Sharpening a Machete*, stairwell, mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City

In a small scene a *campesino* is seen sharpening his machete, indicating that he will take arms in the Revolution. The emphasis on the machete may also reference the journal "El Machete," that was recently founded by the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors and which eventually became the journal of the Mexican Communist Party. By including this scene adjacent to that of the hacienda, Rivera indicates the revolutionary action that the oppressed *campesinos* could take against the landowning class.



Figure **1.3.2.2.10**: Diego Rivera, *The Burial*, stairwell, mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City

At the top of the stairwell, within the Mexico City valley, the revolutionary narrative reaches its climax. In the first scene, titled *The Burial*, Rivera represents the return to the earth of those who have died in the revolutionary struggle—the red flags signal their worker status, as the color red was affiliated with the international struggle of the working class.



Figure 1.3.2.2.11: Diego Rivera, *Mechanization*, stairwell, mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City

In *Mechanization of the Countryside*, to the left of a seated woman holding two ears of maíz (meant to evoke the Aztec goddess Xilonen), lightning strikes down three figures that represent the enemies of the Mexican people (according to the ideology of the post-revolutionary government): the clergy, capitalism, and the military.

In the distance, a tractor, airplane, power lines, and dam signal the modernization of the countryside, brought about by the power and solidarity of the revolutionary soldier, worker, and farmer depicted at the right, demonstrating the centrality of modernization to the post-revolutionary project.



Figure **1.3.2.2.12**: Diego Rivera, *Self-Portrait*, stairwell, mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City

The stairwell cycle concludes with a self-portrait of Rivera examining blueprints while his assistants prepare the wall behind him. Rivera painted this mural cycle in *buon fresco*, a very labor-intensive painting method that reinforced Rivera's sense of his "artistic labor as a revolutionary work." [2] Art historian Mary K. Coffey suggests that by placing the artist's self-portrait at the top of the stairwell, the implication is that Rivera's mural plays a critical role in Mexico's transformation from an exploited past to a modern and egalitarian society. [3] This reading is reenforced by the murals in the third floor "Court of Labor" that the viewer sees upon emerging from the stairwell.



Figure **1.3.2.2.13**: Diego Rivera, in order from right to left: *Cuauhtémoc*, *Felipe Carrillo Puerto*, *Emiliano Zapata*, and *Otilio Montaño*, Court of Labor, third floor, mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City

The Court of Labor

On the north wall of the third floor of the Court of Labor, Rivera depicts the last Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc (represented with a slingshot as David vs. the Goliath of the Spanish invaders. This refers to a story in the Christian Book of Samuel in which a young boy named David faces off against a giant named Goliath with only a slingshot. Today the phrase is colloquially used to refer to an underdog situation. Rivera employed the slingshot to refer to the distinct technological and military advantage that the Spanish conquistadors held over the Aztecs.

We also see three revolutionary heroes in in draped, red robes: the recently assassinated socialist governor of the Yucatán, Felipe Carrillo Puerto; leading figure of the Revolution, Emiliano Zapata; and revolutionary intellectual, Otilio Montaño. These figures suggest an affiliation with **Byzantine icons**, which are also depicted frontally and against a flat background. In this way, Rivera utilizes religious iconography to indicate the importance of these revolutionary figures in Mexican culture.



Figure **1.3.2.2.14**: Diego Rivera, *Fraternity*, third floor, Court of Labor, mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City

By invoking the martyrdom of Christian saints, Rivera posits that the martyrdom of such revolutionary figures fuels the rebirth of Mexican society. Across from the martyrs, on the east wall, Rivera repeats a central theme of the entire mural cycle—the unity in struggle of the industrial worker and the *campesino*—by showing the two figures shaking hands in *Fraternity*. Behind the two figures is the Greek god Apollo, deity of medicine and beauty.



Figure 1.3.2.2.15: Diego Rivera, *Sculpture*, third floor, Court of Labor, mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City

The Court of Labor is rounded out with scenes of allegories of agricultural abundance and the arts and sciences as humankind's highest achievements on the south wall. Scholars have suggested that the pairing of the symbols of artistic activity with the martyred Revolutionary heroes indicates that Rivera viewed the arts as symbolic of an eternal rebirth and signify the reconstruction of society.



Figure 1.3.2.2.16: Diego Rivera, *The Sciences*, third floor, Court of Labor, mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City

In this case, then, Apollo seems to have been included in Fraternity to "emphasize the idea of a social development in which this harmonic correspondence between art and science plays an important role." [4]

Thus, in the stairwell and third floor Court of Labor scenes, Rivera articulated his vision of the centrality of the artist's role in the postrevolutionary project and in social struggle more generally. He did so as he continued his project at the SEP to develop the formal and iconographic foundations of what we know today as Mexican Muralism.

Notes:

[1] Diego Rivera, "The revolutionary spirit in modern art," *The Modern Quarterly* (Baltimore 6, no.3 (Fall 1932): p. 55.

[2] Diego Rivera, "Los primeros murales," (1925), p. 51.

[3] Mary K. Coffey, "'All Mexico on a Wall': Diego Rivera's Murals at the Ministry of Public Education," in Anreus, Alejandro et.al, *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 70.

[4] Ida Rodríquez Prampolini, *Muralismo Mexicano, 1920–1930: Catalogo Razonado I*, (México, D.F.: Universidad Veracruzana: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012), p. 253.

Additional resources

Learn more about Latin American modernisms in a *Reframing Art History* chapter.

Alejandro Anreus, et.al, *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920–1925* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1979).

Mary K. Coffey, "'All Mexico on a Wall': Diego Rivera's Murals at the Ministry of Public Education," in Anreus, Alejandro et.al, *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

David Craven, *Diego Rivera As Epic Modernist* (New York; London: G.K. Hall; Prentice Hall International, 1997).

Leonard Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico*, 1920–1940 (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge UP, 1998).

Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993).

Ida Rodríquez Prampolini, *Muralismo Mexicano, 1920–1930: Catalogo Razonado I*, (México, D.F.: Universidad Veracruzana: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012).

This page titled 1.3.2.2: Diego Rivera, Stairwell and Third Floor "Court of Labor" at the SEP is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Megan Flattley, "Diego Rivera, Stairwell and Third Floor " in Smarthistory, October 14, 2022, accessed January 5, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/diego-rivera-stairwell-third-floor-court-labor-murals-secretaria-educacion-publica/..

1.3.2.3: The History of Mexico- Diego Rivera's Murals at the National Palace

by MEGAN FLATTLEY

Page ID
188335



Figure **1.3.2.3.1**: Diego Rivera, "From the Conquest to 1930," *History of Mexico* murals, 1929–30, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City

How is history told?

Typically, we think of history as a series of events narrated in chronological order. But what does history look like as a series of images? Mexican artist Diego Rivera responded to this question when he painted *The History of Mexico*, as a series of murals that span three large walls within a grand stairwell of the National Palace in Mexico City. In Rivera's words, the mural represents "the entire history of Mexico from the Conquest through the Mexican Revolution . . . down to the ugly present."[1]



Figure **1.3.2.3.2**: Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: Paula Soler-Moya, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

In an overwhelming and crowded composition, Rivera represents pivotal scenes from the history of the modern nation-state, including scenes from the Spanish Conquest, the fight for independence from Spain, the Mexican-American war, the Mexican Revolution, and an imagined future Mexico in which a workers' revolution has triumphed. Although this mural cycle spans hundreds of years of Mexican history, Rivera concentrated on themes that highlight a Marxist interpretation of history as driven by class conflict as well as the struggle of the Mexican people against foreign invaders and the resilience of Indigenous cultures.

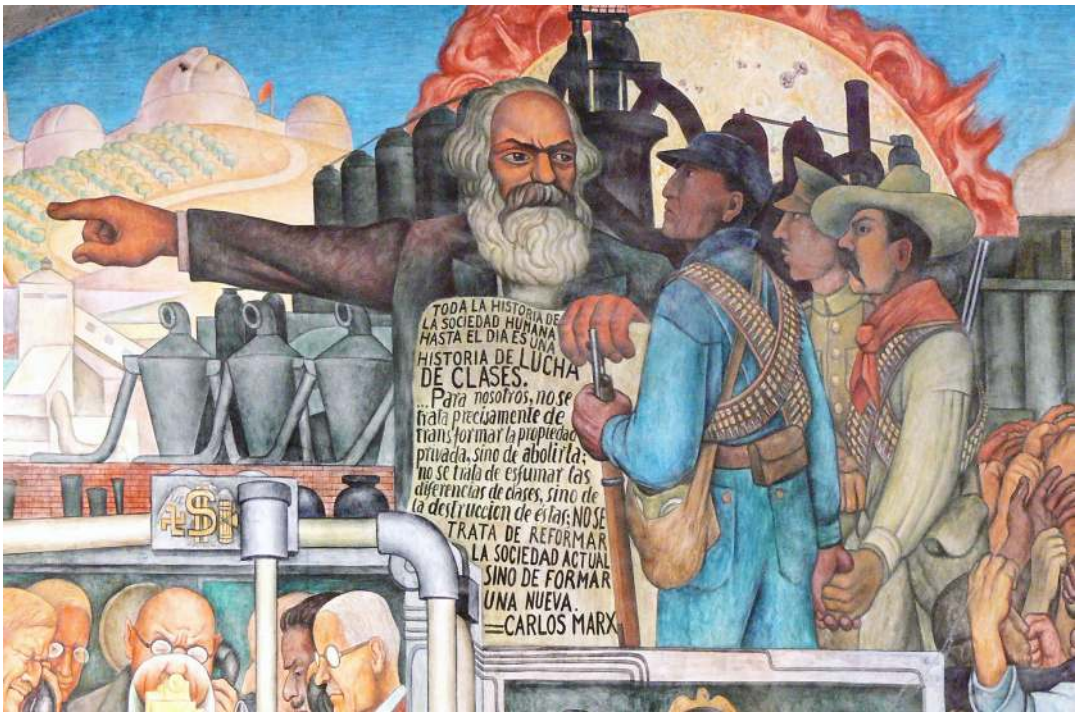


Figure **1.3.2.3.3**: Diego Rivera, "Mexico Today and Tomorrow," detail featuring Karl Marx, *History of Mexico* murals, 1935, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: Wolfgang Sauber, CC BY-SA 3.0)

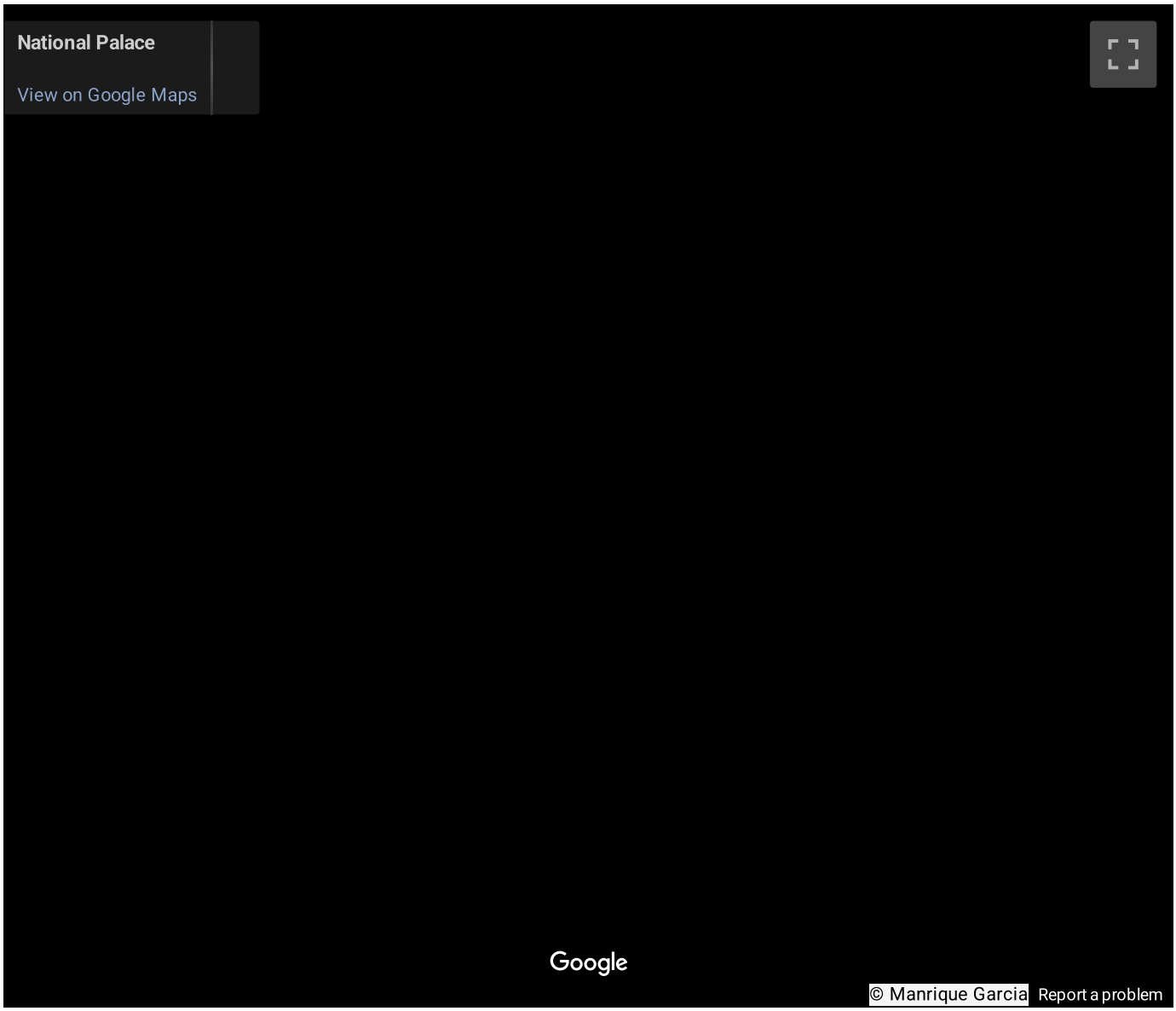
A new national identity

In the immediate years following the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), the newly formed government sought to establish a national identity that eschewed Eurocentrism (an emphasis on European culture) and instead heralded the Amerindian. The result was that Indigenous culture was elevated in the national discourse. After hundreds of years of colonial rule and the Eurocentric dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, the new Mexican state integrated its national identity with the concept of *indigenismo*, an ideology that lauded Mexico's past Indigenous history and cultural heritage (rather than acknowledging the ongoing struggles of contemporary Indigenous people and incorporating them into the new state governance).

José Vasconcelos, the new government's Minister of Public Education, conceived of a collaboration between the government and artists. The result were state-sponsored murals such as those at the National Palace in Mexico City.

Why murals?

Rivera and other artists believed easel painting to be "aristocratic," since for centuries this kind of art had been the purview of the elite. Instead they favored **mural painting** since it could present subjects on a large scale to a wide public audience. This idea—of directly addressing the people in public buildings—suited the muralists' Communist politics. In 1922, Rivera (and others) signed the *Manifesto of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors*, arguing that artists must invest "their greatest efforts in the aim of materializing an art valuable to the people."[2]



Diego Rivera, *History of Mexico* murals, 1929–30, frescos in the stairwell of the Palacio Nacional, Mexico City

Rivera had to design his composition around the pre-existing built environment of the National Palace. Rivera painted in the historical *buon fresco* technique, in which the artist paints directly upon wet plaster that has been applied to a wall resulting in the pigment being permanently fused to the lime plaster. Such murals were common in pre-conquest Mexico as well as in Europe.

In the case of *The History of Mexico*, this meant creating a three-part allegorical portrayal of Mexico that was informed by the specific history of the site. Today the National Palace is the seat of executive power in Mexico, but it was built atop the ruins of the **Aztec** emperor Moctezuma II's residence after the Spanish Conquest of the capital of Tenochtitlan in 1521. The site then served as the residence of the conquistador Hernán Cortés and later the Viceroy of **New Spain** until the end of the Wars of Independence in 1821. This site is a potent symbol of the history of conflict between Indigenous Aztecs and Spanish invaders.



Figure **1.3.2.3.4**: North wall: Diego Rivera, "The Aztec World," *History of Mexico* murals, 1929, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: **Gary Todd**, CC0)

The North Wall



Figure **1.3.2.3.5**: Quetzalcoatl, detail, Bernardino de Sahagún and collaborators, *Florentine Codex*, vol. 1, 1575–1577 (Medicea Laurenziana Library, Florence, Italy)

The Aztec World, the title of the mural on the North Wall, features Rivera's first large-scale rendering of Mesoamerica before the Spanish invasion—here focused on the Aztecs (the Mexica). Rivera's representation of the deity Quetzalcoatl ("feathered serpent"), seated in the center of the composition wearing a headdress of quetzal feathers—draws on imagery from colonial-era sources, in particular, an image of Quetzalcoatl from the ***Florentine Codex***.

Against the backdrop of the Valley of Mexico (where Tenochtitlan and now Mexico City are located), Rivera renders a Mesoamerican pyramid and various aspects of Aztec life. He represents figures grinding maíz (corn) to make tortillas, playing music, creating paintings, sculpture, and leatherwork, and transporting goods for trade and imperial tribute.



Figure **1.3.2.3.6**: Annotated image of the north wall: Diego Rivera, "The Aztec World," *History of Mexico* murals, 1929, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: Gary Todd, CC0)

Despite Rivera's great admiration for pre-Conquest civilizations (he was a great collector of pre-Columbian art) he did not uncritically portray the Aztec world as utopian. In addition to rendering scenes of agriculture and cultural production, *The Aztec World* shows laborers building pyramids, a group resisting Aztec control, and scenes of the Aztecs waging the wars that created and maintained their empire. Rivera demonstrates the Marxist position that class conflict is the prime driver of history—here, even before the arrival of the Spaniards.



Figure **1.3.2.3.7**: West wall: Diego Rivera, "From the Conquest to 1930," *History of Mexico* murals, 1929–30, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: xiroro, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The West Wall

On the West Wall and in the center of the stairway, visitors are confronted with a chaotic composition titled *From the Conquest to 1930*. The wall is divided at the top by corbels from which spring five arches.



Figure **1.3.2.3.8**: Annotated image of the west wall: Diego Rivera, "From the Conquest to 1930," *History of Mexico* murals, 1929–30, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: drkgk)

Across the top, In the outermost sections, Rivera represents the two nineteenth-century invasions of Mexico—by France and the United States respectively. From left to right, the three central sections depict: the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, figures associated with Independence and the Mexican Revolution, and the Constitution of 1857 (during the presidency of Benito Juárez) and the War of Reform. These historical events are somewhat distinguishable thanks to the arches that separate the scenes.



Figure **1.3.2.3.9**: Annotated lower section of the west wall: Diego Rivera, "From the Conquest to 1930," *History of Mexico* murals, 1929–30, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: drkgk)

Annotated lower section of the west wall: Diego Rivera, "From the Conquest to 1930," *History of Mexico* murals, 1929–30, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: drkgk)

In the lower section of the mural however, there is no such distinction between, for example, scenes of the Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire, the subsequent destruction of Mesoamerican painted books (now called codices), the arrival of Christian missionaries, the destruction of pre-Columbian temples, and construction of new colonial structures—emphasizing the interrelated nature of these events.



Figure 1.3.2.3.10: Eagle on cactus (detail), Diego Rivera, “From the Conquest to 1930,” *History of Mexico* murals, 1929–30, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: Sarahh Scher, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)



Figure 1.3.2.3.11: Mexican flag

An eagle standing on a nopal cactus at the very center of the wall, mirrors the insignia at the center of the Mexican flag. These historical scenes have been compressed and flattened on the picture surface resulting in a dense visual mosaic of intertwining figures and forms. The lack of deep space in the composition makes it difficult to distinguish between different scenes, and results in an allover composition without a central focus or a clear visual pathway. This cacophony of historical figures and flurried action overwhelms viewers as they walk up the stairs.



Figure 1.3.2.3.12: Annotated upper section of the west wall: Diego Rivera, "From the Conquest to 1930," History of Mexico murals, 1929–30, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: drkgk)

Given the breadth of the wall space, Rivera had to make critical decisions about which historical figures and narratives to include. Rivera's formal choices—the flattening of the pictorial space, the nonlinear organization, and the monumental scale of the figures—create a non-hierarchical composition. These formal choices support Rivera's decision to represent not just the historically well-known and recognizable figures, such as the independence fighter Miguel Hidalgo, revolutionary Emiliano Zapata (who holds a flag with the words *tierra y libertad*, or land and liberty), or the first Indigenous president Benito Juárez, but also anonymous workers, laborers, and soldiers. As Rivera later noted,

> ***"Each personage in the mural was dialectically connected with his neighbors, in accordance with his role in history. Nothing was solitary; nothing was irrelevant."[3]***

The artist's portrayal of the interconnection of social struggle throughout Mexico's history and the non-hierarchical representation of the historical figures reflects his Marxist perspective.



Figure 1.3.2.3.13: South wall: Diego Rivera, "Mexico Today and Tomorrow," *History of Mexico* murals, 1935, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: Cbl62, CC0)

The South Wall

Rivera's politics become more evident on the South Wall, titled *Mexico Today and Tomorrow*, which was painted years later in 1935. *Mexico Today and Tomorrow* depicts contemporary class conflict between industrial capitalism (using machinery and with a clear division of labor) and workers around the world.



Figure **1.3.2.3.14**: Annotated image of the south wall: Diego Rivera, "Mexico Today and Tomorrow," History of Mexico murals, 1935, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: Cbl62, CC0)

The narrative begins in the lower right and progresses upward in a boustrophedonic pattern (here, a reverse S-curve), similar to the compositional layout of pre-Conquest Mesoamerican painted manuscripts (such as the Codex Nuttall). In the lower section Rivera depicts *campesinos* (peasant farmers) laboring, urban workers constructing buildings, and his wife **Frida Kahlo** with a number of school children who are being taught as part of an expansion of rural education after the Revolution.



Figure **1.3.2.3.15**: Frida Kahlo wearing a necklace with a red star and hammer and sickle pendant (detail), Diego Rivera, "Mexico Today and Tomorrow," *History of Mexico* murals, 1935, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: Jen Wilton, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Following the narrative up, Rivera represents—using a pictorial structure unique to this wall—negative social forces such as high-society figures, corrupt and reactionary clergy, and the invasion of foreign capital—here represented by contemporaneous capitalists such as John D. Rockefeller, Jr. who was attempting to secure access to Mexican oil at the time.

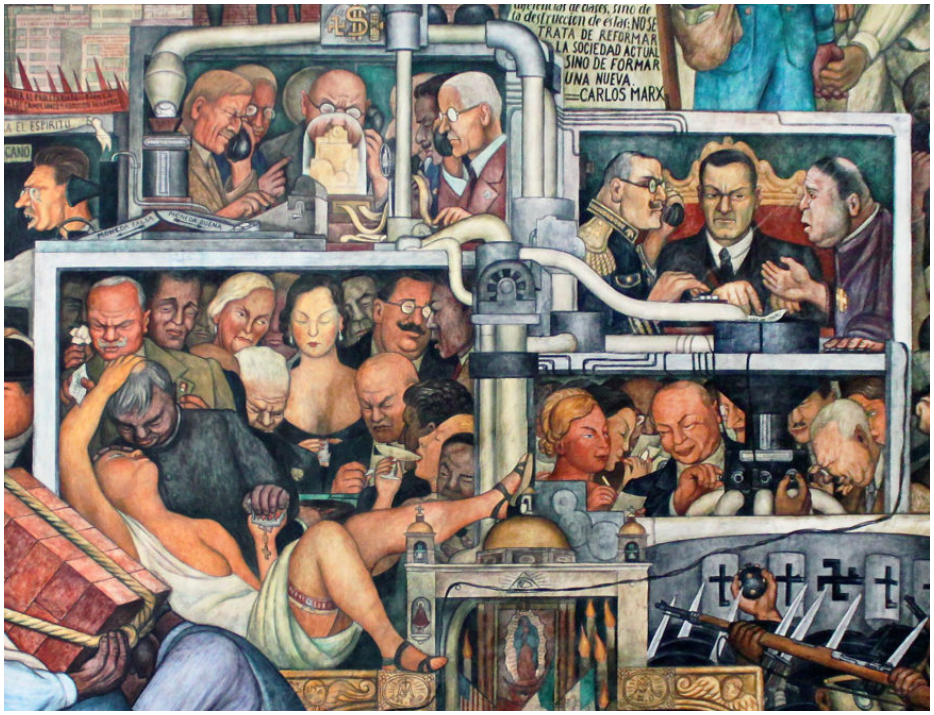


Figure **1.3.2.3.16**: Negative social forces—showing capitalist corruption and greed (detail), Diego Rivera, "Mexico Today and Tomorrow," *History of Mexico* murals, 1935, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: Carlos Villarreal, CC BY-NC 2.0)

To the right, workers are being oppressed by police wearing gas masks, yet just above this scene a figure in blue emerges from a mass of uprising workers, their fists raised in the air against the backdrop of downtown Mexico City. The narrative culminates in a portrait

of Karl Marx who is shown pointing wearied workers and *campesinos* towards a "vision of a future industrialized and socialized land of peace and plenty."[4] Unlike the non-linear composition of the West Wall, here Rivera expresses his vision for the future of Mexico, a winding path that leaves oppression and corruption behind.

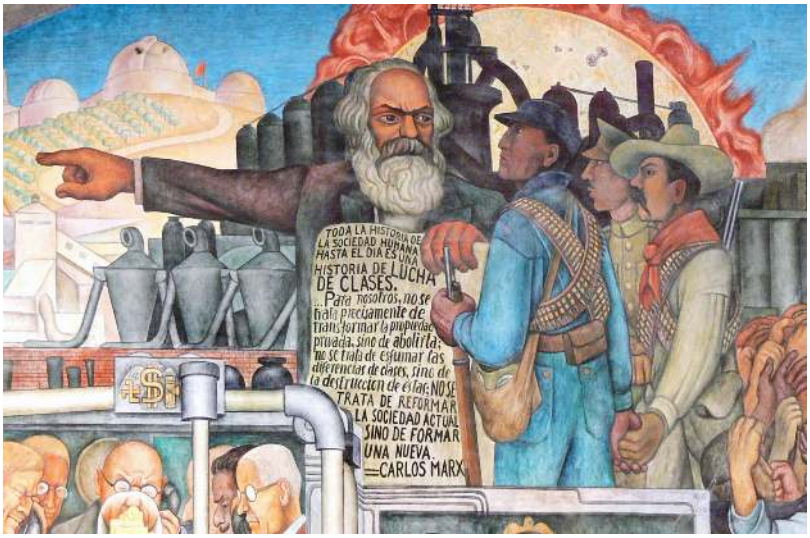


Figure **1.3.2.3.17**: Diego Rivera, "Mexico Today and Tomorrow," detail featuring Karl Marx, *History of Mexico* murals, 1935, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: Wolfgang Sauber, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Diego Rivera, "Mexico Today and Tomorrow," detail featuring Karl Marx, *History of Mexico* murals, 1935, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City (photo: Wolfgang Sauber, CC BY-SA 3.0)

An alternative history

So what type of history has Rivera told us and how did he tell it? Is he the sole narrator? *The History of Mexico* was painted in a governmental building as part of a campaign to promote Mexican national identity, and yet, the mural cycle is not necessarily didactic. Rivera could have created a much simpler representation of Mexican history, one that directed the viewer's experience more explicitly. Instead, the viewer's response to this visual avalanche of history is to play an active role in the interpretation of the narrative. The lack of illusionistic space and the flattening of forms creates a composition that allows the viewer to decide where to look and how to read it. Moreover, the experiential and sensorial act of moving up the stairs allows the viewer to perceive the murals from multiple angles and vantage points. There is no "right way" to read this mural because there is no clear beginning or end to the story. The viewer is invited to synthesize the narrative to construct their own history of Mexico.

Notes:

1. Diego Rivera, *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography* (New York: Dover Publications, 1991), pp. 94–95.
2. "Manifesto of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors," published in Alejandro Anreus, et.al, *Mexican Muralism : A Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) pp. 319–321. Signed by Diego Rivera, Davíd Alfaro Siqueiros, Xavier Guerrero, Fermín Revueltas, José Clemente Orozco, Ramón Alva Guadarrama, Germán Cueto, and Carlos Mérida and published in the journal *El Machete* in June 1924.
3. Diego Rivera, *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography*, pp. 100–101.
4. Diego Rivera, *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography, p.* 131.

Additional resources:

Learn more about Latin American modernisms in a *Reframing Art History* chapter.

Learn more about Rivera's murals, including ***Man Controller of the Universe***, ***Sugar Cane***, and the ***Detroit Industry* murals.**

Alejandro Anreus, Robin Adèle Greely, and Leonard Folgarait, eds. *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

David Craven, *Diego Rivera As Epic Modernist* (New York; London: G.K. Hall; Prentice Hall International, 1997).

Jean Charlot,*The Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920–1925* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1979).

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Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993).

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1.3.2.4: Sugar Cane

by DR. MATTHEW AFFRON and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
188336



Video **1.3.2.4.1**: José Diego María Rivera, *Sugar Cane*, 1931, fresco, 145.1 × 239.1 cm © 2014 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F. (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

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1.3.2.5: Man at the Crossroads

by DR. DORIS MARIA-REINA BRAVO

Page ID
188337

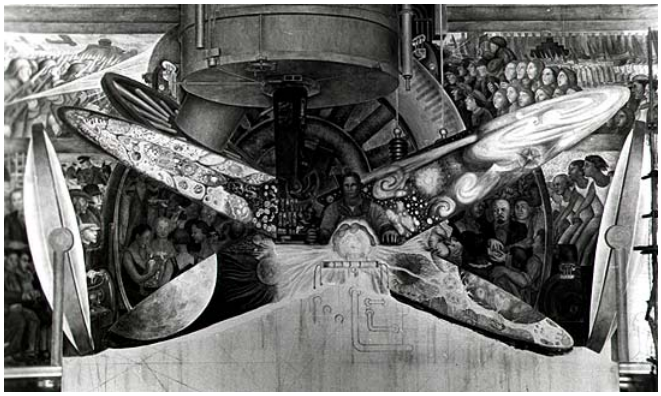


Figure **1.3.2.5.1**: Diego Rivera, *Man at the Crossroads*, 1933, Rockefeller Center, New York (destroyed)

When the Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes opened on November 29, 1934 in Mexico City, the general public finally had a chance to see Diego Rivera's *Man, Controller of the Universe*. At 15.75 x 37.5 feet, this epic work demands attentive viewing. Less than ten months earlier Rivera's first version—originally titled *Man at the Crossroads*—was destroyed at Rockefeller Center in New York City after months of controversy.

Rivera was in the midst of a prolific period when he began this mural. His retrospective exhibition at MoMA opened in December 1931 to positive reviews and contemporaneous mural projects in San Francisco and Detroit enhanced his celebrity as one of the greatest Mexican muralists. Yet something went amiss with the Rockefeller commission: whether it was censorship, a miscommunication or something in between, Rivera's *Man at the Crossroads* became one of the most infamous artworks that never was.

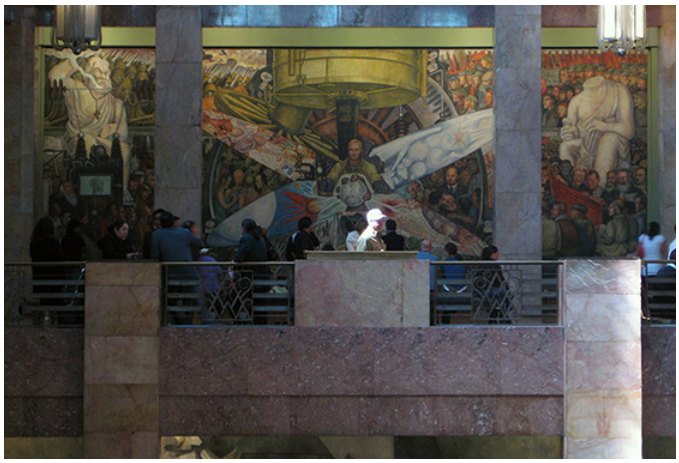


Figure **1.3.2.5.2**: Diego Rivera, *Man, Controller of the Universe*, 1934 (Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City)

In the later (surviving) version at the Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, *Man, Controller of the Universe*, a worker at the center directs an enormous machine at the crossroads of the political ideologies dominating this period: capitalism (to the figure's right) and communism (to the figure's left).



Figure **1.3.2.5.3**: Man at the center of the mural (detail), Diego Rivera, *Man, Controller of the Universe*, 1934 (Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City) (photo: **Joaquín Martínez**, CC Attribution 2.0 Generic)

Though the composition is bursting with activity, Rivera establishes order by using the central figure as a vertical axis: if we fold the scene down the middle, spaces and objects (like the two giant magnifying glasses) align.



Figure **1.3.2.5.4**: Brutalities of WWI, including poison gas and machine guns (detail), Diego Rivera, *Man, Controller of the Universe*, 1934 (Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City) (photo: **Peter Van Eynde**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

This arrangement encourages comparisons between the two sides.

For example, at the top of the capitalist side (on our left, the central figure's right) the brutalities of World War I are on display. Rivera underscores how capitalist nations use technology (poison gas, machine guns, and warplanes) as destructive forces.

By contrast, the top of the communist side (our right, the central figure's left) highlights the glories of the Russian Revolution, whose momentum overflows into the lower part of the composition.

If we continue to focus on the right side, we see key figures in the worker's movement (León Trotsky, Friedrich Engels, and Karl Marx) standing at the foot of a headless classical sculpture brandishing a swastika. As our gaze moves to the lower right, we realize workers are seated on the sculpture's decapitated head.



Figure **1.3.2.5.5**: Defaced classical sculpture surrounded by the political figures of the Russian Revolution (detail), Diego Rivera, *Man, Controller of the Universe*, 1934 (Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City) (photo: **Peter Van Eynde**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

On the other side of the composition, Rivera places another classical sculpture (this one anachronistically wears a Christian cross). Though the figure lacks hands, his face and lightning bolt reveal him as Zeus, the supreme Greek god.

By defacing these classical sculptures, Rivera critiques traditional art history (and its seemingly rarefied tastes) as well as the political elite (from the empires of Antiquity to the Catholic Church and Fascists) that—in his view—had repressed the popular masses throughout human history.

Through this symbolic beheading, the communists have replaced the dominant ideology in Europe with a new way of thinking. Though the statue on the other side holds a ray of lightning, his handless state renders him powerless amidst the turmoil in capitalist countries: behind the sculpture's base workers in New York City fight against the police while the wealthy (whose ranks include a bespectacled Nelson Rockefeller), indulge in debauchery between the magnifying glass on the left and the central worker. The "pie slice" across from this scene features Vladimir Lenin holding the hands of workers of distinct races. Despite being a small fragment of the mural, this tableau is at the heart of the controversy Rivera faced in the United States.

Though Rivera enjoyed tremendous success, he also faced harsh controversy, for both his political beliefs and artistic practice. Though he considered his murals at the Detroit Institute of Arts (1932-33) among his greatest works, his work there faced opposition due to the depiction of men of different races working together.

The most notorious controversy of his career came as he painted *Man at the Crossroads*, the mural for Rockefeller Center's Radio Corporation of America (RCA) building in 1933 (the fresco that he later based *Man, Controller of the Universe* on). Of the hundreds of characters in *Man at the Crossroads*, Lenin caused the most debate. An April 24th headline from the New York World-Telegram stated "Rivera Perpetrates Scenes of Communist Activity for RCA Walls—And Rockefeller, Jr. Foots Bill." Ten days later Nelson Rockefeller, Rivera's patron and member of a famously wealthy family, asked the artist to remove Lenin. When Rivera refused, he was paid in full and dismissed. The murals were covered up and later destroyed, as Rivera's supporters rallied to save the work. E.B. White's "I Paint What I See," written in protest, poignantly highlights this meeting of differing political ideologies:

> ***I paint what I paint, I paint what I see,***
> ***I paint what I think, said Rivera […] I'll take out a couple of people drinkin'***
> ***And put in a picture of Abraham Lincoln; […] But the head of Lenin has got to stay!***
> ***It's no good taste in a man like me,***
> ***Said John D's grandson, Nelson. […] For this, as you know, is a public hall.***
> ***And people want doves, or a tree in fall,***
> ***And tho your art I dislike to hamper,***
> ***I owe a little to God and Gramper.***
> ***And after all,***

> ***It's my wall…***
> ***We'll see if it is, said Rivera.***[1]

As White predicted, Rivera had the last laugh. Eight decades later his mural exists in two places: physically, in the Museo; and, as befitting a censored work, thriving in art history scholarship.

1. As quoted from **E.B. White, "I Paint What I See" (The New Yorker, May 1993)**

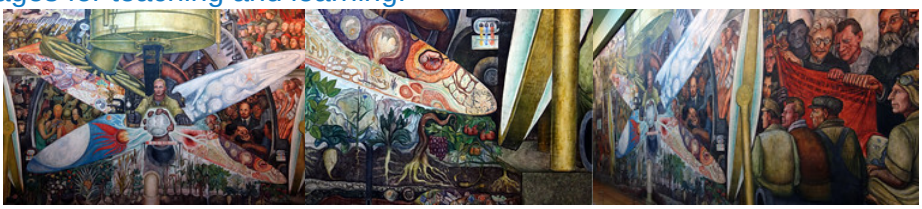
Additional Resources:

Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City

Detroit fresco cycle

Diego Rivera chronology from MoMA

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



Click on image for larger picture (External link to flickr)



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1.3.2.6: Man Controller of the Universe

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **1.3.2.6.1**: Diego Rivera, *Man Controller of the Universe (or Man in the Time Machine)*, 1934, fresco, 4.85 x 11.45 m in the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City

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1.3.2.7: Detroit Industry Murals

by LINDA DOWNS

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Figure 1.3.2.7.1: View toward the south-east (detail), Diego Rivera, *Detroit Industry murals*, 1932-33, twenty-seven fresco panels at the Detroit Institute of Arts (photo: Lars K. Christensen, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The impact of the Great Depression

When the Mexican artist Diego Rivera arrived in Detroit in 1932 to paint these walls, the city was a leading industrial center of the world. It was also the city that was hit the hardest by the Great Depression. Industrial production and the workforce were a third of what they had been before the 1929 Crash.

Rivera arrived days after an infamous Hunger March where thousands of unemployed workers walked from downtown Detroit to the gates of the Ford Motor Company River Rouge plant to demand employment. Armed Ford security guards met them, panicked, shot into the marchers and killed six people. This confrontation became known as the Battle of the Overpass. The workers were shut out of the Ford factories, but Rivera put them to work in the heart of the museum.



Figure 1.3.2.7.2: East wall (detail), Diego Rivera, *Detroit Industry murals*, twenty-seven fresco panels at the Detroit Institute of Arts (photo: Maia C, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

East wall

The space he was given to paint was aligned on an east/west/north/south axis. Rivera utilized this architectural orientation in a symbolic way. On the east wall, the direction of the sunrise, beginnings, new life, he represented a child in the bulb of a plant cradled by two plowshares and framed on either side by hefty nudes holding grain and fruit—symbolizing bountiful harvests. These panels introduce some of the world's earliest technology in agriculture.

North and south walls

The manufacture of the 1932 Ford V-8 at the Ford Motor Company's River Rouge plant is captured in the two major panels on the north and south walls.



Figure 1.3.2.7.3: North wall (detail), Diego Rivera, *Detroit Industry murals*, 1932-33, twenty-seven fresco panels at the Detroit Institute of Arts (photo: quickfix, CC BY-SA 2.0)

On the north wall, the direction of darkness, and the interior of things—Rivera captured all the processes related to the assembly of the motor. The blast furnace glows orange and red at extreme temperatures to make molten steel that is poured into molds to make ingots that are then milled into sheets. All the major processes related to the manufacture of the motor of the car from mold-making in the upper left to the final assembly of the motor on the assembly line in the foreground are accurately rendered with engineering precision. The artist wove the processes together through the use of the serpentine conveyors and assembly lines. The composition is grounded by two rows of white milling machines that stand as sentinels in the center of the wall and march into the background to the blast furnace.



Figure 1.3.2.7.4: South wall (detail), Diego Rivera, *Detroit Industry murals*, 1932-33, twenty-seven fresco panels at the Detroit Institute of Arts (photo: quickfix, CC BY-SA 2.0)

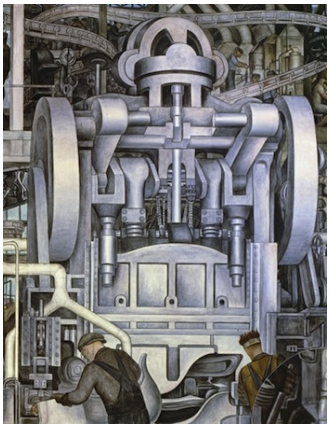


Figure 1.3.2.7.5: Stamping press on the south wall (detail), Diego Rivera, *Detroit Industry murals*, 1932-33, twenty-seven fresco panels at the Detroit Institute of Arts

On the south wall, the wall of light, the exterior of things, Rivera painted the assembly of the body of the car on the south automotive panel. The parts stamped out at the stamping press on the right then are welded in the welding buck in the upper center.

Surrounding this image are painting, upholstering and the final assembly where the chassis is joined to the body. At the end of the assembly line is a finished tiny red car.

The only machine that has been slightly altered is the stamping press because Rivera saw in it a resemblance physically and symbolically to the famous and feared ancient Aztec statue that was believed to have caused death and destruction when it was unearthed in Mexico City in the 18th century. It is now known as the representation of **Coatlicue**, the creation goddess. Cuatlicue was both a creator and destroyer of life. She was fed human hearts in order to maintain the order of the universe. The Coatlicue/stamping press presides over the sacrifice of workers through repetitive and physically demanding factory jobs.



Figure **1.3.2.7.6**: Figures representing the diverse workforce on the northeast corner (detail), Diego Rivera, *Detroit Industry murals*, 1932-33, twenty-seven fresco panels at the Detroit Institute of Arts (photo: **dfb**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

On the upper north and south panels Rivera painted gigantic red, black, yellow and white figures symbolic of the diverse workforce. Each has one of the raw materials that form the basis for the automobile industry—iron ore, coal/diamonds, sand and limestone. Rivera attributed the tensile strength of the raw materials with his conception of the character of each race. The red race he associated to iron ore; the black race to coal and diamonds; the yellow race with malleable sand; and the white race with the building material of limestone.



Figure **1.3.2.7.7**: Bombs and planes on the west wall, symbolizing endings and last judgments (detail), Diego Rivera, Detroit Industry murals, 1932-33, twenty-seven fresco panels at the Detroit Institute of Arts (photo: **dfb**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The west wall

The west wall, the direction of sunsets, endings, and last judgments, Rivera painted passenger planes and bombers. Here the constructive and destructive uses of technology are clearly presented. The panels below the planes depict a dove and a hawk to underscore the theme.

Controversy

The most controversial panel in 1932 was this small right hand panel on the north wall. Here a child is vaccinated in a medical laboratory surrounded by the animals that provided the serum. Rivera took this composition from Christian nativity scenes where the baby Jesus is attended to by Mary and Joseph and honored by three wise men. To Rivera, medical technology would be the new savior of mankind. He based the image of the child on the kidnapped Lindberg baby, Mary is based on the popular movie star of the time, Jean Harlow, and the doctor is a portrait of the museum director, William Valentiner. The three scientist/wise men he referred to as a Catholic, Protestant and a Jew—ecumenical wise/medical men.

A major controversy was sparked when the murals were publicly unveiled. Thousands of people signed petitions to either destroy or save them. The Catholic Church sparred with factory workers and college students and the press wrote articles for weeks. The museum held public speak-outs. The Detroit City Council considered a vote to whitewash them. In the end Edsel Ford publicly accepted them for the museum collection. The Detroit Industry murals remain today one of the most engaging, major modern works of the twentieth century.

Additional Resources:

These frescoes at the Detroit Institute of Arts

Rivera's materials and techniques from MoMA

Rivera painting the Detroit murals (video)

Diego Rivera's Detroit Industry Murals (Bridgeman)

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1.3.2.8: Calla Lilly Vendor (Vendedora de Alcatraces)

- *by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

Page ID

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Video **1.3.2.8.1**: Diego Rivera, *Calla Lilly Vendor (Vendedora de Alcatraces)*, 1942, oil on masonite, (Banco Nacional de Mexico, Mexico City)

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1.3.2.9: Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park

by DR. DORIS MARIA-REINA BRAVO

Page ID
188342



Figure **1.3.2.9.1**: Diego Rivera, *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park (Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central)*, 1947, 4.8 x 15 m (Museo Mural Diego Rivera, originally, Hotel del Prado, Mexico City)

Dream or nightmare

In *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park*, hundreds of characters from 400 years of Mexican history gather for a stroll through Mexico City's largest park. But the colorful balloons, impeccably dressed visitors, and vendors with diverse wares cannot conceal the darker side of this dream: a confrontation between an indigenous family and a police officer; a man shooting into the face of someone being trampled by a horse in the midst of a skirmish; a sinister skeleton smiling at the viewer. What kind of dream, or nightmare, is this?



Figure **1.3.2.9.2**: Diego Rivera, detail with rearing horse and shooting, *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park (Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central)*, 1947, 4.8 x 15 m (Museo Mural Diego Rivera, originally, Hotel del Prado, Mexico City)

Surreal quartet

In the spirit of Surrealism, this is a complex dream. For Surrealists, like Salvador Dalí, dreams were the principal subject matter. Since dreams are so personal and strange, this allowed artists to juxtapose unrelated matter, like clocks and ants for Dalí. Though Rivera never officially joined the Surrealists, he uses this approach in *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park* as he cobbles together a scene composed of disparate historical personages, including Hernán Cortés (the Spanish conqueror who initiated the fall of the Aztec Empire), Sor Juana (a seventeenth-century nun and one of Mexico's most notable writers), and Porfirio Díaz (whose dictatorship at the turn of the twentieth century inspired the Mexican Revolution).



Figure **1.3.2.9.3**: Diego Rivera, detail with the artist as a young man (left), the paintier Frida Kahlo (behind him), La Catrina (the Skeleton) and the printmaker, José Guadalupe Posada (right), *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park (Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central)*, 1947, 4.8 x 15 m (Museo Mural Diego Rivera, originally, Hotel del Prado, Mexico City)

Perhaps the most striking grouping is a central quartet featuring Rivera, the artist Frida Kahlo, the printmaker and draughtsman José Guadalupe Posada, and La Catrina. “Catrina” was a nickname in the early twentieth century for an elegant, upper-class woman who dressed in European clothing.



Figure **1.3.2.9.4**: José Guadalupe Posada, *La Calavera Catrina*, 1913, etching, 34.5 x 23 cm

This character became infamous in Posada’s *La Calavera de la Catrina (The Catrina Skeleton)*, 1913. Here, the renowned printmaker depicted La Catrina as a skeleton in order to critique the Mexican elite. In *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park*, Rivera reproduces the original Posada print and adds an elaborate boa—reminiscent of the feathered Mesoamerican serpent god Quetzalcóatl—around her neck.

La Catrina unites two great Mexican artists in this mural: she holds Rivera’s hand as her other arm is held by Posada. Though Posada died in obscurity in 1913, artists later brought attention to his work and he was a significant influence on the Mexican muralists. The fourth character in this quartet is Kahlo. She stands behind a child-version of her husband, with one hand protectively on his shoulder as her other holds a Yin and Yang object.



Figure **1.3.2.9.5**: Diego Rivera, detail with the artist as a young man (lower left), the paintier Frida Kahlo (behind him), and La Catrina (the Skeleton), *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park (Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central)*, 1947, 4.8 x 15 m (Museo Mural Diego Rivera, originally, Hotel del Prado, Mexico City)

In Chinese philosophy, Yin and Yang refers to opposite yet interdependent forces, like day and night. Within the name of this concept is perhaps the most fundamental duality in humanity: female ("Yin") and male ("Yang"). Thus, this Chinese symbol becomes a metaphor for Rivera and Kahlo's complex relationship: Rivera began as Kahlo's mentor; they then married, separated, and got back together; they were political comrades; and they painted each other frequently. Their double-portraits often reflect the state of the couple's relationship at that moment. In *Frieda and Diego Rivera* (1931) Kahlo subtly plays with the couple's stature in order to emphasize Rivera's influence on her. Kahlo was ill as Rivera worked on this mural and his diminished size may reflect his feelings of helplessness.

Reading Mexican history



Figure **1.3.2.9.6**: Frida Kahlo, *Frieda and Diego Rivera*, 1931, oil on canvas, 39-3/8 x 31 inches or 100.01 x 78.74 cm (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

Stepping away from the center, if one reads the mural like a text, a chronology emerges: the left side of the composition highlights the conquest and colonization of Mexico, the fight for independence and the revolution occupy the majority of the central space, and modern achievements fill the right. For some art historians the central area is a snapshot of bourgeois life in 1895—as refined ladies and gentlemen promenade in their Sunday best, under the watchful eye of Porfirio Díaz in his plumed military garb. One gets a sense of the inequality that stirred average Mexicans to overthrow their dictator and initiate the Mexican Revolution which lasted from 1910 until 1920.

In this light we can appreciate the dreams and nightmares within each epoch. To the left of the balloons the nightmares of the conquest and religious intolerance during the colonial-era give way to the dream of a democratic nation during the nineteenth century, represented by the over-sized figure of Benito Juárez, who restored the republic after French occupation and attempted to modernize the country as president. On the right of the composition, beyond the bandstand, the battles of the revolution give way to a society where "land and liberty," as championed by the workers' flags, becomes a tangible reality.



Figure **1.3.2.9.7**: Diego Rivera, detail with Benito Juárez top center, *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park (Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central)*, 1947, 4.8 x 15 m (Museo Mural Diego Rivera, originally, Hotel del Prado, Mexico City)

Histories normally edited out

More often than not history is written by the victor and thus reflects an incomplete story. *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park* is an antidote to this: Rivera guarantees that histories normally edited out (the stories of the indigenous and the masses) have a place in this grand narrative. The artist reminds the viewer that the struggles and glory of four centuries of Mexican history are due to the participation of Mexicans from all strata of society.

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1.3.3: José Clemente Orozco, Dive Bomber and Tank

by DR. MAYA JIMÉNEZ

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188343



Figure **1.3.3.1**: José Clemente Orozco, *Dive Bomber and Tank*, 1940, fresco, six panels, 275 x 91.4 cm each, 275 x 550 cm overall (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Humanity

José Clemente Orozco painted the mural *Dive Bomber and Tank* in front of visitors at The Museum of Modern Art in 1940. The fresco was made in conjunction with the exhibition, “Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art,” and Orozco captivated his audience over a frantic ten-day period through his performance and his powerful imagery.

Against the backdrop of World War II and the infamous blitzkriegs of the Nazis, Orozco depicted the effects of modern warfare on humanity. Interestingly however, and because weapons of war dominate most of the composition, any hint of the human figure is lost, except for three human legs that sprout from the debris, and upon close inspection three metallic human faces—or masks—chained to the debris. These faces are buried under large, heavy, industrial weapons, that include tank treads and the disassembled parts of a bomber. Through this superimposition, Orozco makes clear the triumph of war over humanity, or as he put it “the subjugation of man by the machines of modern warfare."[1]

Abstraction



Figure **1.3.3.2**: Detail, José Clemente Orozco, *Dive Bomber and Tank*, 1940,fresco, six panels, 275 x 91.4 cm each, 275 x 550 cm overall (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

For all the certainty of this statement, there is significant ambiguity in the painting. The upturned legs could be those of helpless victims or those of the bomber pilots. The artist purposely leaves these questions unanswered, offering little narrative detail or visual clarity. Indeed Orozco claimed that these panels could be arranged in any order (a Surrealist strategy), and not necessarily in

sequential order (as they are usually shown at MoMA). As a result of their interchangeability, the panels each function independently though collectively they create multiple abstract compositions.

His interest in abstraction distinguished Orozco from his closest contemporaries, Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros (together these muralists were known as los tres grandes, “the three great ones”). These abstract tendancies can be seen in *Dive Bomber and Tank* in the relative lack of detail, expressionist brushstrokes, repetition of form, and monochromatic palette.

The attention to the circular forms of the chain links and metallic bolts, and the rectangular shape of the tank treads create a composition that is at once representational and abstract. The fact that these forms are disconnected from each other, a result of the dismembered state of the bomber and tank, and the logistical arrangement of the panels, render the mural even more abstract.

War

While Orozco stated that this mural had “no political significance,” war was the dominant reality in 1940 and focused the attention of other artists at the time. Pablo Picasso had documented the effects of the Spanish Civil War in his painting Guernica in 1937—the same year that David Alfaro Siqueiros painted the powerful *Echo of a Scream*. Picasso’s *Guernica* had been on exhibit at MoMA from late 1939 to January 1940 and the Siqueiros had been in MoMA’s collection since 1937. Together these artists articulated a clear anti-war message that rivaled the more traditional heroic narratives common in history painting. Devoid of the geographical specificity that characterized Picasso’s Guernica, Orozco—like Siqueiros—represented a condemnation of war that can be easily applied to any place or people, fitting given that violence was now world-wide. The fact that *Dive Bomber and Tank* lacks any specific political symbols or historical details makes the mural that much more universal.

1. James Oles, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2011, page 44.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

1.4: Surrealism

Begun in Europe, Surrealism soon crossed the Atlantic and took on a new life in Latin America.

c. 1925 - 1950

1.4.1: Frida Kahlo

- 1.4.1.1: Frida Kahlo, introduction
- 1.4.1.2: Frieda and Diego Rivera
- 1.4.1.3: The Two Fridas (Las dos Fridas)

1.4.2: Rosa Rolanda, Self-Portrait

1.4.3: Wifredo Lam

- 1.4.3.1: The Jungle
- 1.4.3.2: The Eternal Presence

1.4.4: Hector Hyppolite, Ogou Feray also known as Ogoun Ferraille by DR. TAMARA DÍAZ CALCAÑO

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SECTION OVERVIEW

1.4.1: Frida Kahlo

1.4.1.1: Frida Kahlo, introduction

1.4.1.2: Frieda and Diego Rivera

1.4.1.3: The Two Fridas (Las dos Fridas)

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1.4.1.1: Frida Kahlo, introduction

by DR. MAYA JIMÉNEZ

Page ID
188346



Figure 1.4.1.1.1: Frida Kahlo, *The Two Fridas (Las dos Fridas)*, 1939, oil on canvas, 67-11/16 x 67-11/16″ (Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City)

Sixty, more than a third of the easel paintings known by Frida Kahlo are self-portraits. This huge number demonstrates the importance of this genre to her artistic oeuvre. *The Two Fridas*, like *Self-Portrait With Cropped Hair*, captures the artist's turmoil after her 1939 divorce from the artist Diego Rivera. At the same time, issues of identity surface in both works. ***The Two Fridas*** speaks to cultural ambivalence and refers to her ancestral heritage. *Self-Portrait With Cropped Hair* suggests Kahlo's interest in gender and sexuality as fluid concepts.



Figure 1.4.1.1.2: Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*, 1940, oil on canvas, 40 x 27.9 cm (Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico City)

Kahlo was famously known for her tumultuous marriage with Rivera, whom she wed in 1929 and remarried in 1941. The daughter of a German immigrant (of Hungarian descent) and a Mexican mother, Kahlo suffered from numerous medical setbacks including polio, which she contracted at the age of six, partial immobility—the result of a bus accident in 1925, and her several miscarriages. Kahlo began to paint largely in response to her accident and her limited mobility, taking on her own identity and her struggles as

sources for her art. Despite the personal nature of her content, Kahlo's painting is always informed by her sophisticated understanding of art history, of Mexican culture, its politics, and its patriarchy.

The Two Fridas

Exhibited in 1940 at the International Surrealist Exhibition, *The Two Fridas* depicts a large-scale, double portrait of Kahlo, rare for the artist, since most of her canvases were small, reminiscent of colonial *retablos*, small devotional paintings. To the right Kahlo appears dressed in traditional Tehuana attire, different from the nineteenth century wedding dress she wears at left and similar to the one worn by her mother in *My Grandparents, My Parents, and I (Family Tree)* (1936).



Figure **1.4.1.1.3**: Frida Kahlo, *My Grandparents, My Parents, and I (Family Tree)*, 1936, oil and tempera on zinc, 30.7 x 34.5 cm (Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico City)

Whereas the white dress references the Euro-Mexican culture she was brought up in, in which women are "feminine" and fragile, the Tehuana dress evokes the opposite, a powerful figure within an indigenous culture described by some at the time as a matriarchy. This cultural contrast speaks to the larger issue of how adopting the distinctive costume of the indigenous people of Tehuantepec, known as the Tehuana, was considered not only "a gesture of nationalist cultural solidarity," but also a reference to the gender stereotype of "*la india bonita*." [1] Against the backdrop of post-revolutionary Mexico, when debates about *indigenismo* (the ideology that upheld the Indian as an important marker of national identity) and *mestizaje* (the racial mixing that occurred as a result of the colonization of the Spanish-speaking Americas) were at stake, Kahlo's work can be understood on both a national and personal level. While the Tehuana costume allowed for Kahlo to hide her misshapen body and right leg, a consequence of polio and the accident, it was also the attire most favored by Rivera, the man whose portrait the Tehuana Kahlo holds. Without Rivera, the Europeanized Kahlo not only bleeds to death, but her heart remains broken, both literally and metaphorically.

Self-Portrait With Cropped Hair



Figure **1.4.1.1.4**: Frida Kahlo, detail with hemostat, *The Two Fridas (Las dos Fridas)*, 1939, oil on canvas, 67-11/16 x 67-11/16″ (Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City) (photo: Dave Cooksey, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

In opposition, the painting *Self-Portrait With Cropped Hair* boldly denounces the femininity of *Two Fridas*. In removing her iconic Tehuana dress, in favor of an oversized men's suit, and in cutting off her braids in favor of a crew cut, Kahlo takes on the appearance of none other than Rivera himself. At the top of the canvas, Kahlo incorporates lyrics from a popular song, which read, "Look, if I loved you it was because of your hair. Now that you are without hair, I don't love you anymore." In weaving personal and popular references, Kahlo creates multilayered self-portraits that while rooted in reality, as she so adamantly argued, nevertheless provoke the surrealist imagination. This can be seen in the visual disjunctions she employs such as the floating braids in *Self Portrait with Cropped Hair* and the severed artery in *Two Fridas*. As Kahlo asserted to Surrealist writer André Breton, she was simply painting her own reality.

Notes

[1] Adriana Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition: Women, Gender, and Representation in Mexican Art* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), p. 3

Additional resources

Faces of Frida, Google Cultural Institute

Freida and Diego Rivera, Smarthistory

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1.4.1.2: Frieda and Diego Rivera

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
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Video **1.4.1.2.1**: Frida Kahlo, *Frieda and Diego Rivera*, 1931, oil on canvas, 39-3/8 x 31″ / 100.01 x 78.74 cm (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

This was painted in San Francisco during the artist's first trip outside of Mexico. She accompanied her husband Diego Rivera who was painting in the United States and would, at the end of the year, be the subject of a retrospecive at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. The banderole carried by the bird above the artist states: "Here you see us, me, Frieda Kahlo, with my beloved husband Diego Rivera, I painted these portraits in the beautiful city of San Francisco, California, for our friend Mr. Albert Bender, and it was the month of April of the year 1931." Note: Kahlo changed her German name, Frieda, to Frida.

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1.4.1.3: The Two Fridas (Las dos Fridas)

by DR. DORIS MARIA-REINA BRAVO

Page ID
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Figure **1.4.1.3.1**: Frida Kahlo, *The Two Fridas (Las dos Fridas)*, 1939, oil on canvas, 67-11/16 x 67-11/16″ (Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City)

Indelible marks

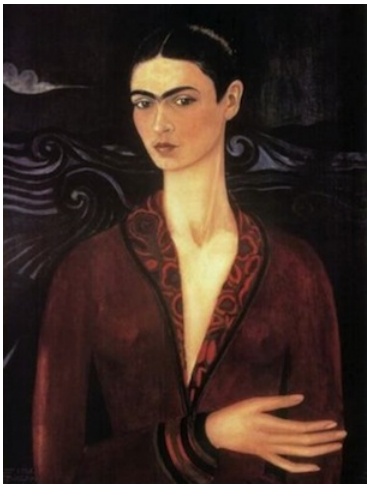


Figure **1.4.1.3.2**: Frida Kahlo, *Self-portrait in a Velvet Dress*, 1926, oil on canvas (private collection)

Facial hair indelibly marks the self-portraits of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. In an era when women still wore elaborate hairstyles, hosiery, and attire, Kahlo was a rebellious loner, often dressed in indigenous clothing. Moreover, she lived as an artist during a period when many middle-class women sacrificed their ambitions to live entirely in the domestic sphere. Kahlo flouted both conventions of beauty and social expectations in her self-portraits. These powerful and unflinching self-images explore complex and difficult topics including her culturally mixed heritage, the harsh reality of her medical conditions, and the repression of women.

The double self-portrait *The Two Fridas*, 1939 (above) features two seated figures holding hands and sharing a bench in front of a stormy sky. The Fridas are identical twins except in their attire, a poignant issue for Kahlo at this moment. The year she painted this canvas she was divorced from Diego Rivera, the acclaimed Mexican muralist. Before she married Rivera in 1929, she wore the modern European dress of the era, evident in her first self-portrait (left) where she dons a red velvet dress with gold embroidery. With Rivera's encouragement, Kahlo embraced attire rooted in Mexican customs.



Figure 1.4.1.3.3: Frida Kahlo, *Self-portrait (Time Flies)*, 1929 (private collection)

Dress

In her second self-portrait (left) her accessories reference distinct periods in Mexican history (her necklace is a reference to the pre-Columbian Jadite of the Aztecs and the earrings are Colonial in style) while her simple white blouse is a nod to peasant women.

The portraits from the 1930s reflect Kahlo's growing penchant for indigenous attire and hair-styling, as is evident in *Frieda and Diego Rivera*, 1931 (below) and *The Two Fridas*. Yet Kahlo never abandoned dressing her subjects and herself in mainstream, European dress; her female relatives wear non-indigenous clothing in *My Grandparents, My Parents, and I (Family Tree)*, 1936 (below). In this painting, the bridal dress Kahlo's mother wears is reminiscent of the white, stiff-collared dress the artist wears in*The Two Fridas*. Indeed, the grotesque view into each woman's insides is heightened by the virginal whiteness of both dresses.



Figure 1.4.1.3.4: Frida Kahlo, *Frieda and Diego Rivera*, 1931, oil on canvas, 39-3/8 x 31 inches (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

In her brief lifetime, Kahlo painted about two hundred works of art, many of which are self-portraits. With the exception of a few family trees, the double-portrait with Rivera and *The Two Fridas* represents a departure in her oeuvre. If a self-portrait by definition is a painting of one's self, why would Kahlo paint herself twice? One way to answer this question is to examine *The Two Fridas* as a bookend to the 1931 portrait, *Frieda and Diego Rivera*. Though this painting was meant to celebrate the birth of their union, their tentative grasp seems to reflect Kahlo's misgivings about her husband's fidelity. By contrast, the double self-portrait, though laden with suffering, exhibits resilience.

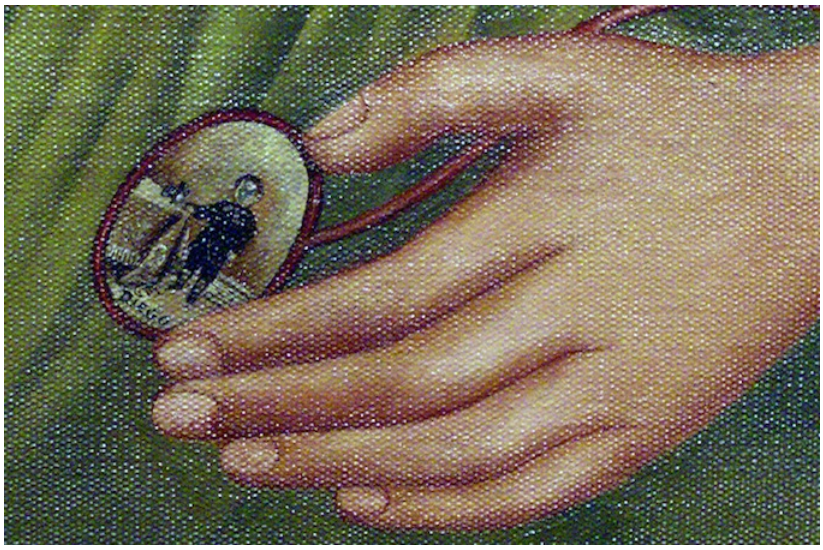


Figure 1.4.1.3.5: Detail of *The Two Fridas*, with hand holding a portrait of young Diego (photo: Dave Cooksey, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Anatomy of Two Fridas

The two Fridas clasp hands tightly. This bond is echoed by the vein that unites them. Where one is weakened by an exposed heart, the other is strong; where one still pines for her lost love (as underscored by the vein feeding Rivera's miniature portrait), the other clamps down on that figurative and literal tie with a hemostat.

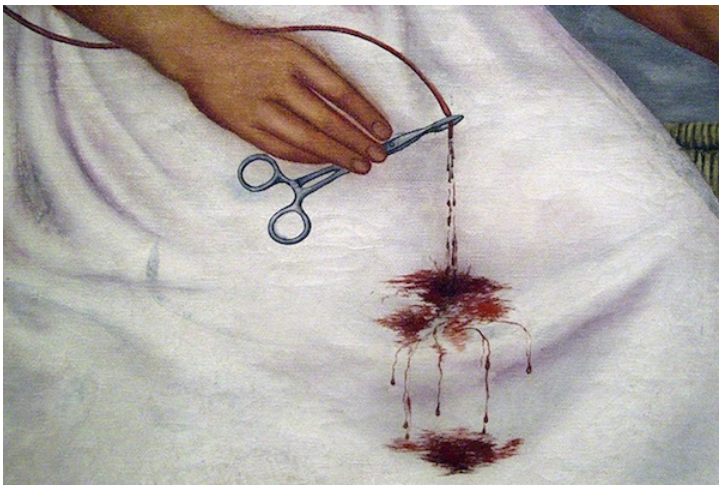


Figure 1.4.1.3.6: Frida Kahlo, detail with Hemostat, *The Two Fridas* (Las dos Fridas), 1939, oil on canvas, 67-11/16 x 67-11/16″ (Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City) (photo: Dave Cooksey, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Human anatomy is often graphiclty exposed in Kahlo's work, a topic she knew well after a childhood bout with polio deformed her right leg and a bus accident when she was eighteen years old left her disabled and unable to bear children. She would endure 32 operations as a result. Detail with Hemostat (photo: Dave Cooksey, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)Kahlo utilized blood as a visceral metaphor of union, as in the 1936 family portrait (below) where she honors her lineage through these bloody ties. She returns to this metaphor in The Two Fridas though with the added impact of two hearts, both vulnerable and laid bare to the viewer as a testament to her emotional suffering.



Figure 1.4.1.3.7: Frida Kahlo, *My Grandparents, My Parents, and I (Family Tree)*, 1936, oil and tempera on zinc, 12 1/8 x 13 5/8″ (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

“I am the person I know best”

Photographs by artists within her milieu, like Manuel Alvarez Bravo and Imogen Cunningham, confirm that Kahlo’s self-portraits were largely accurate and that she avoided embellishing her features. The solitude produced by frequent bed rest—stemming from polio, her near-fatal bus accident, and a lifetime of operations—was one of the cruel constants in Kahlo’s life. Indeed, numerous photographs feature Kahlo in bed, often painting despite restraints. Beginning in her youth, in order to cope with these long periods of recovery, Kahlo became a painter. Nevertheless, the isolation caused by her health problems was always present. She reflected, “I paint self-portraits because I am so often alone, because I am the person I know best.”

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1.4.2: Rosa Rolanda, Self-Portrait

by **DR. JENNIFER PADGETT, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART** and **DR. LAUREN KILROY-EWBANK**

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Video **1.4.2.1**: Rosa Rolanda, *Self-Portrait*, 1939, oil on canvas, 40 x 29.9 cm (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art)

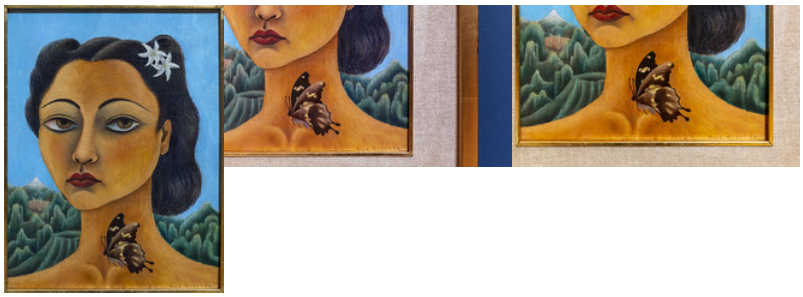
Additional resources

This work at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

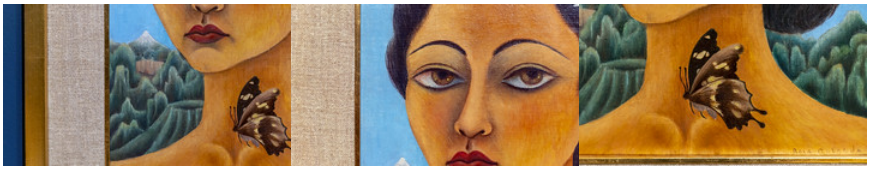
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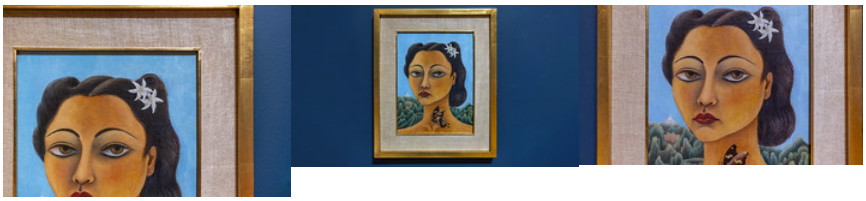
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SECTION OVERVIEW

1.4.3: Wifredo Lam

1.4.3.1: The Jungle

1.4.3.2: The Eternal Presence

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1.4.3.1: The Jungle

by DR. DORIS MARIA-REINA BRAVO

Page ID
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Figure **1.4.3.1.1**: Wifredo Lam, *The Jungle*, 1942-43, gouache on paper mounted on canvas, 94-1/4 x 90-1/2″ / 239.4 x 229.9 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

In *The Godfather Part II* Michael Corleone has the impeccable timing of visiting Cuba on the eve of the 1959 Revolution that would overthrow the corrupt government of Cuba's leader at the time, Fulgencio Batista. Corleone's stay in Havana—marked by business meetings with American corporations and trips to casino-resorts and cabaret shows—highlights the excesses that led to the dramatic fall of that regime during the film's New Year's Eve party. More than fifteen years earlier, when Wifredo Lam painted *The Jungle* (1943), Cuba had already spent over four decades at the mercy of United States-interests.

Wifredo Lam remains the most renowned painter from Cuba and *The Jungle* remains his best known work and an important painting in the history of Latin American art and the history twentieth-century modernism more broadly. In the 1920s and 30s, Lam was in Madrid and Paris, but in 1941 as Europe was engulfed by war, he returned to his native country. Though he would leave Cuba again for Europe after the war, key elements within his artistic practice intersected during this period: Lam's consciousness of Cuba's socio-economic realities; his artistic formation in Europe under the influence of Surrealism; and his re-acquaintance with Afro-Caribbean culture. This remarkable collision resulted in the artist's most notable work, *The Jungle*.

A game of perception



Figure **1.4.3.1.2**: Wifredo Lam, *The Jungle* (detail)

The Jungle, currently on display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, has an undeniable presence within the gallery: the cluster of enigmatic faces, limbs, and sugarcane crowd a canvas that is nearly an 8 foot square. Lam's bold painting is a game of perception. The artist haphazardly constructs the figures from a collection of distinct forms—crescent-shaped faces; prominent,

rounded backsides; willowy arms and legs; and flat, cloddish hands and feet. When assembled these figures resemble a funhouse mirror reflection. The disproportion among the shapes generates an uneasy balance between the composition's denser top and more open bottom—there are not enough feet and legs to support the upper half of the painting, which seems on the verge of toppling over. Another significant element within Lam's game of perception is how he places the figures within an unorthodox landscape. Lam's panorama excludes the typical elements of a horizon line, sky or wide view; instead this is a tight, directionless snapshot, with only the faintest sense of the ground.

One part of the flora in this scene—sugarcane—is alien to the jungle setting suggested by the painting's title. Sugarcane does not grow in jungles but rather is cultivated in fields. In 1940s Cuba, sugarcane was big business, requiring the toil of thousands of laborers similar to the cotton industry in the American South before the Civil War. The reality of laboring Cubans was in sharp contrast to how foreigners perceived the island nation, namely as a playground. Lam's painting remains an unusual Cuban landscape compared to the tourism posters that depicted the country as a destination for Americans seeking beachside resorts. While northern visitors enjoyed a permissive resort experience, U.S. corporations ran their businesses, including sugar production. Though Cuba gained independence from Spain at the end of nineteenth century, the United States maintained the right to intervene in Cuba's affairs, which destabilized politics on the island for decades.

European Modernism and Santería



Figure **1.4.3.1.3**: Conrado W. Massaguer, *Visit Cuba*, postcard, n.d. (before 1960)

During the interwar period in Paris, Lam befriended the Surrealists, whose influence is evident in *The Jungle*. Surrealists aimed to release the unconscious mind—suppressed, they believed, by the rational—in order to achieve another reality. In art, the juxtaposition of irrational images reveal a "super-reality," or "sur-reality." In Lam's work, an other-worldly atmosphere emerges from the constant shifting taking place among the figures; they are at once human, animal, organic, and mystical.

This metamorphosis among the figures is also related to Lam's interest in Afro-Caribbean culture. When the artist resettled in Cuba in 1941, he began to integrate symbols from Santería, an Afro-Cuban religion that mixes African beliefs and customs with Catholicism, into his art. During Santería ceremonies the supernatural merges with the natural world through masks, animals, or initiates who become possessed by a god. These ceremonies are moments of metamorphosis where a being is at once itself and otherworldly.

No cha-cha-cha

Lam created a new narrative within the Cuban imagination: rooted in the island's complex history, his work was an antidote to the picturesque frivolity that mired the nation in stereotype,

> ***[…]I refused to paint cha-cha-cha. I wanted with all my heart to paint the drama of my country, but by thoroughly expressing the negro [sic] spirit […] In this way I could act as a Trojan horse that would spew forth hallucinating figures with the power to surprise, to disturb the dreams of the exploiters. I knew I was running the risk of not being understood either***

> ***by the man in the street or by the others. But a true picture has the power to set the imagination to work, even if it takes time.[1]***

The Jungle is both enigmatic and enchanting, and has inspired generations of viewers to liberate their imaginations.

1. Fouchet, Max-Pol. *Wifredo Lam*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1976, 188-189. Republished in Richards, Paulette. “Wifredo Lam: A Sketch.” *Callaloo* 34 (Winter 1988): 91-92.

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1.4.3.2: The Eternal Presence

by **DR. MEY-YEN MORIUCHI**

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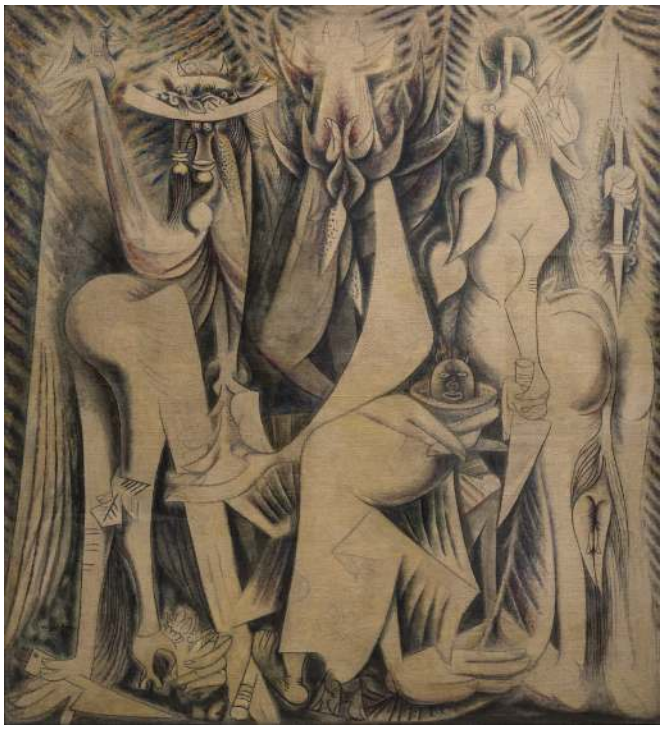


Figure 1.4.3.2.1:Wifredo Lam, *The Eternal Presence (An Homage to Alejandro García Caturla)*, 1944, oil and pastel over papier mâché and chalk ground on bast fiber fabric, 85 1/4 x 77 1/8 inches (Rhode Island School of Design Museum; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Who are these strange mutant creatures? What is happening in this densely filled composition? In this monumental painting, Wifredo Lam leaves no corner unfilled. We are presented with three imposing anthropomorphic figures that stand and confront the viewer curiously. Overlapping bodies and limbs make it difficult to distinguish the figures and their attributes. The monochromatic color palette fuses the figures and the background into a compressed, claustrophobic space. There is no place to move, no place to hide.

An homage

The multicultural surrealist artist Wifredo Lam was born to a Chinese father and Cuban mother of African and Spanish descent and raised in Cuba. His early travels to Europe exposed him to modernist styles, and important friendships with Pablo Picasso and André Breton secured his place among the Parisian avant-garde. Additionally, Lam traveled to Martinique, where he encountered Aimé Césaire and was exposed to his writings on *Negritude*, a movement that affirmed the value of black culture, heritage, and identity. Lam's hybrid animal-human figures and fragmented, flattened compositions draw from a variety of sources, including his Afro-Cuban culture, his experimentation with Surrealist techniques like automatism and *cadavre exquis*, as well as his interests in Chinese cultural and aesthetic traditions.

Lam dedicated *The Eternal Presence* to the Cuban composer Alejandro García Caturla, who had been murdered four years earlier at the age of 34. In his musical compositions, Caturla blended elements of European and African culture, becoming a leader of *Afrocubanismo*, which was an artistic and social movement that focused on the recognition and assimilation of African cultural features present in Cuban society. This blending of cultures resonated with Lam's artistic objectives. *The Eternal Presence* depicts a majestic, ambiguous creature in the center accompanied by two fantastical, mythical beings. This triad of figures is still, as if in a

trance-like state. The thick palm-tree fronds in the background recall Cuba's tropical climate and are featured in many of Lam's paintings, like *Fruta Bomba* from 1944.



Figure **1.4.3.2.2**: Wifredo Lam, *La Fruta Bomba*, 1944, oil on canvas, 154.7 x 125 cm (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid)

The Horse



Figure **1.4.3.2.3**:Wifredo Lam, *The Eternal Presence (An Homage to Alejandro García Caturla)*, detail, 1944, oil and pastel over papier mâché and chalk ground on bast fiber fabric, 85 1/4 x 77 1/8 inches (Rhode Island School of Design Museum; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The figure on the left of *The Eternal Presence* is a *femme-cheval*, or female-horse, figure. Lam had begun introducing horse-like motifs into his work in the 1940s, inspired by the Afro-Cuban religion of Santería that blends Yoruba spirituality with some aspects of Roman Catholicism.

Within an Afro-Cuban context, the horse figure can be interpreted as an incarnation of an *orisha* (divine spirit) and its presence refers to the process of being possessed during sacred ceremonies. In Santería rituals, the practitioner is referred to as a "horse" and undergoes a spiritual transformation. [1]

In Chinese culture the horse has a long history of pictorial and poetic representation and may have held personal significance for Lam. Horses were particularly revered in China because of their military and political usefulness, as well as their role in the mythology of early China.

As close kin to dragons and supernatural beings, horses were also believed to have spiritual meaning and were known to guide believers on heavenly journeys. Represented in ornamental bronze masks, jade figurines, terracotta sculptures, ink wash paintings, and poetry, horses were a predominant subject throughout China's history.

The Chinese had a notable presence in Cuba since the nineteenth century when Lam's father immigrated. [2] As the youngest child, Lam had a special relationship with his father. Lam fondly remembered when his father would create silhouettes of horses galloping across the walls during Chinese festivals. [3]

In *The Eternal Presence*, the feminine femme-cheval figure wears a wide-brimmed hat and high heels and her striking curves resemble figures seen in other paintings from the period, such as Lam's renowned ***The Jungle*** from one year earlier. Her horse-mask protects and guides her on a spiritual journey.

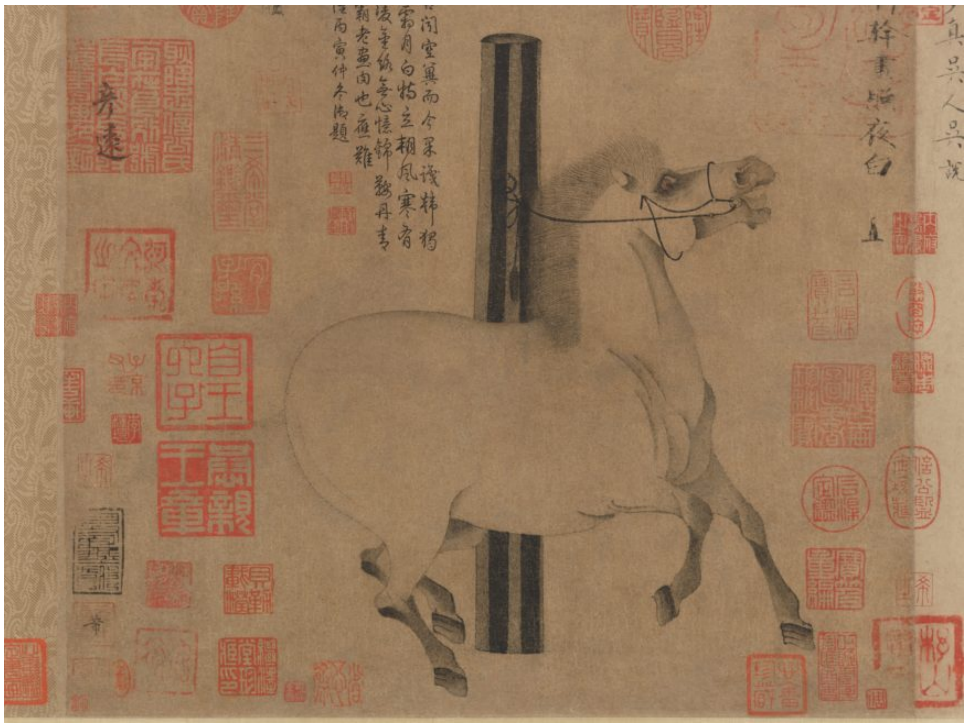


Figure 1.4.3.2.4: Han Gan, *Night-Shining White*, c. 750, Tang Dynasty, China, ink on paper, 30.8 x 34 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Religious syncretism



Figure 1.4.3.2.5: Wifredo Lam, *The Eternal Presence (An Homage to Alejandro García Caturla)*, detail, 1944, oil and pastel over papier mâché and chalk ground on bast fiber fabric, 85 1/4 x 77 1/8 inches (Rhode Island School of Design Museum; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The figure on the right holds a knife and a "palo congo," the weapon of Changó, the warrior and master of thunder whose sacred power is symbolized by a double-edged axe. In Santería, Changó is an *orisha* that is often syncretized with Saint Barbara or Saint Jerome. Religious and artistic fusion surrounded Lam.

The Chinese deity Sanfancón is an example of a syncretic form of worship that developed combining Chinese with Afro-Cuban and Christian traditions. The deity is the synthesis of the orisha Changó with the cult of Kuan Kong and Saint Barbara. [4] The right-most Changó figure, who peers outward as his distorted body seems to emerge out of the thick palm-fronds that surround him, could also be interpreted as Sanfancón.

Lam's second wife, German scientist Helena Holzer, noted that upon their arrival in Havana in 1941, the couple would visit bookstores in Old Havana discovering books on Oriental philosophies and alchemy. [5] These Oriental philosophies enriched their conversations and influenced Lam's subject matter. Holzer and Lam discussed the symbolism of the number three in different cultures. In Chinese philosophy, the two opposing forces Yin (dark, feminine) and Yang (bright, masculine), combine with Tao, the path that is in harmony with nature.

The number three in the *I Ching* is the symbol "Chun" which represents birth and new beginnings emerging from chaos. Three in the Holy Trinity is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, indicative of life, sacrifice, and forgiveness.

Following these conversations, Lam began painting compositions with three figures, such as *The Eternal Presence* and *The Wedding* (1947). Holzer explains the subject matter of *The Eternal Presence* as

> ***… a trinity representing the bird of love and the weapon of destruction (the opposites Yin and Yang) flanking the supreme Tao in the center. [6]***

Referencing life, sacrifice, and new beginnings, the painting is an appropriate homage to his late friend Cartula. The central Tao figure with a multiple horned head also evokes the orisha Elegua, the deity of roads and paths. He is portrayed frontally with two oversized arms that cross his body. His darker upper body recedes into the background, while his lower body suggests a surrealist doubling of forms.

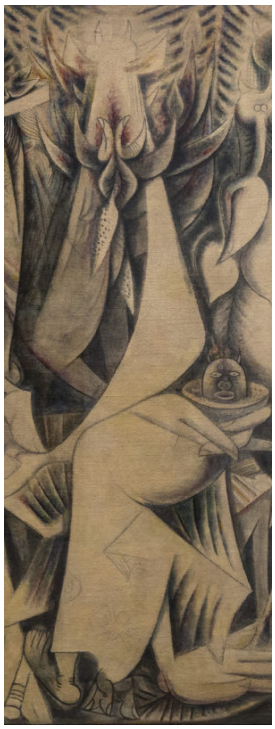


Figure **1.4.3.2.6**: Wifredo Lam, *The Eternal Presence (An Homage to Alejandro García Caturla)*, detail, 1944, oil and pastel over papier mâché and chalk ground on bast fiber fabric, 85 1/4 x 77 1/8 inches (Rhode Island School of Design Museum; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

On the one hand, the light-filled space could be the figure's legs draped in a robe. His right hand holds a plate with a face. On the other, the unfilled shape suggests a hunched-back figure. The perspective is disorienting and the conflation illegible, allowing for a multiplicity of interpretations. The eyes peer forward as if inviting the viewer to speculate on the potential meanings of this intriguing image.

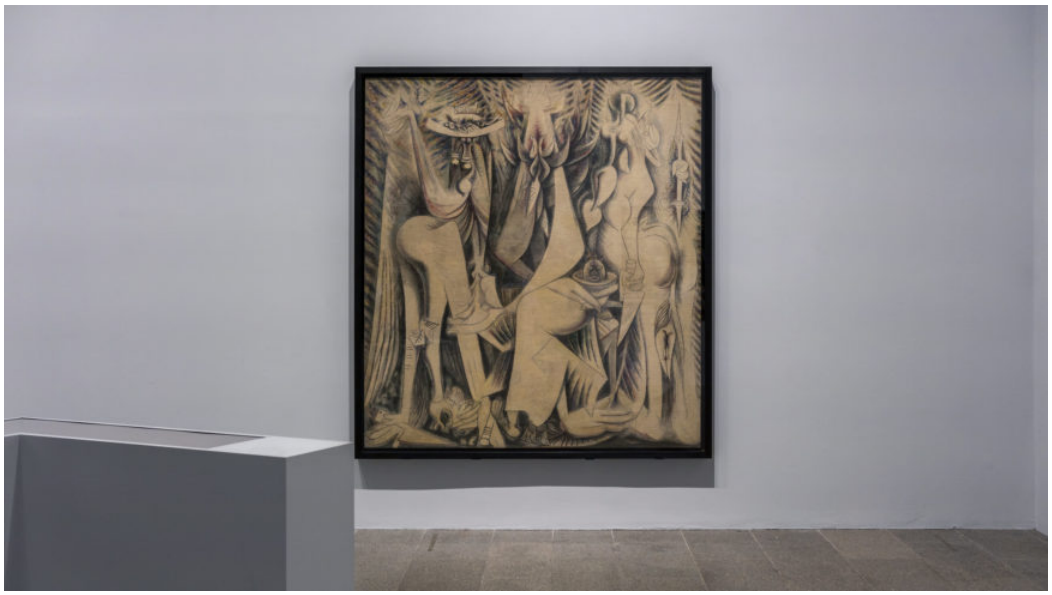


Figure **1.4.3.2.7**: Wifredo Lam, *The Eternal Presence (An Homage to Alejandro García Caturla)*, 1944, oil and pastel over papier mâché and chalk ground on bast fiber fabric, 85 1/4 x 77 1/8 inches (Rhode Island School of Design Museum; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

In the eye of the beholder

Lam's figures stem from and connote transcultural meanings drawing on the various spiritual and artistic ideas that surrounded him. He merged Afro-Cuban Santería, the tropical vegetation of his native land, the Chinese philosophies of the Yin, Yang, and Tao doctrine, and alchemical teachings into his visual representations. The latter exposed him to the belief that sublimation could be achieved through transmutations, that spiritual and intellectual elevation were intertwined with the imagination.

Lam viewed art as a dialogue between the viewer and the figures on the canvas. He believed that art could evoke multiple responses that could change from one day to the next depending on one's mood. This is enhanced by the multiplicity of his symbolism, where one motif might infer various, diverse meanings, drawing on his multicultural heritage, influences, and interests.

Notes:

1. Julia Herzberg, "Wifredo Lam: The Development of Style and World View, The Havana Years, 1941–1952," in *Wifredo Lam and his Contemporaries*, ed. Maria R. Balderrama (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1992), 33.
2. See Kathleen López, *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013; Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).
3. Antonio Nuñez Jiménez, *Wifredo Lam* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1982), 54.
4. Frank F. Scherer, "Sanfancón: Orientalism, Self-Orientalism, and 'Chinese Religion' in Cuba," in *Nation Dance: Religion, Identity, and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean*, ed. Patrick Taylor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 164.
5. Helena Holzer Benitez, *Wifredo and Helena, My Life with Wifredo Lam, 1939–1950* (Lausanne: Acatos, 1999), 27, 104.
6. Ibid., 107.

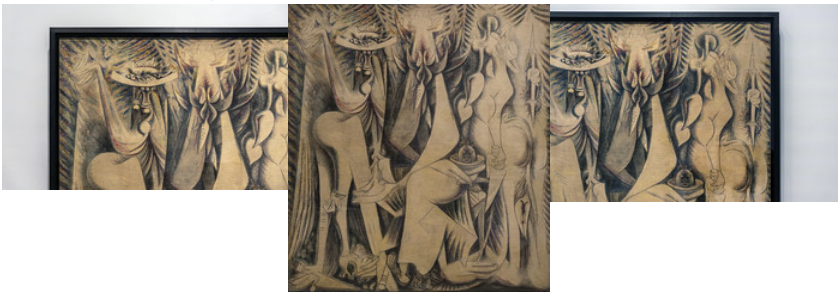
Additional resources

Lowery Stokes Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde, 1923–1982* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002).

Mey-Yen Moriuchi, "Locating Chinese Culture and Aesthetics in the Art of Wifredo Lam," in *Afro-Asian Connections in Latin America and the Caribbean*, eds. Debra Lee-DiStefano and Luisa Ossa (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), 2760.

Read the Wifredo Lam Room Guide at the Tate Modern

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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1.4.4: Hector Hyppolite, Ogou Feray also known as Ogoun Ferraille by DR. TAMARA DÍAZ CALCAÑO

by **DR. TAMARA DÍAZ CALCAÑO**

Page ID
193542



Figure **1.4.4.1**: Hector Hyppolite, *Ogou Feray also known as Ogoun Ferraille*, c. 1945, oil paint on Masonite (The Museum of Everything, London; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Who is this man with a sword and a machete in his hands surrounded by symbols and objects that seem to float around him, including a table with a flaming chalice. He wears boots, a military-style coat above an orange vest, and tall red hat adorned with black symbols. His face is rather inscrutable, with an unfocused gaze and a slightly scowling mouth. He is Ogou Fer, also known as Ogou Feray, an important *loa* of the Haitian Vodou pantheon. The artist, Hector Hyppolite, created many paintings like this one that are tied to Vodou, for the burgeoning Haitian art market of the 1940s.

Vodou as subject and inspiration



Figure **1.4.4.2**: Hector Hyppolite, *Ogou Feray also known as Ogoun Ferraille* (detail), c. 1945, oil paint on Masonite (The Museum of Everything, London; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Vodou remains a popular religion in Haiti. Its origins are diverse, and it developed initially among the enslaved population during the Spanish and French colonial periods. Like other Afro-Caribbean religions (such as santería in Cuba), Vodou is characterized by syncretism (an amalgamation of different religions). Vodou's rich visual and ritual culture builds on Fon, Yoruba, Kongo, Mbundu, and Mondongue religious beliefs from West and Central Africa and on Spanish and French Catholicism. People from Africa, or of African descent who were forced into the practice of Catholicism in the Caribbean made associations between Christian holy figures and the deities and narratives of their own religions. This was a way to continue practicing their original beliefs in secret

while maintaining strong links to their African culture under the severe restrictions caused by slavery and colonial society. With time, this practice resulted in Haitian Vodou as a unique religious system.

Vodou acquired national significance during and after the Haitian Revolution, in part because it was credited with sparking the enslaved population's involvement in the uprising. In the following centuries, Vodou was both esteemed and vilified. For example, in the 19th century, the autocratic president Faustin Soulouque publicly associated himself with the practice of the religion and sought its official acceptance. Then in the early 20th century anti-superstition campaigns were led by the government and the Church to eradicate its practice. All the while, Vodou continued as an important religious and cultural practice among the general Haitian population. Finally in 1946, it was properly legalized and became a popular subject of artistic production.

The artist, Hector Hyppolite, was a third generation *houngan* (Voudou priest) and was intimately familiar with the religion's practice and imagery. He was a self-taught artist who specialized in decorative and religious art for use in *oum'phors* (Voudou temples). He became well-known in Haiti and internationally during the second half of the 1940s. Due to his relationship with the Centre d'Art in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince, he also produced works based on Vodou imagery for a market that attracted buyers and collectors from Europe and North America. It is likely that *Ogou Feray (also known as Ogoun Ferraille)*, was made for this audience, and the French Surrealist André Breton, bought this work from Hyppolite on his visit to Haiti in late 1945 and early 1946.



Figure 1.4.4.3: Hector Hyppolite, *Ogou Feray also known as Ogoun Ferraille* (detail), c. 1945, oil paint on Masonite (The Museum of Everything, London; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The painting

Besides the weapons he carries, Ogou Feray is easily identifiable by the drum that carries his name on the right portion of the composition and because he wears red, his color. Hyppolite took considerable liberty in the representation of *loas* (spirits or deities) but there are elements of the composition that point to this figure's status and identity. [1] As a *loa*, he is linked with warfare, reason, and wisdom. [2] Military imagery and fire often accompany his representation and here we see swords, axes, and a burning lamp. Traditionally conceived as the *loa* who works with iron, Ogou Feray is also associated with blacksmiths.



Figure 1.4.4.4: Santiago on Horseback, 16th century, polychromed and gilded wood, Mexico (Museo Franz Mayer, Mexico City, Mexico)

The prevalence of weapons, and military associations may be what led to Ogou Feray being linked with Saint James the Greater; a syncretic association related to the representation of James as the Moor-slayer (Santiago Matamoros). In this representation the saint is often shown in armor, riding a horse, and raising a sword to slay his foe. St. James the Great is the patron of Spain and his cult was popular in the Spanish Americas since the beginning of colonization. Armed angels and defensive saints were common throughout the Spanish Americas, with images of the Archangel Michael and St. James the Great popular as defenders of Christianity and Christians themselves. This was also the case in what would later become the nation of Haiti and may point to the early appearance of the syncretized Ogou Feray in the region.



Figure 1.4.4.4: Hector Hyppolite, *Ogou Feray also known as Ogoun Ferraille* (detail), c. 1945, oil paint on Masonite (The Museum of Everything, London; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Figure 1.4.4.5: Hector Hyppolite, *Damballah La Flambeau*, 1946–48, oil on board, 30 x 24 inches

Many objects surround Ogou Feray in this painting (filled cups and vases, crosses, playing cards, and more). These objects and those on the table may allude to the type of offerings left at his altar. Offerings are often presented by the believer when wanting to ask a favor, when fulfilling a promise, or simply to please the loa. The snake that seems to float over the table may reference Danbhalah Wédo, a high-ranking deity in the Vodou pantheon. Danbhalah Wédo is a serpent-god, often represented as a great snake or as a figure with a head and upper chest of the human and the body of a snake.

The style of the work is representative of what became known as Haitian primitivism. **Primitivism** as an artistic trend developed in Europe in the latter half of the 19th century that rejected traditional aesthetic and formal conventions often associated with art academies and fascinated many in the European vanguard. The term was often used to describe non-Western art that was seen as authentic and uncorrupted while also naïve. It also was often used to refer to the style of self-taught and folk artists and to the work produced in non-industrial societies. We can see some of this in *Ogou Feray*, in the lack of depth in what seems to be an interior space and the flatness in the representation of Ogou Feray's figure.

The making of Haitian primitivism

In 1944, the American artist and teacher DeWitt Peters opened the Centre d'Art in Port-au-Prince with the support of the writer Philippe Thoby-Marcelin and other local intellectuals and artists. Its goal was to offer art education and create a space for exhibitions and the sale of Haitian art to a local and international audience. It was there that Breton bought this painting. In its early years it sought primarily to showcase popular Haitian art, with work by artists such as Hyppolite, Philomé Obin, Rigaud Benoit, and Castera Bazile. Popular subjects included historic scenes and figures linked to the Revolution. Vodou was another prominent subject and source of inspiration—even among artists who were not practitioners of the religion.

The institution's directors sought to attract international artists and create links with other Caribbean nations. People like the Martinican writer Aimé Césaire and Cuban painters **Wifredo Lam** and René Portocarrero visited the Centre in its first few years. The works showcased at the Centre, with their cultural and political subject matter and naïve style, became associated with notions of an authentic Haitian art. This is something that put the Centre at odds with mainstream and modernist Haitian artists, many of whom were formally trained and whose work was stylistically in dialogue with the international avant-garde movements. [3]

The concept of Haitian primitivism can be understood as a foreign interpretation of popular Haitian art. In its early period, the Centre created a narrative partly fed by foreign misconceptions of Haiti and the modernist fascination with Primitivism. Commercially this worked well for many of the artists connected with the Centre. Nevertheless, the production of popular artists who had been painting for decades before the Centre was founded, points to the long-established artistic tradition in the country.

Ogou Feray also known as Ogoun Ferraille encapsulates much of what made Hyppolite's work so popular. A busy and bright composition that pulled from his vast catalog of Vodou imagery, which played a great role in attracting the attention of collectors and the international avant-garde. During his short but intense career, he became one of the most internationally famous artists from Haiti and saw his work purchased by European and North American artists and collectors, including MoMA's Director René d'Harnoncourt. This all happened in the span of some three years, from 1945 to his sudden death from a heart attack in 1948.

Notes:

[1] Veerle Poupeye, *Caribbean art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2022), p. 103.

[2] Milo Rigaud, *Secrets of Voodoo* (San Francisco, City Lights Books, 1985), p. 70.

[3] Veerle Poupeye, *Caribbean art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2022), p. 88.

Additional resources

Gérald Alexis, "The Caribbean at the Hour of Haiti," in *Caribbean: Art at the Crossroads of the World* (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 2012), pp. 107–23.

Veerle Poupeye, *Caribbean art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2022), pp. 84–90, 103–39.

Terry Rey, "**Toward an ethnohistory of Haitian pilgrimage,**" *Journal de la Société des américanistes* 91, no 1 (Nanterre: Société des américanistes, January 2005): pp.161–83.

Milo Rigaud, *Secrets of Voodoo* (San Francisco, City Lights Books, 1985).

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1.5.2.2: Inverted America

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1.5.1: Geometric Abstraction in South America, an introduction

by **DR. GILLIAN SNEED**

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Figure **1.5.1.1**: Joaquín Torres-García, *Color Structure*, 1930, oil on canvas, 24 x 20 inches (**The Museum of Modern Art, New York**)

During his decades spent living in Europe, Uruguayan artist and theorist **Joaquín Torres-García** experimented with several different artistic modes, including making representational paintings (depicting recognizable images) in a Neoclassical style or with bright colors and bold brushstrokes. While living in Paris, he would also come into contact with European geometric abstraction (abstract art based on geometric forms) and created a group with other artists he encountered there. He transitioned from making small toys and representational paintings to making geometric abstractions. He eventually returned to Uruguay and helped influence artists in Argentina, Brazil, and later, Venezuela to make art in this new modern style.



Figure 1.5.1.2: South American countries where geometric abstraction was popular (underlying map © Google)

Geometric Abstraction rose to prominence in South America between the 1930s and the 1970s. Prior to this period, traditional representational art styles rooted in the traditions of academic painting were officially sanctioned and considered respectable in the region. This radical departure toward geometric abstraction was embraced by artists and state powers across Latin America as a way of culturally distancing themselves from the colonial past (c. 16th to early 19th century), while signifying their alignment with a new modern, economically independent future.

Joaquín Torres-García in Paris



Figure 1.5.1.3: Joaquín Torres-García, *Color Structure*, 1930, oil on canvas, 24 x 20 inches (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Like many Latin American artists of his generation, who lived, worked, and studied in Paris between World War I and II, Torres-García came to Paris because it was seen as the artistic capital of the West. While living there in the 1920s and early 1930s, he met Theo van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian, the Dutch founders of the art movement De Stijl (also known as Neoplasticism). Together, they formed the artistic group "Circle and Square," which promoted geometric abstraction in opposition to Surrealism, an art movement based on dream-like imagery and the subconscious that was well known in France at the time. Torres-García was inspired by Mondrian, but was critical of De Stijl's strict austerity. He wanted to propose a more "human" approach to geometric abstraction that would engage his interests in Latin American Pre-Columbian and European ancient and Classical art.



Figure 1.5.1.4: Piet Mondrian, *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

Torres-García's *Color Structure*, made in Paris in 1930, demonstrates his interest in many of the same principles as the Neoplasticists, including the grid, a reduced palette of primary colors, and the use of the Golden Ratio. These qualities are also evident in Mondrian's ***Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*** (made the same year as Torres-Garcia's *Color Structure*), a non-objective painting divided asymmetrically by thick black lines into squares of various sizes filled with flat planes of white and primary colors, the largest one, a bright red. Torres-García was inspired by De Stijl's emphasis on the grid and **Constructivism**'s geometry, as well as what he believed to be the "universalism" of nonobjective art—in other words, he believed that geometric abstraction, which does not depict recognizable figurative imagery, could be visually understood across all cultures. In Torres-Garcia's *Color Structure*, we also see a grid composed of different sized of rectangles in blue, yellow, white, and red, arranged vertically and horizontally.

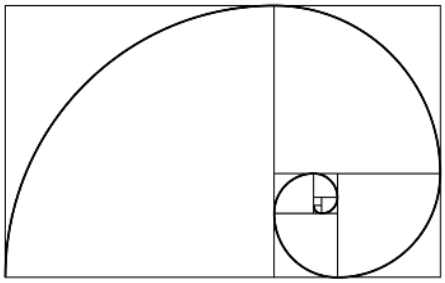


Figure 1.5.1.5: A Fibonacci spiral that approximates the Golden ratio (diagram: **Dicklyon**)

Torres-García also adopted van Doesburg's and Mondrian's use of the Golden Ratio, an important concept to him, which he felt would help his art become integrated with natural and cosmic forces. But, unlike Mondrian, Torres-García emphasizes *Color Structure*'s imperfections: the grid is drawn freehand with wavy lines and the colors are muddy and include tonal variation and rough brushwork.

Constructive Universalism in Uruguay



Figure 1.5.1.6: Sun Gate, 500 and 900 C.E., Tiwanaku, Bolivia (photo: Brent Barrett, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

When Torres-García returned home to Uruguay in 1934 (for financial reasons and the encouragement of friends), after more than forty years living abroad, he sought to bring geometric abstraction to Latin America as a way to reconcile this style with the region's own cultural histories and artistic traditions. Dissatisfied with what he saw as a lack of emotion or humanity in

Constructivism and De Stijl, he developed his own style called *Universalismo Constructivo* (Constructive Universalism), which sought to combine the "reason" of Constructivism's and De Stijl's geometry with the sources of abstract art found in the arts and crafts of ancient civilizations from around the world. He incorporated pictographs (simplified images or symbols) related to the cultures of various ancient civilizations (including Pre-Columbian cultures), into his images. He felt these pictographs communicated common ideas to people everywhere, making them "universal."

As a cultural nomad who lived abroad in the U.S. and Europe for 43 years before returning to Uruguay, Torres-García was interested in the concept of "universalism" because he wanted to find visual elements that were shared by all cultures, underpinning his belief in the metaphysical wholeness of the universe. He also wanted to show how the geometric principles of pre-Columbian, Indigenous artistic styles actually anticipated later European geometric abstraction. His ideas paralleled psychologist Carl Jung, who believed that archetypal images could connect individuals to collective cultures and universal experiences. Torres-García was not relating to Jung directly, and for him, the metaphysical was much more important than the psychological. His search for the universal was not based on the psyche of the individual, but rather the universal collective.



Figure **1.5.1.7**: Joaquín Torres-García, *Arte universal (Universal Art)*, 1943. Oil on canvas, 106 cm x 75 cm (**Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales de Uruguay**)

We find an expression of these impulses in his painting *Universal Art*, a composition in earthy browns depicting many interconnected rectangular compartments filled with pictographs, including shapes, symbols, and recognizable images such as the sun, the moon, scales, fish, a heart, a house, boats, and people, that appear as if they are carved into wood or stone. Like his earlier works that borrow from Mondrian, Torres-García creates an asymmetrical grid based on the Golden Ratio with a reduced color palette, but his earth tones convey more warmth, and his rough, painterly strokes and shading appear more "crafty" and reveal a human touch.

Later, Torres-García founded an arts and crafts workshop called the Taller Torres-García to disseminate his artistic theories to a younger generation of Uruguayan artists, whose style came to be known as the School of the South. Following Torres-García's innovations in the 1930s and 1940s, artists across Latin America—especially in Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela—began working in geometric abstraction, which would dominate the painting and sculpture in those countries until the 1960s and 1970s.



Figure 1.5.1.8: The cover of *Arturo* by artist Tomás Maldonado, an organic, abstract automatist woodcut, contradicts the kinds of constructive geometric abstraction being advocated inside the magazine's pages, and demonstrates that this was still early on in the process of theorizing and practicing the new style. Tomás Maldonado, *Arturo* magazine cover, 1944

AACI and Madí in Argentina

In 1944, a group of Argentine and Uruguayan artists based in Buenos Aires published the first and only issue of a magazine about abstract art titled *Arturo*, with texts and reproductions of artworks by Torres-García, Mondrian, and the Russian abstract artist Wassily Kandinsky. The magazine was intended to promote Concrete Art (a term first used by Theo van Doesburg to describe nonobjective geometric abstraction) in Argentina.

Two Argentine Concrete Art groups emerged from the magazine: the Association of Concrete-Invention (AACI) and the Madí Group. These developments took place during the first term of the presidency of the Argentine populist Juan Domingo Perón, whose administration officially sanctioned naturalistic, figurative art styles, which these Concrete art movements fought against.

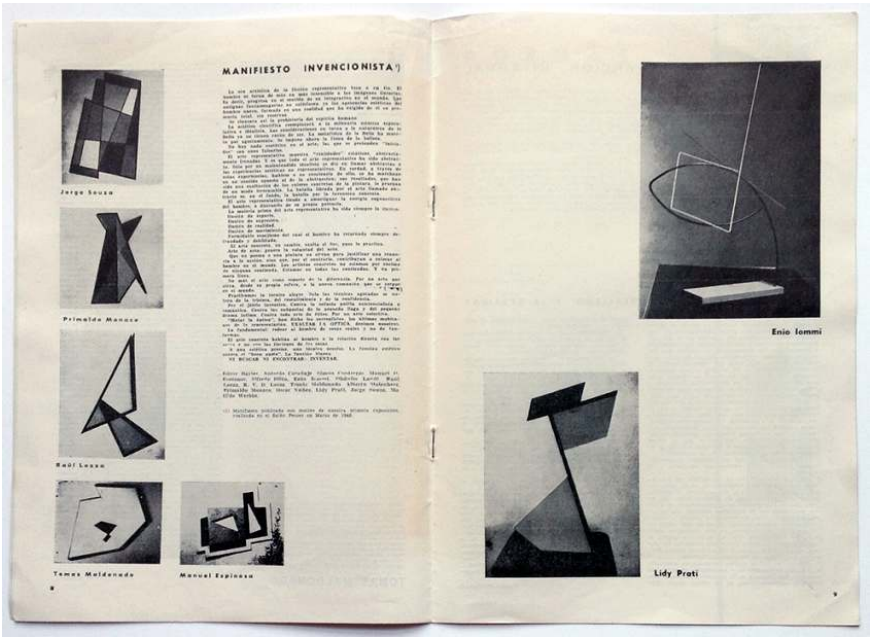


Figure **1.5.1.9**: Inventionist manifesto alongside photographs of artworks, included inside the catalogue for the group's first exhibition

AACI

The AACI was founded in 1945 by Argentine artist Tomás Maldonado and poet Edgar Bayley. The catalogue for the group's first exhibition included their manifesto—a written statement declaring the group's intentions, motives, and views—titled the "**Inventionist Manifesto**." It called for artists to "invent" their own images, rather than trying to copy what they see, and justified Concrete art through Marxist political theories. [1]

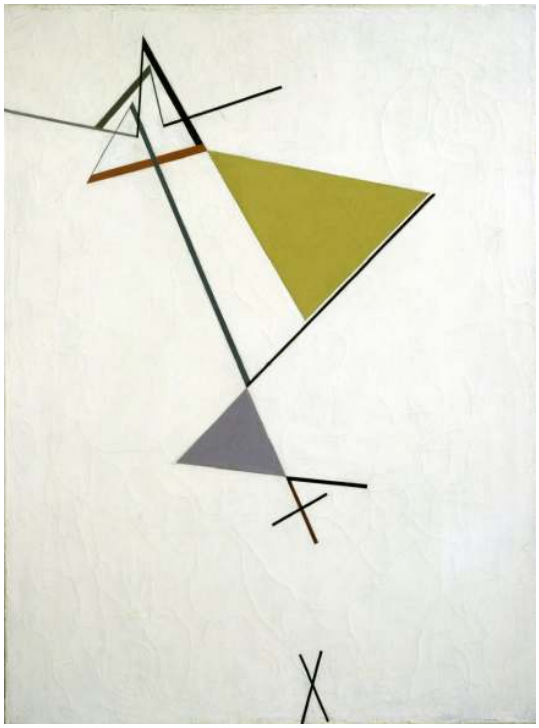


Figure **1.5.1.10**: Tomás Maldonado, Development of a Triangle, 1949. Oil on canvas, 31 3/4 x 23 3/4 in (**Museum of Modern Art**)

Embracing Mondrian's and van Doesburg's strict Concrete aesthetics while rejecting Torres-García's emphasis on symbolism and a hand-made aesthetic, the AACI emphasized a rigorous, mathematical, even mechanical-looking approach to geometric abstraction

with flat, planar colors. These principles are on display in Maldonado's *Development of a Triangle* a composition on a white ground of intersecting straight and angular lines and a series of triangles, one yellow and another violet. [2]

Madí Group

In 1946 the Madí Group was formed by artists Rhod Rothfuss, Carmelo Arden Quin, and Gyula Kosice. [1] Like the AAIC, Madí endorsed making nonobjective artworks with flat planes of bright color. But, unlike the AAIC, Madí art was more playful and experimented with three-dimensions and unusual materials such as Plexiglas and neon.

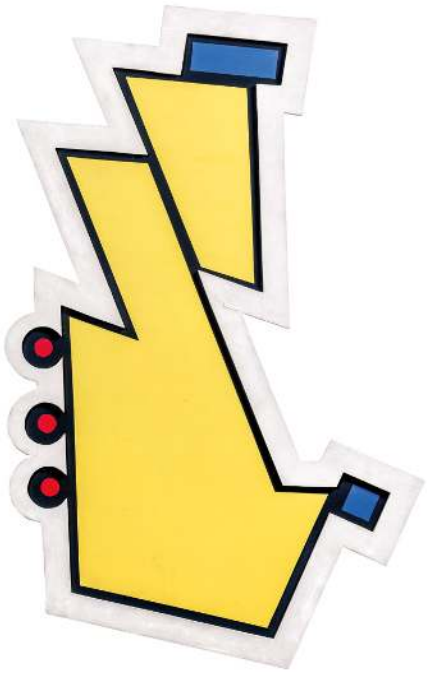


Figure **1.5.1.11**: Rhod Rothfuss, *Tres círculos rojos (Three Red Circles)*, 1948, filler and enamel on wood, 100 x 70 cm (Museu de Arte Latino-Americana de Buenos Aires)

Madí artists often rejected the traditional rectangular picture frame in favor of an irregularly-shaped canvas, known as a *marco recortado* (cutout frame). The cutout frame was first conceived by Rothfuss in an essay he wrote for *Arturo*, in which he argued that irregularly-shaped canvases would allow artworks to function like other objects in the world, rather than as windows framing views of another world. One example of the cutout frame is Rothfuss's *Three Red Circles*, a bright yellow geometrically-shaped composition with shapes delineated with thick black lines, a blue rectangle at the top and on the side, and three small red circles on the left.



Figure 1.5.1.12: Max Bill, *Tripartite Unity*, 1948–1949, stainless steel, 113,5 cm x 83 cm x 100 cm (Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Universidade de São Paulo)

Concrete and Neo-Concrete Art in Brazil

Max Bill

In 1951, Swiss Concrete artist and former Bauhaus student Max Bill won the grand prize for sculpture at the First São Paulo Biennial (a large international exhibition occurring every two years) in Brazil, for his metallic sculpture of flowing, intertwining ribbon-like forms, called *Tripartite Unity*. This sculpture would influence a young generation of Concrete artists in the country, including the Grupo Ruptura in São Paulo and the Grupo Frente in Rio de Janeiro. Concrete art captured the values of science and mathematical precision heralded in Brazil in the 1950s, a period of rapid industrial growth, modernization, and the development of a new capital in Brasília defined by architect Oscar Niemeyer's futuristic International Style architecture.

The Grupo Ruptura

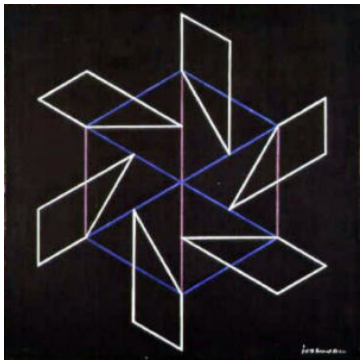


Figure 1.5.1.13: Judith Lauand, *Espaço Virtual (Virtual Space)*, 1960. Tempera on canvas, 45 cm x 45 cm x 2.7 cm (Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Universidade de São Paulo)

The Grupo Ruptura was formed in 1952 with an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo. The group's name meant "rupture," and it sought to break with traditional art styles, namely naturalistic painting, which was seen as elitist (though this break was not specifically tied to political radicalism). Their works were characterized by flat colors and a reduced palette, geometry, and industrialized media like enamels and mechanical techniques like spray painting that would not reveal the hand of the artist. Their

works also incorporated Gestalt psychological theory (a perceptual theory about how the brain forms a whole image from many component parts) by training the viewer's eye on outlines as contours of a solid shape, as in Judith Lauand's *Virtual Space*, a painting of a pinwheel-like shape of white and purple lines in a field of black. Lauand was also the only woman in the Grupo Ruptura.

The Grupo Frente and Neo-Concrete art

The Grupo Frente was founded by artist and teacher Ivan Serpa in Rio de Janeiro in 1954. Many of the artists involved were his former students at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro. They rejected the Grupo Ruptura's strict adherence to purity, science, and math and promoted instead more creative intuition in geometric abstraction. This shift in the Grupo Frente's brand of Concrete art eventually led to a new style altogether, known as Neo-Concrete art, pioneered by artists **Lygia Clark**, Lygia Pape, and later, **Hélio Oiticica**.

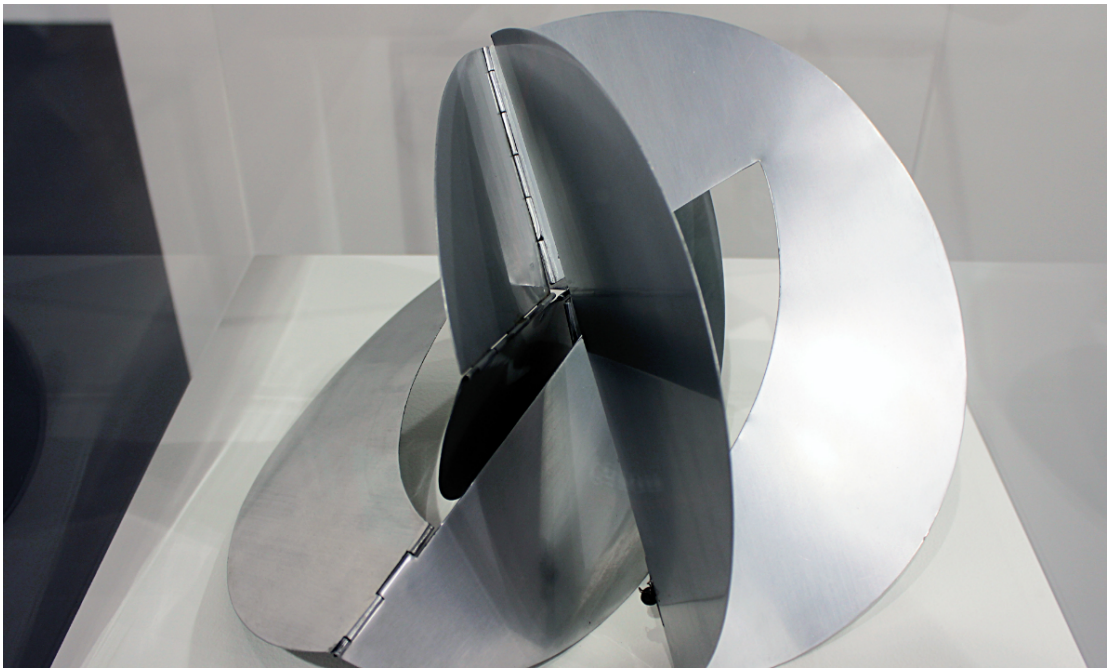


Figure **1.5.1.14**: Lygia Clark, *Bicho*, 1962, aluminum (photo: trevor.patt, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The principles of Neo-Concrete art were theorized by poet Ferreira Gullar in his "**Neo-Concrete Manifesto**" (1959), which called for more sensuality, freedom, and feeling in Concrete art. Like Torres-García who sought to infuse geometric abstraction with more emotion, the manifesto sought to distance the new movement from the dogmatic rationalism of European Concrete art styles like Neo-plasticism and Constructivism.

Gullar also developed the theory of what he termed the "non-object," by which he meant an art object that would function as a mediator between the spectator and the physical experience of the object. This is exemplified by Lygia Clark's *Bicho* (Critter), a metal sculpture made of moveable flaps intended to be manipulated and rearranged by the spectator-participant (or someone who observes and participates). As Clark's *Bicho* suggests, Neo-Concrete art adapted Concrete art's geometric shapes and transformed them into organic three-dimensional objects to be handled by spectators, or environments to be physically entered, which helped to break down boundaries between art and life in Brazilian art of the 1960s.

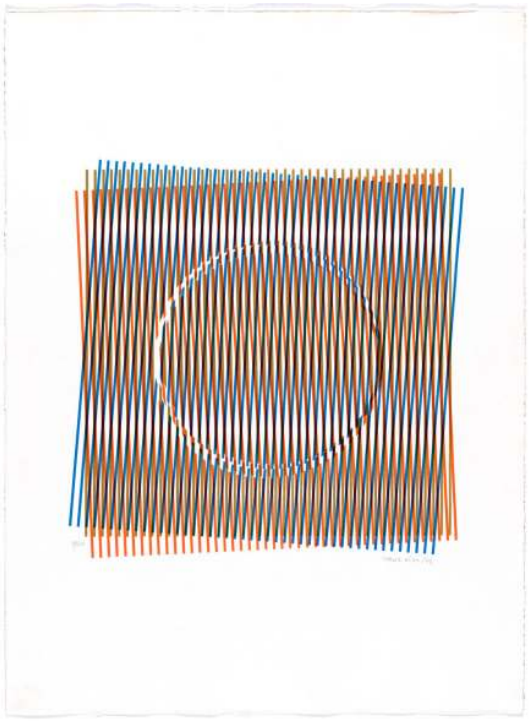


Figure **1.5.1.15**: Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Chromo-Interference (Cromo Interferencia)*, from *AGPA 73: Pan American Graphic Arts* (*AGPA 73: Artes gráficas panamericanas*), 1973, screenprint, 43 x 42.5 cm (Museum of Modern Art)

Optical and Kinetic Art in Venezuela

Two other forms of geometric abstraction, known as Optical (or Op, a style of abstract art based on patterns and optical illusions) and Kinetic art (objects that have moving parts), became popular in Venezuela in the 1950s and 1960s. These styles were dominated by three artists in the country: Carlos Cruz-Diez, Alejandro Otero, and Jesús Soto. Their works included small and large-scale abstract sculptures and public artworks made of bright colors and industrial materials that moved, or appeared to move.



Video 1.5.1.1: Jesús Rafael Soto, Penetrable BBL Bleu, conceived 1999, given to LACMA in 2020 (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

A famous example are Soto's "penetrables," tubes of colored plastic suspended from the ceiling in box-like shapes, into which participants could enter and play. While Brazilian Neo-Concretists sought to move away from the purely optical toward the experiential and sensual, the Venezuelans still embraced the visual, but also created participatory and sensually experiential environments and objects to be interacted with, like Soto's penetrables.

The Op and Kinetic works by these artists received corporate and government support from the Venezuelan regime of Colonel Marcos Pérez Jiménez's dictatorship of the 1950s, as well as later democratically elected administrations in the 1960s and 1970s, and resulted in the commissions of several large-scale public artworks. The state and corporate leaders believed such works helped position Venezuela on the world stage as a modern, forward thinking, and technologically advanced country. This was important to them as they were growing their oil industry for international export. These works were used by corporations and the state as propaganda promoting Venezuela as an international modern center of industry, revealing how state-patronage and nationalist interests intervened in the so-called "avant-garde" art in the country during the period.



Figure 1.5.1.16: Gego (Gertrude Goldschmidt), *Reticulárea (ambientación)*, 1969, installation view Museo de Bellas Artes Caracas, 1969 (photo: Paolo Gasparina © Fundación Gego)

Another important artist in the history of Venezuelan abstraction was Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt), a German emigrant, who developed her own approach to geometric abstraction, creating delicate sculptures and environments (sculptures that occupy entire gallery spaces) made of wire. Gego's large *Reticulárea* (Reticular), created at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas in 1969, comprises a sprawling wire grid that filled the gallery's floor, walls, and ceiling, into which spectators could enter and walk around.

Contributions and Legacy

Latin American geometric abstraction united international principles of modernist abstraction with local cultural traditions, and led to more participatory forms of art. It also served as an ideological tool for both Latin American artists and nation-states to signal a break with traditional art styles—associated with their colonial past—and to assert a new, modern, and often utopian industrialized future. Latin American geometric abstraction is probably most notable for the large number of women artists who were leaders in these movements and who achieved successful artistic careers in their lifetimes, something that was much less common with mid-twentieth century art movements in the U.S. and Europe. [3]

Notes:

[1] Their formulation of "Concrete-Invention" was rooted in their commitment to Marxist materialism and anti-idealist revolutionary and collective art.

[2] The term "Madí" has various purported origins: it may have represented the combination of the first syllables (in Spanish) of the term "dialectic materialism," it may have been an abbreviation of "Madrid," or it could have been an acronym for "Carmelo Arden Quin."

[3] In addition to the women artists mentioned in this article, Judith Lauand, Lygia Pape, Lygia Clark, and Gego, were many others, including Lydi Prati, Mira Schendel, Fanny Sanín, María Freire, Amalia Nieto, and Mercedes Pardo.

Additional resources:

Check out installation photos from MoMA's S*ur moderno* exhibition

Watch three videos from the Getty about Concrete art that discuss **breaking the frame**, **painting in an industrial age**, and the **challenge of a straight line**

Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, "**Concrete Art in Latin America**." Grove Art Online, March 26, 2018.

David Fernando Cortés Saavedra, "**Geometric Abstraction and Concrete Art in South America**." Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism, September 5, 2016.

Alexander Alberro, *Abstraction in Reverse: The Reconfigured Spectator in Mid-Twentieth-Century Latin American Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

Mónica Amor, *Theories of the Nonobject: Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, 1944–1969* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016).

Yve-Alain Bois, et al. *Geometric Abstraction: Latin American Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

Dan Cameron, *Kinethesia: Latin American Kinetic Art, 1954–1969* (Palm Springs, CA: Palm Springs Art Museum, 2017).

María Amalia García, *Abstract Crossings: Cultural Exchange between Argentina and Brazil* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019).

Aleca Le Blanc and Pia Gottschaller. *Making Art Concrete: Works from Argentina and Brazil in the Twentieth Century in the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2017).

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SECTION OVERVIEW

1.5.2: Joaquín Torres-García

1.5.2.1: Composition

1.5.2.2: Inverted America

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1.5.2.1: Composition

by DR. LAUREN KILROY-EWBANK and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
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Video 1.5.2.1.1: Joaquín Torres-García, *Composition*, 1931, oil on canvas, 91.7 x 61 cm (The Museum of Modern Art) © estate of the artist

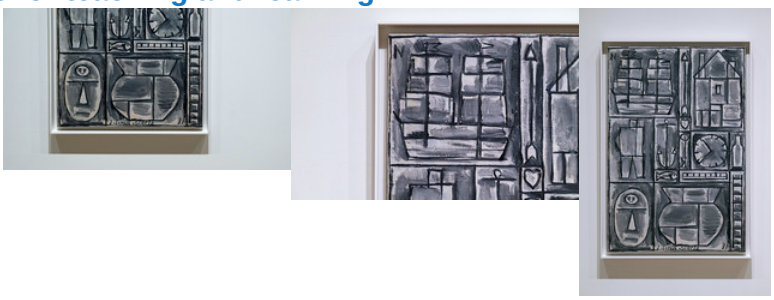
Additional resources

This work at the Museum of Modern Art

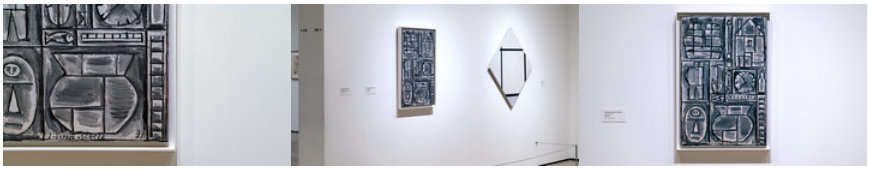
Joaquín Torres-García catalogue rasionné, a scholarly resource dedicated to the documentation of the paintings and sculptures

Torres-García on Google Arts and Culture

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1.5.2.2: Inverted America

by DR. MAYA JIMÉNEZ

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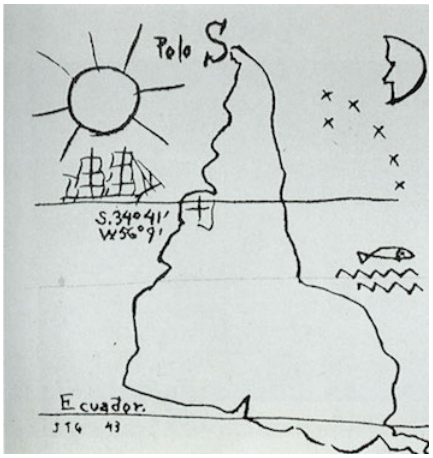


Figure 1.5.2.2.1: Joaquin Torres-García, *América Invertida (Inverted America)*, 1943, ink on paper, 22 x 16 cm (Fundación Torres García, Montevideo)

"Our North is the South."

So Joaquín Torres-García proudly announced in 1935 in *The School of the South Manifesto*, in which he articulated his ideas about the direction of Uruguayan, and indeed all Latin American art. Torres-García upended traditional hierarchical structures by defining the art of South America on its own terms, rather than in relation to that of the North (i.e. the United States and Europe) as it had been in the past. In proclaiming itself independent from artistic centers of power like New York and Paris, Torres-García looked to the pre-Columbian past (before the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas in 1492) as a source of artistic inspiration.

In 1934, Torres-García returned to Uruguay from the United States and Europe, where he had lived for roughly 40 years. Upon his return, he established the School of the South, a workshop in which he encouraged students to seek inspiration locally rather than globally, while at the same time establishing an autonomous artistic tradition. As seen in *América Invertida (Inverted America)*, the aim of Torres-García was to challenge the traditional frame of mind, and reposition the South as the new North.

Inverted map



Figure 1.5.2.2.2: Joaquin Torres-García, *Cosmic Monument*, 1938, Montivideo, Uruguay

With the southern cone turned upside down, one sees the map of South America in an entirely new way. The map communicates important details like the cardinal direction of the South, the latitude line of Montevideo, and the equatorial line.
Rather than show the equator at the center of the hemisphere, as is usually the case, Torres-García instead places Uruguay in this privileged position.

Other symbols like the sun, boat and fish seem relatively straightforward, however for Torres-García they also communicated greater meaning. Appearing often in his work, the sun is a powerful pre-Columbian symbol. Due to its life giving force, Torres-García prominently features it, not only in this map, but also in his *Cosmic Monument* (1938), where it appears at the center. The boat is usually associated with travel, while the fish represents fecundity.



Figure 1.5.2.2.3: Gate of the Sun, Tiwanaku, 500 and 900 C.E., La Paz, Bolivia (photo: **thoew**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Torres-García argued that these symbols were indigenous to Latin America and featured in monuments as old as the ones found in Tiwanaku (one of the most prominent civilizations in South America prior to the Inca empire). As a result of their ancient origins and timeless quality, Torres-García held that these were universal symbols. In the *Gate of the Sun* at Tiwanaku (above), the Sun God faces out from the top of the gate with rays around his face. Pre-Columbian symbols here joined the great art of ancient civilizations, along with the hieroglyphics of the ancient Egyptians and the reliefs of the ancient Greeks. Torres-García drew on quintessentially Latin American symbols to articulate a version of modern art that was autonomous from what he had seen in Barcelona, Paris and New York, thus reaffirming his cultural identity, while simultaneously articulating a new direction.

Constructive Universalism

Constructive Universalism, as he referred to this new style, sought to imbue geometric art with a new spiritual dimension, here achieved through the appropriation of ancient symbols.

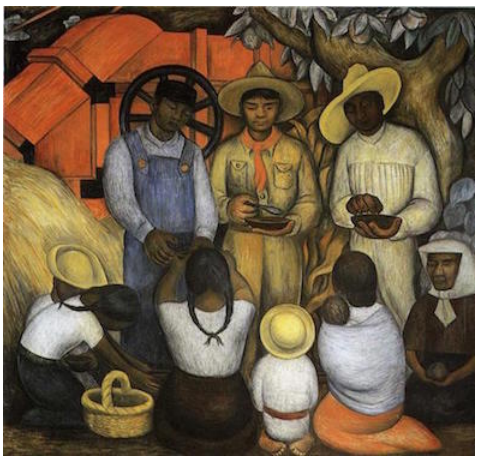


Figure 1.5.2.2.4: Diego Rivera, *Triumph of the Revolution*, 1926, Autonomous University of Chapingo, Mexico (photo: **Joaquín Martínez**, CC BY 2.0)

Abstraction and figuration were at odds with each other at this time, when other Latin American artists like Mexican Diego Rivera (above), Ecuadorian Camilo Egas, and Brazilian Candido Portinari championed figural depictions of local subjects rooted in social activism. Interestingly, Torres-García upheld both the principles of abstraction and a regional sense of identity, while eschewing any socio-political message.

While pre-Columbian art was at the center of Constructive Universalism, Torres-García also looked to astral, zodiacal, and other ancient signs, explaining the presence of the star and the yin and yang in his *Cosmic Monument* (above). The conflation of these influences demonstrates the international nature of his work, despite its emphasis on Latin American culture.

Additional Resources:

Other works by this artist at the Museum of Modern Art

Artist biography at the Guggenheim Museum

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1.5.3: Lygia Clark, Bicho

by DR. MAYA JIMÉNEZ

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Figure **1.5.3.1**: Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius, gilded bronze, c. 173-76 C.E. (Capitoline Museums, Rome)

Fold, turn, close, open

When you think of sculpture, you might think of an ancient Roman emperor or a bronze military hero, both of which exemplify the principles of traditional sculpture: idealism and permanence. *Bicho (Critter)*, a sculpture by Lygia Clark, defies these ideas of sculpture as a static idealized form. The viewer can fold, turn, close, and open *Bicho*, exploring its multifaceted nature. Consisting of geometric shapes connected through hinges, Lygia Clark created a sculpture that was not only participatory, but also seemingly infinite in its variability.

Neo-Concretism

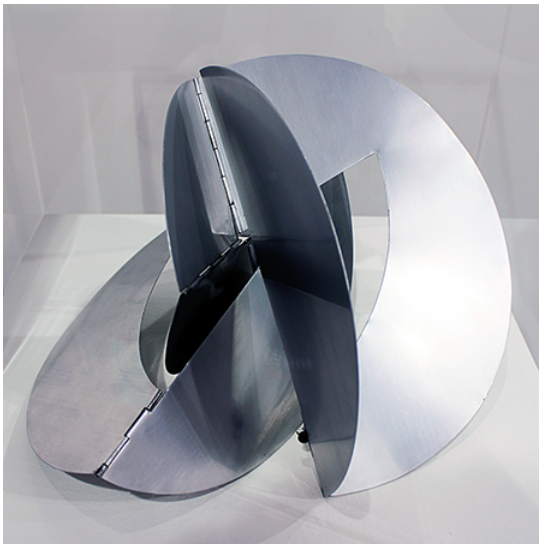


Figure **1.5.3.2**: Lygia Clark, *Bicho*, 1962, aluminum (photo: **trevor.patt**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

In 1951, abstract art took on new meaning and form in Brazil, largely through the impact of a retrospective of the Bauhaus-trained artist Max Bill in São Paulo and the first São Paulo biennale. Throughout the 1950s, Bill's influence in Brazil led to the development of concrete art, a kind of abstract art, which championed universal subjects like order and rationality, founded on objectivity and science.Together with Helio Oiticica and other artists from Rio de Janeiro, however, Clark articulated her ideas about this kind of abstraction in the 1959 "Neo-Concrete Manifesto." In it, the artists declared their break from the tenets of

concrete art with its systematic approach to abstraction. Clark, on the other hand, sought a freer and more organic interpretation of geometric abstraction, effectively eliminating the demarcation between two-dimensional and three-dimensional form.

We see the organic nature of *Bicho*, in keeping with the ideas of neo-concretism, not only in its exoskeletal form and transformative nature, but also in its name. Whereas traditional sculpture hides its structural support, Clark instead focuses on it, by drawing attention to the hinges that bind the work together, and to the empty spaces created in between these folded spaces. As seen in *Bicho*, the straight-edged and round shapes recall skeletal forms while the hinges function as spinal columns. Even the name, *Critter*, recalls natural life, as if the work were a living creature meant to be animated – or better yet mutated—by the participant.



Figure **1.5.3.3**: Lygia Clark, *Bicho Pássaro do Espaço (Maquette)*, 1960, aluminum (photo: **trevor.patt**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Participation and experience

Clark made these sculptures to be participatory, and therefore variable. Created as a series, there are around seventy *Bichos* in total. She challenged not only the idea that sculpture is fixed, but also that there is only one way to view or experience it. The sculptures are fundamentally unstable—both literally and metaphorically. They have no front or back, no inside or outside, no left or right. In this way, they have no author, since each participant creates a different experience of *Bicho*. Different from performance art however, these sculptures do not create spectacle, but rather invite participation. The work of art is not the viewing of the sculpture itself, but one's participation with it.

A "non-object"

In exploring painting, particularly the space between the painting and frame, Clark discovered what she referred to as the "organic line." She arrived at this conceptual idea when she looked at a door and noticed that the door and its frame are one. She observed that the gap in between is a connective line that visually integrates the two into a single whole. *Discovery of the Organic Line* (1954) illustrates this idea, since it is the painting within a painting that calls attention to the line itself.

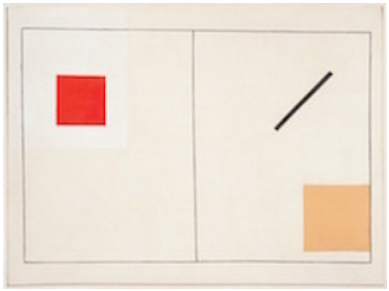


Figure **1.5.3.4**: Lygia Clark, *Discovery of the Organic Line*, 1954, oil on canvas (private collection)

Clark arrived at *Bicho* through her exploration of the "organic line," and its mutability in two and three-dimensional form. However, it was Ferreira Gullar, primary author of the "Neo-Concrete Manifesto" who called *Bicho* neither painting, nor sculpture.

Instead, Gullar described the work as a non-object (an early phrase for abstraction) that did not have a function and that resisted categorization.



Video 1.5.3.1: Lygia Clark, Bicho1960

Additional Resources:

Bichos, Walker Art Center (video)

Bichos, The Museum of Modern Art (audio)

The 1959 Neo-Concrete Manifesto

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1.5.4: Breaking the Frame – the Concrete Art Movement

- by **THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM**

Page ID

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Video 1.5.4.1: **Created by Getty Museum and the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros**. Discover how Argentine and Brazilian artists in the 1940s broke from linear perspective to create art in unique shapes, starting the Concrete Art movement. This video is one of three that accompanied the “Making Art Concrete: Works from Argentina and Brazil in the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros” (September 16, 2017 – February 11, 2018) at the Getty Museum. For more information visit **https://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/cisneros/**

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1.5.5: Painting in an Industrial Age – the Concrete Art Movement

- by **THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM**

Page ID

188363



Video **1.5.5.1**: **Created by Getty Museum and the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros**. Discover how Brazilian Concrete Artists engaged with a rapidly industrializing culture by using the entire range of industrial paints developed in the 20th century. This video is one of three that accompanied the “Making Art Concrete: Works from Argentina and Brazil in the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros” (September 16, 2017 – February 11, 2018) at the Getty Museum. For more information visit **https://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/cisneros/**

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1.5.6: The Challenge of a Straight Line – the Concrete Art Movement

- by **THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM**

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188364



Video 1.5.6.1: **Created by Getty Museum and the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros**. Explore key methods Concrete Artists in Brazil and Argentina used to create perfectly straight edges in paint. This video is one of three that accompanied the “Making Art Concrete: Works from Argentina and Brazil in the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros” (September 16, 2017 – February 11, 2018) at the Getty Museum. For more information visit **https://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/cisneros/**

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1.5.7: Rhod Rothfuss, Yellow Quadrangle

by DR. LAUREN KILROY-EWBANK and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID

188365



Video 1.5.7.1: Rhod Rothfuss, *Yellow Quadrangle*, 1955, alkyd and gouache on board, 37 x 33 cm (MoMA)

Additional resources

This work at the Museum of Modern Art.

Learn more about **geometric abstraction from Smarthistory** and **from Colección Cisneros**.

Rhod Rothfuss, "**El marco: un problema de plástica actual**," *Arturo* (1944).

Making Art Concrete: Works from Argentina and Brazil in the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, ed. Pia Gottschaller, Aleca Le Blanc, Zanna Gilbert, Tom Learner, and Andrew Perchuk (Getty Publications, 2017).

"**Manifiesto Madí**," *Madí Magazine* no. 0 (Buenos Aires: 1947).

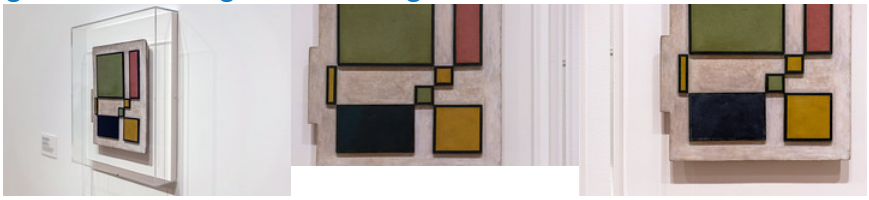
Yve-Alain Bois, et al. *Geometric Abstraction: Latin American Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

David Fernando Cortés Saavedra, "Geometric Abstraction and Concrete Art in South America," Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism, September 5, 2016.

María Amalia García, *Abstract Crossings: Cultural Exchange between Argentina and Brazil* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019).

Learn more about Joaquín Torres-García and his work featured in this video, *Composition*.

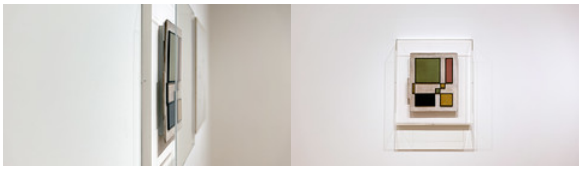
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SECTION OVERVIEW

1.6: Brazilian modernism

1.6.1: The origins of modern art in São Paulo, an introduction

1.6.2: Tarsila do Amaral, Abaporú

1.6.3: An Antidote for Social Amnesia- The Memory Space of the Cais do Valongo

1.6.4: Letícia Parente, Marca registrada

1.6.5: Hélio Oiticica, Parangolés

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1.6.1: The origins of modern art in São Paulo, an introduction

by DR. ADRIANA ZAVALA



Figure **1.6.1.1**: Anita Malfatti, *The Fool*, 1913, oil on canvas, 61 cm x 50.6 cm (**Museum of Contemporary Art of University of São Paulo, Brazil**)

Modern art in São Paulo

1922 was an important year for avant-garde activities in Brazil. During the week of February 11–18, which was also Carnival and the centennial celebration of Brazil's declaration of independence from Portugal, a multidisciplinary event, known as *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Modern Art Week) took place at the Municipal Theatre of São Paulo. It featured an art exhibition, poetry readings, music, and dance festivals organized by the painter Emiliano di Cavalcanti, and poets Oswald de Andrade and Mario de Andrade (no relation to Oswald).



Figure **1.6.1.2**: Municipal Theatre of São Paulo, 1903–11, São Paulo, Brazil (photo taken during the 1920s, **Brazilian National Archives**)



Figure **1.6.1.3**: Victor Brecheret, *Eve*, 1921 (photo: **Pinheiro Natália**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Modern Art Week was intended to announce the São Paulo avant-garde's break with earlier art. The exhibition of art included works by the sculptor Victor Brecheret, who returned to Brazil from Rome in 1919, paintings by Anita Malfatti, completed during her time in Berlin and New York, and di Cavalcanti, along with numerous other painters, sculptors, and architects. One of the other painters who would play a significant role in the development of Brazilian modernism was **Tarsila do Amaral**.

The *Semana* was conceived as a reaction against the official academic art and literature. Academic art was associated with the conservative oligarchy (powerful families who owned huge coffee plantations) and remained intent on emulating the time-worn Romanticism of nineteenth-century Europe. In many respects the impetus for the art exhibition was the radical newness of Brecheret's sculptures and Malfatti's expressionist paintings. Brecheret's sculptures were rendered in a dramatically stylized, proto-Art Deco style, and Malfatti's paintings were met with derision from the establishment when first exhibited in 1917.

At the time of the *Semana*, São Paulo was one of the fastest growing cities in Brazil. Industrialization was transforming this coffee-growing center into a thriving metropolis with electrified street lamps, a café culture, movie theaters, and luxurious department stores. Young Brazilian intellectuals were hungry for art and literature that matched the city's vibrant energy and they were also part of a political movement intent on challenging the stranglehold of the oligarchy. Like their peers in Argentina, writers and artists like Mario and Oswald de Andrade and di Cavalcanti were eager for an intellectual culture that was not only modern and up-to-date but also intrinsically Brazilian.

The controversy surrounding Malfatti's paintings



Figure **1.6.1.4**: Anita Malfatti, *The Fool*, 1913, oil on canvas, 61 cm x 50.6 cm (**Museum of Contemporary Art of University of São Paulo, Brazil**)

When Malfatti exhibited a selection of her paintings, including *The Fool* and *The Man of Seven Colors*, the art critic Monteiro Lobato attacked her in an influential São Paulo newspaper ("A Propósito da Exposição"). He described her painting as "beastly" and "deformed," the latter a satirical play on the translation of her Italian last name ("mal fatti"); he declared her painting to be akin

to art produced by the mentally insane, work born of “paranoia and mystification,” and finally he dismissed her as “a girl who paints.”



Figure 1.6.1.5: Anita Malfatti, *The Man of Seven Colors*, 1915–16, charcoal and pastel on paper, 62 x 46 cm (**Museu de Arte Brasileira, São Paulo**)

Describing her as an amateurish follower of the “excesses” of Picasso, Lobato described two kinds of artists, those who see things “normally,” in the tradition of **Praxiteles**, **Raphael**, **Rubens**, and **Rodin**, and feel called to preserve the rhythm of life aesthetically, and, those who see things as “deformed” and “sadistic.” He wrote that such artists, Malfatti among them, were merely “shooting stars” destined to oblivion. Lobato was surely offended both by her expressionistic and non-naturalistic use of color but also by her engagement with the male nude, which was still taboo for women artists.

Malfatti’s approach was, however, entirely in keeping with modern art in Berlin and New York where she had studied with Lovis Corinth and Homer Boss. It was Boss who had challenged her to use pure color, as seen in the high key yellow, green, and blue in both *The Fool* and *The Man of Seven Colors*.

In *Man of Seven Colors* she used expressive lines to emphasize the sculptural quality of the nude body and areas of pure color to emphasize figural torsion. The fact that the nude is headless suggests a distancing from the individual portrayed, and the potential erotic charge. The painting engages the viewer more emotionally and cerebrally than sexually, given the model’s modest posture.

Anita Malfatti and modern art in Brazil



Figure 1.6.1.6: Anita Malfatti, *The Woman with Green Hair*, 1916 (private collection)

In the wake of the controversy surrounding the exhibition of Anita Malfatti’s work, young writers like Mario de Andrade rallied to her side, championing her for initiating modern art in Brazil. Twenty of her paintings were included in the exhibition during the *Semana*, including works like *The Yellow Man* and *Woman with Green Hair*, the titles of which call attention to the innovative use of color that had so incensed Monteiro Lobato. Emiliano di Cavalcanti recalled that Malfatti’s exhibition was “a revelation . . . [she] came from the outside, and her modernism . . . had the seal of experience in Paris, Rome, and Berlin.”[1]

Emiliano Di Cavalcanti

Di Cavalcanti worked as an illustrator for newspapers and magazines. He designed the program for the *Semana de Arte Moderna*, and his image for the cover declares his embrace of modern art and of stylistic diversity. It features a female nude standing on a pedestal, but the figure is rendered with a combination of sharp and sensual curving lines, not unlike Malfatti's work and even Picasso's already infamous ***Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*** (1906–07).



Figure **1.6.1.7**: Emiliano di Cavalcanti, ***Semana de Arte Moderna***, 1922

Di Cavalcanti invokes the turn in avant-garde art toward primitivism, whereby artists like Pablo Picasso and the Emil Nolde drew inspiration from objects appropriated from indigenous peoples and cultures in Africa and the South Pacific, as well as pre-conquest civilizations of the Americas to challenge establishment values by engaging in formal and conceptual experiments inspired by the exotic "other." Throughout Latin America primitivism was made even more complex as many artists were rediscovering "other" cultures within their own local contexts and appropriating these in order to innovate and at times challenge European domination of the arts and remnants of colonial practices.

Here, di Cavalcanti sets the nude amidst a primitivistic background of foliage. In the lower right, a simplified human figure recalls a trope of ethnographic sculpture. In the middle- and background there appear to be modernist, even Cubist paintings hung askew. Their frames are articulated with jagged lines that lend additional energy to the composition.

Despite being a leading figure in the emergence of Brazilian modernism, di Cavalcanti's own style was still overtly sensual. His portraits and figural compositions aimed at championing "another concept of femininity" as representative of the authentic Brazil, or *brasilidade*, and in this regard his work was somewhat atypical of the art movement launched by the *Semana de Arte Moderna*[2].

In a context dominated by the white elite, di Cavalcanti's pictorial interpretations of Brazil's working classes need to be understood as a confrontation of prevailing notions of beauty. They are also in dialogue with Mexican muralists who wanted to focus on the working class and make art for the people. To the modern eye however, his work appears to internalize stereotypes of Brazil's exotic "other" even if his aim was to subvert academic authority by affirming the beauty and value of Brazil's mixed-race working class.



Figure **1.6.1.8**: Emiliano di Cavalcanti, *Samba*, 1925, oil on canvas, 175 x 154 cm (Collection of Geniève and Jean Boghici, Rio de Janeiro)

Di Cavalcanti's approach is exemplified in *Samba*, a painting completed in 1925 following a two-year sojourn in Paris where he met Picasso. The painting depicts a partly nude black woman and a partially clothed *mulatta* swaying to the music of a guitar, strummed by a young black man. The figures' vacant stares serve to heighten the quality of sensual abandon. Art historian Edith Wolfe has observed that the solid, naturalistic bodies suggest an affinity for Picasso's post-Cubist classicism transferred to the favela in the service of nationalistic modernism.[3]



Figure **1.6.1.9**: Cover of Klaxon no. 3

Di Cavalcanti's primitivized bodies seem to risk re-colonizing Brazil's marginal communities, especially its women, in the service of the male gaze. Others have argued that the artist's aim was to extoll Brazilian unity by celebrating and reconciling racial and class disparities. Di Cavalcanti's *Samba* exemplifies the quest for an art that was both modern and Brazilian, and that followed in the wake of the *Semana de Arte Moderna*.

Building from the Semana de Arte Moderna, artists and writers went on to champion modernism in the pages of the journal *Klaxon*, considered the first publication of the Brazilian avant-garde and published between 1922 and 1923. By 1923, however, not only di Cavalcanti, but also Malfatti, Brecheret, Oswald de Andrade, and Vicente do Rêgo Monteiro were all in Paris, where each in their own way engaged with the avant-garde in the pursuit of a Brazilian modernism.

Notes

[1] Emiliano di Cavalcanti, "Remembering Modern Art Week," in *Manifestos and Polemics in Latin American Modern Art*, ed. and trans. Patrick Frank (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017), pp. 15–19, the passage quoted appears on p. 16. This essay originally appeared in Emiliano di Cavalcanti, *A viagem da minha vida* (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Civilização Brasileira, 1955), pp. 107–18.

[2] Ferreira Gullar, *Di Cavalcanti 1897–1976* (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Pinakotheke, 2006), pp. 11–12.

[3] Edith Wolfe, “Melancholy Encounter: Lasar Segall and Brazilian Modernism, 1924-1933,” PhD Dissertation (University of Texas at Austin, 2005), pp. 259-261.

Additional Resources

Read more about Modern Art Week at Brown University’s **Brazil: Five Centuries of Change**

Read more about Brazilian modernism with the **Guggenheim Museum’s Brazil: Body and Soul** online materials

Read more about the original **exhibition catalogue for the Modern Art Week in Brazil in 1922** from the Documents on 20th-century Latin American and Latino Art

Read more about **Klaxon** from the Documents on 20th-century Latin American and Latino Art

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1.6.2: Tarsila do Amaral, Abaporú

by **DR. MARIA CASTRO**

Page ID
188368



Figure **1.6.2.1**: Tarsila do Amaral, *Abaporú*, 1928, oil on canvas, 85 cm × 73 cm (Museum of Latin American Art, Buenos Aires)

"Man Who Eats"

Brazilian artist Tarsila do Amaral painted *Abaporú* in her São Paulo studio early in 1928. It depicts a seated nude figure in profile who is of ambiguous age, gender, and race. His bare right foot and hand are firmly planted on the ground. His right knee is bent towards his chest, obscuring any view of a left leg or foot. His left elbow rests on the bent right knee, propping up a very small head. This figure is painted from an extremely low perspective, which causes his body to appear distorted. His right hand and foot are enormous, while his head and upper torso are quite small. The figure appears to be outdoors, sitting on a green surface from which rise a large cactus and a yellow sphere, against a blue background.

Tarsila, as she is commonly known in Brazil, was one of the foremost painters of **São Paulo's modernist movement** in the first half of the twentieth century. She is best known for her innovative paintings of the 1920s, when she was actively engaged in the development of a new visual language of Brazilian modernism.

In January of 1928, Tarsila presented *Abaporú* as a birthday gift to her husband, the writer and modernist theorizer Oswald de Andrade. By their own accounts, de Andrade was fascinated by the painting and proclaimed that he would make a movement around it. Consulting a seventeenth-century dictionary of Tupi-Guarani Indigenous languages written by the Jesuit missionary Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, Tarsila named the painting "aba-poru," a combination of words that has been roughly translated to "man who eats."

Abaporú, which is today in the collection of the Museum of Latin American Art in Buenos Aires (MALBA), has become an icon of twentieth-century Brazilian art. This is both because the painting employs unique visual strategies and also because it inspired the writing of one of the most important documents in Brazilian art of the twentieth century: the *Manifesto Antropófago* (*Cannibalist Manifesto*, 1928), written by de Andrade.

The *Cannibalist Manifesto*

With the now famous phrase "Tupi or not tupi, that is the question," de Andrade opens his *Cannibalist Manifesto* making a reference to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* while asking a question about Brazilian cultural identity. Tupi was one of the largest Indigenous linguistic groups in pre-conquest Brazil, encompassing many tribes that lived along the region's Atlantic coast. Some were said to practice ritual anthropophagy at times of war; practices that aroused the interest, and often imagination, of early European explorers and colonizers. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century artists such as Theodor de Bry and Albert Eckhout explored the subject of anthropophagy in fantastical prints and paintings that depicted Indigenous Brazilians consuming or carrying severed limbs.


Revista de Antropofagia

MANIFESTO ANTROPOFAGO

Figure **1.6.2.2**: Oswald de Andrade, *Manifesto Antropófago (Cannibalist Manifesto)*, in the *Revista de Antropofagia (Journal of Anthropophagy)*, May 1928

Addressing this colonialist preoccupation with cannibalism, in his manifesto de Andrade employs the concept of anthropophagy as a metaphor for cultural consumption. He argues that artists should be free to cannibalize, or appropriate, the many cultural influences that surrounded them in modern Brazil—be they Indigenous, popular, or foreign. After a process of digestion, or synthesis, he believed this consumption would yield new cultural products, both original and genuinely Brazilian.

The manifesto was published in the first issue of the *Revista de Antropofagia* (*Journal of Antropophagy*) in May, 1928. In its original publication, it was illustrated by a line drawing of Tarsila's *Abaporú*.

Anthropophagy and Tarsila



Figure **1.6.2.3**: Auguste Rodin, *The Thinker*, bronze, 189 x 98 x 140 cm (Musée Rodin, Paris) (photo: Tammy Lo, CC BY 2.0)

Approaching Tarsila's painting through de Andrade's theory reveals how the artist engaged multiple visual sources and reassigned meaning to the forms of European art. For example, art historian Michele Greet has argued that the figure's posture in *Abaporú* recalls that of Auguste Rodin's famous sculpture *The Thinker*—a large bronze sculpture of a heroic male nude shown in deep contemplation.

As she notes, however, "with its diminutive head, [*Abaporú*] subverts Rodin's emphasis on intellectual contemplation." [1] By distorting the body, Tarsila instead places our focus on the figure's enlarged limbs that, rather than resting on a pedestal, connect directly to the earth, perhaps suggesting that *Abaporú* is a creature rooted in Brazilian nature.



Figure **1.6.2.4**: Fernand Léger, *Three Women*, 1921–22, oil on canvas, 183.5 x 251.5 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)



Figure **1.6.2.5**: Abaporú (detail), 1928, oil on canvas, 85 cm × 73 cm (Museum of Latin American Art, Buenos Aires)

Some of the techniques Tarsila employed in painting *Abaporú* were in dialogue with the works of French painter Fernand Léger, with whom she had briefly studied in 1923. Between 1918–1923, what has become known as his "mechanical" period, many of Léger's paintings presented machine-like forms and tubular figures. In such paintings as *Three Women*, Léger achieved a sense of volume in the human figures by creating dark shading contouring their rounded bodies. In *Abaporú*, Tarsila employs a similar technique. The figure's sinuous body is outlined in darker tones, and Tarsila's brushstrokes become lightest in color towards the middle of his right arm and foot. While Léger often applied this technique to create sleek, curved bodies in relationship to gridded backgrounds that recall machine-made built environments, Tarsila brings this modernist style into conversation with Brazil's organic landscapes.



Figure **1.6.2.6**: Sciapod (or "unipedes"), woodcut printed in the Nuremberg Chronicle, 1493, p.12 (Bavarian State Library)

Scholars have proposed a number of visual and literary sources Tarsila may have drawn upon in imagining *Abaporú*'s distorted form. Art historians Carol Damian and Regina Teixeira de Barros, for instance, have suggested that the figure's enlarged single foot may reference mythological creatures called sciapods. [2] Accounts by ancient Greek authors described sciapods as small men said to live in hot climates, who had only one leg and could use their giant foot to shade themselves from the sun, such as we see represented in a woodcut in the Nuremberg Chronicle.

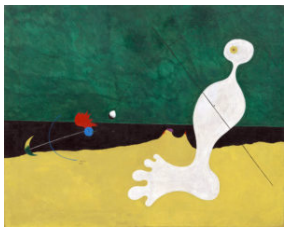


Figure **1.6.2.7**: Joan Miró, *Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird*, 1926, oil on canvas, 73.7 x 92.1 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Other scholars have noted shared concerns between Tarsila's image and works by surrealist artists working in Europe in the 1920s. Greet, for example, pointed out the "visual affinity" between *Abaporú* and Joan Miró's *Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird*, painted just two years earlier, in 1926. [3] In both paintings, large swaths of color define the flattened background and foreground of landscapes inhabited by a single abstracted figure, each with a prominent, oversized foot.

These are only a few examples of the ways in which Tarsila applied the strategies of Anthropophagy in painting *Abaporú*, as she consumed and synthesized a wide network of visual and cultural sources from Brazil and Europe. In doing so, Tarsila established her own knowledge and mastery of international modernist forms while putting forward a wholly original work informed by her perspective as a Brazilian artist.

Abaporú and Brazilian modernism

In the 1920s, artists across Brazil began exploring modernism as a means to reject the strict Academic system that had dominated national artistic production since the early nineteenth century. Artists like Tarsila had travelled to Europe and experienced different avant-garde movements that were already underway there, such as Cubism, Fauvism, and German Expressionism. Convening in large urban centers such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, and Recife, they developed their own modernist languages that significantly altered the landscape of Brazilian art.

The *Cannibalist Manifesto* aimed to present a strategy for producing artworks that were both original to Brazil and engaged with these broader international discourses. The theories of the *Cannibalist Manifesto* and the visual strategies that Tarsila employed in *Abaporú* provide crucial models for us to study the transnational dialogues artists were engaged in, which propelled the development of new forms of art throughout the twentieth century.

Notes:

[1] Michele Greet, "Devouring Surrealism: Tarsila do Amaral's Abaporu," *Papers of Surrealism*, issue 11 (Spring 2015), p. 12

[2] Carol Damian, "Tarsila do Amaral: Art and Environmental Concerns of a Brazilian Modernist," *Woman's Art Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring–Summer, 1999): p. 5; and Regina Teixeira de Barros, "Abaporú," *MALBA*, accessed July 22, 2021

[3] Greet, "Devouring Surrealism," pp. 20–21.

Additional resources:

Michele Greet, "Devouring Surrealism: Tarsila do Amaral's *Abaporú*." *Papers of Surrealism*, issue 11 (Spring 2015), pp. 1-39.

This work at MALBA

"Modern Art Week and the Rise of Brazilian Modernism" from Brown University Library

"Modernism and Concretism in Brazil: Impacts and Resonances" from MoMA

Amaral, Aracy A. *Tarsila: sua obra e seu tempo* (São Paulo: Ed. 34, 2003).

D'Alessandro, Stephanie, and Luis Pérez Oramas. *Tarsila Do Amaral: Inventing Modern Art in Brazil* (New Haven: Distributed by Yale University Press, 2017).

Damian, Carol. "Tarsila do Amaral: Art and Environmental Concerns of a Brazilian Modernist," *Woman's Art Journal*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring – Summer, 1999), pp. 3-7.

Oswald De Andrade, and Leslie Bary, trans. “Cannibalist Manifesto.” *Latin American Literary Review* 19, no. 38 (1991), pp. 38-47.

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Camila Maroja, “From São Paulo to Paris and Back Again: Tarsila do Amaral,” *Stedelijk Studies*, issue 9 (Fall 2019).

Pedrosa, Adriano, and Fernando Oliva, eds. *Tarsila do Amaral: Cannibalizing Modernism* (São Paulo: Museu de Arte de São Paulo, 2019).

Saturni, Maria Eugênia, and Regina Teixeira de Barros. *Tarsila do Amaral: Catalogue raisonné* (São Paulo: Base 7 Projetos Culturais, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo: 2008).

Gillian Sneed, Gillian. “Anita Malfatti and Tarsila Do Amaral: Gender, “Brasilidade” and the Modernist Landscape,” *Woman’s Art Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1 (2013), pp. 30-39.

Teixeira de Barros, Regina. “Abaporú.” *MALBA*.

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1.6.3: An Antidote for Social Amnesia- The Memory Space of the Cais do Valongo

by CAMILLA QUERIN

Page ID
188369



Figure 1.6.3.1: Valongo Wharf, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, December 13, 2013 (photo: Wagner Tamanaha, CC BY-SA 2.0)

In 2011 an archeological site of global importance resurfaced in Rio de Janeiro: the *Cais do Valongo* (Valongo Wharf)—once the main port of entry for enslaved Africans in the Americas. Over the course of more than three centuries, the Portuguese colony of Brazil bought and exploited the largest number of African slaves in the Americas, with some estimates reaching over four million. In addition to layers of cobblestoned floor dating back two centuries, archeologists uncovered thousands of objects that belonged to the African slaves, such as amulets, rings, ceramics, smoking pipes, horns and shells, and copper coins. Six years after the excavation, in July 2017, UNESCO recognized the Cais do Valongo as a World Heritage Site, acknowledging its importance as a physical trace of a horrendous human history that should never be forgotten or repeated.

The archeologist Tania Andrade Lima, who worked on the Cais do Valongo excavation, once remarked that historical archeology is an antidote to social amnesia.[1] The anthropologist and historian Lilia Schwarcz suggested a similar idea when she stressed the importance of the Cais do Valongo as a "memory space" for contemporary Brazil, a country whose social dynamics and racial inequalities are profoundly marked by its violent colonial past.[2] Coined by French philosopher Pierre Nora, "memory space" refers to material sites and objects, as well as immaterial vestiges, that have a symbolic meaning for collective memory. According to Schwarcz, memory spaces are far from being natural, stable entities. On the contrary, a collective effort is required to create these spaces, invest them with symbolic meanings, and keep the memories they hold alive.



Figure **1.6.3.2**: Avenida Rio Branco, Rio de Janeiro, 1925, Augusto Cesar de Malta Campos (Brazilian, 1864–1957). Gelatin silver print, 7 x 9 ½ in. The Getty Research Institute, 92.R.14

Archives and museums can be part of that effort, as they reveal forgotten histories through their collections and exhibitions. Such is the case for **The Metropolis in Latin America: 1830–1930**, on view at the Getty Research Institute until January 7, 2018, which looks at the transformation of six capitals in Latin America, including Rio de Janeiro, from colonial cities to modern metropolises. By highlighting important sociopolitical events—including a redevelopment campaign that erased the Cais do Valongo from public view—that shaped the urban plans of these cities, it tells the history of how memory spaces have been both hidden and revealed by cycles of construction and demolition.

While the story of the Cais do Valongo—from its use in the slave trade to its multiple renovations and relevance in the present day—is not told directly in *The Metropolis in Latin America: 1830–1930*, it is an essential part of Rio de Janeiro's history. In recognition of its recent World Heritage Site designation, it is fitting to contribute to the construction of the Cais do Valongo as a memory space by telling that story here.

Covering up History

Even after gaining independence from Portugal in 1822, Brazil continued the practice of slavery and was the last country in the Americas to abolish it—in 1888, a year before becoming a republic. Beginning in 1811, the year of its construction, and through the next two decades of its operation, approximately a million Africans walked on the Cais do Valongo's paved floors before being subjugated to the gruesome process of having their bodies exchanged for money.

The Cais do Valongo was initially paved using a technique common in colonial towns: *pé de moleque*, which literally translates to "boy's foot." Stones of irregular shape and size were arranged in a layer of sand that street children flattened by tramping on them. The *pé de moleque* was covered in granite blocks in 1843 for the arrival of Empress Teresa Cristina, from Sicily, who was betrothed to the Emperor of Brazil Dom Pedro II. The Cais do Valongo was renamed the Cais da Imperatriz (Empress Wharf) to conceal its past as a site of misery and mistreatment.

The wharf was completely covered again in 1911 as part of the urban renovation championed by the mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Francisco Pereira Passos, in his attempt to modernize the city as the capital of the young federal republic.

A century later, the Cais do Valongo was unearthed during the excavation phase of another urban renewal campaign that was part of an ambitious plan to renovate the historic port area of the city in anticipation of the 2016 Olympic Games.

The City at Large

The Metropolis in Latin America explores the urban renewal of Rio de Janeiro, promoted by the aforementioned Pereira Passos, the mayor of the city from 1902 to 1906, when Rio de Janeiro was still Brazil's capital. Like his contemporaries, Pereira Passos was inspired by **Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann**, the prefect of Paris between 1853 and 1870, who implemented an extensive

urban renewal project in the French city half a century before. Pereira Passos's changes not only affected the site of the Cais do Volango but also the former slaves and residents who lived nearby it.

Two Brazilian photographers documented the metamorphosis of the cityscape in Pereira Passos's era. Marc Ferrez (1843–1923) and Augusto Malta (1864–1957) captured the recently opened carioca avenues, lined with eclectic Art Deco architecture, richly decorated iron lampposts, and sidewalks paved in mosaics of Portuguese stone. A careful eye, though, can notice that behind the elegant buildings, the photographs sometimes also captured low-rise, modest dwellings—the colonial adjacent to the modern.



Figure **1.6.3.3**: Older, smaller buildings (visible in the circled areas) co-exist with newer multi-story buildings in Street View of the Floriano Promenade in Rio de Janeiro, 1928, Augusto Cesar de Malta Campos (Brazilian, 1864–1957). Gelatin silver print, 7 x 9 ¼ in. The Getty Research Institute, 92.R.14

Major public works, including a sanitation system, and the beautification of the city came at the cost of large-scale demolitions of residential quarters and the displacement of their populations. While the affluent moved to salubrious neighborhoods at a distance from the city center and along the beaches, such as Botafogo and Copacabana, the lower classes were displaced to the outskirts of the city, forming the first favelas (shantytowns).

Freed slaves and their descendants were among these communities. After the abolition of slavery, freed urban slaves remained economically and socially marginalized, earning a precarious living as street vendors, blacksmiths, barbers, and domestic laborers. Many had initially settled in the harbor area near the Cais do Valongo, in the city center that was at the heart of Pereira Passos's urban renewal project. They and other poor citizens were among those who least benefited from the modernization of the city at the turn of the twentieth century.

One hundred years later, the Cais do Valongo resurfaced from layers of dirt and forgetfulness to reveal the history of the African genocide that lasted for over three centuries in Brazil. Despite the destruction of documents and the covering up of architecture, the history of these spaces remains alive through archeological sites, artworks, photographs, maps, and written accounts and it is our moral responsibility to look, learn, and remember.[3]

Notes:

1. Tania Andrade Lima, interview for the Institute of National Historical and Artistic Patrimony (IPHAN) of Rio de Janeiro.
2. Lilia Schwarcz, "O Cais do Valongo. Lugares de memória: lembrar para não esquecer," *Nexo*, July 31, 2017.
3. The abolitionist senator Rui Barbosa (1849–1923), for example, signed a controversial decree to destroy government records on slavery that ex-slave owners could have used as aids for indemnification. After abolition, some people believed that slave owners suffered losses in granting freedom to their slaves and servants and therefore had the right to compensation. For more details, see Dain Borges, "Intellectuals and the Forgetting of Slavery in Brazil," *Annals of Scholarship* 11 (1996): 41.

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Additional resources:

Ana Lucia Araujo, "Public Memory of Slavery in Brazil," in *Slavery, Memory and Identity: National Representations and Global Legacies*, ed. Douglas Hamilton, Kate Hodgson, and Joel Quirk (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), 115–30.

Dain Borges, "Intellectuals and the Forgetting of Slavery in Brazil," *Annals of Scholarship* 11 (1996).

Clarissa Diniz and Rafael C. Denis, *Do Valongo à Favela: Imaginário e periferia* (Rio de Janeiro: Odeon Instituto: Museu de Arte do Rio, 2015).

George Ermakoff, *Augusto Malta e o Rio de Janeiro: 1903–1936* (Rio de Janeiro: G. Ermakoff Casa Editorial, 2009).

Annateresa Fabris and Solange F. Lima, *Fotografia: Usos e funções no século XIX* (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 2008).

Marc Ferrez, Robert Polidori, Shelley Rice, Angela Alonso, and Sergio Burgi, *Rio* (Göttingen: Steidl; São Paulo: Instituto Moreira Salles, 2015).

Boris Kossoy and Maria L. T. Carneiro, *O Olhar Europeu: O negro na iconografia Brasileira do século XIX* (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 2002).

Lilia Schwarcz, "O Cais do Valongo. Lugares de memória: lembrar para não esquecer," *Nexo*, July 31, 2017.

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1.6.4: Letícia Parente, Marca registrada

by PAULINA PARDO GAVIRIA

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Trademark

Throughout the ten-minute duration of her video *Marca registrada*, Brazilian artist Letícia Parente sews the sole of her foot using a needle and thread. Stitched in capital letters, she writes the sentence "Made in Brasil," as if sewing it as a trademark (the visual symbol or text used to represent a company or a product). *Marca registrada* translates from Portuguese into English as *Trademark*. In Parente's video, the stitched trademark represents the Brazilian origin of a product, which in this case is not imprinted onto an industrial object but rather onto the artist's skin.



Figure **1.6.4.1**: Letícia Parente, video still from *Marca registrada*, 1975

Marca registrada exemplifies the use of new media that characterizes much contemporary art, as Parente records her actions in video and uses her body as the primary material of the work. Parente created this video in 1975 with a portable camera recording in black and white. *Marca registrada* specifically integrates body art (in which the physical presence of the artist is the main element of the work) and video art (an artistic medium that develops over time a recorded series of images and mimics the format of television). During its entire duration, Parente's left foot and hands are the only visible parts of her body, and spectators are directed to look attentively at the manual skills of the artist.



Figure **1.6.4.2**: Letícia Parente, video still from *Marca registrada*, 1975

Pioneers of video in contemporary Brazilian art

Parente's use of video for recording her actions was an innovative technique in the 1970s, since only a few of her peers used the medium of video as a tool for art-making. Fundamental to Parente's artistic innovation was her relocation within Brazil. Parente was originally from Brazil's northeastern region; she was born in Salvador and settled in the city of Fortaleza to develop her

scientific career by working as a professor of chemistry. In 1969, she moved with two of her five children to Rio de Janeiro to attend graduate school and earn graduate degrees in inorganic chemistry.



Figure **1.6.4.3**: Anna Bella Geiger, video still from *Passagens, nº 1*, 1975

It was while living in Rio that she met a group of artists who regularly used the workshop studios of the Museu de Arte Moderna and held weekly meetings as an independent artists' group under the guidance of Anna Bella Geiger. Parente, Geiger, and others like Sonia Andrade and Ivens Machado were among the first artists in Brazil to produce and exhibit works of video art.

They usually deployed this medium to express their reflections about one's own agency and their concerns for the limitations of civil rights, from the right to vote to the lawful application of justice. In Brazil, these artists were "pioneers of video art" because of their involvement with the medium at a time when portable video cameras were not commercially available in the country. Exhibited at the time to relatively small audiences, their work has recently been exhibited in different museums of modern and contemporary art around the world.

Made in "Brasil"



Figure **1.6.4.4**: Left: Nam June Paik, *Magnet TV*, 1965, 17-inch television set and magnet; black and white, silent, 28 3/4 x 19 1/4 x 24 1/2 inches (Whitney Museum of American Art); Center: Nam June Paik in collaboration with David Atwood, Fred Barzyk, and Olivia Tappan, *9/23/69: Experiment with David Atwood*, 1969, single-channel video; color, sound (Smithsonian American Art Museum); Right: Nam June Paik, *Electronic Schematic Drawing for Paik/Abe Video Synthesizer*, 1969, pencil, colored pencil and ink on paper, 30 3/4 x 43 inches (photo: **Smithsonian American Art Museum**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Although Parente's *Marca registrada* can be compared with international, early examples of video art, her work has distinctive local characteristics. Comparable international examples to Parente's videos are the practices of Korean artist **Nam June Paik** and U.S. artist Joan Jonas, both working in the U.S. However, Paik's and Jonas's works tend to emphasize the technological aspect of video, visible through the strategic adjustment of the image, as seen in Jonas's *Vertical Roll*, and the manipulation of TV monitors, as seen in Paik's *Magnet TV*.



Figure **1.6.4.5**: Joan Jonas, video still from *Vertical Roll*, 1972

Parente, on the other hand, does not manipulate the technological configuration of video but rather explores its conceptual possibilities. With her actions, Parente might be referring to the fact that as much as one's own identity, as well as their nationality, can be a source of pain. She might also be referring to the impossibility of carrying, at that time, openly public discussions about the country's socio-political situation. One of the most significant signs of the Brazilian origin in Parente's video is the Portuguese spelling of Brazil ("Brasil") during the last minutes of *Marca registrada*. Using her native language to inscribe the name of her country on the sole of her foot, Parente declares her personal identity while labeling her work: both her body and this video are made in Brazil.



Figure **1.6.4.6**: Letícia Parente, video still from *Marca registrada*, 1975

Parente's stitched statement reads both as a praise of her national and linguistic roots and as a critical response to the socio-political situation of her national context. By the time Parente created *Marca registrada*, Brazil's military dictatorship (1964–85) had been in power for over a decade. This authoritarian government had closed congress and suspended civil rights, while at the same time carrying out a public campaign that promoted a positive perception of Brazil both inside and outside the country. Civil rights like suffrage (the right to vote) and *habeas corpus* (the right of a prisoner to appear before a judge) were suspended for ten years under a temporary constitutional amendment called Institutional Act No. 5.

Yet, the State simultaneously sponsored media advertisements seeking to foster a sense of national identity and stability. Through broadcast television, they highlighted, for example, Brazil's victory in the 1970 World Cup and popularized the slogan "Brazil, love it or leave it." While the content of Parente's statement echoes these favorable campaigns popularly exalting the pride of national identification, her statement's location on the sole of her foot also recalls forms of torture, particularly the practices that military officials used during Brazil's dictatorship against civilians, like the application of electric shocks on the soles of the feet of political detainees.



Figure 1.6.4.7: "Brazil, love it or leave it" sticker

Through the spelling of Brazil in Marca registrada, Parente reclaims the name of her country—Brasil—and her own language—Portuguese—in a sentence that otherwise reads like an English trademark idiom, usually related to international commercial networks. The location of Parente's statement on the sole of her foot and stored in a videotape also speaks to the potential of these trade networks to skirt censorship, much like in the work of another Brazilian artist, Cildo Meireles, whose *Coca-Cola Project* presents ideological statements only visible when the Coca-Cola bottles inscribed by Meireles were filled.



Figure 1.6.4.8: Cildo Meireles, *Insertions into ideological circuits: Coca-Cola Project*, 1970, 3 glass bottles, 3 metal caps, liquid and adhesive labels with text, each: 25 × 6 × 6 cm (photo: Yann Caradec, CC BY-SA 2.0)

Yet, stitched on her skin, Parente's laborious enunciation takes on a personal aspect, as well as one that is unmistakably violent. Created at a time of governmental repression and torture, *Marca registrada* demonstrates that identifying one's creative work and physical body with the name of the country becomes a painful action only accessible through a black-and-white recorded videotape.

Additional resources:

Watch *Marca registrada*

Read more about Cildo Meireles' *Coca-Cola Project* at the Tate museum

Read more about Anna Bella Geiger at the Hammer Museum

Nick Fitch and Anne-Sophie Dinant, "'Situações-Limites': the emergence of video art in Brazil in the 1970s." *Moving Image Review & Art Journal* 1:1 (2012): 59-67

Myriam Gurba, “Images of Torture in Videos by Letícia Parente in *Radical Women*.” Hammer Museum Blog. Last modified November 21, 2017

Mick Hartney, “Video Art .” Grove Art Online. 2003. Accessed November 20, 2019

Arlindo Machado, ed., *Made in Brasil: três décadas do vídeo brasileiro* (São Paulo: Iluminuras: Itaú Cultural, 2007)

André and Katia Maciel Parente, *Letícia Parente: Arqueologia do cotidiano: objetos de uso* (Rio de Janeiro: Oi Futuro, 2011)

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1.6.5: Hélio Oiticica, Parangolés

by **DR. GILLIAN SNEED**

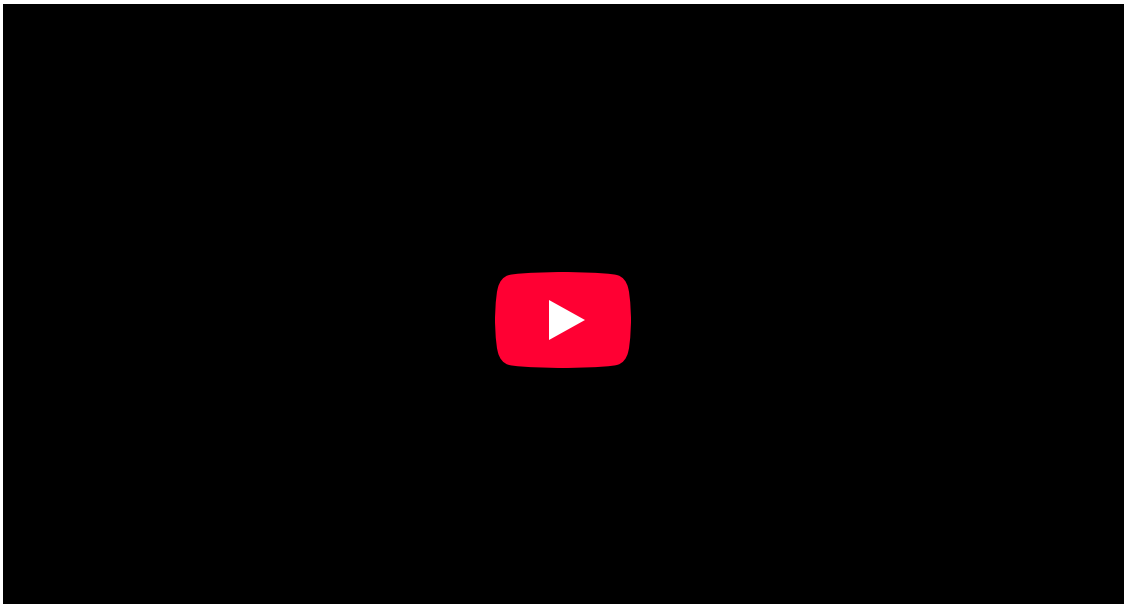
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Figure **1.6.5.1**: Ivan Cardoso, stills of a man dancing before a mural of the Brazilian flag, from the documentary *H.O.*, 1979, 35mm film transferred to video (color, sound), 13 minutes

Samba and the favela

A vibrant soundtrack of samba plays as Afro-Brazilian men and women rhythmically dance and twirl while wearing colorful, asymmetrical fabric assemblages. One man waves billowing orange, red, and yellow textiles over his arms as he dances in front of a painted mural of the Brazilian flag. A woman attired in a similar combination of green and red cloth spins around joyously to an energetic rhythm. Another man leans backwards with his legs spread wide, his arms enveloped in red plastic flaps which unfold like wings as he opens them, before hurling his body into dance with ecstatic abandon.





Video 1.6.5.1: Ivan Cardoso's *HO*, a documentary film about the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica. It shows Oiticica and his collaborators wearing the Parangolés. Ivan Cardoso, *H.O.*, 1979, 35mm film transferred to video (color, sound), 13 minutes

These sequences appear in *H.O.*, a documentary film about the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica. They show people wearing one of Oiticica's most iconic artworks: *parangolés, or* wearable, experiential garments that he initiated in 1964 and continued working with for the rest of his career. *Parangolés* are capes, or cloak-like layers of different materials that were intended to be worn by moving and dancing participants. They were made of colored and painted fabrics, as well as nylon, burlap, and gauze. Some contained political or poetic texts, photographs, or painted images, along with bags of pebbles, sand, straw, or shells. They also sometimes took the form of flags, banners, or tents.



Figure 1.6.5.2: Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé P4 Cape 1*, acrylic on canvas, fabric, nylon, rope and plastic, 93 x 160 x 10 cm (MAM Rio Collection)

It was through learning to dance the samba that Oiticica developed the *parangolé*. He said that dancing freed him from art's "excessive intellectualization."[1] He learned about samba through his contact with the community of Mangueira, a *favela* (Brazilian slum) located on the outskirts of his hometown of Rio de Janeiro. He began visiting the favela in an attempt to escape what he perceived as the constraints of Rio de Janeiro's art scene. Oiticica was white, middle class, and educated, while the favela's inhabitants were mainly Black, poor, and uneducated. Despite the significance of this disparity, Oiticica developed friendships with a number of residents and was eventually accepted by the community. He learned to samba and even became a *passista* (a highly

skilled dancer who performs in Brazilian Carnival) in the Mangueira samba school (a club for dancing and playing samba in the annual Carnival parade).



Figure **1.6.5.3**: Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé P1 Cape 1*, canvas and plastic (Enciclopédia Itaú Cultural de Arte e Cultura Brasileiras. São Paulo: Itaú Cultural, 2020)

Oiticica asserted that the favela made him more aware of social inequities. As a result, the concept of "marginalization" became fundamental to him, especially as a gay man. He began to associate the marginalized position of the artist in society with the marginalization of favela communities. This was thrown into sharp relief when Oiticica invited some friends from Mangueira to help him inaugurate the *parangolés* by dancing in them in their first public presentation at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro for the opening of the exhibition *Opinião 65* (Opinion 65). The dancers were refused entry into the building, revealing the institutionalized racism and classism pervading Rio de Janeiro at the time. Even the word "parangolé" (meaning a sudden agitation, an unexpected situation, or a dance party) was rooted in marginalization: he adopted the term when he saw a piece of cloth with the word on it hung by a beggar on the street. Oiticica's experience of the marginality of Rio de Janeiro's most impoverished inhabitants awakened him to the social and ethical implications of art.

Brazilian Concrete and Neoconcrete art

Influenced by Piet Mondrian and Kasimir Malevich, Oiticica started his art career in the late 1950s making paintings in a style known as Concrete art. He soon became frustrated by the style's rigidity, and he joined a new movement (organized by artists Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, and others) called Neoconcrete art, which would influence the development of his *parangolés*.

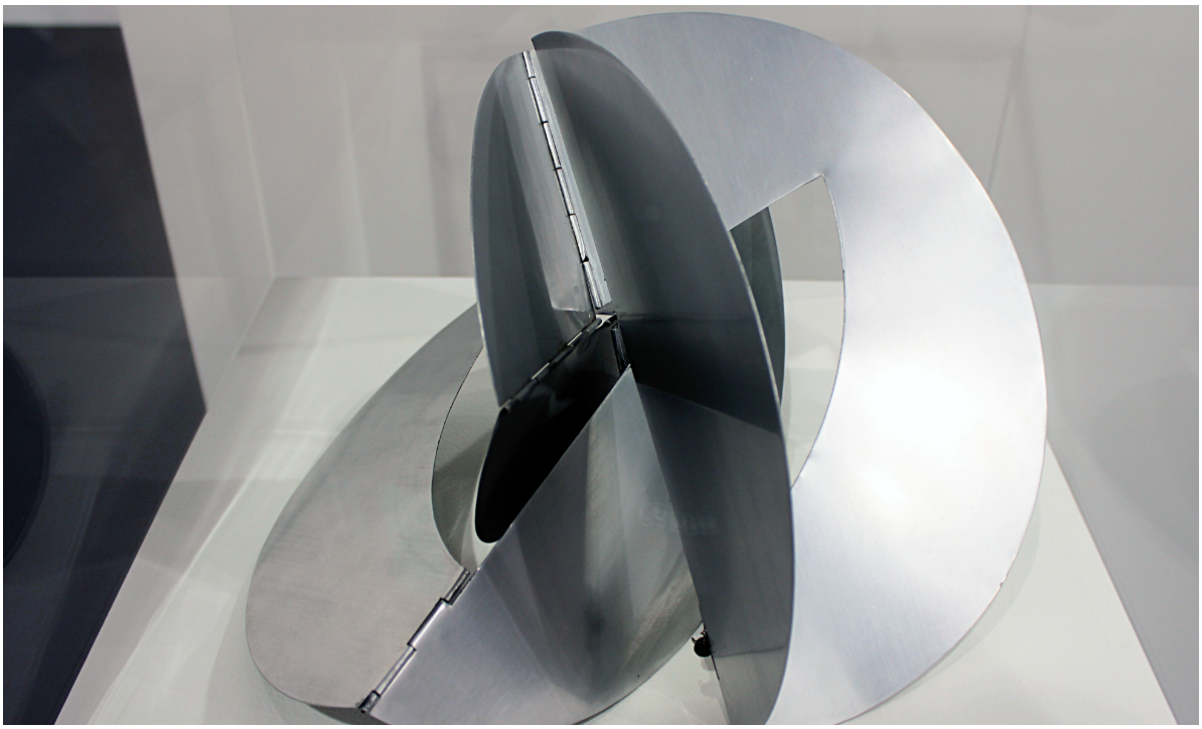


Figure **1.6.5.4**: Lygia Clark, Bicho, 1962, aluminum (photo: trevor.patt, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Neoconcretism called for more sensuality and personal expression in geometric abstraction. The movement's manifesto by poet Ferreira Gullar criticized Concrete art's rationalism, advocating instead for subjective interactions between viewers and artworks that were influenced by French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty describes perception as rooted in bodily experience. Neoconcrete art helped to spark a new interactivity between the art object and the viewer-participant, who was now encouraged to touch and manipulate artworks. For instance, Oiticica's friend Lygia Clark added hinges and flaps to her geometric aluminum sculptures called ***bichos*** (or critters), so that they could be manipulated and transformed by the spectator.



Figure **1.6.5.5**: Hélio Oiticica, *B11 Bólide Box 09*, 1964, Wood, glass and pigment, 498 × 500 × 340 mm (Tate)

Oiticica's works from this time are marked by their transformation from two-dimensional grid-like paintings to various forms he titled *bólides*, that include boxes with drawers containing various materials that could be touched. He also created closed environments that could be physically entered by the spectator (such as his *PN1 Penetrável*, 1960), demonstrating his shift toward increased audience participation. With the *parangolé*, the spectator's moving body became a part of the work by mobilizing the cape as color in motion, and activating what Oiticica described as a "wearing-watching cycle" among participants.[2]

From participatory art to political resistance

The same year that Oiticica developed the *parangolé*, the Brazilian military (with U.S. support) launched a coup d'etat, initiating a twenty-one year military dictatorship. It was against the backdrop of increasing political repression that Oiticica began engaging the spectator as a participant in his works, an approach known today as participatory art. This approach to art engages the audience in the creative process so that they become collaborators in the work. A common interpretation of the *parangolés* is that they were intended to liberate their wearers from the repressive military regime by enabling them to become aware of their capacity to rebel.



Figure 1.6.5.6: Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé P15, Capa 11, Incorporo a Revolta*, 1967. Photographs by Cláudio Oiticica (Enciclopédia Itaú Cultural de Arte e Cultura Brasileiras. São Paulo: Itaú Cultural, 2020)

Some *parangolés* even included political statements such as “Of Adversity We Live” (1965) or “I Embody Revolt” (1967). Such statements went unobserved by authorities because state-sponsored censorship initially focused more on the press and pop music than on visual art. More widespread censorship gained momentum only after 1968, when the dictatorship enacted the Institutional Act Number 5, leading to the imprisonment and torture of dissidents. Many artists, including Oiticica, left Brazil due to the increasing oppression. He travelled to London to mount his solo exhibition *The Whitechapel Experiment* at Whitechapel Gallery in 1969.



Figure 1.6.5.7: Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé Capa 30*, 1972. Photograph by Andreas Valentin (Enciclopédia Itaú Cultural de Arte e Cultura Brasileiras. São Paulo: Itaú Cultural, 2020)

Parangolés in New York and beyond

Oiticica came to New York in 1970 to participate in *Information*, a group exhibition of conceptual art at The Museum of Modern Art. After winning a Guggenheim Fellowship the same year, he stayed in exile in the city for the next eight years. In 1973, he organized an excursion with some friends into the subway system in order to invite riders to try out the *parangolés*.[3] The interactive encounter represented a continuation of his exploration of the intersections of art and life and his interest in engaging non-art audiences. Much like the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, in the 1970s New York’s heavily-graffitied subway had the reputation of being a site of criminal activity, its denizens thought to be beggars, drug addicts, and gang members. Bringing the *parangolé* into that space attested to Oiticica’s continued socio-political commitment to engaging marginalized people through liberating

experiences. He would continue to play and experiment with his *parangolés* until his untimely death in Rio de Janeiro in 1980 at the age of forty-two.

Parangolés demand to be worn and moved in, not observed as lifeless objects hung on a wall for display. Today, they are usually only seen in documentary photographs and films, rather than worn by the spectator. When samples are available to try on in exhibitions, they rarely match the lively energy they once inspired. Even so, they continue to have a lasting impact on participatory and socially engaged art practices.

Notes:

[1] Hélio Oiticica, "A Dança na minha experiência," November 12, 1965, in Renato Rodrigues da Silva, "Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolé* or the Art of Transgression," *Third Text* vol. 19, no. 3 (2005): p. 214.

[2] Hélio Oiticica, "Anotações sôbre o 'Parangolé'," November 25, 1964, p. 2 (AHO/PHO 0070.65), in Irene Small, *Hélio Oiticica: Folding the Frame* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 218, 276.

[3] Despite image captions that indicate the subway excursion occurred in 1972, the Projeto Hélio Oiticica affirms it took place in February 1973. See "Biography," **Projeto Hélio Oiticica**.

Additional resources

Hélio Oiticica, ***P16 Parangolé Cape 12 "From Adversity We Live,"*** 1965 (reconstructed 1992), Collection of the Museum of Modern Art.

Projeto Hélio Oiticica

"The story of Hélio Oiticica and the Tropicália movement," Tate.

Anna Dezeuze, "Tactile Dematerialization, Sensory Politics: Hélio Oiticica's Parangolés," *Art Journal* vol. 63, no. 2 (2004): pp. 58–71

Adriano Pedrosa and Tomas Toledo, eds., *Hélio Oiticica: a dança na minha experiência* (São Paulo: Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand [MASP], 2020)

Renato Rodrigues da Silva, "Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolé* or the Art of Transgression," *Third Text* vol. 19, no. 3 (2005): pp. 213–231

Mari Carmen Ramírez and Luciano Figueiredo, eds., *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Color* (Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2007)

Irene Small, *Hélio Oiticica: Folding the Frame* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016)

Lynn Zelevansky, Elisabeth Sussman, James Rondeau, and Donna De Salvo, eds., *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* (New York: DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2016)

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SECTION OVERVIEW

1.7: International style architecture

1.7.1: International Style architecture in Mexico and Brazil

1.7.2: Building Brasília

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1.7.1: International Style architecture in Mexico and Brazil

by DR. MAYA JIMÉNEZ

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188373



Figure 1.7.1.1: Oscar Niemeyer, The Cathedral of Brasília, 1958–1970, Brasília, Brazil (photo: **Fausto F. Mota**, CC BY-SA 4.0)



Figure 1.7.1.2: Le Corbusier, **Villa Savoye**, Poissy, France, 1929 (photo: Renato Saboya, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

In Latin America, the International Style of architecture flourished in the mid-twentieth century, replacing the classicism of the previous decades. Countries with booming economies and nation-building efforts embraced international abstraction as an alternative to indigenism. The International Style is a general term that refers to modern architecture often stripped of ornamentation to reveal the beauty of its structural form. Designs are often use reinforced concrete and *brise soleil* walls. As exemplified by the Swiss architect Le Corbusier, the International Style consisted of a functional style of architecture, through which purpose dictates form. Devoid of ornament, the exterior of many of these buildings feature geometric design, modular units, and clean lines. The style transformed Latin American cities, like Mexico City and Brasília, into modern metropoles.

The International Style in Mexico City

In Mexico, Juan O'Gorman designed housing projects to accommodate the rapid urbanization of Mexico City, as well as private residences, among them the house and studio of the artists Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. The large windows and the modular units of square panels of glass are typical characteristics of the International Style, not to mention highly functional in the context of artists' studios.



Figure 1.7.1.3: Juan O'Gorman, House and Studio of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo (including the Casa Azul), 1931–32, Mexico City, Mexico (photo: Jay Galvin, CC BY 2.0)

An important feature of the house was the rooftop bridge, which connected the larger red house that belonged to Rivera with the smaller blue house that belonged to Kahlo (and refers to *La Casa Azul*, "The Blue House," in which she grew up in Coyoacán). The horizontality of the bridge railings, which paralleled that of the window panes, was a typical feature of the International Style, as were the supporting *pilotis* (or piers) on the ground floor, which elevated the house and provided parking space, as exemplified in the ***Villa Savoye*** (1931) by Le Corbusier.

The population of Mexico City grew rapidly between 1940 to 1960, increasing from 1.7 million to 5.4 million people. In order to accommodate this exploding population, housing developments, such as Satellite City, sprouted up throughout Mexico City. Designed by Mario Pani, who also designed the campus of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), this self-sufficient urban enclave catered primarily to the middle class.



Figure 1.7.1.4: Luis Barragán, Jesús Reyes Ferreira, and Mathias Goeritz, *The Towers of Satellite City*, 1957–58, Mexico City, Mexico (photo: ProtoplasmaKid, CC-BY-SA 4.0)

At the entrance to the city, the German émigré artist Mathias Goeritz and the Mexican architect Luis Barragán created *The Towers of Satellite City*, a work that "would mark the origin point of Mexico City's mid-century middle-class expansion to the north."[1] The monument consists of five wedge-shaped structures that rise more than 100 feet, and they demonstrate the artists' abandonment of figuration. Varying in height, placement, and shape, they recreate an urban landscape through which their spatial relation with the viewer changes according to movement, an effect that is further dramatized by passing drivers. Goeritz further

elaborated on the importance of abstraction in civic architecture in his “Emotional Nature” manifesto, in which he called for “a spiritual uplifting” in architecture.

Tropical modernism



Figure **1.7.1.5**: View of the civic center of Brasília, Brazil (photo: **Jason Rosenberg**, CC BY 2.0)

Perhaps the greatest monuments of the International Style in Latin America can be seen in Brasília. The capital city of modern-day Brazil was created between 1956 and 1960 by the famed Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer. Niemeyer first met Le Corbusier in 1929, when the French architect traveled to Rio de Janeiro as part of his first trip to South America, which also included visits to Argentina and Uruguay.

Transforming the horizontals and verticals of Le Corbusier into sweeping curves and spires, Niemeyer articulated a unique and modern architectural vision for Brazil. This was partly due to the influence of his mentor, Lúcio Costa, who advocated for a synthesis of Modernism and *Brasilidade* (“Brazilian-ness”), a “tropical modernism,” that presented a view of an industrially modern, yet exotic country. Like the **Mexican Muralists**, Niemeyer was empowered by the government, who showered him with commissions for architectural projects in emerging cities like Pampulha and Brasília.

Pampulha



Figure **1.7.1.6**: Oscar Niemeyer, Church of Saint Francis of Assisi, completed 1943, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais in the region of Pampulha (photo: **Edgar Jiménez**, CC BY-SA 2.0)



Figure **1.7.1.7**: Church of São Francisco de Assis, Ouro Preto (photo: **svenwerk**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Pampulha was established as a resort community near a lake of the same name. Pampulha served as the vacation destination for residents of the surrounding city of Belo Horizonte and of Brasília. Among the many buildings designed by Niemeyer, the *Church of Saint Francis of Assisi* demonstrates his iconic use of curves, made possible through reinforced concrete. Niemeyer was building the curvilinear forms that characterized the Brazilian Baroque style from centuries earlier—particularly the work of Antonio Francisco Lisboa, who designed the **Church of São Francisco de Assis** in Ouro Prêto. The curves also echo the topography of Brazil, and Niemeyer dramatized his structure further by having the entire church plan consist of a single vaulted nave. This provides an intimate atmosphere for worship. It also prevents the interruption of form between wall and ceiling. Still, some residents of Pampulha resented the simplicity of Niemeyer's design. Candido Portinari, on the other hand, who created murals based on the life of Saint Francis for both the interior and exterior of the church, benefitted from Niemeyer's curved design, which provided an ideal surface for his murals.

Brasília

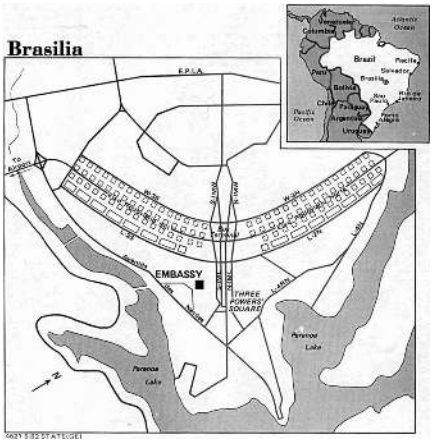


Figure **1.7.1.8**: Lúcio Costa, *Pilot Plan*, 1957, Brasília, Brazil

Literally built from scratch, Brasília was to showcase the modernity of a newly industrialized country, as encapsulated by its slogan "fifty years of progress in five." The urban planning was entrusted to Lúcio Costa, while the development of government, religious, and domestic buildings was assigned to Niemeyer. Costa's design, called the Pilot Plan, separated civic spaces from those meant for residential living. The civic spaces are arranged on an "x" axis, while blocks of housing units for 500,000 people were constructed on a "y" axis for the city.



Figure 1.7.1.9: Oscar Niemeyer, National Congress, Brasília, Brazil (photo: **Mario Roberto Duran Ortiz**, public domain)

At the civic center, known as the Plaza of the Three Powers, Niemeyer situated the legislative, executive, and judicial buildings in close proximity to one another. The National Congress, which houses the legislative branch, consisted of a one-story structure topped with two opposing half-circles, a dome, which marked the Senate, and a bowl, the Chamber of Deputies. While the horizontality of the National Congress contrasts with the curvature of the bowl and the dome, it also intersects with the verticality of the two administrative buildings, prominently placed behind it. A powerful play on shape and line, Niemeyer further dramatizes the layout by adding ramps onto which visitors can approach the dome and bowl not only at street level, but also from the rooftop.

Notes

[1] Jennifer Josten, *Mathias Goeritz: Modernist Art and Architecture in Cold War Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 139

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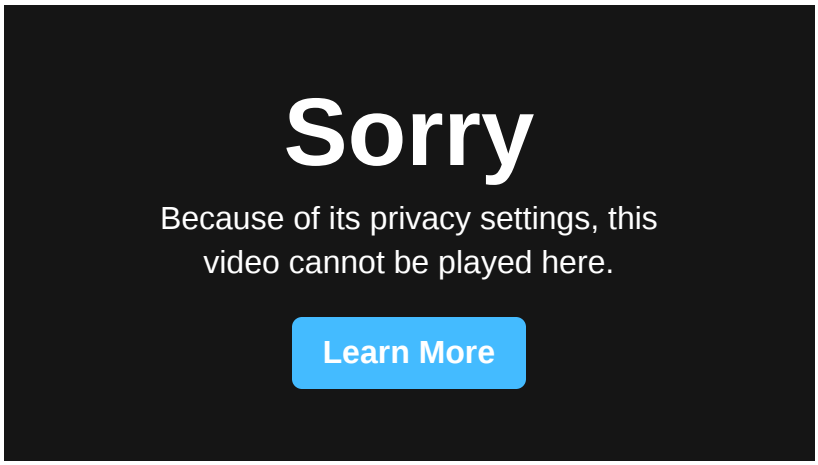
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1.7.2: Building Brasília

- by **HENI TALKS**

Page ID

188374



Building Brasília from HENI Talks on Vimeo.

Video **1.7.2.1**: **Building Brasília** from **HENI Talks** on **Vimeo**.

1955. Brazil. A man – Juscelino Kubitschek – campaigning to be president made a promise to the people to construct an entirely new capital city from scratch, to create modern heart for the fledgling country. Kubitschek won; he was elected president and so commenced one of the most ambitious single building projectsever, the city of Brasília fashioned in just 4 years.

City planner Lùcio Costa's graphic design for an ideal city was combined with architect Oscar Niemeyer's artistic prowess and provocative use of concrete. Niemeyer was notorious for creating pure, sculptural and sometimes shocking buildings. But were these seemingly otherworldly structures practical? And what is their legacy today? Join Professor Richard J. Williams in this HENI Talk to uncover the story of this modernist utopia.

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- **2.3: Ancient Egypt** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

SECTION OVERVIEW

1.8: Photography

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1.8.1: Martín Chambi, Juan de la Cruz Sihuana, Cuzco Studio

by **DR. DANIELLE STEWART**

Page ID
188376



Figure **1.8.1.1**: Martín Chambi, *Juan de la Cruz Sihuana*, *Cuzco Studio*, 1925, gelatin silver print, printed 1978 (**Museum of Modern Art**)

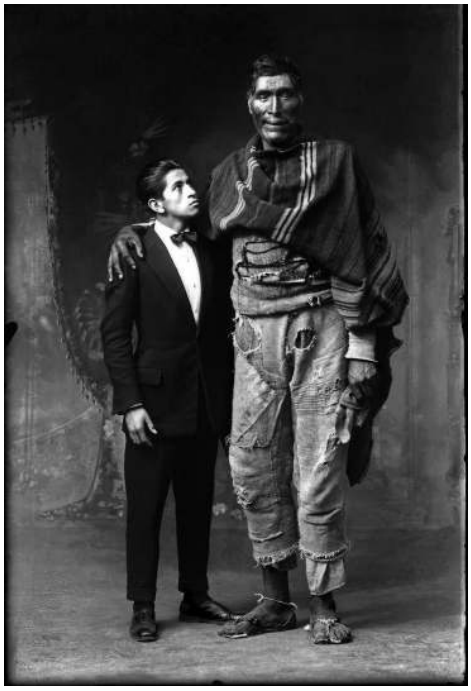


Figure **1.8.1.2**: Martín Chambi, *Victor Mendivil and the Llusco Giant, Cuzco*, 1925, gelatin silver print, 47 × 31.5 cm (**The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston**)

The towering figure of Juan de la Cruz Sihuana nearly scrapes the edges of a portrait photograph created by Cusco photographer Martín Chambi in 1925. His barely shodden feet are tied into flimsy sandals, and his traditional *chullo* cap stretches towards the picture's upper edge. Chambi's decision not to include any props, which were common in studio portraits of the time, makes it difficult to judge Sihuana's scale. At least one other photograph of Sihuana with his arm around Víctor Mendívil (Chambi's assistant) gives us a better sense of the former's unusual height of almost seven feet.

Chambi created these pictures of Sihuana at his own initiative and expense—they were not commissioned portraits. He did not make much money off of the images after they were created either. Chambi's photograph was originally published in the Lima-based newspaper *El Peruano* in the article "The Giant of Paruro?", but it was not printed on postcards, displayed in exhibitions, or published in additional formats during Chambi's lifetime. The photograph's limited circulation may indicate Chambi's rejection of historical narratives that exoticized and "othered" native Peruvians. Since the **early colonial period,** European writings and illustrations produced in and about Peru had treated its Indigenous populations derisively. At best, Indigenous people were portrayed as innocents incapable of self-governance; at worst, they were dehumanized as devil-worshiping heathens in need of conversion and control. [1]

To understand Chambi's motivations for creating this image, we need to understand the symbolic, political, and cultural importance of Indigenous peoples in modern Peru.

Chambi, the photographer

Chambi's perspective on his country's native cultures was shaped by his mixed cultural heritage and impoverished upbringing. Born in a remote Andean village in southern Peru to a family that worked in mining and farming, Chambi spoke Quechua (an Indigenous language that had also been the primary language of the Inka) and received limited formal schooling. He was first exposed to photography by a British photographer who worked for a local mining company. As a teenager, Chambi panned for gold to earn money, which he used to travel to the city of Arequipa for photographic training.

Despite these humble origins, the eventual success of Chambi's photographic studio in Cusco made him part of the city's vibrant intellectual community. Photography provided Chambi with opportunities to network with the artists and other public figures who came to him to have their portraits taken. Chambi's relationships with artists, writers, and politicians drew him into Peru's *indigenista* circles. The *indigenismo* movement, discussed below, embraced Indigenous cultural forms and peoples as the core of Peruvian national identity. Ultimately, Chambi's portrait of Sihuana demonstrates how he amalgamated influences from Peru's Indigenous cultures, European portraiture conventions (like centered subjects, painted backdrops, and controlled and even lighting), and his own creative vision to create an image that both celebrated and romanticized Peru's Indigenous population—as the rest of this essay unpacks.

Sihuana, the Giant of Paruro

Chambi's photograph of Sihuana is a sensitive portrait of an Indigenous Peruvian man in traditional dress, including a draped poncho and chullo cap. Created in Cusco (the historical capital of the **Inka civilization)** in 1925, Chambi's photograph reflects the prevalence of European portrait conventions even in predominantly Indigenous areas of **independent Peru**. Chambi carefully lit Sihuana so that his bronzed skin glowed against the dark background. The raking light creates **chiaroscuro**-like effects that outline the deep folds of his poncho and draw attention to the patches sewn onto his trousers. A painted cloth of honor (the ornamental draper behind Sihuana) heightens the sense of spatial recession and brings a hint of classicism into the photograph via the bucolic landscape upon which the curtain opens.



Figure 1.8.1.3: José Gil de Castro, *José Bernardo de Tagle y Portocarrero, Marqués de Torre-Tagle*, 1828, oil on canvas, 215.70 x 130.30 cm (MALI)



Figure 1.8.1.4: Martín Chambi, *Juan de la Cruz Sihuana, Cuzco Studio*, 1925, gelatin silver print, printed 1978 (Museum of Modern Art)

Sihuana's direct gaze confronts the viewer. His stance and surroundings mimic painted portraits of a century earlier, like Afro-Peruvian portraitist José Gil de Castro's portrayal of the Marques de Torre-Tagle. Although Gil de Castro never traveled to Europe, he became famous for his ability to represent the Peruvian elite in grand style. Much like Sihuana, the gentlemanly Tagle is positioned in front of a cloth of honor and surrounded by decorative objects that help to signal his status. While his dress is much more refined than Sihuana's, his body position and direct gaze foreshadow those of Chambi's sitter. As a photograph, Chambi's image is decidedly sparser and lacks the vibrant color of Gil de Castro's creation, but twentieth-century Peruvians would have easily spotted the visual parallels between Chambi's image and the aristocratic portraits of yesteryear.

The focal point of the image is Sihuana's quizzical expression. Some scholars have suggested that as a portraitist, Chambi was interested in individuality rather than in creating typifying views that drew attention to subjects' ethnicities, cultural specificities, or their physical features. [2]



Figure **1.8.1.5**: Max T. Vargas, *Tipo indíjeno*, Cuzco, c. 1890–1915, postcard

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, photography was frequently used by anthropologists, ethnographers, amateur explorers, law enforcement, and artists to categorize people. In creating his portrait of Sihuana, Chambi drew from the nineteenth-century tradition prevalent across Latin America of creating ***tipos*** or types. *Tipo* photography and illustration often depicted members of urban society dressed in their stereotypical clothing and plying the tools of their trade. The images attempted to show the costuming, foodstuffs, and artisanal productions of the region in which they were produced. However, they were also used as caricature to poke fun at women and non-white citizens. The pictures were often gathered into albums (accompanied by satiric texts) and printed on postcards which circulated both domestically and internationally.

Chambi's mentor, Max T. Vargas, was well known for his *tipos*. Chambi spent nine years as an apprentice in Vargas's Arequipa studio, so he would have been familiar with Vargas's pictures of "old beggars" and "Indian types." For example, Vargas's photo of a "Tipo indigeno" does not give the name of his sitter, it merely identifies him as an "Indigenous type" from Cusco. The man poses in front of a wall of Inka masonry linking him to the pre-Columbian past, rather than to contemporary society and politics. His stance, attitude, and dress do little to communicate anything beyond the fact of his Indigeneity and do not illustrate his relationship to the modern world. Because tipos tended to depict members of the lower socio-economic classes and focus on tradition, their imagery represented Peru as timeless, unchanging, and without access to modern technology (even when they were made with a camera).

In contrast, Chambi's photograph of Sihuana can be read as a portrait of modern Indigeneity. [3] Sihuana's dress identifies him as Indigenous, but his extraordinary height—especially in Peru, whose population has one of the shortest average heights in the world—defies neat categorization. By emphasizing Sihuana's individuality, Chambi resists his sitter's categorization into a common type. Instead of giving the portrait a generic or stereotypical title, Chambi identified Sihuana by name. This gesture elevated poor and Indigenous sitters like Sihuana to the level of Chambi's upper-class, paying clients who came to have their portraits taken in front of the same backdrop. Furthermore, by taking Sihuana's portrait in the popular style of the day, Chambi situated him firmly in the present. We do not think of Sihuana as an anonymous Indigenous subject whose life is rooted in culture and traditions tied to the past, but as a distinct individual capable of navigating a modernizing world.

Chambi also conveys Sihuana's modernity through his photographic aesthetic. The relatively uncluttered studio space, incredibly clear image, and strong contrasts of light and dark all reflect Chambi's modern photographic style. While nineteenth-century photographers often preferred staged, narrative imagery and atmospheric effects, twentieth-century practitioners across the globe embraced "straight photography" that privileged sharp focus and heightened detail. Straight photographers, including Chambi, viewed their work as more documentary than allegorical. They often placed a single subject in the center of the photo, allowing for close examination. Nevertheless, straight photography was highly evocative, embracing the stark tonal contrasts of black-and-white film for dramatic effect, as Chambi does in his portrait of Sihuana.

Indigenismo

Chambi's portrait of Sihuana is more subtle than Vargas's *tipo*, but it is not unbiased. There were significant imbalances of wealth and influence between the middle-class, cosmopolitan world Chambi inhabited, and that of the Indigenous Sihuana. [4] Early-twentieth-century Peruvian intellectuals—including Chambi—were intensely interested in the various Indigenous cultures of Peru, which they viewed as the root of Peruvian national identity. Peruvian Modern art—including Chambi's photography—was shaped by the values and ideas of a group of Cusco-based philosophers who embraced *indigenismo*, the belief that regional identity should spring from Indigenous cultural forms and that Indigenous peoples should be more dominant in local politics.



Figure 1.8.1.6: José Sabogal, *India Huanca*, 1930, woodcut (OAS AMA | Art Museum of the Americas Collection)

However, *indigenismo* was largely championed by the *mestizo* (mixed-race) bohemian elite—including Chambi—rather than by people who primarily identified as Indigenous themselves. While artists like Chambi who prescribed to *indigenista* ideas helped to elevate the visibility of Indigenous peoples, they did little to change the material circumstances of Peru's Indigenous population, many of whom—like Sihuana—were impoverished. *Indigenismo* was especially popular in Cusco because the city was the former Inka capital. Chambi was close friends with *indigenista* artists like José Sabogal and Juan Manuel Figeroa Aznar. He also took early photographs of Machu Picchu after its rediscovery in 1911. For Chambi and the *indigenistas*, Machu Picchu served as a testament to the brilliance of its Inka builders, reaffirmed their well-deserved place atop Peru's social hierarchy, and foretold an Indigenous renaissance. [5]



Figure 1.8.1.7: Martín Chambi, *Machu Picchu, Cuzco*, 1928, gelatin silver print (Museo de Arte de Lima. Donación Natalia Majluf y Ricardo Kusunoki Rodríguez)



Figure **1.8.1.8**: Martín Chambi, *Juan de la Cruz Sihuana, Cuzco Studio*, 1925g, elatin silver print, printed 1978 (Museum of Modern Art)

Chambi's portrait of Sihuana demonstrates *indigenista* influence in the way it emphasizes Sihuana's traditional dress, including its patterning, texture, and style. But some scholars have argued that Chambi's evocative lighting, close attention to textural detail, and simplified staging portray Sihuana as a doomed romantic figure—a representative of a static culture and dying race that was destined to be supplanted by modern society. [6] Sihuana's benign expression and inactive pose betray a tension in Chambi's photograph: while this *is* a more nuanced view of the Indigenous subject than those produced in previous generations, Sihuana's tattered clothes still locate him at the bottom of Peru's social and economic pyramid. Passive and immobile, Sihuana inhabits a modern photographic studio, but does not completely embody the ideals of self-actualization and technological evolution at the heart of Modernity.

As an individual of mestizo heritage from a rural family who rose to the middle-class via adaptation and embracing photographic technologies, Chambi personally experienced the deep divide between Peru's Indigenous underclasses and the *criollo* elite. His photographs, which attempted to balance a sympathetic view of Indigenous Peruvians with ongoing practices of exoticization and othering, visualize the inherent paradoxes of early twentieth-century *indigenismo*.

Chambi's legacy today is mixed: he is by far the most famous Peruvian photographer of his generation. His distinctive personal style is highly recognizable and demonstrates his mastery of his medium. But his photographs also occupy an ambiguous place in the history of Peruvian *indigenismo*: part sensitive representations of Indigenous individuals and part idealizations of the tragic "disappearing Indian."

Notes:

[1] Pedro de Cieza de Leon, *Parte primera de la Chronica del Peru* (Seville, Spain, 1553). Accessed Aug. 21, 2021: https://archive.org/details/partepri...p?view=theater;

English text: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4877...h.htm#page_179.

21] Andrés Garay Albújar and Moritz Neumüller, "The Andean People in the Work of Martin Chambi," *PhotoResearcher* 16 (2011): 75.

[3] Silvia Spitta, "Out of the Archive and Into the Streets: El Cusco de Martín Chambi," accessed 15 September 2021, https://chambioutofthearchive.hemi.press/.

[4] Sihuana came from the Llusco district in Chumbivilcas province in southeastern Peru, between Cusco and Arequipa. This area's population is still more than 97 percent Indigenous. Little is known about Sihuana's life, but anecdotal sources suggest that he was regionally recognized for his height and that the publication of Chambi's photograph raised his profile to a limited degree. Despite this notoriety, Sihuana was poor throughout his life. See Herman Schwarz, '¿Gigante de Paruro?', in: *El Peruano*, Lima (Nov. 14, 2000), 14.

[5] Luis E. Valcárcel, *Tempestad en los Andes* (Lima: Editorial Minerva,1927), 2.

[6] Deborah Poole, "Figueroa Aznar and the Cusco Indigenistas: Photography and Modernism in Early Twentieth-Century Peru," *Representations* 38 (Spring 1992): 62. Poole sees Chambi's practice as very similar in tone to that of U.S. photographer Edward

Curtis, who photographed the “vanishing race” of North American Indians from 1906–1930. Curtis’s project was more scientific and comprehensive than Chambi’s, but they shared a desire to document native peoples in advance of their modernization and disappearance.

Additional resources:

Roderic A. Camp, “Martín Chambi, Photographer of the Andes,” *Latin American Research Review* 13, no. 2 (1978): 222-228.

Jorge Coronado, “Toward Agency: Photography and Everyday Subjects in Cuzco, 1900-1940,” *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 3 (May 2009): 119-135.

Andrés Garay and Jorge Latorre, “Martín Chambi: A ‘Self-Portrait’,” *History of Photography* 31, No. 2 (2007): 201-209.

Michele M. Penhall, “The Invention and Reinvention of Martín Chambi,” *History of Photography* 24, no. 2 (Nov 2000): 106-112.

Edward Ranney, “New Light on the Cusco School: Juan Manuel Figueroa Aznar and Martín Chambi,” *History of Photography* 24, no. 2 (2000): 113-120.

James Scorer, “Andean Self-Fashioning: Martín Chambi, Photography and the Ruins at Machu Picchu,” *History of Photography* 38, no. 4 (2014): 379-397.

Link to Sabogal: **https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/jos%C3%A9-sabogal/m09qdk6?hl=en**

Link to Figeroa Aznar: **https://coleccion.mali.pe/people/1009/juan-manuel-figueroa-aznar/objects**

This page titled 1.8.1: Martín Chambi, Juan de la Cruz Sihuana, Cuzco Studio is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Dr. Danielle Stewart, "Martín Chambi, Juan de la Cruz Sihuana, Cuzco Studio," in Smarthistory, November 5, 2021, accessed January 5, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/martin-chambi-juan-de-la-cruz-sihuana-cuzco-studio/..

1.8.2: Lola Álvarez Bravo, Architectural Anarchy in Mexico City

by **DR. JUANITA SOLANO ROA**

Page ID
188377

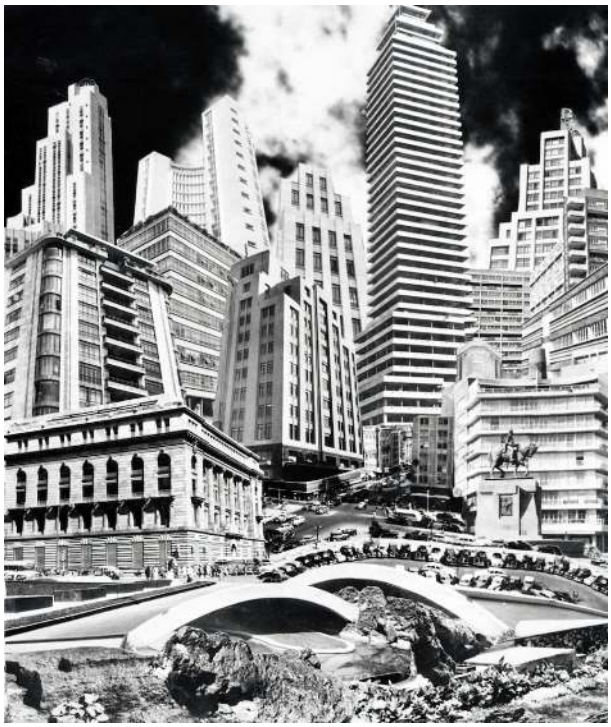


Figure 1.8.2.1: Lola Álvarez Bravo, *Anarquía Arquitectónica en la Ciudad de México (Architectural Anarchy in Mexico City)*, 1954, gelatin silver print, 21.4 x 17.7 cm (© Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona Foundation)

Mexican photographer Lola Álvarez Bravo thought architecture could be subversive and revolutionary. She expressed this view using Mexico City's growing and changing urban landscape in her photomontage *Anarquía Arquitectónica en la Ciudad de México (Architectural Anarchy in Mexico City)*. Created in 1954, the photograph was created by cutting and pasting images from different sources that Álvarez Bravo then re-photographed to create a new seamless print. It deploys a chaotic and overwhelming view of some of Mexico City's most emblematic buildings. Álvarez Bravo's photomontage of about 14 different edifices creates a modern and overwhelming concrete jungle, whose height is exaggerated by the play of scales between the different constructions, as well as their contrast with the human scale (in the foreground of the picture, very small people walk through the streets of this imaginary environment built on a defiant rocky landscape at the bottom of the picture plane).

The changing city



Figure 1.8.2.2: Lola Álvarez Bravo, detail showing the Torre Latinoamericana and a staute of Simón Bolívar, *Anarquía Arquitectónica en la Ciudad de México (Architectural Anarchy in Mexico City)*, 1954, gelatin silver print, 21.4 x 17.7 cm (© Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona Foundation)

To the right of *Anarquía*'s center, touching the upper border of the picture, we see the Torre Latinoamericana (built in 1949)—Mexico City's most emblematic modern building and Latin America's first skyscraper. The construction of this building marked the country's transition to modernity. Before this time, Mexico was immersed in what is known as the post-revolutionary period. After Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821, the country entered a period of consolidation as an independent nation. In 1876, General Porfirio Díaz was elected president and he ruled the country for more than 30 years. He consolidated the central power of the state, strengthened the capitalist sector, and promoted foreign investment. The economy boomed during Díaz's regime. However, the increase of wealth was concentrated among urban elites while the majority Mexico's population was rural and Indigenous. This widened the gap between social classes and ultimately led to the Mexican Revolution of 1910–20. By the time the Torre Latinoamericana was built, the post-revolutionary period (c. 1920–40) was finally over.

In *Anarquía*, the Torre punches through the top edge of the picture plane and divides Álvarez Bravo's composition in two. It forms the central axis of the artwork. Upon closer inspection, it appears that the Torre Latinoamericana was still under construction when it was photographed, as the glass windows were not yet installed.

The contrast of tall modern buildings and older ones, such as the horizontal Banco de México building (built between 1903 and 1905) in the lower left, conveys the modern turn and the economic affluence that the country experienced at the time the photomontage was made. Beginning in the 1940s, the country was entering a new phase known as "el milagro mexicano" (the Mexican miracle). This new period was characterized by sustained economic growth and the change towards the formation of a modern and industrialized nation. Álvarez Bravo's photomontage seems to anticipate the rapid growth of Mexico City. In 1940, the city had a total of 1.8 million people. When Álvarez Bravo made the photomontage in 1954, Mexico City had around 3 million inhabitants—by 1980, it had become a megalopolis of more than 14 million people.

The tension between Mexico's traditional past and its modern future is further reinforced by the inclusion of Simón Bolívar's statue to the right of the Torre Latinoamericana. Bolívar was a Venezuelan military and political leader, who led territories of the Spanish Empire (today Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru) to independence. The presence of his statue in *Anarquía* points to Mexico's shared colonial past within the Americas; Mexico was once part of the viceroyalty of New Spain, a territory that

was under the power of the Spanish Empire from 1519 until its independence in 1821. In *Anarquía*, Bolívar's statue stands in front of mid-twentieth century modern buildings, such as those designed by architect Mario Pani, who was credited with introducing International Style architecture to Mexico. Álvarez Bravo's composition exposes the diverse paths and styles that modern Mexican architecture followed. However, the photomontage also conveys a sense of skepticism about modernity through its overwhelmingly chaotic assemblage of buildings.

Photomontage

The impulse to create images like *Anarquía* was explained by Álvarez Bravo herself:

> ***Sometimes I wanted to say something, and photography didn't fully allow me to do it. So I'd take a sheet of cardboard, make a drawing, select the negatives, print them the necessary size, then cut and paste. [1]***

She created *Anarquía* utilizing her own photographic negatives, which allowed her a greater degree of control over the viewpoint, scale, lighting, and composition of the final image. By the time she created this picture, she had already had a prolific career as a photographer beginning in 1934, after she separated from the renowned photographer Manuel Álvarez Bravo. She worked in different genres and styles, including portraiture and unmanipulated Straight Photography to document the Indigenous and peasant populations of Mexico. Her work was featured in several magazines, and she worked for both government agencies and private patrons. With *Anarquía*, we see her use of political photomontage, which was popular in the 1930s in Mexico. Besides Lola Álvarez Bravo, artists such as Tina Modotti, Agustín Jiménez, Emilio Amero, and Antonio and Rafael Carrillo had started to use the medium.

The origins of avant-garde artists' use of photomontage can be traced back to German Dada artists Hannah Höch, Raoul Hausmann, and John Heartfield, as well as to Soviet artists Varvara Stepanova, Alexander Rodchenko, and El Lissitzky. In these European artists' contexts, it was mainly utilized to express opinions about politics or social and cultural issues.

Álvarez Bravo's work draws on both local and foreign traditions of photomontage. Her oeuvre was most certainly inspired by the work of Dada and Soviet artists, whose photomontages circulated in Mexico in leftist magazines.

Photomontage and muralism

Álvarez Bravo's regard for architecture was cultivated throughout her 50-year career. By the time she created *Anarquía*, Álvarez Bravo was on the editorial board of the magazine *Espacios*, a journal that promoted architecture and the fine arts.



Figure 1.8.2.3: Unidentified photographer, still from the motion picture *La rival*, 1955, gelatin silver (Collection of the Biblioteca de Arte Ricardo Pérez Escamilla)

Anarquía was first published on the cover of the magazine *Arquitectura / México* in 1955, but it was introduced to a mass audience when it was shown as a photographic mural in the background of the 1955 film *La rival*, directed by Chano Urueta. The film tells the story of an architect who was having an affair. Álvarez Bravo's photomontage was enlarged to fill a wall in the protagonist's office, where it was juxtaposed with a real-life view of colonial-era buildings from the office's windows. The encounter between the past and a chaotic future is a visual metaphor for the film's plot.

Álvarez Bravo's *Anarquía* also challenged modern Mexican painting, while expressing skepticism about the future. In other words, she was not sure that the rapid modernization process as expressed through architecture was necessarily something good. She used photographic murals (such as *Anarquía* became because of the film) to inscribe herself into Mexico's male-dominated, most emblematic twentieth-century artistic tradition: muralism. By introducing a modern medium—photography—she challenged the

more traditional fresco painting technique of the muralism movement associated with the “tres grandes” (Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco). *Anarquía* was not Álvarez Bravo’s first photographic mural.

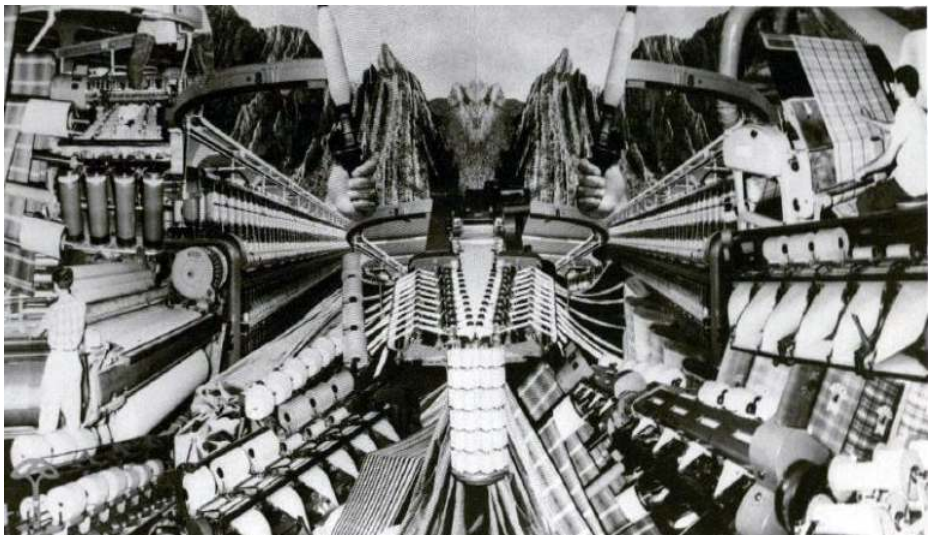


Figure **1.8.2.4**: Lola Álvarez Bravo, *Hilados del Norte I*, c. 1944, gelatin silver print, 14.9 x 31 cm (Ackland Art Museum)

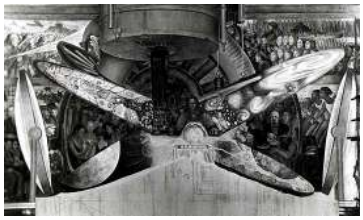


Figure **1.8.2.5**: Diego Rivera, *Man at the Crossroads*, 1933, Rockefeller Center, New York (destroyed)

In the 1940s and 1950s, she was commissioned to create a series of large-scale photographs to be publicly displayed. The most famous was *Hilados del Norte I*, created for a textile factory in Monterrey. This photographic mural was in direct dialogue with Diego Rivera’s ***Man at the Crossroads***, the mural he initially created for New York’s Rockefeller Center, but which was destroyed before its official unveiling. (Rivera created a **second version** of this mural for Mexico’s Palacio de Bellas Artes, where it still stands.) Both *Hilados del Norte I* and *Man at the Crossroads* revolve around a central powerful figure, and from which diagonal lines that guide navigation of the compositions emerge. Giant disembodied hands appear in both artworks as the ultimate directors of their surroundings. The strategy of replacing the old medium of fresco with that of photography conveyed the transition from an art form that had once been revolutionary—but that by the 1940s had become outdated—to a medium that aligned with a modern view of the world: photography was machine-made, reproducible, and truly accessible to the masses. Like in *Anarquía*, Álvarez Bravo used photomontage to create *Hilados del Norte I*, which was enlarged to cover an entire wall and evoked the scale of mural painting. As she stated:

> ***The photographic mural can be executed as a photomontage or through the projection of a single real subject that makes it possible to expand perspectives, landscape, and luminosity, which offers in turn to the viewer the possibility of being rapidly transported to a different setting. [2]***

As art historian James Oles has suggested, Álvarez Bravo wanted to elevate the status of photomontage to that of muralism. [3]

A critique and a challenge

Anarquía Arquitectónica en la Ciudad de México (Architectural Anarchy in Mexico City) not only conveys a critique towards the rapid growth of modernist architecture characteristic of changing time in Mexico, but it also challenges Mexican muralism. Her photomurals take a different stance to that of the “tres grandes” even though she shared their leftist beliefs. With pictures such as

Anarquía, Alvarez Bravo inserted herself within the practice of a male-dominated artistic world, addressing new contemporary issues such as the changing urban landscape through a new modern medium.

Notes:

[1] Olivier Debroise, *Fuga Mexicana. Un Recorrido por la Fotografía en México*, (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2005), p. 339.

[2] Álvarez Bravo is quoted in: Cristobal Andrés Jacome, "Dialogues with Architecture," in *Lola Álvarez Bravo and the Photography of an Era* (Mexico City: Editorial RM and Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2012), p. 130.

[3] "**Los fotomurales de Lola Álvarez Bravo** Ahora Pueden ser Traídos de Vuelta a la Luz: James Oles," Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, accessed October 4, 2021

Additional resources:

Debroise, Olivier. *Mexican Suite: A History of Photography in Mexico* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001).

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1.8.3: José Yalenti, Architecture or Twilight

by **DR. DANIELLE STEWART**

Page ID
188378



Figure 1.8.3.1: José Yalenti, *Architecture or Twilight*, c. 1957, gelatin silver print (Museu de Arte de São Paulo)

At first glance, José Yalenti's *Architecture or Twilight* seems like a disorienting jumble of splotches of inky black spilling over medium-grey surfaces, cut through by startlingly straight lines and a variety of surface textures. The photographer's descriptive title orients us, and three-dimensional space emerges from the chaotic greyscale forms. We are looking at the shadows cast by the perforated cement canopy of a covered walkway. Organically shaped marquees like these were a popular feature of mid-century Latin American architecture, which favored permeable indoor/outdoor spaces well-suited to a tropical climate like Brazil's. The best example of a structure like this is the canopy Oscar Niemeyer designed in 1954 as the centerpiece for a complex of buildings in Ibirapuera Park in São Paulo.



Figure **1.8.3.2**: Werner Haberkorn, *View of the Ibirapuera Marquee*, c. 1954, gelatin silver print (Museu Paulista (USP) Collection)

Recognizing the photograph's subject allows us to see how the picture engages two important media that were intertwined in 1950s Brazil: architecture and photography. The year 1939, eighteen years before Yalenti created *Architecture or Twilight*, was a pivotal year for both architecture and photography.



Figure **1.8.3.3**: Lucio Costa, Affonso Eduardo Reidy, Oscar Niemeyer, et al. Ministry of Education and Health Building, Rio de Janeiro, designed 1935-36, constructed 1939–43 (**source**)

It was the year work began on the iconic Ministry of Education and Health Building (MES) in Rio de Janeiro—the project which most scholars consider the beginning of Brazilian architectural Modernism—and the year that Yalenti, along with colleagues Eduardo Salvatore and Benedito Duarte, established the Foto Cine Clube Bandeirante (FCCB) in São Paulo, the group that did the most to codify the language of Brazilian Modern photography. These events are foundational to the creation of *Architecture or Twilight*, and to the development of Brazilian Modern art, which became increasingly abstract between 1939 and 1957.

Photography in São Paulo



Figure **1.8.3.4**: José Campos do Amaral and Raul Silveira Simões, Martinelli Building, São Paulo, Brazil, completed 1929

José Yalenti was born in São Paulo, Brazil in 1895, and came of age during a spectacular population boom. Between 1930 and 1955, São Paulo's population nearly quadrupled from 550,000 people to two million. Immigrants fleeing war-torn Europe (like Yalenti's Italian parents) and rural Brazilians looking for better jobs fueled São Paulo's expansion. As the population grew, so did its infrastructure: magazines boasted that Paulistanos (inhabitants of the city), built three new homes every hour. [1] After the inauguration of São Paulo's first skyscraper, the Martinelli Building in 1929, high rises began springing up.

On April 28, 1939, a group of photography aficionados, including Yalenti, formed the Foto Clube Bandeirante, later changed to Foto Cine Clube Bandeirante, or FCCB. Like many members of the FCCB, Yalenti was an amateur photographer who practiced as a hobby. The FCCB hosted photography seminars, weekend excursions, and internal competitions. They also housed a library and darkroom for members' use. FCCB was open to both men and women, but yearly dues made it primarily accessible to members of São Paulo's upper-middle class.

Starting in the late 1940s, a contingent of FCCB photographers began creating photographs of abstracted architectural motifs (as in *Architecture or Twilight*), and eventually became known as the Escola Paulista, or "Paulista School."

Modern Architecture and Photography



Figure **1.8.3.5**: Inauguration of the FCCB's "International Salon of Photographic Art" at the Galeria Prestes Maia

Yalenti was among the members of the unofficial Paulista School. Between 1945 and 1960, the Paulista School photographers explored the rapidly changing formal qualities of São Paulo. By photographing skyscrapers and stairways at steep angles, creating closely cropped compositions from found geometric motifs, and capturing the flattening effects of shadows, Paulista School photographers investigated the new physical perspectives emerging in the urban environment. They created a distinctively Modern aesthetic that used strong contrasts of light and dark, geometric forms, linear compositions, and collapsed space to assert photography's status as an artistic medium.

As part of their pursuit of photographic Modernism, Yalenti and his fellow Brazilians adapted the stylistic innovations of U.S. and European photographers such as f.64, New Objectivity, Dada, Surrealism, and the Bauhaus, to the Brazilian context. Along with his FCCB compatriots—Thomaz Farkas, Geraldo de Barros, and German Lorca, among others—Yalenti explored the formal properties of black-and-white image-making.



Figure **1.8.3.6**: Thomaz Farkas, *Side view of the Ministry of Health and Education*, c. 1948, gelatin silver print, 32.6 × 29.9 cm (MoMA)

Yalenti and the Paulista's School's abstract photographs responded to the new trends in Brazilian Modernist architecture being developed by young architects in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. In 1939, Lúcio Costa, Oscar Niemeyer, and Affonso Reidy broke ground on the Ministry of Education and Health Building (MES), the building that would define Brazilian architectural modernism. The Rio-based team combined elements of Le Corbusier's undecorated structural purity with Brazilian regional design to produce a more organic and "tropical" Modernism that responded to the local culture and climate. [2]

The sinuous and sensuous curves of Yalenti's photograph are directly influenced by stylistic developments in architecture at the MES, including the building's covered entry and its organically abstract contours. By 1957, when Yalenti created *Architecture or Twilight*, Brazil was globally recognized as an architectural leader. MoMA in New York City organized a popular exhibition of Brazilian architecture in 1943 ("Brazil Builds"), and highlighted the country again in its survey show "Latin American Architecture since 1945," that ran from 1955–56. Brazilian photography was also recognized internationally when the FCCB was invited to join the influential FIAP (International Federation of Photographic Arts) as its first non-European member in 1950. Thus, Architecture or Twilight capitalizes on the global reputations of Brazilian architecture and photography.

The Language of Lines



Figure **1.8.3.7**: José Yalenti, "Reverse," published in "A Linguagem das Linhas," *Íris* vol. 2, no. 15 (April 1948), p. 21.

Yalenti studied civil engineering at the Escola Politécnica da Universidade de São Paulo (Poli-USP), one of Brazil's most prestigious universities, and the training ground for many important mid-century Brazilian architects and city planners. During the time he frequented the FCCB, Yalenti also worked as an engineer for the São Paulo city government, so he was aware of the

changes taking place in his city and of modern architectural trends throughout Brazil. In 1948 Yalenti wrote an article for a Brazilian photography magazine *Íris* titled "The Language of Lines," in which he argued that to consider photography a fine art, practitioners must embrace the medium's inherently graphic qualities, specifically the way it speaks through lines. [3]

In the *Íris* article, Yalenti identified five types of lines—"parallel and diagonal," "arabesques," "circular," "triangular," and "reverse"—and provided examples of each type from his own photographs. Although Yalenti did not clearly define the characteristics of each type of line, four of his sample illustrations were photographs of buildings. Yalenti felt that the linear quality of architecture was rendered particularly emphatic by the black-and-white film (color film was prohibitively expensive in Brazil at the time). As he wrote:

> ***The language of lines is the domain of photography, an indisputable and exclusive domain, and not even the most celebrated painters of all history have been able to create with their artworks equal [to photography]. [4]***

Although written almost a decade before *Architecture or Twilight*'s creation, Yalenti's musings in *Íris* help us to understand what the photographer saw in the photograph's jumble of lines and patches of grey: it is a visual treatise on seeking out new perspectives and "writing with light"—as the word "photography" implies. For Yalenti, black-and-white photography most directly responded to the changes he saw in São Paulo's physical and artistic environment as industrialization and a new architectural language swept the city. *Architecture or Twilight* demonstrates Yalenti's commitment to creating artistic photographs using a linear, abstract, formal vocabulary that drew from contemporary architectural trends and reflected the rapid growth of modern Brazilian cities.

Notes:

[1] "3 Casas por Hora!" S. Paulo 1, No. 1 (January 1936): n.p.

[2] For more on tropical modernism, see Phillip L. Goodwin, *Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old, 1652–1942* (New York: MoMA, 1943), p. 25 and p. 62; William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, 3rd ed. (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), p. 386; Daryle Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil: The First Vargas Regime, 1930–1945* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 207–10; and Aleca Le Blanc, "Building the Tropical World of Tomorrow: The Construction of *Brasilidade* at the 1939 New York World's Fair," *Hemisphere: Visual Cultures of the Americas* 2, 1 (2009): p. 28.

[3] José Yalenti, "A Linguagem das Linhas," Íris 2, No. 15 (April 1948): pp. 14–21.

[4] Yalenti, "A Linguagem das Linhas," p. 15.

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2.1.1: Metcalf, Havana Harbor

by DR. KATHERINE BOURGUIGNON, TERRA FOUNDATION OF AMERICAN ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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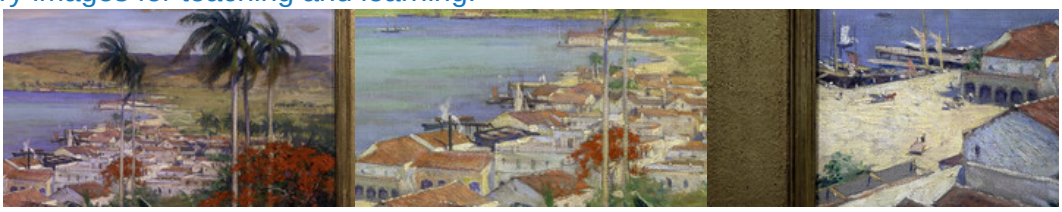


Video **2.1.1.1**: Willard Metcalf, *Havana Harbor*, 1902, oil on canvas, 46.5 x 66.4 cm (Terra Foundation for American Art, Daniel J. Terra Collection, 1992.49), a Seeing America video. Dr. Katherine Bourguignon, Curator, Terra Foundation for American Art, and Dr. Steven Zucker

Additional resources

This painting at the Terra Foundation for American Art

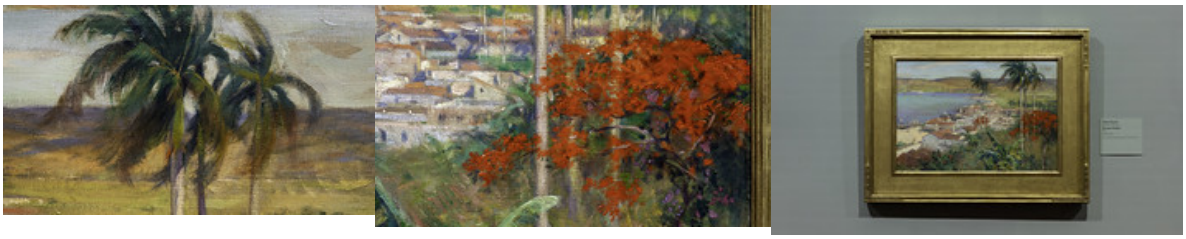
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accessed August 15, 2020, smarthistory.org/cuban-cigars-independence/..

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2.1.2: When the department store was new- Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones, The Shoe Shop

by DR. ANNELISE MADSEN, THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO and DR. BETH HARRIS

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Video **2.1.2.2**: Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones, The Shoe Shop, c. 1911, oil on canvas, 99.1 x 79.4 cm (Art Institute of Chicago). Speakers: Dr. Annelise Madsen, Gilda and Henry Buchbinder Assistant Curator of American Art, The Art Institute of Chicago and Dr. Beth Harris

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2.2: Symbolism, Henry Ossawa Tanner

2.2.1: The Banjo Lesson

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2.2.1: The Banjo Lesson

by FARISA KHALID

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Figure **2.2.1.1**: Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Banjo Lesson*, 1893, oil on canvas, 49 × 35.5 inches / 124.5 × 90.2 cm (Hampton University Museum, Hampton, VA)

Henry Ossawa Tanner was the United States' first African-American celebrity artist. His training at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (under the guidance of **Thomas Eakins**) and at the Académie Julian in Paris (with Jean-Léon Gérôme) put him in the unique position of having experienced two vastly different approaches to painting— American Realism and French academic painting. He was also one of the few artists to have had such training at a time when there were many barriers to education for African-Americans. Though Tanner lived most of his life in France and became well known for his lush biblical paintings, *The Banjo Lesson* is his most famous work and the painting that has become emblematic with his oeuvre.

Henry Tanner painted *The Banjo Lesson* in 1893 after a series of sketches he made while visiting the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina four years before. Tanner had been studying and working in Paris until he developed a bout of typhoid fever and was advised to return to the United States to recover his health and dwindling finances. While taking up a teaching post at Clark University in Atlanta, Tanner's doctor told him to take in some mountain air. His trip to North Carolina opened his eyes to the poverty of African-Americans living in Appalachia.

The legacy of slavery

The United States had abolished slavery only twenty-four years before, in 1865, and the physical and psychological wounds of that brutal institution would continue to be a palpable presence in African-American communities—especially so in the South. Though Tanner was born in Pittsburgh within the tight-knit world of highly-educated members of America's burgeoning African-American intelligentsia, Tanner's mother Sarah had been born a slave and had escaped north to Pennsylvania through the Underground Railroad. His middle name, Ossawa, was chosen by his father, Benjamin Tucker Tanner, a Methodist minister and abolitionist, after Osawatomie, Kansas—the site of the abolitionist John Brown's bloody confrontation with pro-slavery partisans on August 30, 1856.



Figure **2.2.1.2**: Left: Henry Ossawa Tanner, photographic study for *Harper's Young People* illustration, 1893; right: illustration by Henry Ossawa Tanner for *Harper's Young People* 16, no 736 (December 1893), p. 81.

Throughout his education and advancement in the art world in both the United States and Europe, the legacy of slavery haunted Tanner as he tried to establish a niche for himself as painter to be regarded on his own terms. *The Banjo Lesson* grew out of a set of photographs and illustrations (above) that Tanner made for the periodical *Harper's Young People* in 1893. The illustration is of an elderly man teaching a young boy how to play the banjo, accompanied a short story by Ruth McEnery Stuart called "Uncle Tim's Compromise on Christmas," in which the titular character imparts his most prized possession, a banjo, to his grandson on Christmas morning.



Figure **2.2.1.3**: Left: William Sidney Mount, *The Banjo Player*, 1856, oil on canvas, 36 x 29 inches (The Museums at Stoney Brook); right: Thomas Eakins, *Study for "Negro Boy Dancing," The Banjo Player*, probably 1877, oil on canvas on cardboard, 49.5 x 27.9 cm (The National Gallery of Art)

American realism + the European tradition

Tanner had spent years been refining a style of his own that combined elements of American Realism and the European Old Master tradition. *The Banjo Lesson* has its roots in the genre paintings of African-Americans by William Sidney Mount and Thomas Eakins (above) and in Renaissance and Flemish paintings, notably Domenico Ghirlandaio's *An Old Man and His Grandson* and Johannes Vermeer's *Woman with a Lute* (below).



Figure **2.2.1.4**: Right: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *An Old Man and His Grandson*, c. 1490, tempera on wood, 62 x 46 cm / 24.4 x 18.1 inches (Louvre Museum); Johannes Vermeer, *Woman with a Lute*, c. 1662-63, oil on canvas, 51.4 x 45.7 cm / 20 1/4 x 18 inches (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

While studying in Paris, Tanner was also inspired by the works of the French Realists, namely **Gustave Courbet** and **Jean-François Millet**, in their depictions of the rural poor. Millet's *The Angelus*, with its quiet, intensely spiritual portrayal of a farmer and his wife praying amid the fields at dusk, is a palpable influence on Tanner's *The Banjo Lesson*.



Figure **2.2.1.5**: Jean-François Millet, *The Angelus*, 1857-59, oil on canvas, 55.5 × 66 cm / 21.9 × 26 inches (Musée d'Orsay)

A radically different image

This theme of spiritual solace that Tanner encountered in the paintings of French Realists like Millet resonated with his own upbringing as the son of a Methodist minister. He hoped to find a way of highlighting the dignity and grace of poor African-Americans in the manner that he had seen in France—an approach that would be radically different from stereotypical images of the overly servile "Uncle Tom" figure (named after the main character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's iconic 1852 novel) that was familiar to Americans in countless advertisements (like **this one**, for Ayer's Cathartic Pills [The Country Doctor], c. 1883) and popular magazines.

In *The Banjo Lesson*, Tanner's desire to show us his vision of the resilience, spiritual grace, and creative and intellectual promise of post-Civil War African-Americans is fully realized. The scene is staged within the small confines of a log cabin with the cool glow of a hearth fire casting the scene's only light source from right corner, enveloping the man and the boy in a rectangular pool of light across the floor. The boy holds the banjo in both hands, his downward gaze a reflection of his focused concentration on his grandfather's instructions. The older man holds the banjo up gently with his left hand so that the boy is not encumbered by its weight, yet the staging shows us that the man wants the boy to come into the realization of the music and its rewards through his own intuition and hard work.



Figure **2.2.1.6**: Detail, Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Banjo Lesson*, 1893, oil on canvas, 49 × 35.5 inches / 124.5 × 90.2 cm (Hampton University Museum, Hampton, VA)

The contrast between the man's age and the boy's adds to the narrative tension within in the painting as in the Ghirlandaio, a counterpoint between age and experience, and youth and the promise of achievement. The boy is bathed in the glow of the fire's warmth with a glimmer of white light shining across his forehead, the center of knowledge and understanding. The older man is submerged in the cool shadows of the room. This carefully orchestrated play of warm and cool, of shadow and light, conveys that the success of future generations is built upon the legacy of previous ones. Bathed in muted cool tones of grays and blues, the grandfather is the past, the old America of slavery and The Civil War, of oppression, racism, and poverty, while the boy, caught in the warm glow of the fire's light, is the new America, of renewed opportunities, advancement, education, and new beginnings.

Banjos, minstrel shows, and stereotypes of African-Americans

Certainly Tanner would have seen a great deal of his own life played out in this tender scene. As the educated son of a former slave and a minister and abolitionist, Tanner was always striving to live up to his potential as an artist in the post-Civil War, post-Reconstruction era America. It is also important that the instrument that leads the boy towards enlightenment is the banjo, an instrument highly significant to African-American slave culture and the music of the American South. The banjo evolved from the gourd instruments of Africa and the West Indies and became integral to slave music throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

By Tanner's time, it was a mainstay of minstrel shows, popular variety entertainment that featured white actors in blackface performing songs and skits. In minstrel shows, it was the custom to portray African-Americans as boisterous, jaunty, buffoonish, and dim-witted. This portrayal fed into the preconceived notions of white racial superiority—that African-Americans, even if they were no longer slaves, would still be infantile and incapable of self-determined action or remarkable achievements. The entire visual and popular culture of Uncle Tom imagery and minstrel shows were part of the pernicious psychological chains of slavery that persisted in America throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The shows also depicted African-Americans as having an innate musicality, which acknowledged their talent but undermined their intelligence.

For Tanner, painting this image of generational torch-passing, was a way of debunking the entrenched derogatory stereotypes of African-Americans propagated by minstrel shows. In Tanner's painting we see the grandfather and the boy as intelligent, noble, graceful people engaged in an intimate act of sharing creative knowledge. Their lesson becomes emblematic of the larger African-American journey of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, from Emancipation, Reconstruction, the terrors and injustices of the Jim Crow laws, the exodus of the **Great Migration**, and the foment and dynamism of the Harlem Renaissance.



Figure **2.2.1.7**: Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Thankful Poor*, 1894, oil on canvas, 90.3 x 112.5 cm / 35 1/2 x 44 1/4 inches (collection of William and Camille Cosby)

An American artist

After painting *The Banjo Lesson* and *The Thankful Poor* (above), Tanner moved back to Paris where he would remain for most of his life. Tanner felt that France was less encumbered with the baggage of racial prejudice towards people of color than the United States. "In America, I'm Henry Tanner, Negro artist, but in France, I'm '*Monsieur Tanner, l'artiste américaine.*'"[1]



Figure **2.2.1.8**: L. Matthes, *Henry Ossawa Tanner with a palette*, c. 1935, photographic print (Archives of American Art)

His desire to be recognized by the quality of his talent would inspire him to paint prolifically throughout his life, traveling through the Middle East and North Africa in search of authentic imagery for biblical paintings that would become the hallmark of his later career. When World War I was declared in Europe, Tanner enlisted in the Red Cross, serving as a medical volunteer as well as making numerous sketches and various paintings of the soldiers in France and Belgium. In 1923, he was awarded the Legion of Honour by the French government for his service during the war.

But it is *The Banjo Lesson* that has become the iconic painting of his entire career. Its economy of scale, its emotional delicacy, its nuanced orchestration of light and shadow and symbolism situates it in a resonant space in American art history. Both *The Banjo Lesson* and *The Thankful Poor* were remarkable achievements for Tanner—works that according to the art historian Judith Wilson, "invest their ordinary, underprivileged, Black subjects with a degree of dignity and self-possession that seems extraordinary for the times in which they were painted."[2] It is a testament to Tanner's vision as an artist, and his personal convictions as an African-American, amid the possibilities offered by twentieth century, that these two paintings continue to speak so profoundly to us now.

[1] Marcia M. Matthews, *Henry Ossawa Tanner: American Artist* (University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 90.

[2] Judith Wilson, "Lifting "The Veil": Henry O. Tanner's The Banjo Lesson and The Thankful Poor," Contributions in Black Studies: vol. 9, article 4 (1992)

Additional resources:

Henry O. Tanner, exhibition subsite from the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Anna O. Marley, ed. *Henry Ossawa Tanner: Modern Spirit* (University of California Press: 2012).

Marcia M. Matthews, *Henry Ossawa Tanner: American Artist* (University of Chicago Press: 1995).

Kristin Schwain, *Signs of Grace: Religion and American Art in the Gilded Age* (Cornell University Press: 2007).

Will South, "A Missing Question Mark: The Unknown Henry Ossawa Tanner," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, vol. 8. issue 2 (Autumn 2009).

Judith Wilson, "Lifting 'The Veil': Henry O. Tanner's *The Banjo Lesson* and *The Thankful Poor*," *Contributions in Black Studies: A Journal of African and Afro-American Studies*, volume 9, article 4.

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2.2.2: Angels Appearing before the Shepherds

by FARISA KHALID

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188385



Figure 2.2.2.1: Henry Ossawa Tanner, *Angels Appearing before the Shepherds*, c. 1910, oil on canvas, 65.3 x 81.1 cm (Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.)

Henry Ossawa Tanner's evocative *Angels Appearing before the Shepherds* compels us to ask larger questions: what is the purpose of art that depicts religious subjects? Can the visual arts dramatize the Biblical word in a way that text cannot? Tanner grappled with these questions in a painting depicting a scene from the New Testament when angels appeared before the shepherds in Bethlehem to announce the birth of Jesus. In doing so, he followed in the footsteps of many artists—like those that crafted the stained glass windows at Reims Cathedral depicting Christian angels and saints or the craftsman that sculpted bronze statues of Hindu gods in 11th century India—who used the power of visual representation for religious messages.

Tanner, his formation and influences

Henry Ossawa Tanner was the first African-American painter to gain critical recognition outside of the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century. Trained at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts under the guidance of Thomas Eakins and then at the Académie Julian in Paris with Jean-Léon Gérôme, Tanner's remarkable talent and experience was highly unique for a man of his position and race in post-Civil War America.



Figure 2.2.2.2: Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Banjo Lesson*, 1893, oil on canvas, 124.5 × 90.2 cm (Hampton University Museum, Hampton, VA)

Though Tanner painted his most well-known works, *The Banjo Lesson* (1893) and *The Thankful Poor* (1894), in a more naturalistic style, he painted *Angels Appearing before the Shepherds* in a more abstract, Symbolist style. The painting reflects his lifelong fascination with Christianity and the stories of the Bible. Tanner's father, Benjamin Tucker Tanner, was a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh and a political activist for the abolition of slavery, and religion played an important role in Tanner's life and art.

Tanner completed this painting a few years after traveling to the Middle East in 1897. His first major biblical paintings, *Daniel in the Lions' Den* (1896) and *The Resurrection of Lazarus* (1897) (below), gained critical acclaim in the Paris Salon (the official art exhibition of the Académie des Beaux-Arts). The art critic Rodman Wanamaker funded a trip for Tanner to visit the Middle East claiming that any serious artist who wanted to paint biblical scenes with conviction should familiarize himself with the Holy Land. From the experience of his travels, Tanner evokes the various shades of blue in the twilight sky of Jerusalem along the hills of Bethlehem.



Figure **2.2.2.3**: Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Resurrection of Lazarus*, 1897, oil on canvas (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)



Figure **2.2.2.4**: Odilon Redon, *Jacob and the Angel*, c. 1907, oil on board, 47 x 41.6 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Tanner's painting of the angel and shepherds is a familiar subject for many artists like Rembrandt, Castiglione, and Thomas Cole. He depicts the pivotal scene of revelation, but renders it in a more lush and atmospheric tone than seen in the work of previous painters. Tanner's exposure to the work of the post-Impressionists and the Symbolists in Paris in the 1890s seems to influence his hazy melding of color and line. The work of Odilon Redon, in particular, is a strong influence in this depiction of the multi-formed angel and in the blending of cool muted colors to echo the tones of pastels.

Looking closely at the painting, we have to ask ourselves what was the artist thinking in choosing to paint this dramatic scene in blue. Why would Tanner depict such an important scene of spiritual revelation in shadowy tones and cool colors?

Color and tranquility



Figure **2.2.2.5**: Angels (detail), Henry Ossawa Tanner, *Angels Appearing before the Shepherds*, c. 1910, oil on canvas (Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.)

Around the time Tanner painted this, the work of the Symbolist painters was at the vanguard of new intellectual thought in art in Paris, a group which included Paul Gauguin, Odilon Redon, and Gustave Moreau. The Symbolists were influenced by the color theories of German artist Franz von Stück, who was in turn influenced by Johan Wolfgang von Goethe's important theory of color published in 1810. According to Goethe, colors, in addition to their inherent optical and scientific qualities, possessed psychological qualities as well. Stück explained that blue exuded mystery, eternity and calm. Through his modulated use of shades of blue and gray, Henry Tanner's painting exudes the tranquility of God's spiritual grace.

Beyond the colors, it is also important to consider our perspective as viewers into the painting. By situating our point-of-view from behind the angels, we look down at the distant figures of the shepherds below. Tanner enhances our sense of wonder by heightening the illusion of flight, the vastness of the landscape, and smallness of the shepherds within the aerial view.



Figure **2.2.2.6**: Shepherds (detail), Henry Ossawa Tanner, *Angels Appearing before the Shepherds*, c. 1910, oil on canvas (Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.)

Tanner's evolving style

This painting is emblematic of Tanner's evolving style in the middle part of his unique career. The critical acclaim of *The Banjo Lesson* made him wary that he might be restricted to painting tender scenes of rural life among black Americans, which would have been limiting to a man of his diverse interests and cosmopolitan background. In *Angels Appearing before the Shepherds*, we see

Tanner move from the more traditional, naturalistic style of *The Banjo Lesson*, inspired by the work of Vermeer and the light-infused paintings of the Dutch Golden Age, to the more visionary approach of the Symbolists.

The influence of the nineteenth-century Romantic painters is also a palpable influence. In the cool blue glow of light along the Judean hills, Tanner evokes the moon paintings of Caspar David Friedrich (below), whose work inspired other American artists like Childe Hassam and Frederic Remington. Like Friedrich, who brings his spectator into a hushed communion with his cloaked subjects and the otherwordly eminence of nature and God, in *Angels Appearing before the Shepherds*, Tanner represents a time, tone, and scene conducive to a mood of spiritual reflection. As the art historian Alexander Nemerov describes Friedrich's paintings, "the figures not only stand for the audience outside the canvas, but show us how to behave in the presence of moonlight—with awe and reverence."



Figure **2.2.2.7**: Caspar David Friedrich, *Moonrise over the Sea (Mondaufgang am Meer)*, 1822, oil on canvas, 71 x 55 cm (Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin)

To an early twentieth-century European and American audience, the grandeur of biblical imagery in art was embodied by the traditional style of Rembrandt, Rubens, and the painters of the Spanish Baroque. Henry Tanner hoped to redefine religious painting in the twentieth century and to prove that an American—a black American—could create incisive and moving religious art on par with the work of the European Masters. Tanner proved that the visual representation of the Bible could indeed continue to be fresh, modern and highly relevant and accessible to any contemporary age.

Additonal Resources:

This painting at the Smithsoinian American Art Museum

Anna O. Marley, ed., *Henry Ossawa Tanner: Modern Spirit* (University of California Press, 2012).

Kristin Schwain, *Signs of Grace: Religion and American Art in the Gilded Age* (Cornell University Press, 2008)

Alexander Nemerov, "Burning Daylight: Remington, Electricity, and Flash Photography," Nancy Anderson, ed., *Frederic Remington: The Color of Night* (Washington, D.C., The National Gallery of Art, 2003).

John Gage, *Color and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism* (University of California Press, 1999).

Marcia Matthews, *Henry Ossawa Tanner: American Artist* (University of Chicago Press, 1969).

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2.2.3: The Good Shepherd

by DR. MINDY BESAW, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART and DR. BETH HARRIS

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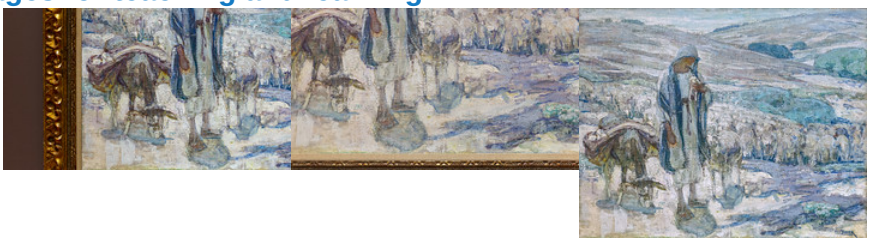


Video **2.2.3.1**: Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Good Shepherd*, 1917, oil on canvas, 25-1/2 x 32 inches (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art)

Additional resources

This work at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

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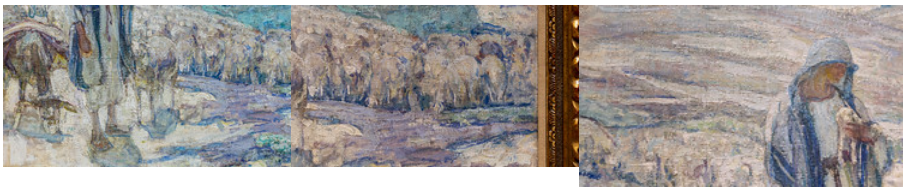
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SECTION OVERVIEW

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2.3.1: The Ashcan School, an introduction

by FARISA KHALID

Page ID
188388



Figure **2.3.1.1**: George Wesley Bellows, *New York*, 1911, oil on canvas, 42 x 60″ / 106.7 x 152.4 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)

Populist, expansive, and committed to documentary realism

In the early part of the twentieth century, a maverick group of painters in New York City set the foundation for depicting the sheer variety and scale of life in the changing, surging metropolis. Their name, like that of the Impressionists, was initially a term of derision branded by the prevailing critics, though it ultimately became their banner of pride. The painters of the Ashcan School wanted to create a new kind of art rooted in the raw, visceral day-to-day reality of the city—not the New York that was depicted by the popular painters of the time, the American Impressionists William Merritt Chase and Childe Hassam—the decidedly posh, haute bourgeoisie New York of Park Avenue, Central Park, and Washington Square—but the New York of the Lower East Side and the Bowery, of newly arrived immigrants, dockworkers, nightclub performers, saloonkeepers, boxers, and the average worker trying to make ends meet while squeezing whatever small pleasure there was to be had out of life.



Figure **2.3.1.2**: George Bellows, *Stag at Sharkey's*, 1909, oil on canvas, 36.2 x 48.3″ / 92 x 122.6 cm (Cleveland Museum of Art)

Their art was populist, expansive, and committed to a documentary realism that was far-reaching and ahead of its time. The poetry of Walt Whitman, the prose of Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser, the plays of Eugene O'Neill, and the music of ragtime and Tin Pan Alley comprised their emotional and spiritual soundtrack. The painting above by George Bellows of Madison Square at the intersection of Broadway and Twenty-third Street echoes the panorama and rhythms of Whitman's 1888 poem, "Mannahatta":

> ***"I WAS asking for something specific and perfect for my city,***
> ***Whereupon, lo! upsprang the aboriginal name!***

I see that the word of my city is that word up there,
Because I see that word nested in nests of water-bays, superb, with
tall and wonderful spires…

Numberless crowded streets—high growths of iron, slender, strong,
light, splendidly uprising toward clear skies…

Immigrants arriving, fifteen or twenty thousand in a week;
The carts hauling goods—the manly race of drivers of horses—the brown-faced
sailors;
The summer air, the bright sun shining, and the sailing clouds aloft;
The winter snows, the sleigh-bells—the broken ice in the river,
passing along, up or down, with the flood tide or ebb-tide…

The mechanics of the city, the masters, well-form'd, beautiful-faced,
looking you straight in the eyes;
Trottoirs throng'd—vehicles—Broadway—the women—the shops and
shows,
A million people—manners free and superb—open voices—hospitality—
the most courageous and friendly young men;

The free city! no slaves! no owners of slaves!
The beautiful city, the city of hurried and sparkling waters! the
city of spires and masts!
The city nested in bays! my city!"

The sparkling subject of Whitman's poem—the expanse of city landscape and life in all its diversity, color, and noise—is at the core of what the Ashcan School painters depicted in much of their work. They wanted to show New York City as it evolved from a sleepy Dutch island into the vital cultural capital of America.

Too many pictures of ashcans?

The Ashcan School formed out of an urge to rebel against the dogmatic criteria of popular painting of the time, namely American Impressionism and academic realism. In the spring of 1907, the Philadelphia-trained painter Robert Henri rallied his friends, John Sloan, Everett Shin, Arthur Davies, Ernest Lawson, Maurice Prendergast, William Glackens, and George Luks when Luks' painting, *Man with Dyed Mustachios*, was rejected by the conservative National Academy for their Spring Exhibition.



Figure **2.3.1.3**: George Luks, *Allen Street*, c. 1905, oil on canvas. 32 x 45 in. / 81.3 × 114.3 cm (Hunter Museum of American Art, Chattanooga, TN)

Working together with the prominent Fifth Avenue dealer, William Macbeth, the group set up their first major exhibition at The Macbeth Gallery in February 1908 called Eight American Painters, which later became known simply as "The Eight." Though he did not participate in the show, the other Ohio-born painter in the group, George Bellows, also joined the Ashcan artists in creating iconic paintings of the city in all its gritty splendor. Their work struck a nerve among emerging collectors: Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney purchased four paintings from the show that would become the basis for the permanent collection of her Whitney Museum of American Art.



Figure **2.3.1.4**: John Sloan, *Chinese Restaurant*, 1909, oil on canvas, 26 x 32 1/4″ / 66 x 81.9 cm (Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester)

It was eight years later, however, in 1916, that the group got their evocative name. John Sloan, Robert Henri, and George Bellows were also illustrators for the well-known socialist magazine, *The Masses*, and one of their staff members voiced a complaint that there were too many "pictures of ashcans and girls hitching up their skirts on Horatio Street." The artists were amused and flattered, and the name stuck.

Painting true to life

In the 1920s, John Sloan spoke of how the unofficial leader of the group was Robert Henri, a distant cousin of Mary Cassatt's and the son of a professional gambler and real estate developer who once shot a man to death over a land dispute:

> ***It was really Henri's direction that made us paint at all, and paint the life around us. The American genre painters Winslow Homer, Eastman Johnson, and William Sidney Mount had painted life around them, but we thought their work was too tight and finished. There were many other artists drawing for newspapers in Chicago, San***

> ***Francisco…but they did not turn to painting. I feel certain that the reason our group in Philadelphia became painters is due to Henri.*** [1]

Painting true to life was the key to the Ashcan School's visual distinction in subject matter and fame. Like the artists of nineteenth century France, Honoré Daumier, Édouard Manet, and Gustave Courbet, the Ashcan painters captured those fleeting scenes of everyday life among the middle and lower classes at work and at leisure.



Figure **2.3.1.5**: William J. Glackens, *Hammerstein's Roof Garden*, c. 1901, oil on canvas. 30 x 25″ / 76.2 x 63.5 cm (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York)

Paintings like William Glackens' *Hammerstein's Roof Garden (left)*, John Sloan's *Chinese Restaurant* (above), and George Bellows' *Stag at Sharkey's* (above), show the sheer variety of entertainment that the city had to offer with people reveling in the moment regardless of propriety and decorum. There is a documentary feel and intense presentness to the scenes depicted, from the woman feeding the cat in the John Sloan painting to the man with the cigar turning his face towards us in the George Bellows, we get an immediate sense of the vitality and evanescence of a society in transition, a newly emergent urban middle class with enough money and time for the short transitory pleasures of the city.

There were also paintings of longshoremen, laundresses, bartenders, and waitresses, all a part of a dynamic working class. The influx of immigration to America from Europe filled the workforce in cities, driving down demand and allowing employers to reduce wages. Many people became part of what was known as "the working poor," living payday-to-payday. The Danish-American photographer Jacob Riis exposed the staggering poverty and squalor of the Lower East Side's residents in his groundbreaking series, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890).



Figure **2.3.1.6**: George Bellows, *Men of the Docks*, 1912, oil on canvas (National Gallery of Art, London)

The Ashcan painters were generally not as direct and confrontational as Riis in his "muckraking" approach to social reform. They were not reformers, or even explicitly political, aside from illustrating for *The Masses* and frequenting occasional Socialist salons, which was the fashion among intellectuals in New York City at the time. The artists of the Ashcan School would not adopt political doctrine as did some contemporaneous movements in Europe, such as the Constructivists, who were decidedly more political and utopian in its aims. Rather, the Ashcan painters wanted to depict the American worker in a straightforward manner devoid of cant and propaganda: revealing the simplicity and beauty of the American at work and at play.



Figure **2.3.1.7**: Robert Henri, *Cumulus Clouds, East River*, 1901-1902, ol on canvas, 25 3/4 x 32″ / 65.4 x 81.3 cm. (Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.)

It's important to remember the painters of the Ashcan School didn't limit themselves to scenes of the city and its people but also painted a variety of pastoral landscapes. John Sloan and Robert Henri, who both had a classical training under Thomas Anschutz at The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, felt that the role of the American painter of the twentieth century was not confined to a specific social agenda but involved an expansive application of techniques and methods in a variety of genres.

Robert Henri's *Cumulus Clouds, East River* (above) depicting a sunset and a swirling mass of thick coral cloud along the docks of Upper New York Bay, has echoes of the seascapes of nineteenth-century Romanticism, particularly those of J.M.W. Turner. John Sloan's *Sunflowers at Rocky Neck* (below) painted along the coast of Gloucester, Massachusetts, was based in part on the swirling vibrancy of Vincent van Gogh's *Sunflowers* (1888), which Sloan saw at the Armory Show of 1913 in New York along with other works of European Post-Impressionism and modernist painting.



Figure 2.3.1.8: John Sloan, *Sunflowers at Rocky Neck*, 1914, oil on canvas (Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, MA)

Sloan along with Henri had helped organize The Armory Show, which was a turning point for modern art in America. The public's exposure to avant-garde work by artists like Marcel Duchamp, Paul Cézanne, Georges Braque, and Henri Matisse, among others, set the tone for the kind of art that Americans thought they should be making if they wanted to keep up with the tide of modernism across the world—art that was startlingly free of academic expectations of realism and conservative thought.

Food for starving souls

Though the Armory Show eventually helped propagate a new style of modern painting exemplified by artists like Stuart Davis (a student of Henri's), Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove, and Georgia O'Keefe, the impact of the Ashcan School was far-reaching in American figurative painting for much of the twentieth century. The work of Edward Hopper (another of Henri's famous pupils) owes a great deal to the subject matter and style of the Ashcan painters in terms of its propensity for human tableaus, theatricality, and detailed intimacy. Contemporaries of Hopper, Charles Burchfield and George Ault, were also inspired by the pioneering work of the Ashcan School, whose stylistic influence is palpable in their city scenes and melancholy vistas.

The lasting legacy of the Ashcan School is that for the first time in the twentieth century, American painting took on a populist commitment dedicated to depicting the reality of life in a changing, diverse, cosmopolitan society. Though the artists themselves never professed to be agents of social change they were bound together by a shared interest in providing meaningful and enjoyable artwork for a large audience: art for everyone and anyone. Writing in the 1930s, in his autobiography, John Sloan described the importance of art in everyday life as a fundamental need that is essential to one's spiritual survival:

> ***They say that art is a luxury because of the depression. But I really believe this is the time when people should turn to the artists. Not the artist whose work is selling for thousands, but the interesting work of men who sell their things for reasonable figures. I believe the work of artists, poets, musicians, is a kind of food for starving souls, as necessary as food for the body. Why should we worry about feeding bodies if they have starving souls? That may sound churchy but I don't mean it so. Select your own soul-food in the way of art.***[2]

What Sloan is espousing might seem naïve to some, but as a man who came of age in that period of American history between the end of The Civil War and through World War I, the Roaring Twenties, and the Great Depression, prosperity and poverty were two sides of a swiftly spinning coin in collective fortunes. Art had the ability to provide enlightenment, education, and spiritual fulfillment to an enormous audience, and the painters of the Ashcan School were among the first to expand its changing role in American life.

1. As quoted in Rebecca Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (University of California Press: Los Angeles, 2006), p. 25.

2. As quoted in *John Sloan on Drawing and Painting: The Gist of Art* (Dover Publications: New York, 2010), p. 26.

Additional resources:

The Ashcan School on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Bernard Perlman, *Painters of the Ashcan School: The Immortal Eight* (Dover Publications: New York, 2012).

Rebecca Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (University of California Press: Los Angeles, 2006).

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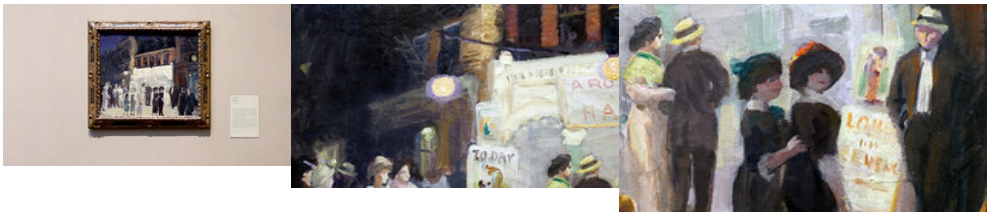
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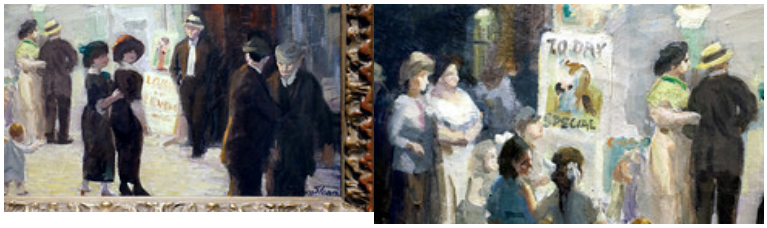
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2.3.2: George Luks, Hester Street

by MARGARITA KARASOULAS, ASSISTANT CURATOR OF AMERICAN ART, BROOKLYN MUSEUM and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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188389



Video **2.3.2.1**: George Benjamin Luks, *Street Scene (Hester Street)*, 1905, oil on canvas, 65.5 x 91.1 cm (Brooklyn Museum, 40.339, Dick S. Ramsay Fund) Speakers: Dr. Margarita Karasoulas, Assistant Curator of American Art, Brooklyn Museum and Dr. Steven Zucker

Additional Resources

This painting at the Brooklyn Museum

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SECTION OVERVIEW

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2.3.3.1: Pennsylvania Station Excavation

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2.3.3.1: Pennsylvania Station Excavation

by MARGARITA KARASOULAS, ASSISTANT CURATOR OF AMERICAN ART, BROOKLYN MUSEUM and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

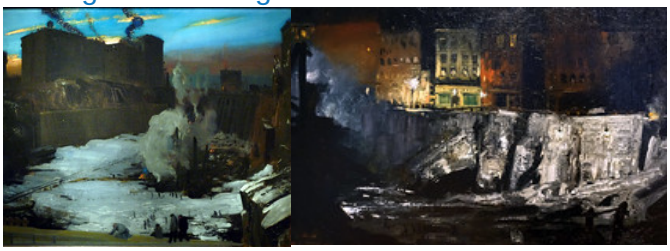
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Video **2.3.3.1.1**: George Bellows, *Pennsylvania Station Excavation*, c. 1907–08, oil on canvas, 79.2 x 97.1 cm (Brooklyn Museum), a Seeing America video Speakers: Dr. Margarita Karasoulas, Assistant Curator, American Art, Brooklyn Museum and Dr. Steven Zucker

Additional resources

This painting at the Brooklyn Museum

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2.3.3.2: Both Members of This Club

by ABBY R. ERON

Page ID
188392



Figure **2.3.3.2.1**: George Bellows, *Both Members of This Club*, 1909, oil on canvas, 115 x 160.5 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.)

In the early twentieth century, the artist George Bellows aspired to represent the rough edges and dark aspects of New York City. In his early twenties, Bellows moved to the city from Ohio, where he had attended the Ohio State University and played baseball and basketball. He studied with Robert Henri at the New York School of Art and became part of an informal group of American artists that came to be called the “Ashcan School” due to the painters’ gritty brand of realism and the apparent muddiness of their color palettes. Henri, who led the group, encouraged his associates, a number of whom had been illustrators in Philadelphia, to sketch and paint from real life. Typical subjects for Henri, Bellows, and their Ashcan brethren included rough-and-tumble youths, working class people, immigrant communities, and the hubbub of the urban street. While still in his twenties, Bellows painted *Both Members of This Club* (1909), one of his most recognizable images.

Style, composition, and color

In the painting, two men, one white and the other black, on the left and right respectively, engage one another in a prizefighting (boxing for cash prize) ring. The painting’s style reinforces its subject matter. Bellows’ brushstrokes underscore the violence, physicality and vigorous action of the match. Bellows applied paint with a quickness and sketchiness that echoes the energetic movement of the athletes and the flickering of low light as it bounces across the faces of the rowdy, restless audience. The forms, while distinct, are not delicately rendered, but instead are roughly described. Slashes of paint are particularly noticeable in the highlights along the black boxer’s back and side. They are also apparent in the streaks of red, evoking blood, by the elbow of the white boxer, along his ribs and stomach, and across his neck and chin.



Figure 2.3.3.2.2: (Boxers (detail), *Both Members of This Club*, 1909, oil on canvas, 115 x 160.5 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.)

The composition is approximately triangular with the apex marked by the collision of the boxers' upraised fists. The fighter on the right lunges forward, gaining momentum by pushing off an extended and unnaturally attenuated right leg, into the left fighter, whose right knee seems ready to buckle beneath him. Several layers of the crowd define the base of this compositional triangle.

Bellows mostly limited the colors in this painting to shades of blue-gray, brown, and cream, but accentuated this tonal palette with touches of white, red, orange, and pink, plus the green of the left boxer's trunks. Bellows illuminated the composition to spotlight the action, thus associating the ring with a theater stage. The obscure darkness of the background largely precludes any perception of recession into space, and also creates the feeling of a dangerous and secretive atmosphere. Indeed, the title *Both Members of This Club* refers to the dubious practice of turning boxers into temporary sports club members in order to skirt a New York state law that prohibited public prizefighting. For a time, Bellows lived across the street from Sharkey Athletic Club (one institution that took part in this subterfuge), where he could readily observe men fighting.

Race and boxing

Bellows keyed in to the racial dynamics of his era by pitting a black fighter against a white fighter. He showed *Both Members of This Club* at the Exhibition of Independent Artists in 1910, the year of a much-anticipated fight between heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson and his challenger Jim Jeffries. The media billed Jeffries as the latest in a series of "great white hopes" who aspired to take the coveted heavyweight title away from Johnson, the African-American man who had held it since 1908. Racial animosity dramatized coverage of the fight, a contest in which Johnson ultimately proved victorious. Though the matchup in *Both Members of This Club* cannot be definitively assigned to any particular boxing bout, race is thematically and compositionally central in Bellows' scene. The painting's title registers as darkly satirical when we realize that, during this period of segregation, fighting—especially illicit prizefighting at a place such as Sharkey's—was one of the few forums in which membership could be conferred equally and close interracial interaction condoned.[1]

The crowd and the city

Bellows' painting also reflects a contemporary interest in crowd psychology (the study of how individuals behave differently as part of a crowd as well as the behavior of the crowd itself). Bellows famously claimed that "the atmosphere around the fighters is a lot more immoral than the fighters themselves." In *Both Members of This Club*, Bellows exaggerated the faces of the onlookers. They grimace, shout, and stare bug-eyed at the drama before and above them. Particularly startling is the toothy grin of a spectator with a long face who can be spotted just to the right of the black boxer's foreshortened left foot. Bellows' incisive depiction of the match's audience reveals the influence of nineteenth-century French artist and caricaturist Honoré Daumier, but it also points to societal concerns of Bellows' day.



Figure **2.3.3.2.3**: Crowd (detail), *Both Members of This Club*, 1909, oil on canvas, 115 x 160.5 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)

Bellows painted this canvas in 1909, the year after the publication of what are often considered the first two social psychology textbooks. The books' authors, sociologist Edward Alsworth Ross and psychologist William McDougall, both explored crowd psychology. Ross wrote about the dissolution of individual identity within a crowd, and the crowd's increased susceptibility to waves of emotion over logical reasoning. Similarly, McDougall theorized that being part of a crowd was a definitive condition of human recreation, stemming from what he referred to as the "gregarious impulse." He also argued that this "gregarious impulse" was evidenced by the undeniable appeal of cities, which continued to attract residents (such as Bellows himself) despite the high cost of living, pollution, congestion, and risk for disease.[2]

Urban entertainments



Figure **2.3.3.2.4**: Everett Shin, *The White Ballet*, 1904, oil on canvas, 74.9 x 93.3 cm (Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.)

Critics considered Bellows to be distinctly American because he never studied abroad in Europe, as so many other American artists at the time did. Yet Bellows' work was not insular. His boxing pictures relate to images that fellow Ashcan artist Everett Shinn created of the theater. Shinn was in turn deeply influenced by the work of French Realist and Impressionist Edgar Degas. However, comparison with Shinn and Degas highlights what distinguishes *Both Members of This Club*. Rather than depicting the polite urban recreation of theater attendance, as in Shinn's *The White Ballet* from 1904, Bellows blatantly exposed the city's dingy and nearly illegal underside, featuring an all-male space where brutality and head-to-head conflict replaced the glamour and coordination of ballet performance.

Part of the crowd?



Figure **2.3.3.2.5**: George Bellows, *Stag at Sharkey's*, 1909, oil on canvas, 110 x 140.5 cm (Cleveland Museum of Art)

Both Members of this Club is one of three boxing paintings Bellows made in the first decade of the twentieth century. As in the other two, *Club Night* (1907) and *Stag at Sharkey's* (1909), *Both Members of This Club* places its viewers in an ambivalent position. We are implicated as part of the bloodthirsty crowd directly behind the heads of the front row spectators, while simultaneously separated from this crowd as visitors in the hushed and refined space of an art gallery.

1. Marianne Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 104-113.

2. Arie W. Kruglanski and Wolfgang Stroebe, "The Making of Social Psychology," in *Handbook of the History of Social Psychology*, ed. Arie W. Kruglanski and Wolfgang Stroebe (New York: Psychology Press, 2012), p. 3; Edward Alsworth Ross, Social *Psychology: An Outline and Sourcebook* (New York: MacMillan, 1908), pp. 45-46; and William McDougall, *An Introduction to Social Psychology*, 2nd ed. (Boston: John W. Luce, 1909), pp. 86, 297.

Additional Resources:

This painting at the National Gallery of Art

The Aschcan School at the Timeline of Art History (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

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2.3.3.3: Return of the Useless

by DR. JENNIFER PADGETT, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
188393



Video **2.3.3.3.1**: George Bellows, *Return of the Useless*, 1918, oil on canvas, 149.9 x 167.6 cm (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art), a Seeing America video Speakers: Dr. Jen Padgett, Associate Curator, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and Dr. Steven Zucker

Additional resources

This painting at The Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art
The Bryce Report at the British Library

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2.3.4: John Sloan, Movies

by DR. LAWRENCE W. NICHOLS, TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
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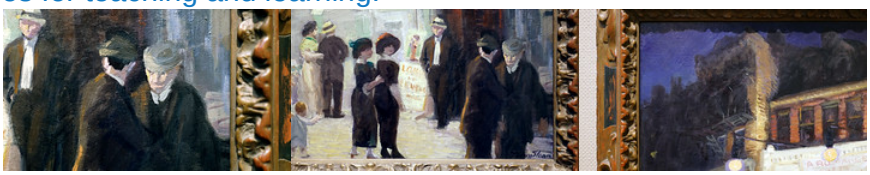


Video **2.3.4.1**: John Sloan, *Movies*, 1913, oil on canvas, 50.3 61 cm (Toledo Museum of Art)

Additional resources

This painting at the museum

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.4: 291

This New York gallery led by Alfred Stieglitz was at the forefront of modernist painting and photography in the United States.

1908 - 1917

2.4.1: 291—Little Galleries of the Photo Secession

2.4.2: Alfred Stieglitz, The Steerage

2.4.3: Florine Stettheimer, Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz

2.4.4: Marsden Hartley, Portrait of a German Officer

2.4.5: Joseph Stella, The Voice of the City of New York Interpreted

2.4.6: Charles Demuth, I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold

2.4.7: Georgia O'Keeffe

- 2.4.7.1: Radiator Building—Night, New York
- 2.4.7.2: The Lawrence Tree

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2.4.1: 291—Little Galleries of the Photo Secession

by DR. STEPHANIE CHADWICK

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Figure 2.4.1.1: Alfred Stieglitz, “Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession,” image from *Camera Work*, No. 14 (April 1906) (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Alfred Stieglitz Collection)

291 Fifth Avenue

If you walked into the “Little Galleries of the Photo Secession” at 291 Fifth Avenue run by New York photographer Alfred Stieglitz and his devotees between 1905–1917, you would likely have been surprised. You might have seen an exhibition of avant-garde photography or perhaps an exhibition of bizarre Cubist paintings. The latter, especially, would have been an unusual sight.

At the time, New York City was not yet well known as an artistic center. As a result, many artists and institutions in New York still looked to European cities—particularly Paris—as artistic and cultural beacons. Although Modernism was gaining ground in Europe, it held little appeal to American audiences outside of small artistic circles. Stieglitz’s 291 gallery, which exhibited modern European painting as well as the latest art photography, helped to change all of that.

Stieglitz and the art of photography

Stieglitz had become a well known photographer—perhaps the most renowned photographer in the United States—a result of his advocacy for the relatively new medium, forming camera clubs (such as the Photo Secession, in 1902), and publishing photography journals. Photography had been used to create art since its invention in the mid-nineteenth century, but it was a relative late comer in comparison to easel painting and printmaking, which had been the preferred artistic media for two-dimensional work since the end of the Renaissance.

Because photographs were created using a mechanical device (an analog camera) rather than by the artist’s hand, many artists and critics debated whether it belonged within the realm of art exhibited in galleries and museums.



Figure **2.4.1.2**: Advertisement for the Kodak camera, 1889

Further complicating photography's claims to art status was the invention in 1888 by the Eastman Kodak Company of the first portable hand-held camera and the advertising slogan "you press the button, we do the rest," making the ability to take pictures affordable and widely available to ordinary people for the first time. With photography in the hands of the masses as well as commercial studios concerned primarily with portraits, advertisements, and other practical matters, Stieglitz and fellow art photographers felt compelled to differentiate their photography from the production of commercial studios and the common snapshots of everyday life.



Figure **2.4.1.3**: Alfred Stieglitz, [The Street – Design for a Poster], 1896, photogravure, 30.6 × 23.3 cm (The J. Paul Getty Museum)



Figure **2.4.1.4**:Paul Strand, *Photograph – New York [Abstraction, Porch Shadows]*, negative 1916; printed spring 1917, photogravure, 24.2 × 16.7 cm (The J. Paul Getty Museum)

Pictorialism, and later, modern life

Early in his career, Stieglitz championed a photographic style known as Pictorialism, which sought to achieve artistic, even painterly, effects that included soft focus and altering of the photograph using cropping or marking the prints with chemicals. Pictorialist photographers also preferred idealized imagery over images of modern life. Over time, however, Stieglitz shifted his approach and helped to cultivate a photographic aesthetic grounded in the idea of "straight photography." This meant renouncing the pictorialist alteration of photographs (a practice conceived of as being too rooted in nineteenth-century practices), in favor of more sharply focused images that featured modern forms and artistically emphasized the **formal elements** of the image. "Straight photographers" heralded in the era of the modern photographic image. In fact, the younger photographer, Paul Strand, instigated a decidedly modernist aesthetic in photography after seeing a Cubist exhibition at 291.



Figure **2.4.1.5**: Alfred Stieglitz, *The Steerage*, 1907, photogravure, 33.5cm x 26.4cm (LACMA)

The modern age, the artistic avant-garde, and “Little Gallery” known as 291

The painter and photographer Edward Steichen and other notable artists were instrumental in developing the program of exhibitions at 291, which first highlighted Photo Secessionist photographers and then went on to feature exhibitions by prominent European artists including Henri Matisse, Paul Cézanne, and the Cubist works of Pablo Picasso that would influence artists across media around the world. But 291 also exhibited the work of emerging American artists whose paintings and photographs explored modernity (modern life as impacted by new industrial, social, and political developments) or Modernism (the radically different artistic sensibilities avant-garde artists thought best represented modern experiences).



Figure **2.4.1.6**: Georgia O'Keeffe, *Yellow Calla*, 1926, oil on fiberboard, 22.9 x 32.4 cm (Smithsonian American Art Museum)

One of the American Modernists exhibiting at 291 was Georgia O'Keefe, whose abstracted urban and organic forms captivated Stieglitz and with whom he became romantically involved. The exhibitions of innovative photographs, paintings, and sculptures at 291 made it the preeminent venue for modern art in the United States in the early twentieth century.



Figure **2.4.1.7**:Paul Strand, *From the El*, 1915, platinum print, 33.6 x 25.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) © Aperture Foundation Inc., Paul Strand Archive.

The Modern Metropolis

The modern skyscrapers being built in New York appealed to Stieglitz, and he was known to roam the streets of the city looking to capture its essence in his photographs. The thriving metropolis also intrigued Strand, whose photographs of the city conveyed the new modernist aesthetic. New York attracted artists from Europe as well, including Francis Picabia, a French modernist who spearheaded the New York iteration of the Dada movement (artists associated with Dada responded to the horrors of WWI by creating works that featured chance, humor, and absurdity).

Picabia had developed a rapport with Stieglitz and the artists at 291 when he visited New York for the first large-scale exhibition of modern art at the Armory Show in 1913. When he returned to New York to escape serving in WWI he spent time helping out at 291, where artists also gathered for lively discussions. Picabia experimented with a new machine aesthetic and with the idea of the photograph as a work of mechanical reproduction that would change art—including painting—forever.

While at 291, Picabia made portraits called “Mechanomorphs” that portrayed the artists, photographers, and critics there as hybrid machines—depicting Stieglitz as an intriguing camera-like device. Such works also represented the wide array of practices supported by 291 and the idea that the gallery fostered the transmission of European Cubism and Collage (practices of cutting and rearranging images from visual culture) to artists in the United States.

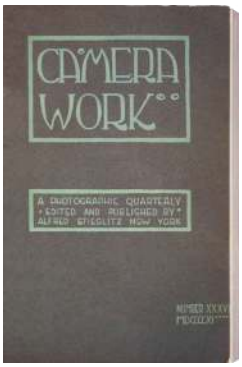


Figure **2.4.1.8**:*Camera Work*: 36 (1911)

Publishing, circulation, and art in visual culture

One of the activities at 291 that helped promote modern painting and photography was publishing. Stieglitz and his friend Steichen began publishing the journal *Camera Work* in 1903 and continued this project until 1917. During that time the journal featured illustrious art photographs and articles about photography as well as features on modern art from Europe.

The publishing efforts at 291 served as an important conduit for modern art in the United States (even for those viewers who did not pay a visit to the gallery). From 1915–1916 Stieglitz and companions at 291 published a journal of the same name. The short-lived journal *291* featured even more radically modern art—so radical in fact that few readers were interested.



Figure **2.4.1.9**:Francis Picabia, *Ici, c’est ici Stieglitz, foi et amour,* cover of *291*, No. 1 (1915)

Picabia’s bizarre mechanical portrait of Stieglitz (see the Smarthistory essay “Ideal”) was featured on the cover of a 1915 edition of the journal but represented another conundrum. The tendencies of some contributing artists, such as Picabia, to embrace the newly emerging Dada movement made the publication too enigmatic for general audiences and, it is said, even to Stieglitz himself.

Despite the fact that this journal seemed relevant to only a small group of artists in early twentieth-century New York, its transnational contributions and cutting-edge content remain historically significant. Like the gallery at 291, the journal’s function as a conduit for modernism in the United States has earned it a prominent place in art history.

Additional resources

Art Institute of Chicago, “Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession/291”

Eastman Museum,“From the Camera Obscura to the Revolutionary Kodak”

Beaumont Newhall, *Photography: Essays and Images* (Museum of Modern Art, New York 1980)

John Pultz, "Cubism and American Photography," *Aperture*, no. 89 (1982), pp. 48-61

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2.4.2: Alfred Stieglitz, The Steerage

by DR. KRIS BELDEN-ADAMS

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188397



Video **2.4.2.1**: Alfred Stieglitz, *The Steerage*, 1907, photograph, 33.34 x 26.51 cm (includes black border), Museum Library Purchase, 1965 (LACMA M.65.76.1) A conversation with Eve Schillo, Assistant Curator, Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Beth Harris



Figure **2.4.2.2**: Alfred Stieglitz, *The Steerage*, 1907, photogravure, 33.5cm x 26.4cm , (J. Paul Getty Museum)

First class

After his 8-year-old daughter Kitty finished the school year and he closed his Fifth Avenue art gallery for the summer, Alfred Stieglitz gathered her, his wife Emmeline, and Kitty's governess for their second excursion to Europe as a family. The Stieglitzes departed for Paris on May 14, 1907, aboard the first-class quarters of the fashionable ship Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Although Emmeline looked forward to shopping in Paris and to visiting her relatives in Germany, Stieglitz was anything but enthusiastic about the trip. His marriage to status-conscious Emmeline had become particularly stressful amid rumors about his possible affair with the tarot-card illustrator/artist Pamela Coleman Smith. In addition, Stieglitz felt out of place in the company of his fellow upper-class passengers. But it was precisely this discomfort among his peers that prompted him to take a photograph that would become one of the most important in the history of photography. In his 1942 account "How *The Steerage* Happened," Stieglitz recalls:

> ***How I hated the atmosphere of the first class on that ship. One couldn't escape the 'nouveau riches.' […]***
>
> ***On the third day out I finally couldn't stand it any longer. I had to get away from that company. I went as far forward on the deck as I could […]***
>
> ***As I came to the end of the desk [sic] I stood alone, looking down. There were men and women and children on the lower deck of the steerage. There was a narrow stairway leading up to the upper deck of the steerage, a small deck at the bow of the steamer.***
>
> ***To the left was an inclining funnel and from the upper steerage deck there was fastened a gangway bridge which was glistening in its freshly painted state. It was rather long, white, and during the trip remained untouched by anyone.***
>
> ***On the upper deck, looking over the railing, there was a young man with a straw hat. The shape of the hat was round. He was watching the men and women and children on the lower steerage deck. Only men were on the upper deck. The whole scene fascinated me. I longed to escape from my surroundings and join these people.***

In this essay, written 35 years after he took the photograph, Stieglitz describes how *The Steerage* encapsulated his career's mission to elevate photography to the status of fine art by engaging the same dialogues around abstraction that preoccupied European avant-garde painters:

> ***A round straw hat, the funnel leading out, the stairway leaning right, the white drawbridge with its railings made of circular chains – white suspenders crossing on the back of a man in the steerage below, round shapes of iron machinery, a mast cutting into the sky, making a triangular shape. I stood spellbound for a while, looking and looking. Could I photograph what I felt, looking and looking and still looking? I saw shapes related to each other. I saw a picture of shapes and underlying that the feeling I had about life. […] Spontaneously I raced to the main stairway of the steamer, chased down to my cabin, got my Graflex, raced back again all out of breath, wondering whether the man with the straw hat had moved or not. If he had, the picture I had seen would no longer be. The relationship of shapes as I wanted them would have been disturbed and the picture lost.***
>
> ***But there was the man with the straw hat. He hadn't moved. The man with the crossed white suspenders showing his back, he too, talking to a man, hadn't moved. And the woman with a child on her lap, sitting on the floor, hadn't moved. Seemingly, no one had changed position.***
>
> ***[…It] would be a picture based on related shapes and on the deepest human feeling, a step in my own evolution, a spontaneous discovery.***

Hindsight

With this account, Stieglitz argues with the benefit of more than three decades of hindsight that *The Steerage* suggests that photographs have more than just a "documentary" voice that speaks to the truth-to-appearance of subjects in a field of space within narrowly defined slice of time. Rather, *The Steerage* calls for a more complex, layered view of photography's essence that can accommodate and convey abstraction. (Indeed, later photographers Minor White and Aaron Siskind would engage this project further in direct dialogue with the Abstract Expressionist painting.)

Stieglitz is often criticized for overlooking the subjects of his photograph in this essay, which has become the account by which the photograph is discussed in our histories. But in his account for *The Steerage*, Stieglitz also calls attention to one of the contradictions of photography: its ability to provide more than just an abstract interpretation, too. *The Steerage* is not only about the "significant form" of shapes, forms and textures, but it also conveys a message about its subjects, immigrants who were rejected at Ellis Island, or who were returning to their old country to see relatives and perhaps to encourage others to return to the United States with them.

Ghastly conditions

As a reader of mass-marketed magazines, Stieglitz would have been familiar with the debates about immigration reform and the ghastly conditions to which passengers in steerage were subjected. Stieglitz's father had come to America in 1849, during a historic migration of 1,120,000 Germans to the United States between 1845 and 1855. His father became a wool trader and was so successful that he retired by age 48. By all accounts, Stieglitz's father exemplified the "American dream" that was just beyond the grasp of many of the subjects of *The Steerage*.

Moreover, investigative reporter Kellogg Durland traveled undercover as steerage in 1906 and wrote of it: "I can, and did, more than once, eat my plate of macaroni after I had picked out the worms, the water bugs, and on one occasion, a hairpin. But why should these things ever be found in the food served to passengers who are paying $36.00 for their passage?"

Still, Stieglitz was conflicted about the issue of immigration. While he was sympathetic to the plight of aspiring new arrivals, Stieglitz was opposed to admitting the uneducated and marginal to the United States of America—despite his claims of sentiment for the downtrodden. Perhaps this may explain his preference to avoid addressing the subject of *The Steerage*, and to see in this photograph not a political statement, but a place for arguing the value of photography as a fine art.

Additional Resources:

This photograph at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

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2.4.3: Florine Stettheimer, Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz

by **DR. JENNIFER PADGETT, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID
188398



Video **2.4.3.1**: Florine Stettheimer, *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz*, 1928, oil on canvas, 96.5 x 66.7 cm (Fisk University and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art)

Additional resources

This work at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.

Learn more about Stieglitz and the 291 galleries.

Watch a video and read about Stieglitz's photograph *The Steerage*.

Learn about the artists referenced in this portrait—**Marsden Hartley**, **Charles Demuth**, and **Georgia O'Keeffe**.

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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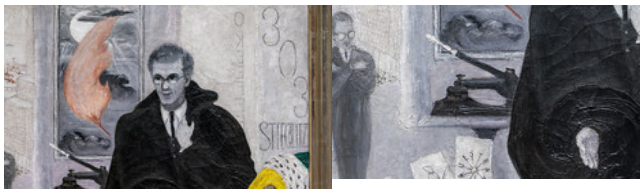
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- **2.3: Ancient Egypt** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

2.4.4: Marsden Hartley, Portrait of a German Officer

by DR. BRYAN ZYGMONT

Page ID
188399



Figure **2.4.4.1**: Marsden Hartley, *Portrait of a German Officer*, 1914, oil on canvas, 173.4 x 105.1 cm (Alfred Stieglitz Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

A different kind of portrait

I once hired a photographer to take my picture for a publication. The resulting portrait accurately shows what I looked like on a morning in January 2013: wavy brown hair with a receding hairline; narrow, pale blue eyes aided by black-rimmed spectacles; a smile with a thin upper lip; broad nose; clean-shaven face. It even shows what I wore that day: dark jeans, light blue shirt, brown tweed blazer. This image is an accurate representation of my appearance, but does it tell you anything about *who* I am? Would it be possible for a different kind of portrait do something else—could it instead depict aspects of my professional or personal *identity* rather than simply showing how I *appear*? If a painter filled a canvas with things that symbolize my life, could that image be just as meaningful an expression of who I am? This kind of "allegorical" or symbolic portrait was exactly what Marsden Hartley achieved in his 1914 *Portrait of a German Officer*, which he painted while living in Germany during the start of World War I.



Figure **2.4.4.2**: Alfred Stieglitz (photographer), portrait of Marsden Hartley, 1915-16 (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

New York, Paris and Berlin

Hartley was an American by birth and training: born in Maine, he moved to New York City in 1899, where he studied with the American painter William Merritt Chase and, later, at the National Academy of Design. In New York, he also met the preeminent avant-garde photographer Alfred Stieglitz, who owned and operated the prestigious 291 Gallery. Stieglitz not only gave Hartley a one-person show at the gallery, but he also introduced the 28-year-old painter to the newest trends in European modernism.

In 1912, Hartley packed his trunks and moved to Paris. There, he moved within artistic circles that included artists such as **Pablo Picasso** and **Henri Matisse**, who both influenced Hartley's work. While in Paris, Hartley also met Arnold Rönnebeck, a German sculptor, and his cousin, Karl von Freyburg, who was then a lieutenant in the German army. He and Hartley became close, and a number of art historians have suggested that they were lovers. Hartley visited Rönnebeck and von Freyburg in Berlin in early 1913, and moved there just months later. He stayed through the start of the World War I in August 1914, and remained in Germany until December of 1915, when the war was fully and catastrophically underway. While in Germany, Hartley also met the German Expressionists Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, the founders of the ***Blaue Reiter*** (Blue Rider) movement. An examination of Hartley's paintings during his Berlin years suggests that the abstraction of Kandinsky and Marc also had a profound effect on his work.



Figure **2.4.4.3**: Left: Pablo Picasso, *Ma Jolie*, 1910-11, oil on canvas, 100 x 64.5 cm (photo: **Dr. Steven Zucker**) (The Museum of Modern Art, New York); right: Vasily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 28* (second version), 1912, oil on canvas, 111.4 x 162.1 cm (photo: **Dr. Steven Zucker**) (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

New modes of abstraction

Portrait of a German Officer is a great example of this abstraction, and it is clear that Hartley used elements from both Picasso's Cubism and the German Expressionists to depict not what Karl von Freyburg looked like, but a portrait that alludes to who and

what he was. The painting brings together a cluster of real-world objects in a manner that emulates Cubism—the practice, pioneered by Picasso and his collaborator Georges Braque, of deconstructing three-dimensional forms and reassembling them on a two-dimensional canvas. Hartley's use of bright hues and dynamic, linear forms in the painting also display the impact of Kandinsky, who was at the time developing a painterly language of pure form and color designed to elicit spiritual and emotional responses from the viewer. In utilizing these new modes of abstraction to depict a person, Hartley fundamentally shifted both the nature and function of the traditional portrait.



Figure **2.4.4.4**: Marsden Hartley, *Portrait of a German Officer* (detail), 1914, oil on canvas, 173.4 x 105.1 cm (Alfred Stieglitz Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Deciphering the portrait

Portrait of a German Officer is also a commemorative image of von Freyburg, who had died in October 1914, an early casualty of World War I. It is a surprisingly large canvas—about the height of a human being. Hartley has filled the composition with the pomp and pageantry of the military. Von Freyburg's initials, "Kv.F," are included in the lower left of the painting (left). The red number four on a dark blue field (below) refers to von Freyburg's military regiment, and the yellow "24" refers to his age at the time of his death.



Figure **2.4.4.5**: Marsden Hartley, *Portrait of a German Officer* (detail), 1914, oil on canvas, 173.4 x 105.1 cm (Alfred Stieglitz Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

The letter "E" appears twice in the composition: the red, curvilinear E on a gold background in the middle of the painting (right) is a battalion marker that refers to the *Bayerische Eisenbahn*, the name of von Freyburg's railroad battalion. A second cursive E on what looks to be an epaulette in the lower right could refer to either Hartley's birth name, Edmund, or Queen Elisabeth of Greece, the royal patron of von Freyburg's regiment. The silver star connecting to a serpentine line near the yellow 24 is a boot spur, referring to von Freyburg's position as a cavalry officer (above). Finally, the stylized cross with white trim (see image at top of page) is a German Iron Cross—a medal awarded to soldiers who demonstrated exceptional valor. Von Freyburg earned this medal shortly before his death. If we imagine this vertical canvas as an analog to a human figure, this decoration might be understood as being worn on the chest, suspended from a red and white striped ribbon.



Figure 2.4.4.6: Marsden Hartley, *Portrait of a German Officer* (detail), 1914, oil on canvas, 173.4 x 105.1 cm (Alfred Stieglitz Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Hartley's painting is also more than a portrait of an individual: it expresses the rising German nationalism that he witnessed while living in Berlin. The diagonal blue and white checkerboard pattern (left) is a reference to the flag of Bavaria, and so too are the pair of blue and white stripes on the right side of the image. The red, white, and black stripes on the bottom third of the canvas represent a *Kriegsschiffgösch* or German naval war flag, turned upside-down. This flag typically had a black cross in the middle of it, but Hartley omitted this element so as to bring compositional importance to the medal in the upper part of the painting. Beneath the German flag are the standards of two of Germany's enemies: the red and white St. George's Cross of England, and the black, yellow, and red tricolor of Belgium.

More than appearances

In western academic painting of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, veracity and naturalism (at least to the extent that they flattered the subject) were prized aspects of portraiture. The renowned early American portraitist **Gilbert Stuart**, for example, was said to have "nailed the face to the canvas." Clearly, Marsden Hartley had no such interest in nailing any part of Karl von Freyburg's body to the canvas. Instead, through the use of military and nationalistic accoutrements, Hartley created an allegorical visual ode to his friend, a portrait that says nothing about his appearance, but communicates much about who and what he was as a person.

Additional Resources:

View this work at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Townsend Ludington, *Marsden Hartley: The Biography of an American Artist*, Cornell University Press, 1998.

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2.4.5: Joseph Stella, The Voice of the City of New York Interpreted

by DR. TRICIA LAUGHLIN BLOOM and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video **2.4.5.1**: Joseph Stella, *The Voice of the City of New York Interpreted*, 1920-22, oil and tempera on canvas (five panels), 99.75 x 270 inches overall (Purchase 1937 Felix Fuld Bequest Fund 37.288a-e, Newark Museum), a Seeing America video

Additional resources

This painting at the Newark Museum

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2.4.6: Charles Demuth, I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold

by DR. LARA KUYKENDALL

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Precisionism



Figure **2.4.6.1**: Left: Charles Demuth, *After Sir Christopher Wren*, 1920, watercolor, gouache, pencil on cardboard; 60.5 x 51 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York); Right: Charles Demuth, *My Egypt*, 1927. oil on fiberboard, 90.8 × 76.2 cm (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York)

Charles Demuth is known as a Precisionist, and many of his paintings apply the fractured visual language of cubism and the dynamism of futurism to distinctive American places like cities and factories. In the 1920s, Precisionists like Demuth, Charles Sheeler, and others were called the "Immaculates" because of the smooth surfaces, clean lines, and meticulous geometry of their images. In this vein, Demuth painted the church tower and rooftops of Provincetown, Massachusetts in *After Sir Christopher Wren*, 1920, the brand new grain elevators in his hometown of Lancaster, Pennsylvania in *My Egypt*, 1927, and New York City in *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold*, 1928.

From poem to painting

I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold was inspired by the poem, "The Great Figure," written by Demuth's friend, William Carlos Williams:

> ***Among the rain***
> ***and lights***
> ***I saw the figure 5***
> ***in gold***
> ***on a red***
> ***firetruck***
> ***moving***
> ***tense***
> ***unheeded***
> ***to gong clangs***
> ***siren howls***
> ***and wheels rumbling***
> ***through the dark city.***

Williams' poem recalls a night when he was walking down Ninth Avenue in New York City on his way to painter Marsden Hartley's studio. He heard the noises of a fire truck, only to turn around just as it was passing by. All he saw was the number of the truck, a five painted in gold, on a red background speeding past. At this moment in his career Williams was trying to create poems that were precise and concrete representations of original experiences, so he avoided symbolism and metaphor in favor of simple

language that evokes the speed (“moving tense unheeded”), the sounds (“gong clangs siren howls and wheels rumbling”), and the images (rain, lights, firetruck, dark city) he witnessed. Reportedly, Williams wrote this one-sentence poem right there on the street that night.



Figure **2.4.6.2**: Figure 5 in Gold, 1928, oil on cardboard, 90.2 x 76.2 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Williams’ poetry is deliberately straightforward, but Demuth’s painting is complicated. You really must know the poem to decode the painting. The setting is a tunnel-like street, which is flanked by sidewalks and buildings. Much of this backdrop is gray and black, but for the illuminated shop windows and globular streetlamps on both sides. The fire engine dominates the middle of the composition and although its form is abstracted we can recognize it by its red color. We can see the truck’s ladder on the right, and a long bar stretches across the bottom of the truck, which resembles an axle with two wheels or roaring sirens. The little curved lines that radiate from those sirens or wheels can indicate sound, motion, or both.



Figure **2.4.6.3**: Figure 5 in Gold (detail), 1928, oil on cardboard, 90.2 x 76.2 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Picturing motion

Demuth divided the picture plane into rectangles and triangles, which refract light and change the color of space and shapes. The diagonal lines force your eyes to race around as you try to understand the image. That identifying number five repeats very clearly three times in the center of the composition. The fives get larger as they surge into the foreground (or smaller as they recede into the background), and in the upper right corner you can glimpse the curve of a fourth five as it leaves the surface of the picture and enters your space. The echoing numbers evoke the fire truck as it races toward you and past. Demuth’s painting, with its prismatic chards of space and color and the recurring number five, visualizes the motion and mystery of Williams’ experience in a futurist way. It collapses an extended period of time onto one still canvas.



Figure **2.4.6.4**: Figure 5 in Gold (detail), 1928, oil on cardboard, 90.2 x 76.2 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Poster portraits: symbolic and witty

In addition to representing Williams' poem, Demuth designed *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold* as a portrait of Williams. It is one of at least eight "poster portraits" that Demuth completed during the 1920s. All are abstract or symbolic representations of Demuth's friends, which contain oblique references to their subjects' identity instead of depicting them in bodily form. In *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold*, Demuth included Williams' initials, W.C.W., at the bottom of the composition. His nickname Bill is cropped at the top, and his middle name Carlos emanates from a skyscraper in the distance (with the "s" on the end hidden behind another structure). These references to Williams are not terribly obvious, though, and they only make sense if you already know to associate Williams with this painting.

The poster portraits function as graphic advertisements for their sitters, but they also included puns or inside jokes that encode Demuth's friendship with his subjects in more subtle ways. Carlos, which is how Demuth addressed Williams, consists of yellow dots like the light bulbs on an illuminated theater sign, making Williams into a Broadway star. Bill is high in the sky, as if on a billboard above a building, and is a pun on the word "bill," which can mean poster or ad. *Like I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold*, the poster portraits that Demuth made of his friends and fellow artists Georgia O'Keeffe and Arthur Dove incorporate their signature subject matter—fruits, plants, and landscapes—and their names, written in popular 1920s commercial fonts and bold colors.



Figure **2.4.6.5**: Left: Charles Demuth, *Poster Portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe*, 1924, oil painting on panel, 59 x 48 cm (Alfred Stieglitz / Georgia O'Keeffe archive, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University); Right: Charles Demuth, *Poster Portrait of Arthur Dove*, 1924, oil painting on panel, 57.2 x 67 cm (Alfred Stieglitz / Georgia O'Keeffe archive, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University)

O'Keeffe's portrait practically shouts the letters of her last name, which people were always misspelling. Here Demuth is telling her (and us) that he knows her well enough to remember how many Es and Fs to include. In his poster portrait, Dove's scythe has a red ribbon tied around it, a reference to his partner, the painter Helen Torr, who was known to friends as "Reds." These witty details personalize the images, but only make sense if you know a bit about Demuth and his friends, which is perhaps why critics were slow to appreciate the cleverness of the poster portraits.

Symbolic portraiture as a modernist tactic



Figure \(\PageIndex{6\): Marsden Hartley, *Portrait of a German Officer*, 1914, oil on canvas, 173.4 x 105.1 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Symbolic or abstract portraiture was in vogue in Demuth's day. Writer Gertrude Stein made word portraits of her friends, and Francis Picabia and Arthur Dove caricatured photographer and dealer Alfred Stieglitz as parts of a camera. Images like Marsden Hartley's *Portrait of a German Officer*, 1914, a painted collage of symbols like flags, chessboards, and parts of a military uniform, are also important precedents for Demuth's project. As modernists, all of these artists made works that are conceptually complicated, visually abstract, and exciting responses to the challenge of being innovative in the early twentieth century.

Additional resources:

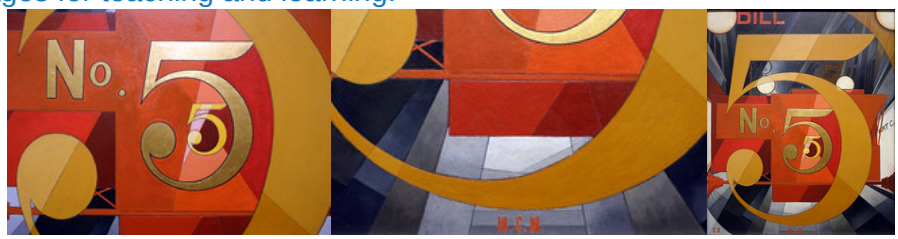
This painting at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Corn, Wanda M. *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915- 1935*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Haskell, Barbara. *Charles Demuth*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, in association with Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987.

Williams, William Carlos. *Autobiography*. New York: Random House, 1951.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.4.7: Georgia O'Keeffe

2.4.7.1: Radiator Building—Night, New York

2.4.7.2: The Lawrence Tree

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2.4.7.1: Radiator Building—Night, New York

by DR. JENNIFER PADGETT, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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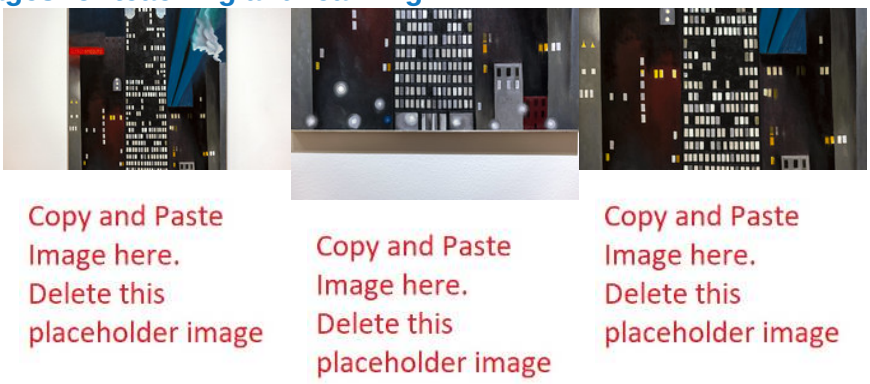


Video **2.4.7.1.1**: Georgia O'Keeffe, *Radiator Building—Night, New York*, 1927, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 76.2 cm (The Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Fisk University, Nashville and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville) © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

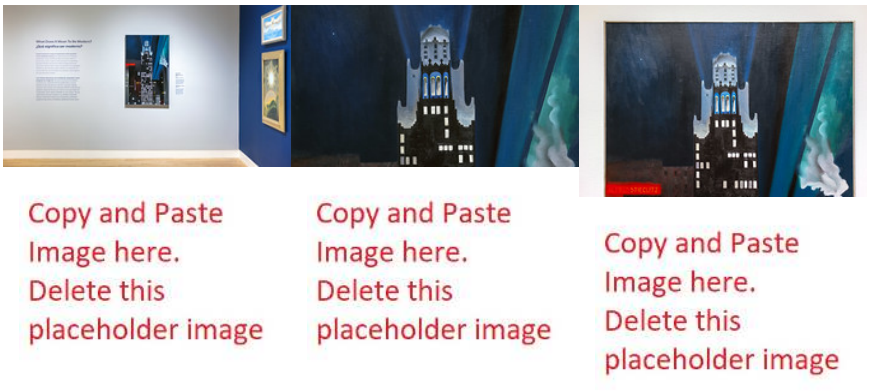
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2.4.7.2: The Lawrence Tree

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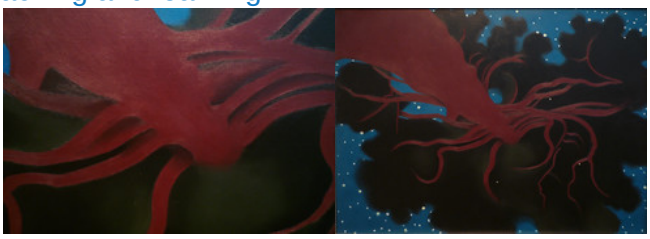
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Video **2.4.7.2.1**: Georgia O'Keeffe, *The Lawrence Tree*, 1929, oil on canvas, 31 x 40″ (Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut)

This was painted in the summer of 1929 while visiting D.H. Lawrence at his Kiowa Ranch during O'Keeffe's first trip to New Mexico. The tree stands in front of the house.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.5: North American Modernism

2.5.1: Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Little Joe with Cow

2.5.2: Elsie Driggs, Blast Furnaces

2.5.3: Millard Sheets, Tenement Flats

2.5.4: Franklin Carmichael, Grace Lake

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2.5.1: Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Little Joe with Cow

by DR. JENNIFER PADGETT, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **2.5.1.1**: Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Little Joe with Cow*, 1923, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 106.7 cm (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art), a Seeing America video, speakers: Dr. Jen Padgett, Associate Curator, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, and Dr. Beth Harris

Additional resources

This painting at Crystal Bridges

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2.5.2: Elsie Driggs, Blast Furnaces

by DR. JENNIFER PADGETT, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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188408



Video **2.5.2.1**: Elsie Driggs, *Blast Furnaces*, 1927, oil on canvas, 83.8 x 99.1 cm (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, 2017.1), a Seeing America video Speakers: Dr. Jenn Padgett, Associate Curator, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, and Dr. Steven Zucker

Additional resources

This painting at Crystal Bridges

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2.5.3: Millard Sheets, Tenement Flats

by DR. VIRGINIA MECKLENBURG, SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **2.5.3.1**: Millard Sheets, *Tenement Flats*, 1933 – 34, oil on canvas, 102.1 x 127.6 cm (Smithsonian American Art Museum). A conversation with Dr. Virginia Mecklenburg, Chief Curator, Smithsonian American Art Museum and Dr. Steven Zucker

Additional resources:

This painting at the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Selected paintings from the 1934 Corcoran exhibition

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2.5.4: Franklin Carmichael, Grace Lake

by **DR. ISABELLE GAPP**

Page ID
188410



Figure **2.5.4.1**: Franklin Carmichael, *Grace Lake*, 1931, oil on canvas, 102.87 x 123.19 cm (The University College Collection, University of Toronto Art Collections)



Figure **2.5.4.2**: Map of North America showing the Canadian Shield (map: Qyd, CC0)

Blue lakes, white hills, pink granite ridges, sugar maples, pine, cedar, oak, black cherry, and American beech fill the La Cloche mountains in Killarney Provincial Park on Georgian Bay in Ontario. This region is situated within the southern area of the Canadian Shield, which itself extends across much of western and northern Ontario. A patchwork of terrains and topographies define this coastal landscape.

Franklin Carmichael made his first trip to the La Cloche area of Killarney with several members of Group of Seven in 1925. Members of the Group had first visited the Algoma region north of Lakes Superior and Huron in 1918 when they stopped off in the city of Sault Ste. Marie and later travelled by rail along the coastline. Later, in 1935, Carmichael constructed a cottage on the shores of Cranberry Lake, nestled in among the La Cloche mountains and the many other lakes, including Grace Lake, that inspired him.



Figure 2.5.4.3: La Cloche Mountains, 2006, along the northern shore of Georgian Bay (Lake Huron) near Willisville, Ontario, Canada (photo: P199, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Taking a cue from current ecological and climate crises, we might begin to think art historically about the geological and environmental history of the Killarney region in contrast to the preoccupation with wilderness and national symbols that have characterized Group of Seven scholarship. [1] Seen as breaking with European artistic traditions the Group of Seven's paintings of the Canadian landscape were equated with social, cultural, and political meanings and ideals.

One legacy of the Group was founded not on the effects of modernization but rather the notion that their work represented Canada as quintessential empty and imposing wilderness. Joan Murray describes the bedrock of the Canadian Shield as "the fundamental basis of Canada." [2] With this I employ in the following essay an ecocritical approach, one which mobilizes multiple practices including visual analysis, cultural interpretation, environmental history, and climate change discussions.

A landscape of lakes



Figure 2.5.4.4: Franklin Carmichael, *Grace Lake*, 1931, oil on canvas, 102.87 x 123.19 cm (The University College Collection, University of Toronto Art Collections)

Although situated relatively inland from the archipelago of islands that are scattered along the north shore of Lake Huron, Carmichael's *Grace Lake* suggests the vast proliferation of lakes in and around the La Cloche mountains. The wider view of *Grace Lake* has been reimagined to suggest further lakes visible over the hills. *Grace Lake* itself is a gradient from almost pitch black to a metallic blue, concealing the point where it joins the lakes beyond. The same metallic finish continues throughout the receding

composition, contrasting with the patchwork of quartzite and granite. Where considerable attention has been paid to the foreground and the stylized sky above, the imagined landscape beyond has been left comparatively plain and unadorned.

Having first apprenticed at Grip Limited in 1911, a commercial art firm in Toronto, alongside others from the Group of Seven, in 1932 Carmichael left his job as a commercial artist to become the Head of the Graphic Design and Commercial Art Department at the Ontario College of Art. Graphic qualities are made visible in his paintings, where an emphasis on pattern, delineation of form, and design emerge from his interpretation of the natural environment. The mountains are constructed as bulbous shapes rising from the reflective pools of water that are Grace Lake and the many surrounding bodies of water. The same curvilinear forms are mirrored in the clouds above, which billow across the sky.



Figure **2.5.4.5**: Joachim Gauthier, photograph of Franklin Carmichael looking down at Grace Lake, 1935 (photo: McMichael Collection)

In 1935, the artist and friend of the Group of Seven, Joachim Gauthier, took a photo of Carmichael, sat upon an exposed white quartzite rock while looking down on Grace Lake. The hooded figure of Carmichael is at work on a small sketch, propped on a board within his paint box. This same vantage point reappears throughout his work. Surrounded by the La Cloche mountains, Grace Lake is a relatively small feature on the landscape, being only two kilometers in length and a few hundred feet wide. Yet, Carmichael's painting has expanded upon it to accommodate the extent of Killarney's many lakes.



Figure **2.5.4.6**: Franklin Carmichael, *Snow Flurries, North Shore of Lake Superior*, 1930, watercolor and gouache over charcoal on wove paper, 51.5 x 69 cm (National Gallery of Canada)

Gradients of geological color



Figure **2.5.4.7**: A. J. Casson, *The White Pine*, c. 1957, oil on canvas, 76 x 101.3 cm (McMichael Collection)

Unique among members of the Group of Seven, Carmichael worked primarily with watercolor and in 1925 co-founded the *Ontario Society for Painters in Watercolour*. *Grace Lake* is, however, an exception. Here, the effects of watercolor are manifested in oil paint. While Carmichael believed that watercolor offered the best expression of the Canadian light and landscape, in lecture notes he wrote, “It is influential that the artists reveal through the medium in which he is happiest, what he sees, thinks, and feels about his surroundings.” [3] The monumentality of *Grace Lake* is communicated through sinuous ribbons of oil paint, preserving the same qualities of light that Carmichael usually sought in watercolor.

A. J. Casson, *The White Pine*, c. 1957, oil on canvas, 76 x 101.3 cm (McMichael Collection)

Formed nearly two billion years ago, the eroded ridges of the white quartzite hills of the La Cloche mountains were shaped by four different glaciers and then 11,000 years of wind and weather. Marked by higher elevations, sharp ridges, and terraced forests, the Killarney landscape is relatively inaccessible, and its distinct geological formations are thought to have once reached higher than today’s Canadian Rocky Mountains. They do, however, remain among the highest peaks in Ontario. Among these white quartzite

hills is the Dreamer's Rock, a sacred site for the Ojibwe, and the location of *The White Pine*, painted by Group member A.J. Casson.

With this, we should stop to recognize the erasure of Indigenous sites and peoples from the visual history of the Canadian landscape more broadly. Such thinking is critical to de-colonizing the Group's work. [4] This is achieved by confronting the legacies of colonialism and centering Indigenous perspectives that challenge the construction of national identities that actively erase First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories and communities. Carmichael's *Grace Lake* sits on the traditional lands of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Peoples, yet any historic or contemporary human presence has been consciously removed. The Group of Seven's landscape paintings have instead been constructed around the idea of emptiness.



Figure **2.5.4.8**: Franklin Carmichael, *Grace Lake* (detail), 1931, oil on canvas, 102.87 x 123.19 cm (The University College Collection, University of Toronto Art Collections)

Throughout his visits to Algoma and Killarney, Carmichael's paintings reflected the light and color that bounced off the white quartzite hills and surrounding lakes. The artist and writer, Erika Alin notes the intricacies of the Canadian Shield, where "patches of pink, red, and black minerals [. . .] form endless interesting streaks and patterns, and delicate light pink lines extend like interlocking webs across the smooth black surfaces of scattered boulders." [5] The composition of *Grace Lake* is set into the granite and syenite of the Shield, painted in shades of grey, brown, yellow, and orange. Interspersed among the cliffs and rocky foreground, where a great abundance of metamorphic rock composes this never-ending coastal precipice, are patches of lichen, moss, and other vegetation.



Figure 2.5.4.9: Franklin Carmichael, *Grace Lake* (detail), 1931, oil on canvas, 102.87 x 123.19 cm (The University College Collection, University of Toronto Art Collections)

Franklin Carmichael, *Grace Lake* (detail), 1931, oil on canvas, 102.87 x 123.19 cm (The University College Collection, University of Toronto Art Collections)

Unlike Grace Lake in the foreground, the bodies of water beyond are bleached a silvery blue, removing any suggestion of weather from the water's surface. The clear-blue of the water might also indicate ecological damage, notably acidification, caused by industrial mining, a prevalent industry in the region during the early twentieth century. Neighboring Nellie Lake, for example, known for its crystal-blue color is so severely acidified that it can no longer sustain life. [6] The realities of environmental and settler colonial history, and the geomorphology of the Canadian Shield, are revealed through Carmichael's varying application of color and his interest in form and shape. This in turn suggests Carmichael's own awareness of Ontario's distinct geology and ecology, with his work allowing him to explore the region's natural history and the human-induced impact of the timber and mining industries prevalent here since the nineteenth century.

From wilderness to industrialized landscape

The Ontario wilderness that the Group of Seven sought to represent had already been shaped by growing infrastructure—notably the construction of the railway—and the development and growth of towns and cities, including Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie, along the northern shores of Lakes Huron and Superior. It no longer exemplified an understanding of wilderness as a barren and desolate space, far removed from civilization. Rather, the processes of modernization facilitated the Group's travels around Canada. There are few instances that signal the Group's awareness of environmental damage and destruction. However, the continued threat of logging on the landscape led to Carmichael and his colleague Alexander Young (A.Y.) Jackson lobbying Ontario's provincial government to establish Killarney as a protected area. Finally, in 1964 Killarney acquired the status of a provincial park.



Figure **2.5.4.10**: Franklin Carmichael, *A Northern Silver Mine*, 1930, oil on canvas, 101.5 x 121.2 cm (McMichael Canadian Art Collection)

Carmichael would later in the 1930s turn to Ontario's industrial landscape as one of the themes in his work. From the geological focus in Carmichael's *Grace Lake*, we might subsequently turn our attention to scenes of the Algoma mining industry found in the work of Jackson, Carmichael, and Yvonne McKague Housser (wife of the art critic and friend of the Group Fred Housser). [7] The extractive processes of industrialization radically altered the geography and ecology of Ontario's landscape. During the mid-twentieth century nickel mining and smelting damaged many of Killarney's lakes, including Nellie Lake and Cranberry Lake which were repeatedly painted by Carmichael. With this, the idea of a pristine wilderness stands to be challenged further, beyond recent scholarship, as it continues to disregard the environmental realities of Indigenous history, colonization, tourism, and industrialization.

Through Carmichael's *Grace Lake*, and others like it, these landscapes manifest as something other than representations of Canadian northernness and national identity. The emphasis on the use of light and color reveals the geology of the environment and the resulting ecological devastation caused by the natural resource industry. It moves away from a prevailing interest in nationalism, symbolism, and the wilderness. Such an ecocritical reading might be extended to depictions of wider Canada by the Group of Seven, and as such recontextualizes these paintings in line with environmental history at a time of unprecedented anthropogenic climate change.

Notes:

[1] The institution of the National Gallery of Canada also played an instrumental part in bolstering support for the Group of Seven. From 1913 onwards, prior to their formation as a Group in 1920, the NGC, initially under the direction of Eric Brown, regularly bought their paintings and later incorporated them into international exhibitions on Canadian art. This affixed both the group and the landscape they painted as national symbols.

[2] Joan Murray, *Rocks: Franklin Carmichael, Arthur Lismer, and the Group of Seven* (Toronto: McArthur & Company, 2006), p. 25.

[3] Franklin Carmichael in Nicole Mari McKowen, "Transcendental Nature and Canadian National Identity: Franklin Carmichael's Representation of the Canadian Landscape," Masters dissertation, Texas Christian University, May 2019.

[4] See John O'Brian and Peter White, eds., *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).

[5] Erika Alin, *Lake Effect: Along Superior's Shores* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 70.

[6] Justin A. Shead, "Chemical and Biological Recovery of Killarney Park, Ontario Lakes (1972-2005) From Historical Acidification," Masters dissertation, Queen's University, Ontario, September 2007.

[7] Kelowna Art, "Northern Pine Lecture Series with Siobhan Angus," YouTube video, 01:04:15, January 22, 2021.

Open Art Histories

This essay is brought to you through a partnership with Open Art Histories.

Additional resources:

Isabelle Gapp, "Water in the Wilderness: The Group of Seven and the Coastal Identity of Lake Superior," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes* 55, no. 3 (Nov 2021). DOI: 10.3138/jcs-2020-0049

Joan Murray, "Carmichael's Triumph?," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1990): pp. 155–59.

Martina Weinhart and Georgiana Uhlaryik, eds., *Magnetic North: Imagining Canada in Painting, 1910–1940* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2021).

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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.6: The American west

2.6.1: Stephen Mopope, U.S. Post Office Murals, Anadarko, OK

2.6.2: Stephen Mopope, Game of Skill

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2.6.1: Stephen Mopope, U.S. Post Office Murals, Anadarko, OK

- by **MATTHEW K. WARD**

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Figure **2.6.1.1**: Stephen Mopope, *14. Buffalo Hunting Scene*, 1937, mural, west wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS*)



Figure **2.6.1.2**: Stephen Mopope, *2. Eagle Dancers*, 1937, mural, east wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)



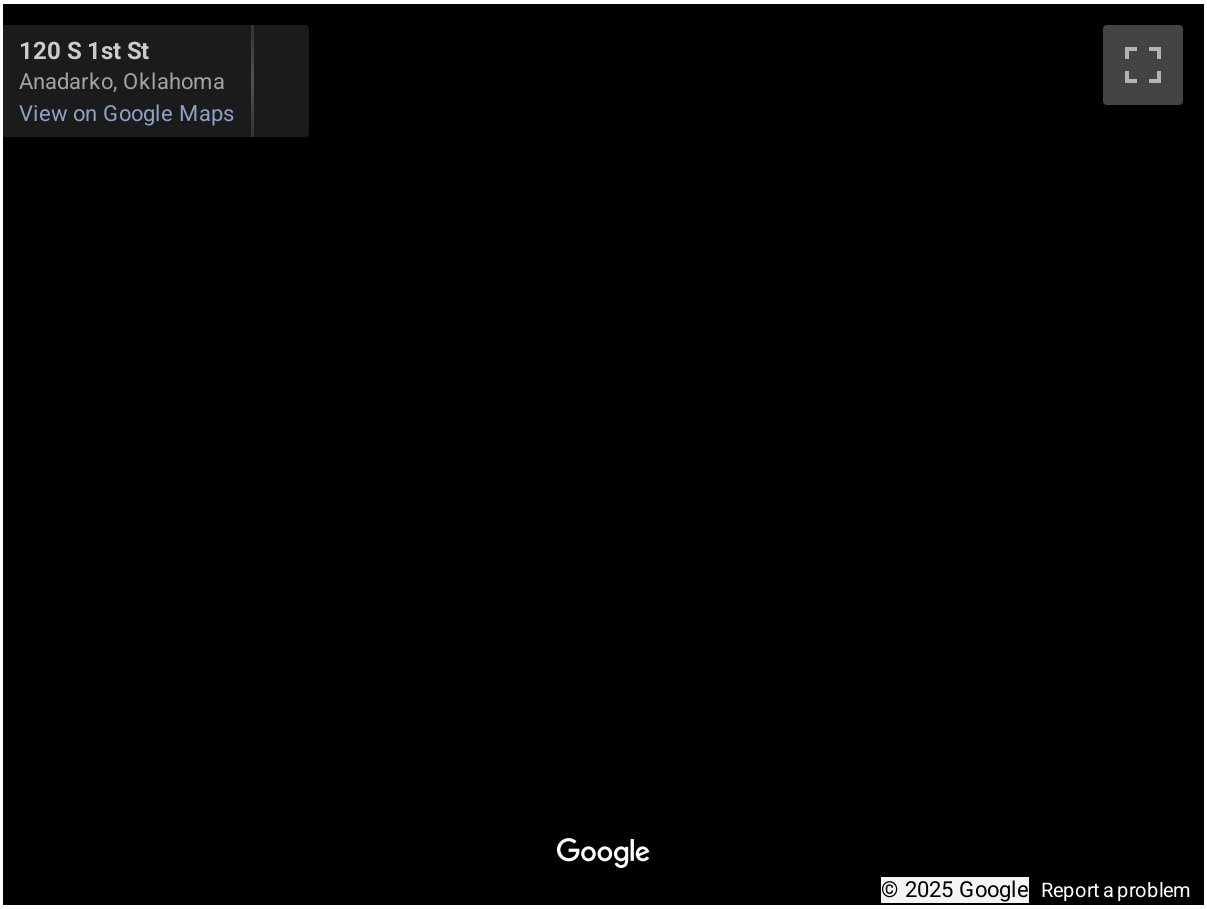
Figure **2.6.1.3**: Inside the Anadarko, OK post office (photo: Jimmy Emerson, CC BY-NC 2.0)

In the narrow lobby of the Anadarko Post Office, a buffalo hunt ensues. A pair of Eagle Dancers perform their ceremonial waltz in the entryway. Over by the P.O. boxes, a Kiowa family begins the long journey south for the winter in *Kiowas Moving Camp*. This panorama unfolds in the small town of Anadarko, located sixty miles southwest of Oklahoma City.



Figure **2.6.1.4**: Stephen Mopope, *12. Kiowas Moving Camp*, 1937, mural, west wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)

With a population of just over 6,500, Anadarko is an unassuming community in the heart of the Southern Plains. The post office itself is a simple buff brick building erected in 1935, its humble appearance does not give any indication of its historical significance.



The post office in Anadarko today. It looks much the same as it did when the murals were painted.



Figure 2.6.1.5: Map of North America showing the regions of Native American cultures

The sixteen murals displayed within depict the life and traditions of the Kiowa people, a Plains Indian tribe. Completed by Kiowa artist Stephen Mopope in 1937, the murals comprise one of the best examples of modern Indigenous American painting in the country.

As vibrant examples of Kiowa-style painting—known for its bold, flat, and colorful aesthetic—these murals tell the story of a rich culture and the centuries-long struggle to preserve it.

The sixteen murals decorate all four walls of the narrow space, and they appear in the following order:

East Wall	North Wall	West Wall	South Wall
1. Two Men in Council	9. Buffalo Skull with Crossed Arrows Behind It	10. Medicine Man's Shield and Lance	16. Fresh Buffalo Head
2. Two Eagle Dancers		11. The Deer Hunter	
3. Fancy War Dancer with Cedar Wood Flute		12. Kiowas Moving Camp	
4. Scalp Dance (Drum Chief Standing)		13. Kiowa Camp Site	
5. Individual War Dance Drummer (Sitting)		14. Buffalo Hunting Scene	
6. Indian Mother and Child in Cradle		15. Buffalo Hunter's Shield	
7. Eagle Whip and Flute Dancers			
8. Two Women and Child Watching Dancers			

The Murals

The Anadarko murals depict scenes of Kiowa life, past and present. Some panels, like *14. Buffalo Hunting Scene* (top of the page) and *13. Kiowa Camp Site*, illustrate life before the arrival of white colonists to the Plains. Other panels, including those depicting ceremonial dancers, highlight Kiowa traditions still practiced today. In this way, artist Stephen Mopope achieved a portrait of Kiowa history and culture traversing time and place.



Figure **2.6.1.6**: Stephen Mopope, *13. Kiowa Camp Site*, 1937, mural, west wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)

Thematically arranged according to the seasons, the murals also create a cyclical narrative. The story of a buffalo hunt—central to the Kiowa way of life—is told in sequence from the northern to southern walls.



Figure **2.6.1.7**: Stephen Mopope, *1. Two Men in Council*, 1937, mural, northeast corner of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)

Two Men in Council and the Sun Dance

In the northeast corner of the lobby, the story begins with *1. Two Men in Council.* Sitting against a flat ochre background, two men prepare for the annual Sun Dance. The man on the left draws our attention to the man on the right by pointing towards his ceremonial fan of feathers. This fan identifies the wielder as the chief of the Sun Dance. Once the most important of all Kiowa rituals, the Sun Dance was held every summer between June and July to encourage the return of the bison herds. As the Kiowa depended on the bison for sustenance, the Sun Dance was a crucial ceremony. However, we do not see a depiction of this sacred dance in Mopope's murals. The absence of a Sun Dance panel is significant because the Bureau of Indian affairs outlawed the Sun Dance in the 1890s in an attempt to suppress Indigenous spiritual practices.



Figure **2.6.1.8**: Stephen Mopope, *7. Eagle Whip and Flute Dancers*, 1937, mural, east wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)

Eagle, Scalp, and War dancers



Figure **2.6.1.9**: Stephen Mopope, *4. Scalp Dance (Drum Chief Standing)*, 1937, mural, east wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK

As we move along the eastern wall, representations of Eagle, Scalp, and War dancers emphasize the diverse range of Kiowa ritual practices. The Kiowa adopted the Eagle Dance (shown in *2. Eagle Dancers* at the top of the essay) from the Taos Pueblo tribe with whom they traded. Performed biannually, the Eagle Dance is a way of lifting up the prayers of the tribe. The leaders of the dance are distinguishable by the eagle wing bone whistles they carry in their mouths.



Figure **2.6.1.10**: Stephen Mopope, *5. Individual War Dance Drummer (Sitting)*, 1937, mural, east wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)

The Scalp Dance, on the other hand, was a ritual of thanks and celebration, typically performed after a successful war raid. Triumphant warriors would present enemy scalps as trophies and tell of their heroics while a band of drummers, led by the Drum Chief, played an accompanying score.

Stephen Mopope was himself an accomplished interpreter of Kiowa war dances, performing often at Indian fairs and powwows throughout the southwest. For the artist, painting was another form through which to preserve Kiowa traditions like these.



Figure **2.6.1.11**: Stephen Mopope, *14. Buffalo Hunting Scene*, 1937, mural, west wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)

Buffalo Hunting Scene

When we arrive at the large *14. Buffalo Hunting Scene* along the south wall, it becomes apparent that the annual Sun Dance was a success. Three men, armed with *bois d'arc* ("bow wood") spear and bows and arrows, pursue the bison on horseback. Treacherous prairie dog holes threaten to trip them up at any moment. The frantic eyes of the bison and the horses speak to the chaotic nature of the hunt, yet, the gaze of each Kiowa hunter remains calm and focused, affixed firmly to their targets.

In eliminating extraneous background detail, Mopope's minimalistic style of painting emphasizes only the most important elements of a scene. In *14. Buffalo Hunting Scene* we note the poise of the hunters, the manic movement of the animals, the trickle of blood emanating from an arrow wound in the hide of a bison, a lone prairie dog fleeing the turmoil and jumping headfirst into its burrow. This narrowing of focus heightens the tension, highlights the action, and allows the viewer to see clearly all of the details being presented. The silhouette of every feather in the hunter's headdress, the cut of his buckskin leggings, the decorative pattern on a quiver—all of this jumps out against the bare backdrop. This graphic style of painting is not only eye-catching, but highly legible, effectively conveying information about the appearance and customs of the Kiowa people.



Figure **2.6.1.12**: Stephen Mopope, *12. Kiowas Moving Camp*, 1937, mural, west wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)

Migration of the Kiowa

A great deal of information is conveyed in panels like *12. Kiowas Moving Camp*, which showcases the annual migration of the Kiowa as they follow the bison herds south. In this panel, a mother and daughter drag a buffalo skin tipi behind their horse. It was the job of Kiowa women to sew and construct the tipis. Following behind them is a young boy towing the tipi poles. Flanking the group, two male guards keep watch.



Figure **2.6.1.13**: Stephen Mopope, *13. Kiowa Camp Site*, 1937, mural, west wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)



Figure **2.6.1.14**: Stephen Mopope, *15. Buffalo Hunter's Shield*, 1937, mural, west wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)

In *13. Kiowa Camp Site*, the members of the group have erected their winter home. On the left-hand side of the composition, a woman is seen tanning a bison hide. Children wrestle in the foreground while men and women watch in repose, a stark contrast to the high-octane energy of the hunting scene. In the background of the camp site, a buffalo hunter's shield hangs alongside a feathered **war bonnet**.

On the western wall of the lobby, Mopope paints a panel dedicated to this very shield, named as *15. Buffalo Hunter's Shield*. Decorated with the image of two bison facing a rainbow, the ceremonial shield serves as a symbol of a fruitful hunt and a healthy winter season.



Figure 2.6.1.15: Stephen Mopope, *9. Buffalo Skull with Crossed Arrows Behind It*, 1937, mural, north wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)



Figure 2.6.1.16: Stephen Mopope, *16. Fresh Buffalo Head*, 1937, mural, south wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)

The seasonal cycle

The seasonal cycle of the mural series is summarized by two bison heads set on opposing walls. *9. Buffalo Skull with Crossed Arrows Behind It* represents the desolation of winter. The bison skull appears picked clean by vultures and bleached white by the sun. In contrast, *16. Fresh Buffalo Head* suggests the new bounty of the summer hunt. Together they form a chain of summer and winter, life and death, sacrifice and jubilation.



Figure **2.6.1.17**: Stephen Mopope, *3. Fancy War Dancer with Cedar Wood Flute*, 1937, mural, east wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)

History

The Anadarko murals were a result of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives. The New Deal (1933–1939) comprised a series of public works projects designed to provide employment opportunities for American workers and to lift the country out of the depths of the Great Depression. One such initiative in 1934, when the U.S. Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts began commissioning artists to decorate federal buildings nationwide. Between 1934 and 1943, the Section of Fine Arts commissioned 1,600 works of art for post offices across America. These works were intended to capture the spirit and history of American life. Many of the resulting pieces depicted Native American subjects, yet most of the artists behind these works were not themselves Native. This discrepancy raises necessary questions about representation and autonomy as many of these federal murals depict Indigenous subjects through a white lens. More often than not, these works cast Indigenous subjects as stereotypes, curiosities, and as caricatures of the fearsome "savage." The European-American philosophy of Manifest Destiny not only forced Indigenous tribes from their ancestral land, but it reimagined their ancestral identities as well, stealing from them both physically and culturally.

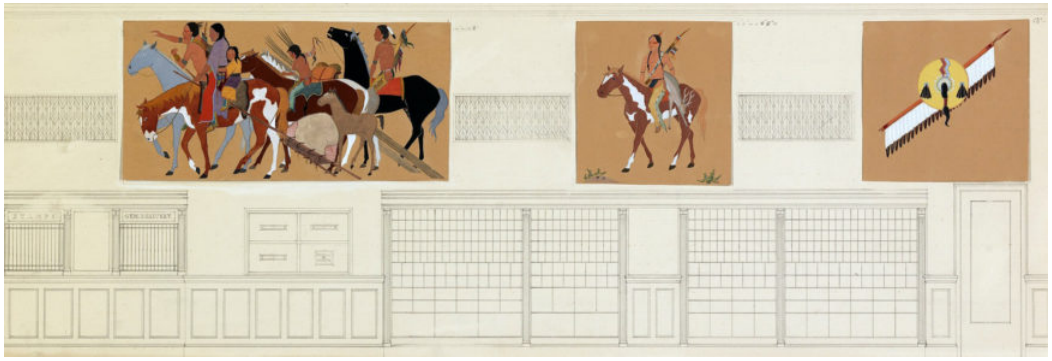


Figure **2.6.1.18**: Stephen Mopope, *Kiowas Moving Camp*, mural study of the west wall showing panels 10–12 (from right to left), 1936, Anadarko, Oklahoma federal building, 1936, gouache and pencil on paper mounted on paperboard (Smithsonian American Art Museum)

Stephen Mopope's contribution to the project stands out as an important example of an Indigenous artist representing his own culture. The result is a more authentic, accurate, and intimate expression of Native life. His selection for the project is also a

testament to the history of the Anadarko Post Office and its former identity as the Kiowa Indian Agency of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (the title of which is still on the building's façade).



Figure **2.6.1.19**: Stephen Mopope working on *11. Deer Hunter* mural on the west wall of the Anadarko Post Office, Oklahoma, 1939 photograph, 5″x7″ (National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum)

In February of 1937, *The Oklahoma News* announced that Anadarko's new post office would be granted a federal mural. "Oklahoma will have something as typical of the state as its comic-opera politics, its crude oil and dust storms," the newspaper declared. [1] Indeed, Stephen Mopope's paintings would be more than typical, capturing an aspect of the region predating all but the dust storms. In large part, the content of Mopope's murals depicted Oklahoma as it was before the arrival of white colonists.



Figure **2.6.1.20**: Stephen Mopope, *6. Indian Mother and Child in Cradle*, 1937, mural, east wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)

At this point in time, Oklahoma had been a state for only thirty years. Anadarko itself had formed in the late 19th century out of a consolidation of Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache reservations. These reservations were themselves established through a series of one-sided treaties, like the Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867, in which the U.S. government relocated Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands. Raised in an environment of government oversight and forced assimilation, Stephen Mopope sought to faithfully record different facets of Kiowa culture in his work.



Figure **2.6.1.21**: Stephen Mopope, *8. Two Women and Child Watching Dancers*, 1937, mural, east wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)

The Artist

Stephen Mopope is widely considered the most prolific of his generation of Kiowa painters and the preeminent member of the group known as the Kiowa Six. Active during the early-to-mid twentieth century, the Kiowa Six gained widespread recognition following their participation in Prague's *First International Art Exhibition* of 1928. A portfolio of their work entitled *Kiowa Indian Art* was subsequently published in France. The group consisted of Stephen Mopope, Spencer Asah, James Auchiah, Jack Hokeah,

Lois Smoky, and Monroe Tasatoke. Asah and Auchiah would assist Mopope in executing his designs for the Anadarko murals on a large scale.



Figure 2.6.1.22: An example of ledger drawing. One Bull/Tȟatȟáŋka Waŋžíla (Hunkpapa Lakota), Custer's War (detail), c. 1900, 39 x 69 inches (irregular), pigments, ink on muslin (Minneapolis Institute of Art)

This generation of Kiowa artists typically worked with watercolor or gouache on paper. From an early age, Stephen Mopope exhibited an affinity for the arts, which was encouraged by his granduncle, the ledger artist Charles Oheltoint (also known as Charlie Buffalo). **Ledger drawing** was a unique form of Plains Indian art so named for the type of ruled paper used in its creation. Featuring scenes of hunts, battles, and dances set against blank backgrounds, ledger art closely resembles the tipi decoration and hide painting practiced by Plains Indians for generations. To these traditional art forms, ledger drawing incorporated materials like crayons and ruled paper introduced through contact with European-Americans. From hide painting, to ledger art, to the watercolor painting of the modern Kiowa, the changing circumstances of the Plains Indians is discernible through the materials used in their artistic practice.

Having trained in traditional Kiowa painting under his granduncle, Mopope continued his artistic studies under the guidance of Susan Ryan Peters, Field Matron of the Anadarko Kiowa Agency. Peters served as a mentor to the Kiowa Six. She encouraged their work and sponsored courses in European art methodology to be taught in Anadarko. At St. Patrick's Mission School, a local Catholic school for Native children, Mopope received further instruction in perspective and proportion.

In the 1920s, Peters encouraged Mopope and the rest of the Kiowa Six to enroll in the University of Oklahoma's art program. It would be the school's director, Oscar Jacobson, who then introduced the Kiowa Six to a wider audience when he arranged their first touring exhibition. As head of the Oklahoma division of the Federal Art Project, Jacobson also facilitated Mopope's Anadarko Post Office commission, which was the largest ever assigned to a Plains Indian artist.

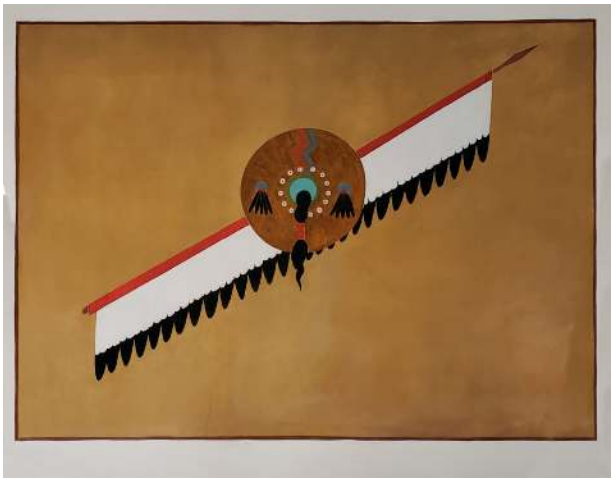


Figure **2.6.1.23**: Stephen Mopope, *10. Medicine Man's Shield and Lance*, 1937, mural, west wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK

In part because of these connections with white America, Mopope's work has sometimes been interpreted as a hybrid style—part Kiowa, part European-American. Contemporary critics alternately compared his bold compositions to the iconographic images of the ancient Egyptians and to the streamlined simplicity of European modernists. In the former comparison, Mopope was labeled a type of primitive, painting relics from antiquity. In the latter, he was assimilated into a tradition and a culture that was not fully his.



Figure **2.6.1.24**: Stephen Mopope, *11. The Deer Hunter*, 1937, mural, west wall of the Anadarko Post Office, OK (photo: USPS)

Mopope's Anadarko murals not only showcase his unique style of painting, but they place the artist firmly in his own historical narrative. Though Summer turns to Winter, though the Kiowa who populate the post office lobby were forced from the open plains to the consolidated reservation, Mopope's murals keep their tradition and their history alive. Restored in 1974 and having undergone their most recent conservation in 2018, Stephen Mopope's murals are visible to the public year-round at the Anadarko Post Office.

Notes:

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[1] Ruth Robinson, “Tribal Traditions to be Recorded on Walls of Anadarko’s Post Office by Trio of Kiowa Indians,” *The Oklahoma News*, Sunday February 21, 1937, p 6.

Additional resources:

Read more about the murals on **The Living New Deal**

Read about Mopope’s mural in the **Udall Department of the Interior in Washington D.C.**

Watch another **video about Millard Sheets’ *Tenement Flats* on Smarthistory that addresses the New Deal**

Bell, Betty and Riffel, Carolyn. “Anadarko (town).” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*. **Anadarko (town) | The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture (okhistory.org)**

Ellison, Rosemary. *Contemporary Southern Plains Indian Painting* (Oklahoma Indian Arts and Crafts Cooperative: Anadarko, OK. 1972).

Greiner, Alyson L and White, Mark A. *Thematic Survey of New Deal Era Public Art in Oklahoma; 2003-2004* (Department of Geography: Oklahoma State University. 2004).

Kracht, Benjamin R. “Kiowa (tribe).” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*. **Kiowa (tribe) | The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture (okhistory.org)**.

Noah, Reuben. “Two Eagle Dancers” in *Indians at the Post Office: Native Themes in New Deal-Era Murals*. Virtual exhibition: Smithsonian National Postal Museum. **Two Eagle Dancers | National Postal Museum (si.edu)**.

Ruth Robinson, “Tribal Traditions to be Recorded on Walls of Anadarko’s Post Office by Trio of Kiowa Indians,” *The Oklahoma News* (Sunday February 21, 1937), p 6.

“Indian Themes.” *USPS Inventory of New Deal Art in Post Offices: Oklahoma Division*. December 28, 1989.

“U.S. Post Office.” City of Anadarko: Anadarko, OK. **Welcome to City Of Anadarko**.

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2.6.2: Stephen Mopope, Game of Skill

- by **DR. CHELSEA HERR** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

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Video **2.6.2.1**: Stephen Mopope, *Game of Skill*, 1933, oil on canvas, 57.2 x 122.6 cm (Gilcrease Museum)

Additional resources

This work at the Gilcrease Museum.

All works by the Kiowa Six at the Gilcrease Museum.

Silverhorn calendar between 1828–1929.

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- **2.3: Ancient Egypt** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

SECTION OVERVIEW

2.7: The American south and southwest

2.7.1: Robert Henri, Tom Po Qui (Water of Antelope Lake/Indian Girl/Ramoncita)

2.7.2: Walter Ufer, Hunger

2.7.3: The lure of the American Southwest- E. Martin Hennings, Rabbit Hunt

2.7.4: Velino Shije Herrera (Ma Pe Wi), Design, Tree and Birds

2.7.5: Nampeyo (Hopi-Tewa), polychrome jar

2.7.6: Puebloan- Maria Martinez, Black-on-black ceramic vessel

2.7.7: Julian Martinez, Buffalo Dancers

2.7.8: 10.7.8-Awa Tsireh's Pottery Makers

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2.7.1: Robert Henri, Tom Po Qui (Water of Antelope Lake/Indian Girl/Ramoncita)

by **DR. ELIZABETH S. HAWLEY**

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Figure **2.7.1.1**: Robert Henri, *Tom Po Qui (Water of Antelope Lake/Indian Girl/Ramoncita)*, 1914, oil on canvas; 40-½ x 32-½ inches (**Denver Art Museum**)

Robert Henri produced this striking portrait of Ramoncita Gonzales (Tom Po Qui) (Tewa, San Juan Pueblo) in 1914, at the onset of the First World War. The date of the painting, the vibrancy of Henri's palette, and the sitter's Indigenous Pueblo identity are key to unpacking the significance of the work.



Figure 2.7.1.2: Robert Henri, *Snow in New York*, 1902, oil on canvas, 81.3 x 65.5 cm (National Gallery of Art, photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Henri was, by this time, an important figure in the American art world, and was recognized as a leading figure in the development of the Ashcan School style of painting. He had been the main organizer of a renegade group of artists known as The Eight. *Tom Po Qui* was painted six years later, relatively late in his career, and here we see a shift in style.

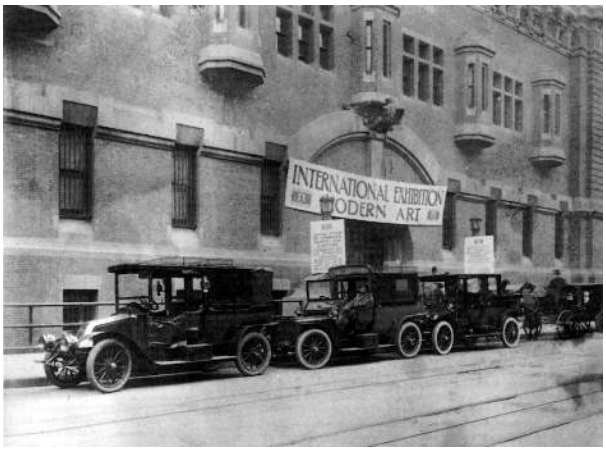


Figure 2.7.1.3: Entrance to the New York City Armory Show, 69th Regiment Armory, New York City, 1913

A new vibrancy

Just a year prior to the production of this work, the New York art world had been rocked by the 1913 Armory Show (also known as the International Exhibition of Modern Art), which was the first major exhibition of modern art staged in the United States. While some American artists (including Henri) were included in the show, it was the Europeans who really shocked audiences with their avant-garde styles, including Fauvism, Cubism, and Futurism. For American viewers who had only recently become accustomed to the gritty realism of Henri and his fellow Ashcan School painters, the experimental European works were shocking.



Figure **2.7.1.4**: left: Robert Henri, *Figure in Motion*, 1913, oil on canvas, 196.2 x 94.6 cm (Terra Foundation for American Art); right: Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*, 1912, oil on canvas, 151.8 x 93.3 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

In fact, one of Henri's contributions to the show, *Figure in Motion*, is often compared to Marcel Duchamp's famed Cubist composition ***Nude Descending a Staircase (No.2)*** as a way to underscore the resolutely representational character of American Realism with the flat planes and abstracted quality of the European avant-garde. While Henri's work remained figurative in the years after the Armory show, his technique grew looser and his palette became lighter and brighter, likely due in part to experiencing Fauvist works at the Armory.



Figure **2.7.1.5**: Robert Henri, *Tom Po Qui (Water of Antelope Lake/Indian Girl/Ramoncita)* (detail), 1914, oil on canvas; 40-½ x 32-½ inches (Denver Art Museum)

However, the vivid colors of *Tom Po Qui* cannot be explained by exposure to European modernist styles alone; that Henri was in California when he painted this canvas is also important. New York-based Henri typically spent summers abroad, traveling to various European locales (significant previous trips included Ireland, Holland, and Spain). However, World War I broke out in the summer of 1914, which made international voyages untenable. Like many Americans whose travel plans were restricted to domestic trips, Henri turned his eye westward. He took the train out to California, settling for the summer months in La Jolla.



Figure **2.7.1.6**: Robert Henri, *Tom Po Qui (Water of Antelope Lake/Indian Girl/Ramoncita)* (detail), 1914, oil on canvas; 40-½ x 32-½ inches (Denver Art Museum)

Henri was particularly drawn to the intense light of southern California, declaring the conditions ideal for painters. His affinity for this light can be seen in the portrait of *Tom Po Qui*, where the backdrop of the painting is not the dark, interior spaces common in his earlier work, but rather a loosely-painted setting evocative of the sunlight-dappled coastal region where he found himself. The patchy brushwork and bright colors may show evidence of the influence of European modernists such as **Paul Cézanne** and **Henri Matisse**, but also the impact of working out west.

"My People"

Henri was not only attracted to the light of California; he was also drawn to the diverse population of the area. Throughout his career, Henri was invested in finding new and interesting people to paint, seeking out models of varying social positions, professions, regions, and ethnicities. In California, he was especially interested in finding sitters of what he understood to be diverse racial identities. During what would eventually be three trips to the area, he painted Black, Chinese American, Mexican American, and American Indian sitters. In a 1915 article predicated on these works, Henri stated: "I was not interested in these people to sentimentalize over them, to mourn over the fact that we have destroyed the Indian, that we are changing the shy Chinese girl into a soubrette, . . . I am looking at each individual with the eager hope of finding there something of the dignity of life, the humor, the humanity, the kindness." [1]



Figure **2.7.1.7**: left: Robert Henri, *Sylvester*, 1914, oil of canvas, 81.2 x 66. cm (Terra Foundation for American Art); right: Robert Henri, *Tam Gan*, 1914, oil on canvas, 60.96 x 50.8 cm (Albright-Knox Art Gallery)

Today we read his rhetoric as problematically racist and patronizing, particularly in light of the article's proprietary title, "My People." But Henri's desire to paint these sitters as dignified individuals nonetheless defies the more virulent racial stereotyping typical of the era, even as his approach could devolve into exoticism.



Figure **2.7.1.8**: Robert Henri, *Tom Po Qui (Water of Antelope Lake/Indian Girl/Ramoncita)* (detail), 1914, oil on canvas; 40-½ x 32-½ inches (Denver Art Museum)

Tom Po Qui is a prime example of such portraiture. On the one hand, the work appears to present Gonzales as an ethnic type, her colorful Native clothing and dazzling silver jewelry highlighted in a manner that seems to render her a decorative object, presented to be consumed by non-Native audiences eager to see depictions of exotic American Indian culture. Yet Gonzales stares out of the canvas with self-possession, evenly meeting the viewer's gaze in a way that disrupts the interpretation of this work as entirely exploitative. The agency of this sitter cannot be ignored, and indeed the historical record regarding Gonzales's identity as a Pueblo artist and performer in her own right brings further nuance to analysis of this painting.

Painted Desert

Henri painted Gonzales not in La Jolla, but in nearby San Diego, at the site of the Panama-California Exposition, which would open in 1915. The Panama-California Exposition was held between January 1, 1915 and January 1, 1917 in San Diego's Balboa Park, to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal and to promote tourism in the region. Construction was underway for the Exposition's various exhibits, including the "Painted Desert," an ethnographic exhibit with a large-scale reconstructed pueblo that would display hundreds of Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache performers. Organizers asked several Pueblo families to travel from their homes in New Mexico to the site early and to aid in construction. Gonzales was among them, arriving with her cousin **Maria Martinez** and Maria's husband **Julian**. While Julian Martinez served as a construction foreman, Gonzales and Maria Martinez constructed the large pots that served as chimneys in the living spaces for the reconstructed Pueblo. When the fair opened, they would continue producing pottery, this time for sale to the visitors who flocked to the exposition. Tourist interest in Pueblo pottery during this period spurred a revival in the practice, which had almost died out in the late nineteenth century.



Figure **2.7.1.9**: Unknown photographer, Maria Martinez and Ramoncita Gonzales making pottery, Painted Desert Exhibit, Panama-California Exposition, 1915 (photo: **San Diego Museum of Man**)

Fairgoers occasionally purchased pots, but they also visited the Painted Desert exhibit to simply observe the Indigenous peoples residing there, undertaking activities deemed traditional—including pottery production. Visitors watched as Maria Martinez and Ramoncita Gonzales shaped and fired their vessels, with Julian Martinez providing the painted designs. These Pueblo figures were artist/performers; they agreed to present themselves as Native peoples living in a traditional manner in exchange for wages paid by the fair organizers. Likewise, as artists such as Henri visited the fairgrounds in search of models, Pueblo performers agreed to sit, or we might say, perform their traditional identity.



Figure **2.7.1.10**: Robert Henri, *Tom Po Qui (Water of Antelope Lake/Indian Girl/Ramoncita) (detail)*, 1914, oil on canvas; 40-½ x 32-½ inches (Denver Art Museum)

Gonzales likely selected her attire for *Tom Po Qui*; it is the same types of clothing and jewelry that we see her and other Pueblo women wearing when the exposition opened. As customary Pueblo livelihoods were threatened by encroaching white culture, Gonzales and others turned to the production of tourist wares and performance as "Show Indians" as a matter of survival. Images such as *Tom Po Qui* are reminders of the exploitative and exoticizing practices that led Pueblo people like Gonzales to take up the performance of their Indigenous identity for financial security. It is worth noting however, that simultaneously, this work documented the agency of Native peoples in the early years of the twentieth century, as they adapted Indigenous traditions to the needs of their modern lives.

[1] Robert Henri, "My People," *The Craftsman* vol. 27, no. 5 (February 1915), p. 467.

Additional Resources

This painting at the Denver Art Museum

Derrick Cartwright and Valerie Ann Leeds, *Robert Henri's California: Realism, Race, and Region 1914–1925* (Laguna, CA: Laguna Art Museum, 2014)

Ruth B. Phillips, "Performing the Native Woman: Primitivism and Mimicry in Early-Twentieth-Century Visual Culture," *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, edited by Lynda Jessup, 26–49 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001)

W. Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995)

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2.7.2: Walter Ufer, Hunger

by LAURA F. FRY and DR. LAUREN KILROY-EWBANK

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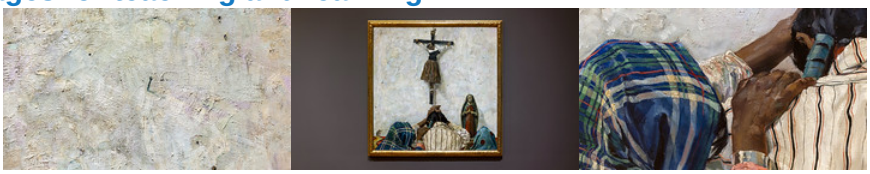


Video **2.7.2.1**: Walter Ufer, *Hunger*, 1919, oil on canvas, 128.3 x 128.3 cm (Gilcrease Museum)

Additional resources

This work at the Gilcrease Museum

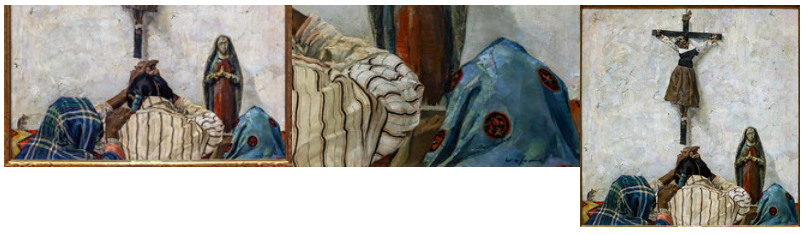
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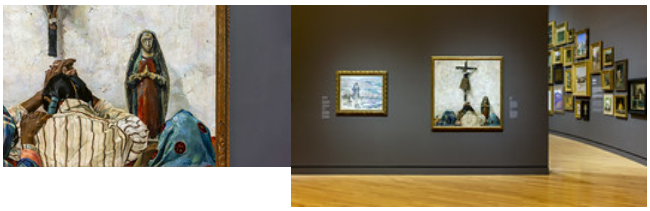
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2.7.3: The lure of the American Southwest- E. Martin Hennings, Rabbit Hunt

by DR. JENNIFER HENNEMAN, DENVER ART MUSEUM and DR. BETH HARRIS

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Video **2.7.3.1**: A conversation with Dr. Jennifer Henneman, Assistant Curator of Western American Art, Denver Art Museum, and Dr. Beth Harris about E. Martin Hennings, Rabbit Hunt, c. 1925, oil on canvas (Denver Art Museum)

Special thanks to the Denver Art Museum

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2.7.4: Velino Shije Herrera (Ma Pe Wi), Design, Tree and Birds

by DR. ADRIANA GRECI GREEN and DR. BETH HARRIS

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Video **2.7.4.1**: Velino Shije Herrera (Ma Pe Wi), *Design, Tree and Birds*, c. 1930, watercolor on paper, 25.25 x 17.75 inches (Newark Museum of Art, Gift of Amelia Elizabeth White, 1937, 37.216)

The Pueblo Modernism of Velino Shije Herrera.

Additional resources:

This work of art at the Newark Museum

The Modernist-Inspired Watercolors of a Pioneering Pueblo Painter

Pablita Velarde's Paintings of Traditional Pueblo Culture

Jessica L. Horton and Janet Catherine Berlo, "Pueblo Painting in 1932 Folding Narratives of Native Art into American Art History" in A Companion to American Art, edited by John Davis, Jennifer A. Greenhill, and Jason D. LaFountain (Wiley, 2015)

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2.7.5: Nampeyo (Hopi-Tewa), polychrome jar

by DR. DAVID W. PENNEY, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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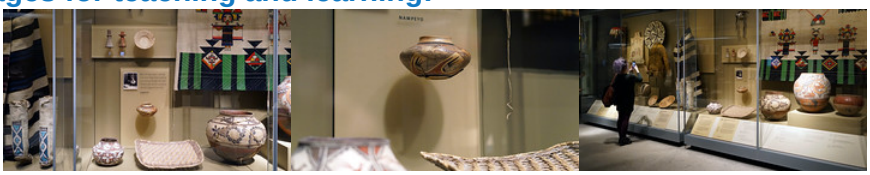
Video **2.7.5.1**: Nampeyo (Hopi-Tewa), polychrome jar, c. 1930s, clay and pigment, 13 x 21 cm (National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution), a Seeing America video

Speakers: Dr. David Penney, Associate Director for Museum Scholarship, Exhibitions, and Public Engagement, National Museum of the American Indian and Dr. Steven Zucker

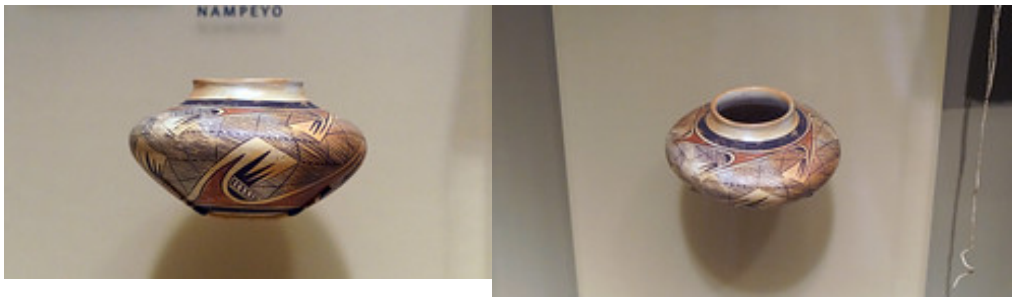
Additional resources

This jar at the National Museum of the American Indian

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2.7.6: Puebloan- Maria Martinez, Black-on-black ceramic vessel

by **DR. SUZANNE NEWMAN FRICKE**

Page ID

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Born Maria Antonia Montoya, Maria Martinez became one of the best-known Native potters of the twentieth century due to her excellence as a ceramist and her connections with a larger, predominantly non-Native audience. Though she lived at the Pueblo of San Ildefonso, about 20 miles north of Santa Fe, New Mexico, from her birth in 1887 until her death in 1980, her work and her life had a wide reaching importance to the Native art world by reframing Native ceramics as a fine art. Before the arrival of the railroad to the area in the 1880s, pots were used in the Pueblos for food storage, cooking, and ceremonies. But with inexpensive pots appearing along the rail line, these practices were in decline. By the 1910s, Ms. Martinez found a way to continue the art by selling her pots to a non-Native audience where they were purchased as something beautiful to look at rather than as utilitarian objects.



Figure **2.7.6.1**: Maria Martinez shown with physicist Enrico Fermi, c. 1948 (public domain; photo by U.S. Government employee made for U.S. Government)

Her mastery as a ceramist was noted in her village while she was still young. She learned the ceramic techniques that were used in the Southwest for several millennia by watching potters from San Ildefonso, especially her aunt Nicholasa as well as potters (including Margaret Tafoya from Santa Clara), from other nearby Pueblos. All the raw materials had to be gathered and processed carefully or the final vessel would not fire properly. The clay was found locally. To make the pottery stronger it had to be mixed with a temper made from sherds of broken pots that had been pounded into a powder or volcanic ash. When mixed with water, the elasticity of the clay and the strength of the temper could be formed into different shapes, including a rounded pot (known as an *olla*) or a flat plate, using only the artist's hands as the potting wheel was not used. The dried vessel needed to be scraped, sanded, smoothed, then covered with a slip (a thin solution of clay and water). The slip was polished by rubbing a smooth stone over the surface to flatten the clay and create a shiny finish—a difficult and time-consuming process. Over the polished slip the pot was covered with designs painted with an iron-rich solution using either pulverized iron ore or a reduction of wild plants called guaco. These would be dried but required a high temperature firing to change the brittle clay to hard ceramics. Even without kilns, the ceramists were able to create a fire hot enough to transform the pot by using manure.

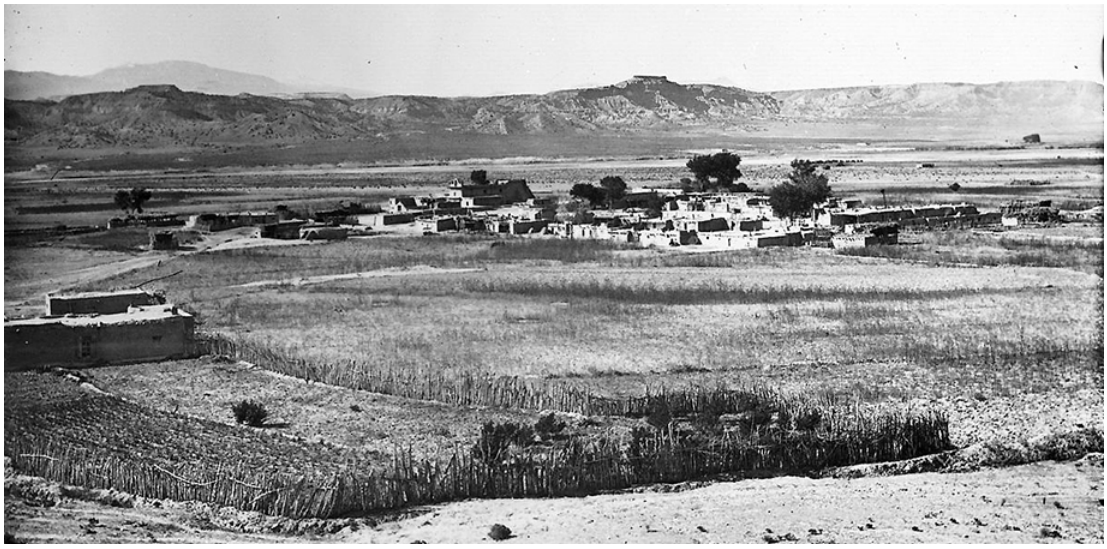


Figure 2.7.6.2: John K. Hillers, San Ildefonso (detail), New Mexico, c. 1871 – 1907 (photo: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, National Archives and Records Administration #523752)

Making ceramics in the Pueblo was considered a communal activity, where different steps in the process were often shared. The potters helped each other with the arduous tasks such as mixing the paints and polishing the slip. Ms. Martinez would form the perfectly symmetrical vessels by hand and leave the decorating to others. Throughout her career, she worked with different family members, including her husband Julian, her son Adam and his wife Santana, and her son Popovi Da. As the pots moved into a fine art market, Ms. Martinez was encouraged to sign her name on the bottom of her pots. Though this denied the communal nature of the art, she began to do so as it resulted in more money per pot. To help other potters in the Pueblo, Ms. Martinez was known to have signed the pots of others, lending her name to help the community. Helping her Pueblo was of paramount importance to Ms. Martinez. She lived as a proper Pueblo woman, avoiding self-aggrandizement and insisting to scholars that she was just a wife and mother even as her reputation in the outside world increased.



Figure 2.7.6.3: Maria Martinez, Black-on-black ceramic vessel, c. 1939, blackware ceramic, 11 1/8 x 13″, Tewa, Puebloan, San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico (National Museum of Women in the Arts)

Maria and Julian Martinez pioneered a style of applying a matte-black design over polished-black. Similar to the pot pictured here, the design was based on pottery sherds found on an Ancestral Pueblo dig site dating to the twelfth to seventeenth centuries at what is now known as Bandelier National Monument. The Martinezes worked at the site, with Julian helping the archaeologists at the dig and Maria helping at the campsite. Julian Martinez spent time drawing and painting the designs found on the walls and on the sherds of pottery into his notebooks, designs he later recreated on pots. In the 1910s, Maria and Julian worked together to recreate the black-on-black ware they found at the dig, experimenting with clay from different areas and using different firing techniques. Taking a cue from Santa Clara pots, they discovered that smothering the fire with powdered manure removed the oxygen while

retaining the heat and resulted in a pot that was blackened. This resulted in a pot that was less hard and not entirely watertight, which worked for the new market that prized decorative use over utilitarian value. The areas that were burnished had a shiny black surface and the areas painted with guaco were matte designs based on natural phenomena, such as rain clouds, bird feathers, rows of planted corn, and the flow of rivers.



Figure 2.7.6.4: Detail, Maria Martinez, Black-on-black ceramic vessel, c. 1939, blackware ceramic, 11 1/8 x 13″, Tewa, Puebloan, San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico (National Museum of Women in the Arts)

The olla pictured above features two design bands, one across the widest part of the pot and the other around the neck. The elements inside are abstract but suggest a bird in flight with rain clouds above, perhaps a prayer for rain that could be flown up to the sky. These designs are exaggerated due to the low rounded shapes of the pot, which are bulbous around the shoulder then narrow at the top. The shape, color, and designs fit the contemporary Art Deco movement, which was popular between the two World Wars and emphasized bold, geometric forms and colors. With its dramatic shape and the high polish of surface, this pot exemplifies Maria Martinez's skill in transforming a utilitarian object into a fine art.

The work of Maria Martinez marks an important point in the long history of Pueblo pottery. Ceramics from the Southwest trace a connection from the Ancestral Pueblo to the modern Pueblo eras. Given the absence of written records, tracing the changes in the shapes, materials, and designs on the long-lasting sherds found across the area allow scholars to see connections and innovations. Maria Martinez brought the distinctive Pueblo style into a wider context, allowing Native and non-Native audiences to appreciate the art form.

Additional resources:

This pot at the National Museum of Women in the Arts

The Art, Life and Legacy of Maria Martinez

Maria Martinez Pottery – San Ildefonso Pueblo

Maria Martinez (Through the Eyes of the Pot: A study of Southwest Pueblo Pottery and Culture)

Maria Martinez: Indian Pottery of San Ildefonso (documentary video, 1972)

Contemporary Pueblo pottery at Bandelier National Monument

R. L. Bunzel, *The Pueblo Potter: A Study of Creative Imagination in Primitive Art* (Dover Publications, 1929).

Hazel Hyde, *Maria Making Pottery: The Story of Famous American Indian Potter Maria Martinez* (Sunstone Press, 1992).

Alice Marriott, *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1987).

Susan Peterson and Francis H. Harlow, *The Living Tradition of Maria Martinez* (Kodansha, 1992).

——, *Pottery by American Indian Women: The Legacy of Generations* (Abbeville Press, 1997).

Richard Spivey,*The Legacy of Maria Poveka Martinez* (Museum of New Mexico Press, 2003).

Stephen Trimble, *Talking with the Clay: The Art of Pueblo Pottery in the 21st Century* (School of American Research Press, 2007).

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2.7.7: Julian Martinez, Buffalo Dancers

by **DR. SUZANNE NEWMAN FRICKE**

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Figure **2.7.7.1**: Maria and Julian Martínez, pot with *avanyu* design, 1934-43, 21.7 x 26.7 cm (National Museum of the American Indian)

Famous Pueblo pottery

As an artist, Julian Martínez from **San Ildefonso Pueblo** is best known for the ceramics he made with his wife, Maria Martínez. Together, they produced the matte-black on polished-black pottery for which they and their Pueblo colleagues gained international fame.

Maria formed the pots into elegant shapes and Julian painted the designs, both geometric and figurative, including historic motifs such as the feather pattern from Mimbres pottery and the *avanyu*, the horned serpent similar the Mesoamerican deity **Quetzalcoatl**.

Julian Martínez also worked at the Museum of New Mexico, where he took advantage of the opportunity to study the Museum's collection of Southwestern pottery, and he learned more during the summers when he worked at the field school at the Pajarito Plateau (later renamed Bandelier National Monument). In addition to his work on pottery, Martínez drew on paper; he always kept a notebook where he sketched ideas and recorded what he had seen. Though most of his images were painted on paper, he created a few murals on walls and, on rare occasions, he painted on hide, as he did for his *Buffalo Dancers* from about 1930, now in the collection of the National Museum of the American Indian in New York City (below).



Figure **2.7.7.2**: Awa Tsireh (Alfonso Roybal), *Girl Holding Kachina*, c. 1920-30, watercolor and pencil on paper (Smithsonian American Art Museum)

Pueblo painting

Painting has long been part of Pueblo life; it can be found on the walls of the *kivas* (the round ceremonial structures usually partially underground) and on dance regalia such as wands, *tablitas* (ceremonial headdresses), clothing, and other items. A thriving art community developed around 1900 during a difficult time in Pueblo history: due to illness and outward migration, the population was reduced to less than 200. When the Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe Railway extended its track to the area in 1880, the economy of the Pueblo was transformed as more outside goods were purchased and more items, especially ceramics and paintings on paper, were made to sell to tourists traveling to the area.

An important group of Pueblo artists called the San Ildefonso Self-Taught Group, active from around 1900 to around 1930, included Julian Martínez, Tonita Peña, Crescencio Martínez, and Awa Tsireh (Alfonso Roybal). Most of their work depicted scenes common to Pueblo life, mainly ceremonial dances and genre scenes.

The Buffalo Dance

Martínez was elected governor of San Ildefonso in 1925 and he served as a leader in ceremonies. Like other Pueblo painters, he refrained from depicting ritual objects, sites, and altars that were considered private, and focused instead on dances that were open to the public. The Buffalo Dance is one of the most commonly represented of all Pueblo dances by the Self-Taught Group. Art historian J.J. Brody described it as one of the most "comprehensible to outsiders of all public ritual dances of the Pueblo people." [1] Performed annually on January 23rd to honor the Pueblo patron saint, San Ildefonso, the Buffalo Dance enacts a hunting scene, with three dancers playing the roles of a hunter, buffalo, and a buffalo maiden (or buffalo mother) who has the power to induce the animals to sacrifice themselves to provide food and hide.

Early twentieth-century Pueblo paintings by artists including Tsireh, Peña, and Martínez all depict the Buffalo Dance in the same way, with the three figures in profile, facing the same direction as they would be during the dance. The men wear a buffalo headdress and dance kilts with depictions of *avanyu* (a horned serpent), and their skin is painted black. The buffalo maiden wears an embroidered one-shouldered *manta*, or dress.



Figure **2.7.7.3**: Julian Martínez, *Buffalo Dancers*, c. 1930s, hide and paint, 79 x 61 cm (National Museum of the American Indian)

In this hide painting, Martínez gave all three figures the same facial features, focusing instead on varying details in their clothing and regalia. There is no sense of space; the figures lack **modeling** and do not cast shadows. The flatness of the figures and the lack of a background suggest the influence of early Modernist abstraction. The empty space might also symbolize an area that is sacred

—unbound by place or time. Paintings of such dances might even portray a space where the viewers themselves also participate in the dance, because, as anthropologist Alfonso Ortiz from Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo has observed, everyone in the community dances in ceremonies.[2]

Though Martínez painted several versions of the Buffalo Dance, the NMAI version is unusual for its material: animal hide. More commonly used in art from the Plains, hide is stronger and suppler than paper as a base. This particular hide has small holes on three of its sides, suggesting that it was used to cover a portfolio or large book, with a string or leather cord run through the holes to attach it over a group of drawings.[3] Later, the image may have been unlaced and cut along one side, accounting for the smooth edge.

Pueblo painting continues

With its bright colors and strong forms, Julian Martínez's *Buffalo Dancers* exemplifies the early period of Pueblo painting. In 1932, the Santa Fe Indian School (whose painting program became known as "The Studio School") started teaching art, and developed the Santa Fe Indian School Style. This new style retained the earlier emphasis on dance and genre scenes with the same flatness and lack of modeling, but the work became more decorative and lost the intimacy of the earlier works.

During Martínez's life, local artists, anthropologists, and ethnographers expressed their appreciation for his work, noting his radiant colors, technical skill, and mastery of form. Martínez's *Buffalo Dancers*, like other paintings produced by the San Ildefonso Self-Taught Group, conveys a sense of movement and energy in its figures and shares the joy of the ceremonies.

[1] J.J. Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico* (School for Advanced Research Press, 1997).

[2] Alfonzo Ortiz, *The Tewa World: Space, Time, Being and Becoming in a Pueblo Society* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1969).

[3] I am indebted to Dr. Jonathon Batkin and Dr. Bruce Bernstein for sharing this idea.

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This page titled 2.7.7: Julian Martinez, Buffalo Dancers is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Dr. Suzanne Newman Fricke, "Julian Martinez, Buffalo Dancers," in Smarthistory, September 30, 2021, accessed January 12, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/julian-martinez-buffalo-dancers-2/..

2.7.8: 10.7.8-Awa Tsireh's Pottery Makers

by **RYUICHI NAKAYAMA**

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188423



Figure **2.7.8.1**: Awa Tsireh, *Pottery Makers*, c. 1930, ink and watercolor, 33.02 x 54.29 cm (Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio)

Two Pueblo women sit and decorate pottery with brushes made of yucca leaves. Beside them, finished vessels in white, black, and red are arranged in a horizontal line. Except for delicate shadows cast on the right side of the women and vessels, the background is left blank and we do not know where these women are working. This painting, known as *Pottery Makers*, is one of many that the artist Awa Tsireh (Cattail Bird, Spanish name Alfonso Roybal) created about Pueblo cultures, including images of ceremonial dances and pottery designs. The Pueblo people are one of many Native American cultural groups living in the southwestern United States.

Increasing contact

Awa Tsireh was a painter and metalsmith from San Ildefonso Pueblo, a Tewa-speaking Indigenous group in New Mexico. Awa Tsireh (and other contemporaneous Pueblo artists) used commercial artistic media, such as ink and watercolor, and their paintings were sold to primarily non-Native audiences. As the result of Pueblo communities' increased contact with U.S. settler-colonial society in the first decades of the twentieth century, Pueblo pottery and Pueblo paintings depicting pottery-making scenes attracted urban middle- and upper-middle-class white audiences (mostly from the urban East coast) some of whom felt that mainstream U.S. culture had lost its harmonious balance between nature and civilization. Other Pueblo painters such as Ma-Pe-Wi (Velino Shije Herrera, Zia Pueblo) and Quah Ah (Tonita Peña, a San Ildefonso female painter who lived in Cochiti Pueblo) also produced paintings of the same subject matter. *Pottery Makers* demonstrates how Awa Tsireh's interactions with an emerging community of non-Native cultural elites (including artists, writers, philanthropists, art collectors, and scholars) living in or visiting Santa Fe and Taos in New Mexico shaped how he depicted scenes of Pueblo pottery making.

Art and ethnography

In the late 1910s, non-Native cultural elites in Santa Fe, such as Edgar Lee Hewett, founder of the Museum of New Mexico (MNM), and Elizabeth DeHuff, wife of then superintendent of the Santa Fe Indian School began to recognize Pueblo paintings not only as ethnographic documents that described Pueblo ceremonial dances and life at villages, but also as fine art. Early advocates of Pueblo paintings encouraged artists to create art based on their own cultures. However, this does not mean Awa Tsireh passively

produced ethnographic depictions of Pueblo culture at the behest of white anthropologists. It is important to emphasize that Pueblo artists like Awa Tsireh had room for negotiation and artistic ingenuity, such as we see in *Pottery Makers*.



Figure **2.7.8.2**: Awa Tsireh, *Pottery Makers* (detail), c. 1930, ink and watercolor, 33.02 x 54.29 cm (Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio)

The pottery in the painting



Figure **2.7.8.3**: Unidentified San Ildefonso artist, Jar, c. 1890s, clay and paint , 31.75 cm in diameter (Denver Art Museum)

All but one of the vessels in *Pottery Makers* are globular in shape with a short neck. They look like actual vessels made with black designs on white slip (watery clay paint) and a red band at the bottom as well as on the inside below the rim. Their color palette resembles black-on-cream wares from the late nineteenth century, such as a storage jar made in the 1890s that uses only black color for abstract motifs on the white field and has an undecorated red band at the bottom and on the rim.



Figure **2.7.8.4**: Unknown San Ildefonso Artist, Jar, c. 1900 (courtesy of School for Advanced Research; photo: Lynn Lown)

However, by the turn of the twentieth century, black-on-cream ware was gradually replaced by new styles, such as polychrome ware that showed colorful abstract motifs using reddish brown pigments.

By the time Awa Tsireh produced this painting around 1930, Julian and Maria Martinez had achieved national success with their now iconic monochrome black-on-black polished ware. Importantly, the ceramic style depicted in *Pottery Makers* does not follow the trend at San Ildefonso Pueblo at that time, which means that Awa Tsireh's paintings are not exact depictions of life in San Ildefonso Pueblo—despite his use of a naturalistic approach. The artist's choice to use this style of pottery helps us to understand the complex thought process of a Pueblo artist in the early twentieth century.



Figure **2.7.8.5**: "Indian work room, Indian Building, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Navaho Indians among them Elle, the most famous weaver among the Navahos, and Tom of Ganado, her husband, and Indians from other tribes—Santo Domingo, Isleta, Laguna, and San Felipi," a postcard from the Fred Harvey series, c. 1900–09 (Newberry Library)

The significant stylistic change from black-on-cream wares in San Ildefonso pottery around the turn of the twentieth century, and the invention of polished black-on-black wares in the late 1910s, were the result of Pueblo communities' increased contact with U.S. settler-colonial society. As the result of railroad tourism in the American Southwest from the 1890s, Pueblo pottery became widely popular among white urban middle- and upper-middle-class individuals. Along with the railroad run by Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe (AT & SF) Railway, Fred Harvey Company's hotels sold Indigenous hand-made objects and set up demonstrations of ceremonial dances as well as the making of Indigenous arts like Pueblo pottery and Diné (Navajo) weavings.

Sales

Meanwhile, Pueblo communities needed to earn cash due to the reduction of the land available for agriculture and hunting due to the encroachment of Anglo and Hispanic ranchers seeking to increase their production of beef as well as the increased presence of a cash economy after New Mexico was annexed by the U.S. in 1848 as a result of the Mexican-American War. The sales of Indigenous hand-made objects for the non-Native market helped Pueblos to survive economically. These sales also created room for Pueblo cultural expression in the face of the forced assimilation policy by the U.S. federal government, which included sending Pueblo youths to boarding schools as well as attacks against ceremonial practices that culminated in a series of documents issued in the early 1920s (by Commissioner of the Office of Indian Affairs Charles Burke) restricting many of them.

At this time, Pueblo potters—mostly women—began to produce less elaborate small pottery vessels and figurines so that they could maximize their sales to tourists. Early tourists preferred small inexpensive vessels as souvenirs and cared less about quality. At the same time, Pueblo potters began to experiment with non-conventional shapes and designs (such as ashtrays, vases with handles, or figurines). They also created pseudo-ceremonial vessels that appealed to tourists' and anthropologists' curiosity about Indigenous esoteric materials, despite the fact that they had no ceremonial function within the Pueblo communities, and were a tactic to protect ceremonial objects from outsiders.

Questions of authenticity

Not all of these changes in the production of Pueblo pottery were favorable in the eyes of white cultural elites who were concerned about the impact of tourism and assimilation policies on Pueblo cultural traditions. Some were concerned that changes to these objects made them less "authentic," a perception that was shaped by the myth of a vanishing race—a pervasive assumption among non-Natives that Indigenous peoples and their cultural distinctiveness would completely disappear in the face of modernization and settler-colonial practices. Herbert J. Spinden, a curator at the American Museum of Natural History, praised San Ildefonso pottery as "decorative art" while expressing his concerns over the destructive impact of "the commercializing American contact" on "the remains of the native culture." [1] In collectors' and scholars' imaginations, Native traditions were on the verge of extinction.

While museums tried to collect what they regarded as pottery vessels free from the negative impact of tourism, Kenneth Chapman, curator of the MNM, encouraged Pueblo potters to study older vessels to revive earlier traditions. Awa Tsireh referenced black-on-

cream wares for *Pottery Makers*—the style widely used in San Ildefonso Pueblo before the expansion of tourism in the Southwest that had caused radical changes in Pueblo pottery-making—and was surely aware of the special value attached to older vessels by educated non-Native audiences.



Figure **2.7.8.6**: Photographs showing the "olla maiden trope" were common in the late 19th-century U.S. *Pueblo Women Carrying Water*, c. 1870–98, from *Stereoscopic views of the Indians of New Mexico*, c. 1870–1908, albumen photoprint (The New York Public Library)

Women in the painting

Interestingly, Awa Tsireh's pottery-making scenes rarely include male figures (even though pottery-making is traditionally women's work among Pueblo people, men also participated in the production of pottery—and the artist himself decorated vessels). Representations of Pueblo women carrying an *olla* on their head ("*olla*" is a Spanish word meaning "cooking pot" but often used as "water jar" in this context) were ubiquitous in dominant U.S. visual culture including in photographs, advertisements, and artworks.

The trope of the "olla maiden" is a romanticized image of Pueblo culture, especially women. White intellectuals in the late nineteenth century saw over-packed urban spaces and machine-made commodities as causing human alienation as well as physical and moral degeneration (especially among white males). The olla maiden became a symbol of an attempt to restore what they felt had been lost: a harmonious balance between nature and civilization. For them, traditional Native handmade objects made by women from natural materials, such as basketry and pottery vessels, provided symbolic connections to nature and a romanticized past. In his pottery-making scenes, Awa Tsireh aligned his pottery-making scenes with the popular "olla maiden" trope by showing only women and adding more globular-shaped jars that referred to earlier types of vessels rather than a diversity of vessels including plates, different types of bowls, canteens, and so forth.



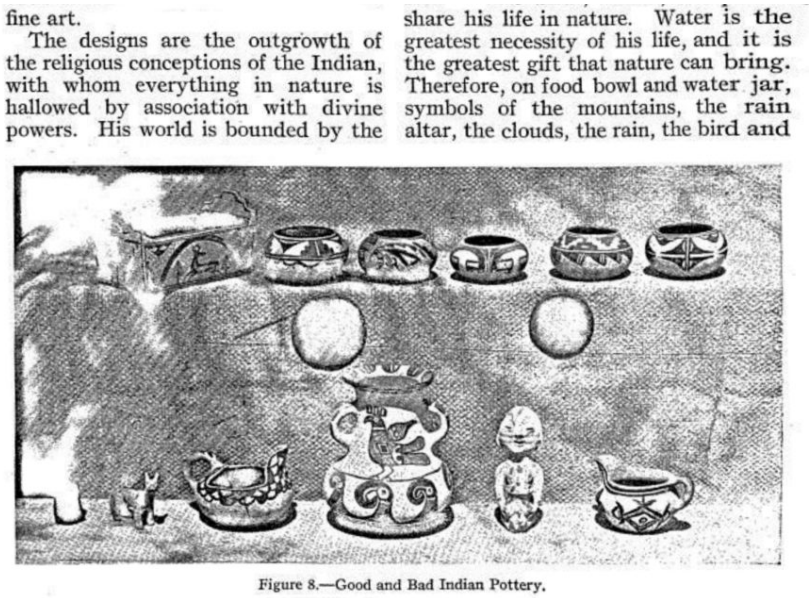
Figure 2.7.8.7: Photographer unknown, *Dolorita Vigil: Dressmaker and Potter*, San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico, c. 1915 (Palace of the Governors Photo Archives Collection)

Awa Tsireh's pottery-making scenes reference an even more specific variation of the "olla maiden" trope—images of Pueblo women making pottery. A staged photograph that shows this subject includes Dolorita Vigil, from San Ildefonso; she squats on her heels, holds a water jar, and is surrounded by three other water jars. She holds a brush made out of a yucca leaf in her right hand as if she is decorating the jar. The brick-paved ground and the wall behind her suggest that she is probably in the courtyard of the Palace of Governors in Santa Fe where Kenneth Chapman had invited San Ildefonso potters to perform demonstrations for white middle- and upper-middle-class visitors.

This staged photograph derives from popular demonstrations of Indigenous art being made at tourist sites. Tourist interest in these hand-made objects was so great that they sought to observe ceramic production by the hands of Indigenous artists. The artificiality of this photograph's setting reveals that the focus was on reproducing images of a Pueblo woman with her water jar, even if it was outside the Pueblo context. Awa Tsireh was surely aware that the "olla maiden" trope provided a frame of reference to strengthen the notion of "authenticity" projected onto Pueblo pottery.

Documenting production

Although photographers had produced images of Pueblo pottery-making since the late nineteenth century, a renewed interest in documenting production emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century. Non-Native specialists studied techniques and design principles for different types of pottery as a way of establishing criteria to discern the quality of Pueblo pottery. They believed this could help to elevate the status of Pueblo pottery to fine art.



fine art.

The designs are the outgrowth of the religious conceptions of the Indian, with whom everything in nature is hallowed by association with divine powers. His world is bounded by the

share his life in nature. Water is the greatest necessity of his life, and it is the greatest gift that nature can bring. Therefore, on food bowl and water jar, symbols of the mountains, the rain altar, the clouds, the rain, the bird and

Figure 8.—Good and Bad Indian Pottery.

Figure 2.7.8.8: Illustration of the Pueblo pottery arranged according to what was considered "good" (the row on top) and "bad" (the bottom row) by collectors. from Olive W. Wilson, "The Survival of an Ancient Art," *Art & Archaeology* (January 1920): 28.

An essay in *Art and Archaeology* by Olive Wilson, "The Survival of an Ancient Art" (1920) illustrated the processes of pottery-making with photographs and text. It also includes a photograph showing Pueblo pottery arranged horizontally, similar to what we

see in Awa Tsireh's *Pottery Makers*—he was likely referencing this type of photographic representation of Pueblo culture. The photograph in Wilson's essay contrasts what the author regarded as "good" pottery on the top row (namely globular-shaped jars with refined shapes and meticulous details and a traditional rectangular corn-meal bowl) and "bad" pottery on the row below (here there are types of vessels invented and sold for tourists, such as clay figurines and non-conventional-shaped vessels decorated with less elaborate designs).

This photograph also shows pottery vessels from a consistent angle, and arranges them isolated from the surrounding environment. This type of neatly arranged photographic image resonated with emerging research on designs of Indigenous artifacts. It shows a marked difference from the cluttered souvenirs commonly found in home decoration that became widely popular among US white middle- and upper-middle classes around the turn of the twentieth century. A trend where Indigenous artifacts from different cultures were promiscuously displayed among artworks and books about Indigenous peoples in dens, alcoves, and hallways. This fashion became possible when department stores and world fairs brought Indigenous art to their clientele, and reflected the value that Indigenous hand-made objects had for some urban white elites. Displays at "Indian corners" framed Indigenous hand-made objects as "souvenirs" and "curios" rather than as "fine arts" or "ethnographic specimens."

The photographic representation of Pueblo pottery employed by anthropologists and curators, could dictate to viewers how these wares should be viewed and what constituted "good" or "bad" pottery as "fine art." Awa Tsireh drew on the authority tied to this photographic format for Indigenous work, in part, perhaps, because of its appeal to white audiences.



Figure **2.7.8.9**: Awa Tsireh, *Pottery Makers*, c. 1930, ink and watercolor, 33.02 x 54.29 cm (Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio)

Unique representations

Awa Tsireh's choice to incorporate older styles into his painting may have resonated with his predominantly white, educated, non-Native audiences, who had access to books and articles about Pueblo pottery. He chose to appeal to their particular interest in older vessels from the late nineteenth century rather than those produced by contemporary potters. Awa Tsireh's *Pottery Makers* tacitly confirms his non-Native audience's understanding of ideally good Pueblo pottery, and gives his painting an aura of authenticity that would have appealed to his audience. Meanwhile, the artist reinforced his audiences' romanticized image of Pueblo culture by referencing the "olla maiden" trope. Because of decades of interactions with non-Native intellectuals, artists at San Ildefonso Pueblo—like Awa Tsireh—were aware of the interest in describing Native techniques and analyzing designs.

Pottery Makers demonstrates that Awa Tsireh created his own unique representation of Pueblo women and pottery by integrating different modes of representations of Pueblo people and culture found in settler-colonial U.S. visual culture into his pottery-making scenes. These ranged from the popular "olla maiden" trope to anthropological photographs studying pottery design. By aligning his artworks with his audiences' desire for authenticity, Awa Tsireh found a means to solidify his external reputation as an outstanding Pueblo artist. At the same time, Awa Tsireh visualized his understanding of contemporary Pueblo communities interacting with outsiders (tourists and anthropologists alike). This created a complex dynamic where his own culture was Othered by the very outsiders he references in his artwork. In this way, Awa Tsireh disrupted the uneven power relationship between the colonizer as observer, and the colonized peoples as the observed.

**At the beginning of this project, the author consulted with the Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) of San Ildefonso Pueblo in order to make sure another essay did not violate protocols of religious matter from the perspectives of cultural specialists. Out of respect to the decision made by the board member, the author decided to write about this topic instead of the original plan. I express my gratitude to the members of the advisory board who reviewed my proposal, and Mike Bremer, officer of THPO. Western academic institutions have tended to regard Indigenous communities as the subject of research and excluded from the decision-making processes related to research projects. Tribal consultation is an important approach to redress structural problems of academic research about Indigenous cultures. Although just a consultation is not enough to redesign research to better reflect interests of Indigenous communities, this essay seeks to introduce such issues to a broader public by using a platform like Smarthistory.*

Notes:

[1] Spinden discussed this in his article “The Making of Pottery at San Ildefonso” (1911)

Additional resources:

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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.8: Harlem Renaissance

2.8.1: Aaron Douglas, Aspiration

2.8.2: Jacob Lawrence

2.8.2.1: The Migration Series

2.8.2.2: Ambulance Call

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2.8.1: Aaron Douglas, Aspiration

by **TIMOTHY ANGLIN BURGARD, FINE ARTS MUSEUMS OF SAN FRANCISCO** and **DR. BETH HARRIS**

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Video **2.8.1.1**: Aaron Douglas, *Aspiration*, 1936, oil on canvas, 152.4 x 152.4 cm (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco), a Seeing America video

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- **2.3: Ancient Egypt** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

SECTION OVERVIEW

2.8.2: Jacob Lawrence

2.8.2.1: The Migration Series

2.8.2.2: Ambulance Call

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2.8.2.1: The Migration Series

- Directly below is the shorter version of this video. You can access the longer version by scrolling down the page.

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Video **2.8.2.1.1**: Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration Series*, 1940-41, 60 panels, tempera on hardboard (even numbers at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, odd numbers at the Phillips Collection, Washington D.C.)



Video **2.8.2.1.2**: Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration Series*, 1940-41, 60 panels, tempera on hardboard (even numbers at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, odd numbers at the Phillips Collection, Washington D.C.)

Additional resources:

***The Migration Series* at the Phillips Collection**

***The Migration Series* at The Museum of Modern Art**

This series through MoMA Learning

A finding guide for images related to the Great Migration at the Library of Congress

A finding guide for primary documents related to the Great Migration at the Library of Congress

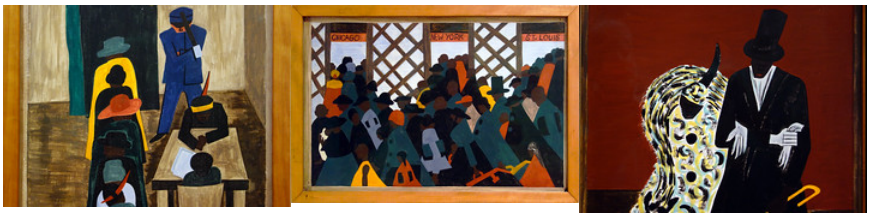
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- **2.3: Ancient Egypt** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

2.8.2.2: Ambulance Call

by DR. JENNIFER PADGETT, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART and DR. BETH HARRIS

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Video **2.8.2.2.1**: Jacob Lawrence, *Ambulance Call*, 1948, tempera on board, 61 x 50.8 cm (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art) Speakers: Jennifer Padgett, assistant curator, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and Beth Harris

Additional resources:

This painting at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

Anna Diamond, “Why the Works of Visionary Artist Jacob Lawrence Still Resonate a Century After His Birth,” September 5, 2017) Smithsonian.com

Jacob Lawrence (from the Whitney Museum of American Art)

This page titled 2.8.2.2: Ambulance Call is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Dr. Jennifer Padgett, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and Dr. Beth Harris, "Ambulance Call," in Smarthistory, October 3, 2018, accessed August 16, 2020, https://smarthistory.org/a-harlem-street-scene-by-jacob-lawrence-ambulance-call-2/..

- **10.10: American art to World War II** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

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2.9.3: Grant Wood

- 2.9.3.1: American Gothic
- 2.9.3.2: Parson Weems' Fable

2.9.4: Alexandre Hogue, Crucified Land

2.9.5: Vertis Hayes, The Lynchers

2.9.6: Vertis Hayes, Juke Joint

2.9.7: Reginald Marsh, Wooden Horses

2.9.8: Ben Shahn

- 2.9.8.1: The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti
- 2.9.8.2: Miners' Wives
- 2.9.8.3: Contemporary American Sculpture

2.9.9: Romare Bearden, Factory Workers

2.9.10: Edward Hopper, Nighthawks

2.9.11: Horace Pippin

- 2.9.11.1: Horace Pippin, Mr. Prejudice
- 2.9.11.2: Josiah McElheny on Horace Pippin

2.9.12: Norman Rockwell, Rosie the Riveter

2.9.13: Eldzier Cortor, Southern Landscape

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2.9.1: Todros Geller, Strange Worlds

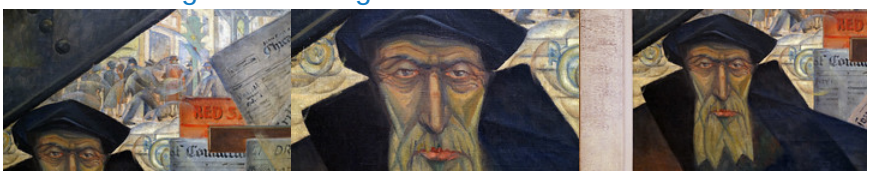
by SARAH ALVAREZ, THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO and DR. BETH HARRIS

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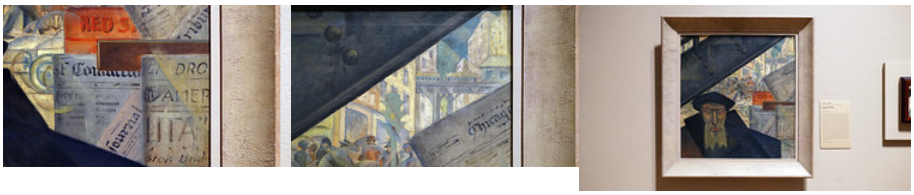


Video **2.9.1.1**: Todros Geller, *Strange Worlds*, 1928, oil on canvas, 71.8 x 66.4 cm (Art Institute of Chicago), a Seeing America videoSpeakers: Sarah Alvarez, Director of School Programs, Department of Learning and Engagement, The Art Institute of Chicago and Steven Zucker

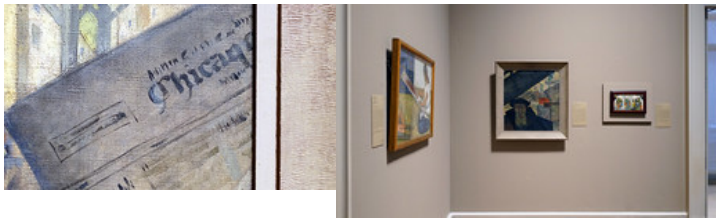
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2.9.2: Hale Woodruff, The Banjo Player

by DR. LEO G. MAZOW and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
188431

Caution

Please note, this video includes historical images that are racist.



Video **2.9.2.1**: Hale Woodruff, *The Banjo Player*, 1929, oil on canvas, 60.33 × 73.03 cm (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts), a Seeing America video

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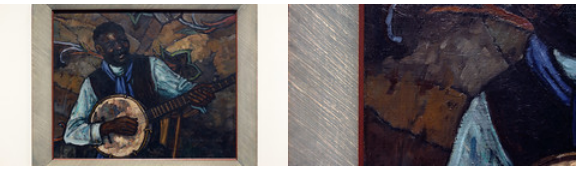


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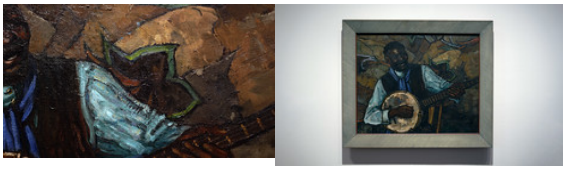
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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.9.3: Grant Wood

2.9.3.1: American Gothic

2.9.3.2: Parson Weems' Fable

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2.9.3.1: American Gothic

- *by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

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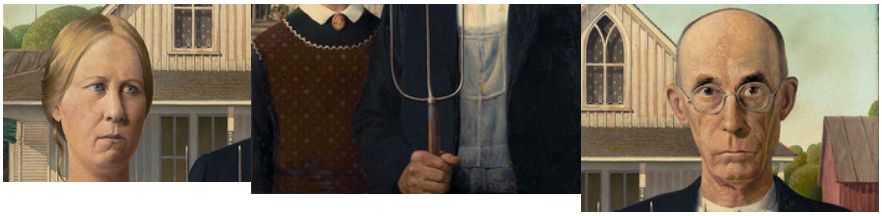


Video **2.9.3.1.1**: Grant Wood, *American Gothic*, 1930, oil on beaver board, 78 x 65.3 cm / 30-3/4 x 25-3/4″ (The Art Institute of Chicago)

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Figure **2.9.3.1.49**: More Smarthistory images…

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2.9.3.2: Parson Weems' Fable

by DR. SHIRLEY REECE-HUGHES, AMON CARTER MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **2.9.3.2.1**: A conversation with Dr. Shirley Reece-Hughes, Curator, Amon Carter Museum of American Art and Dr. Steven Zucker in front of Grant Wood, *Parson Weems' Fable*, 1939, oil on canvas, 38 1/8 x 50 1/8 inches (Amon Carter Museum of American Art)

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2.9.4: Alexandre Hogue, Crucified Land

by LAURA F. FRY and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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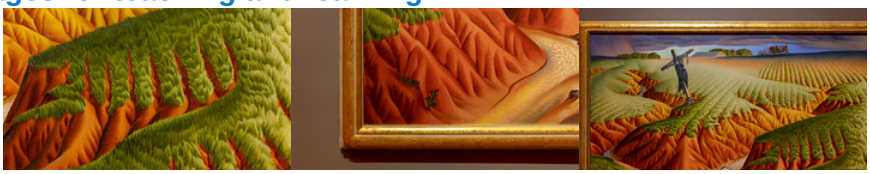


Video **2.9.4.1**: Alexandre Hogue, *Crucified Land*, 1939, oil on canvas, 106 x 152.1 cm (Gilcrease Museum)

Additional resources

This work at the Gilcrease Museum

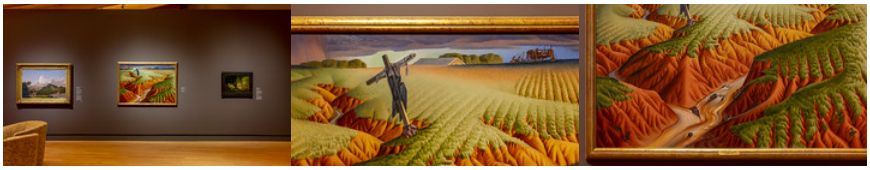
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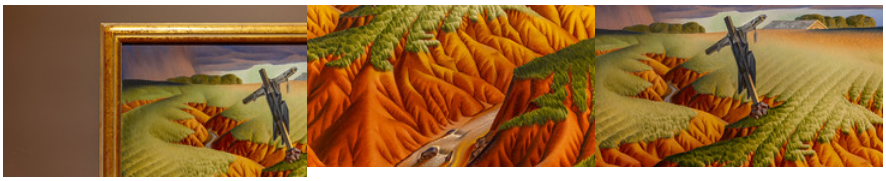
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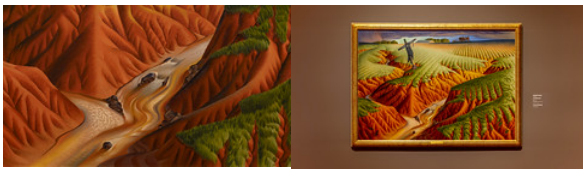
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2.9.5: Vertis Hayes, The Lynchers

by DR. SHAWNYA L. HARRIS and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID

188436

Caution

Warning: this video contains graphic scenes of racial violence



Video **2.9.5.1**: Vertis Hayes, *The Lynchers*, 1930s, oil on canvas, 19-1/2 x 15-1/4 inches (Georgia Museum of Art, Athens); speakers: Dr. Shawnya Harris, Larry D. and Brenda A. Thompson Curator of African American and African Diasporic Art at the Georgia Museum of Art and Dr. Beth Harris

Additional resources

Vertis Hayes, *The Lynchers* on Google Arts & Culture

Learn about Vertis Hayes and his murals in Harlem Hospital

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2.9.6: Vertis Hayes, Juke Joint

by **DR. SHAWNYA L. HARRIS** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID

194515



Video **2.9.6.1**: Vertis Hayes, *Juke Joint*, 1946, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 91.4 cm (The Larry D. and Brenda A. Thompson Collection of African American Art, Georgia Museum of Art), a Seeing America video. Speakers: Dr. Shawnya Harris, the Larry D. and Brenda A. Thompson Curator of African American and African Diasporic Art at the Georgia Museum of Art and Dr. Steven Zucker

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2.9.7: Reginald Marsh, Wooden Horses

by ERIN MONROE, WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
188437



Video **2.9.7.1**: Reginald Marsh, *Wooden Horses*, 1936, tempera on board, 61 x 101.6 cm (Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art). A conversation with Erin Monroe, Robert H. Schutz, Jr., Associate Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, and Steven Zucker

Additional resources:

American art at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.9.8: Ben Shahn

2.9.8.1: The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti

2.9.8.2: Miners' Wives

2.9.8.3: Contemporary American Sculpture

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2.9.8.1: The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti

by DR. LARA KUYKENDALL

Page ID
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Ben Shahn: activist and artist

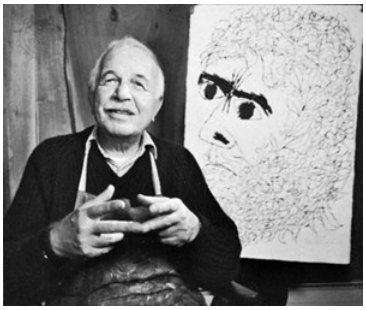


Figure 2.9.8.1.1: Ben Shahn

Ben Shahn said, “I hate injustice. I guess that’s about the only thing I really do hate.” Born in Lithuania (then part of the Russian Empire) in 1898, Shahn grew up in a family of leftist political activists. When Shahn was only four years old, his socialist father was exiled to Siberia because the Russian government suspected he was a revolutionary. Shahn remembered launching his own sort of protest as a child when he would shout “Down with the Czar!” at anyone wearing a uniform. As he recalled, “the air [in Russia] was filled with this whole revolutionary idea.”[1]

In 1906, the whole family immigrated to New York and, like many fellow Eastern European Jews, settled in Brooklyn. As an adult, Shahn called himself “the most American of all American painters” because he “came to America and its culture and was sort of swallowing it by the cupful.”[2] Apart from his love of baseball and chewing gum, Shahn’s Americanism lies in his Social Realist style. In that vein, he made paintings, prints, photographs, and drawings that address problems like racism, poverty, and oppression. His works are often critical of American life, but by exposing social problems, Shahn hoped to inspire reform.

The Sacco and Vanzetti case

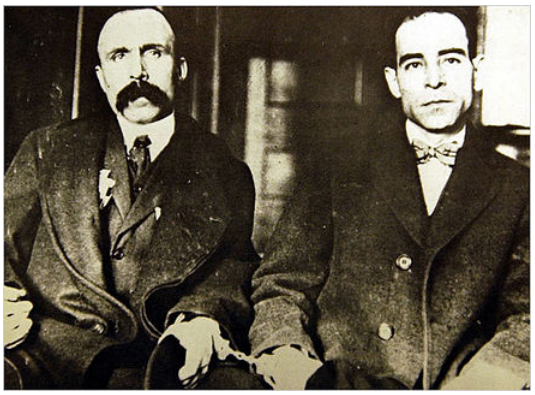


Figure 2.9.8.1.2: Bartolomeo Vanzetti (left) and Nicola Sacco (right) in 1923

One of Shahn’s most enduring subjects was prompted by the arrest, trial, and execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. Sacco, a shoemaker, and Vanzetti, a fish seller, were accused of murdering two men during an armed robbery at a factory in Braintree, Massachusetts in 1920. After seven years of legal battles, Sacco and Vanzetti were executed just after midnight on August 23, 1927. Sacco and Vanzetti’s plight was a cause célèbre—a sensational case that captured the attention of millions of people around the world, many of whom protested against the convictions.



Figure 2.9.8.1.3: Ben Shahn, *Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco*, 1931-32, gouache on paper on board, 10 7/8 x 14 5/8 inches / 27.6 x 37.1 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

The case against Sacco and Vanzetti was troubled from the start by ethnic bigotry and political intolerance. Both men were Italian immigrants, drawn to the United States by the promise of freedom and democracy. But upon arrival, poverty and poor working conditions propelled them toward the radical communist and anarchist thinking of Luigi Galleani. The Galleanisti, as his followers were called, believed that capitalism was an evil economic system that disadvantaged workers to the point of desperation and that violence would be the most effective revolutionary strategy. Sacco and Vanzetti's association with such a militant political group, along with their participation in labor strikes and evasion of the World War I military draft in 1917, placed them on the federal government's watch list of dangerous subversives.

The trail of evidence that led police to arrest Sacco and Vanzetti for the Braintree murders was extraordinarily weak. Their fingerprints did not match those collected at the crime scene and the stolen money (over $15,000) was never found. Though both men owned guns, ballistic analysis never connected the bullets found at the crime scene with Sacco and Vanzetti's weapons. Eyewitnesses to the murders did not credibly identify either suspect; in some cases, witnesses were coerced into giving false testimony. The prosecutor built on a general perception that Italians—especially Italian anarchists—were ruthless, murderous criminals bent on overthrowing the United States government. He argued that Sacco and Vanzetti appeared suspicious when arrested, that they lied during questioning, and the jury agreed and convicted them for the murders. Two men imprisoned for other offenses, Joe Morelli and Celestino Madeiros, later confessed to the Braintree crimes, but Sacco and Vanzetti's prosecutors never followed up on their claims.



Figure 2.9.8.1.4: Ben Shahn, *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*, 1931-32, tempera and gouache on canvas mounted on composition board, 84 × 48 inches (Whitney Museum of American Art)

Shahn followed Sacco and Vanzetti's case closely and believed, like many people around the world, that the two men were not given a fair trial. Shahn participated in protests in support of their release in the 1920s and made twenty-three images about the Sacco and Vanzetti affair in 1931 and 1932. Many of these, including the gouache *Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco* (1931-32) were based on photographs that appeared in newspapers. He returned to the Sacco and Vanzetti case in drawings and prints in the 1950s and used *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* as part of the composition for a large mosaic at Syracuse University in 1967.

In Shahn's early and iconic tempera-on-canvas painting, Sacco and Vanzetti lie in coffins in the foreground in front of a colonnaded neoclassical courthouse (image left). On the porch behind them hangs a portrait of the trial judge, Webster Thayer. Towering over Sacco and Vanzetti are the members of the committee that reviewed their convictions: Samuel Stratton, the president of MIT; Lawrence Lowell, Harvard's president; and Robert Grant, a retired judge. These four men represent the wealthy, intellectual Massachusetts establishment, which was openly hostile to the radical ideals that Sacco and Vanzetti embodied.

Shahn used irony in this painting as a way of indicting Thayer, Stratton, Lowell, and Grant for the roles they played in Sacco and Vanzetti's execution. In the background, Thayer raises his right hand as if he is taking an oath to uphold justice, but he faces a lamppost that resembles the bundle of sticks known as a fasces (image below). Once known as a symbol of judicial power, the fasces became a symbol for Italian fascism and oppression in the 1920s. Indeed, Thayer's bias against immigrants and political radicals was widely known. He presided over Sacco and Vanzetti's initial conviction and denied all motions for retrial. In response to public outcry, Lowell and his two cohorts were tasked with reviewing the proceedings and summarily upheld Sacco and Vanzetti's convictions and death sentences after only ten days of deliberation.



Figure **2.9.8.1.5**: Webster Thayer (detail), Ben Shahn, *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*, 1931-32, tempera and gouache on canvas mounted on composition board, 84 × 48 inches (Whitney Museum of American Art)

Shahn explained in a 1944 interview, “Ever since I could remember I’d wished that I’d been lucky enough to be alive at a great time—when something big was going on, like the Crucifixion. And suddenly realized I was! Here I was living through another crucifixion. Here was something to paint!”[3] The term “passion” in his title connects Sacco and Vanzetti’s deaths with Jesus’s martyrdom (the “Passion of Christ” refers to the period at the end of his life leading to the crucifixion). Shahn also painted in tempera, a matte medium that was used by Italian Renaissance artists for Christian panel paintings, but rarely by modernists in the twentieth century. His composition hearkens back to images of the Lamentation of Christ, but his mourning scene lacks the emotional force that typically accompanies Jesus’ death and burial. The three men in the foreground, Stratton, Lowell, and Grant, wear expressions that communicate placid resolve rather than sorrow. They seem uncomfortable and awkwardly crowded together in Shahn’s painting as they half-heartedly offer white lilies, symbols of goodness and purity, to the deceased. Here Shahn forces these men to bear witness to the injustice that they refused to prevent.

That Shahn’s *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* is eerily devoid of any kind of genuine, heartfelt anguish or grief amplifies the tragedy of the men’s deaths.

Shahn’s long career



Figure **2.9.8.1.6**: Ben Shahn, *Striking miners, Scotts Run*, West Virginia, 1935



Figure **2.9.8.1.7**: Ben Shahn, *Scotts Run, West Virginia*, 1937, tempera on paper, 22 5/8 × 28 1/4 inches, 57.5 x 71.8 cm (Whitney Museum of American Art)

Shahn's career took off in the 1930s as his brand of realism resonated during the Great Depression when American audiences demanded that art communicate directly and serve a social purpose. Works like his photograph and painting of striking miners from Scotts Run, West Virginia (1935 and 1937) chronicled that decade's challenges and contributed to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal efforts to use art to help the nation weather the crisis.

From the 1940s until his death in 1969, as Abstract Expressionism came to the fore in the United States, Shahn's style evolved and his works became more symbolic, expressionistic, and even surreal. But he continually strove to portray dramatic, but universal human experiences like tragedy and survival in ***Liberation*** (1945), ***Age of Anxiety*** (1953), and the *Lucky Dragon* series (1960-62) with empathy and sincerity. The commitment to social justice that he established so clearly in *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* persisted throughout his career.

1. **Oral history interview with Ben Shahn, September 27, 1968**
2. **Oral history interview with Ben Shahn, September 27, 1968**
3. Frances Pohl, *Ben Shahn* (Pomegranate Communications, 1993), p.12

Additional resources:

Alejandro Anreus, ed. *Ben Shahn and The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* (Jersey City, NJ: The Jersey City Museum and Rutgers University Press, 2001.)

Susan Chevlowe, *Common Man, Mythic Vision: The Paintings of Ben Shahn* *Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Morse, John. "Ben Shahn: An Interview," *Magazine of Art* 37, no. 4 (April 1944), pp. 138-139.

Ben Shahn, Ben and Forrest Selvig, "Interview: Ben Shahn Talks with Forrest Selvig," *Archives of American Art Journal* 17, no. 3 (1977), pp. 14-21.

The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti, 1967, mosaic, Syracuse University

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2.9.8.2: Miners' Wives

by JESSICA T. SMITH, PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
188440



Video **2.9.8.2.1**: Ben Shahn, *Miners' Wives*, c. 1948, tempera on panel, 121.9 x 91.4 cm (The Philadelphia Museum of Art) © Estate of Ben Shahn A conversation with Jessica T. Smith, Susan Gray Detweiler Curator of American Art, and Manager, Center for American Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art and Dr. Beth Harris

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2.9.8.3: Contemporary American Sculpture

by **DR. JEFFREY RICHMOND-MOLL** and **DR. BETH HARRIS**

Page ID

188441



Ben Shahn, *Contemporary American Sculpture*, 1940, tempera on board, 21 1/2 x 30 inches (The John and Susan Horseman Collection, Courtesy of the Horseman Foundation); a conversation with Dr. Jeffrey Richmond-Moll (Curator of American Art, Georgia Museum of Art) and Dr. Beth Harris

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2.9.9: Romare Bearden, Factory Workers

by DENNIS MICHAEL JON, MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ART and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
188442



Video **2.9.9.1**: Romare Bearden, *Factory Workers*, 1942, gouache and casein on brown Kraft paper mounted on board, 94.93 × 73.03 cm (Minneapolis Institute of Art)

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2.9.10: Edward Hopper, Nighthawks

by CHRISTINE ZAPPELLA

Page ID
188443



Video **2.9.10.1**: Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks*, 1942, oil on canvas, 84.1 x 152.4 cm (33-1/8 x 60 inches) (The Art Institute of Chicago)



Figure **2.9.10.1**: Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks*, 1942, oil on canvas, 84.1 x 152.4 cm / 33-1/8 x 60″ (Art Institute of Chicago)

Near misses

In place of meaningful interactions, the four characters inside the diner of Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks* are involved in a series of near misses. The man and woman might be touching hands, but they aren't. The waiter and smoking man might be conversing, but they're not. The couple might strike up a conversation with the man facing them, but somehow, we know they won't. And then we realize that Hopper has placed us, the viewer, on the city street, with no door to enter the diner, and yet in a position to evaluate each of the people inside. We see the row of empty counter stools nearest us. We notice that no one is making eye contact with any one else. Up close, the waiter's face appears to have an expression of horror or pain. And then there is a chilling revelation: each of us is completely alone in the world.

The slickness of the paint, which makes the canvas read almost like an advertisement, and immediate accessibility of the subject matter draws the viewer into Hopper's painting. But he does not tell us a story. Rather than a narrative about men and women out for a festive night on the town, we are invited to ask questions about the characters' ambiguous lives. Are the man and woman a couple? Where are they coming from? Where are they going? Who is the man with his back to us? How did he end up in the diner? What is the waiter's life like? What is causing his distress?

The light

By setting the scene on one of New York City's oblique corners and surrounding the diner with glass, Hopper was able to exploit stark pictorial devices. First, the fluorescent light flooding the diner is the only light that illuminates the painting; in the absence of a streetlamp, it spills into the night through both windows onto both sides of the street corner. It throws a series of cast shadows

onto the sidewalk and apartment buildings, but ultimately draws our attention back to the men and woman inside the diner. The angle also allows him to show the people in a mix of frontal and profile views, heightening the sense that no figure is really communicating with another.



Figure **2.9.10.2**: Edward Hopper, *Early Sunday Morning*, 1930, oil on canvas, 35 3/16 x 60 1/4″ (Whitney Museum of American Art)

This feeling can be understood by comparing *Nighthawks* to Hopper's earlier painting *Early Sunday Morning*. Both paintings are set in front of the red brick apartments of New York's Greenwich Village and show us an hour of the day when people are typically not awake. Like *Nighthawks*, which was created at the beginning of America's involvement in World War II, *Early Sunday Morning* was also painted at a historically important moment, the beginning of the Great Depression. But despite their similarities, *Early Sunday Morning* produces a sense of ease in the viewer, not anxiety.

Partially, this is because of the flooding light of dawn. But *Early Sunday Morning*, with its frilly awnings, brightly colored barber's pole, squat fire hydrant, and windows opening to meet the morning sun, presents a world that is about to bustle with life. *Nighthawks* shows the opposite. The windows of the shops and apartments are empty and dark. The only remnants of human activity outside the diner are a cash register in a shop window and a cigar advertisement above the glass pane. There is no clock in the restaurant, but the empty coffee tureens on the back counter betray the indecent hour of night. This is a world shut down. Because our characters are awake, they are alienated—not only from each other, but also from civilization itself.

A timeless feel

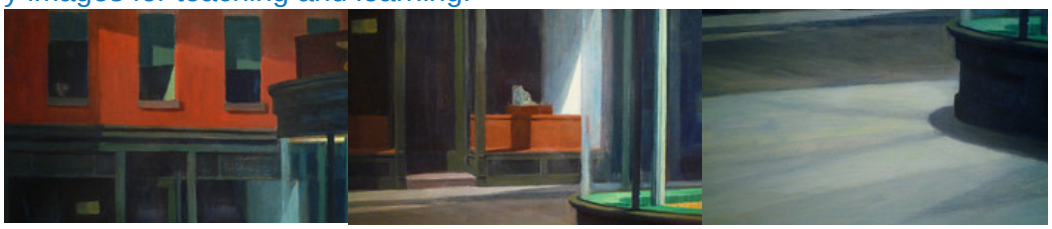
Nighthawks is one of Hopper's New York City paintings, and the artist said that it was based on a real café. Many people have tried to find the exact setting of the painting, but have failed. In his wife's diaries, she wrote that she and Hopper himself both served as models for the people in the painting. Despite these real-life details, the empty composition and flat, abstracting planes of color give the canvas a timeless feel, making it an object onto which one can project one's own reality. Perhaps this is why it has lent itself to so well to many parodies, even appearing as a motif on an episode of The Simpsons.

When it was completed the canvas was bought almost immediately by the Art Institute of Chicago where it remains, and has been wildly popular ever since. The painting's modern-day appeal can also be understood because of its ability to evoke a sense of nostalgia for an America of a time gone-by. Despite its inherent universality, the dress of the four people—the woman evoking a pin-up doll, the men in their well-tailored suits and hats, the worker in his soda jerk costume—as well as the "Phillies" advertisement, firmly plant the painting in a simpler past, making it a piece of Americana.

A subtle critique

But perhaps *Nighthawks'* enduring popularity can be explained because of its subtle critique of the modern world, the world in which we all live. Despite its surface beauty, this world is one measured in cups of coffee, imbued with an overwhelming sense of loneliness, and a deep desire, but ultimate inability, to connect with those around us.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.9.11: Horace Pippin

2.9.11.1: Horace Pippin, Mr. Prejudice

2.9.11.2: Josiah McElheny on Horace Pippin

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2.9.11.1: Horace Pippin, Mr. Prejudice

by JESSICA T. SMITH, PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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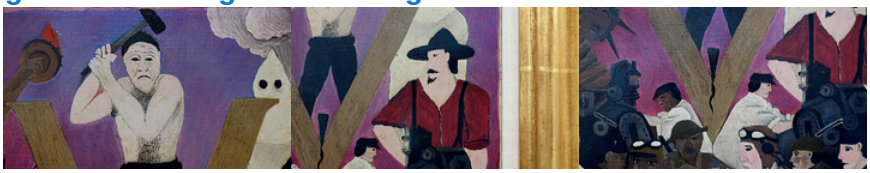


Video **2.9.11.1.1**: Horace Pippin, *Mr. Prejudice*, 1943, oil on canvas, 46 x 35.9 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

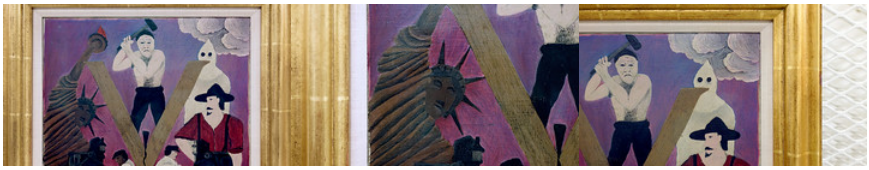
Additional resources

This painting at the Philadelphia Museum of Art
Anne Monahan, "Horace Pippin's Self Portraits," Yale University Press blog (February 22, 2020)

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2.9.11.2: Josiah McElheny on Horace Pippin

- by **THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART**

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Video **2.9.11.2.1**: The Artist Project is an online series in which artists respond to works of art in The Met's encyclopedic collection. **http://artistproject.metmuseum.org/5/josiah-mcelheny/**

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2.9.12: Norman Rockwell, Rosie the Riveter

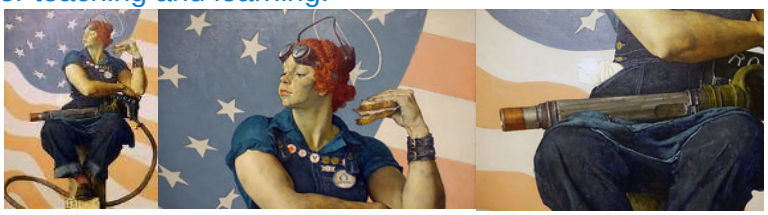
by DR. MARGARET C. CONRADS and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
188448



Video **2.9.12.1**: Norman Rockwell, *Rosie the Riveter*, 1943, oil on canvas, 52 x 40 inches (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art)

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2.9.13: Eldzier Cortor, Southern Landscape

by **DR. SHAWNYA L. HARRIS** and **DR. BETH HARRIS**

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Video **2.9.13.1**: Eldzier Cortor, *Southern Landscape*, 1941, oil on masonite, 44-1/8 x 35-3/4 x 3-3/8 inches (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts)

Additional resources

More about Eldzier Cortor from the Smithsonian American Art Museum

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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.10: Sculpture

2.10.1: Frederick MacMonnies, Civic Virtue

2.10.2: Stone Mountain, Georgia

2.10.3: Alexander Calder, Mobile

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2.10.1: Frederick MacMonnies, Civic Virtue

by DR. MICHELE BOGART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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188451



Video **2.10.1.1**: Frederick MacMonnies (sculptor), Thomas Hastings (architect), Piccirilli Brothers (carvers), *Civic Virtue Triumphant Over Unrighteousness*, 1922, marble, more than 17 feet high (originally City Hall Park, Manhattan, then Queens Borough Hall, now Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn but without fountain basins)

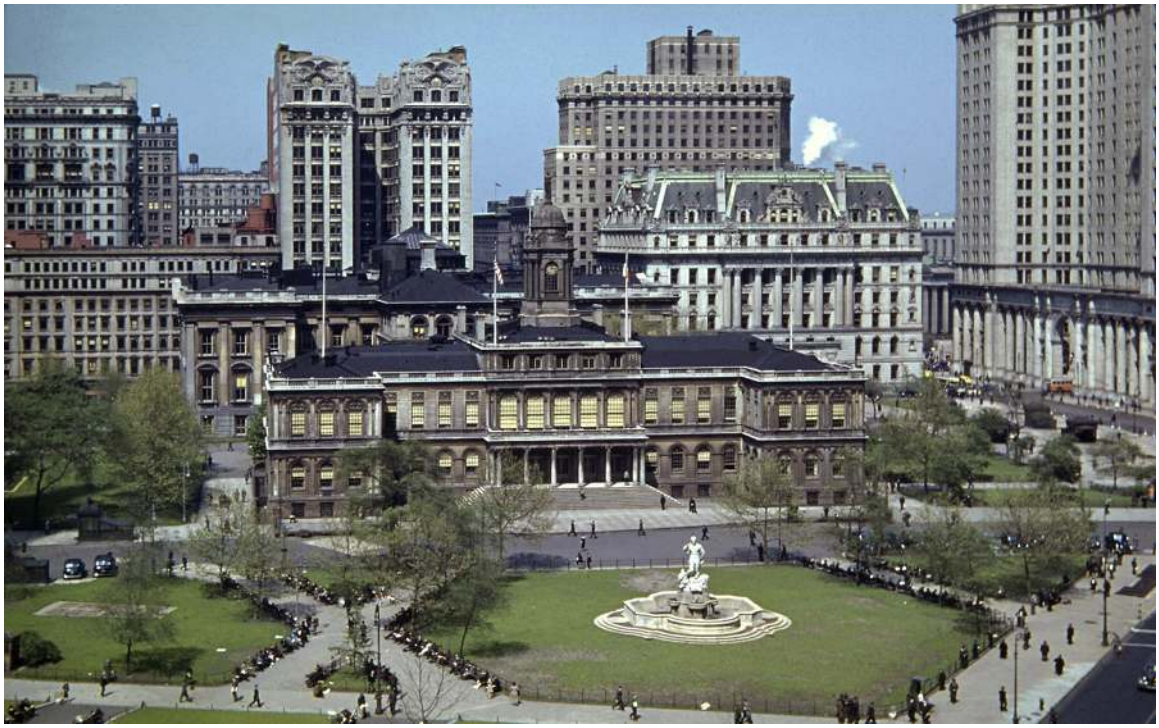
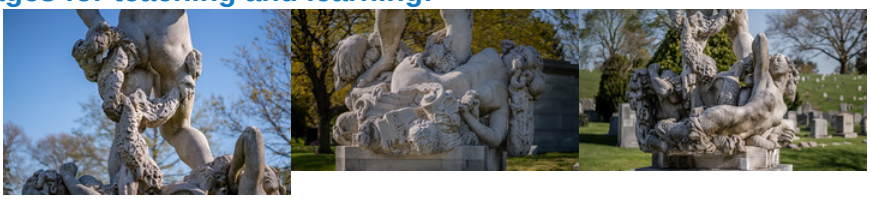


Figure **2.10.1.1**: View of Civic Virtue in its original location in front of City Hall, before March 1941 (courtesy of The NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services)

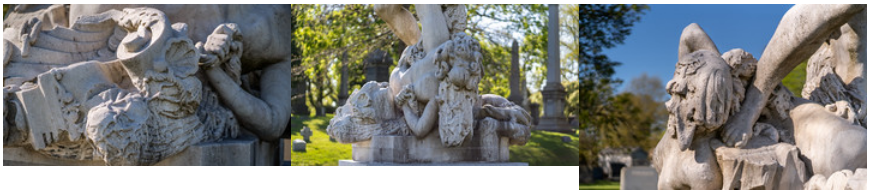
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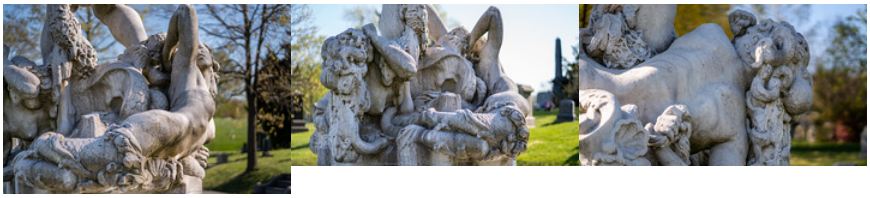
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2.10.2: Stone Mountain, Georgia

Page ID
188452

Caution

Warning: this video contains images of racial violence

Perhaps the largest relief sculpture in the world, this Confederate memorial is an expression of 20th and 21st century racial politics.



Video **2.10.2.1**: Confederate Memorial, Stone Mountain, Georgia (sculptors: Gutzon Borglum, Augustus Lukeman, Julian Harris, Walter Hancock, and Roy Faulkner), completed in 1970

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2.10.3: Alexander Calder, Mobile

- *by THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART*

Page ID

188453



Video **2.10.3.1**: Video from **The Metropolitan Museum of Art**

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SECTION OVERVIEW

2.11: Photography

2.11.1: Walker Evans, Subway Passengers, New York City

2.11.2: Ansel Adams- Visualizing a Photograph

2.11.3: Dorothea Lange, Migrant Mother

2.11.4: Lotte Jacobi, Albert Einstein

2.11.5: Harold Edgerton, Milk-Drop Coronet Splash

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2.11.1: Walker Evans, Subway Passengers, New York City

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Video **2.11.1.1**: Video from The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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2.11.2: Ansel Adams- Visualizing a Photograph

- *by THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM*

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188456



Video 2.11.2.1: Video from The J. Paul Getty Museum

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2.11.3: Dorothea Lange, Migrant Mother

- *by EVE SCHILLO, LACMA and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

Page ID

188457



Video **2.11.3.1**: Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother, Nipomo California*, 1936, printed later, gelatin silver print, 35.24 x 27.78 cm (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, PG.1997.2). A conversation with Eve Schillo, Assistant Curator, Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Steven Zucker.

Additional resources:

This photograph at LACMA

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2.11.4: Lotte Jacobi, Albert Einstein

by DR. GRETCHEN GASTERLAND-GUSTAFSSON

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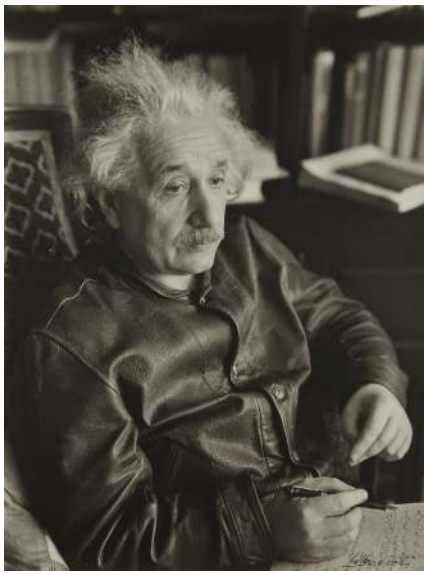


Figure **2.11.4.1**: Lotte Jacobi, *Albert Einstein*, gelatin silver print, 1938, 25.1 x 18.7 cm

A portrait of Albert Einstein

Albert Einstein wears a leather jacket and sits in a tall-backed upholstered chair. His hand loosely holds a fountain pen suspended over ink-layered pages. His heavy-lidded, faraway gaze is soft, pensively disconnected from both his writing and the photographer who is observing him. He appears entirely lost in thought. The focus is also a bit soft, which renders Einstein's immediately recognizable, almost electrified tufts of white hair even softer. The leather jacket picks up the ambient light from an unseen window and its myriad folds envelop the thinker's arms and buttoned-up upper body. The leather jacket, which became a stylish, edgy fashion accessory for men in the late 1930s, seems "off-brand" for Einstein. The jacket calls attention to his body—perhaps strange for someone so celebrated for his mind. Einstein looks comfortable, casual, and somewhat fragile in this delicate portrait.

Lotte Jacobi took this photograph of the theoretical physicist Albert Einstein, at his home in Princeton, New Jersey (at the time he was a professor at the university). Both Jewish, the two had been family friends a decade earlier in Germany. Einstein had renounced his German citizenship for political reasons after leaving Nazi Germany in 1933, and Jacobi had been forced to emigrate to the United States from Nazi Germany after she too renounced her German citizenship in 1935. She also settled on the East Coast, but in New York City—not too far from Einstein in Princeton.

Jacobi and Einstein collaborated on the crafting of his media image in a series of late-1930s Princeton portraits commissioned by *Life* magazine. Einstein agreed to sit for the photo session only if Lotte Jacobi was assigned to photograph him. [1] The image of Einstein in a leather jacket is unusual in that it catches him in a less-guarded, less-constructed moment than the others and offers the viewer a glimpse of the world-famous theoretical physicist as an individual, rather than as a stereotyped professor.

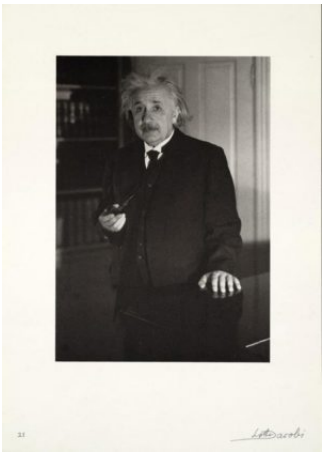


Figure **2.11.4.2**: Lotte Jacobi, *Albert Einstein standing at his Piano*, 1938 (negative); 1978 (print), halftone print, 17.8 × 12.7 cm (Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University)

More formal portraits

Jacobi's portrait *Albert Einstein standing at his Piano*, from the same session, conveys a more expected portrait of an intellectual: standing, hand on a shining clean surface, holding a pipe (not smoking it), in front of a bookcase filled with orderly bound volumes. His gaze is focused on the camera's lens so that he appears to look at the viewer. He is posing for the camera to convey intellectual dignity. Besides the portrait of Einstein in the leather jacket, Jacobi's other photographs from 1938 include at least two in which Einstein is wearing a three-piece suit, holding a pipe, making eye contact with the viewer, and looking professorial. These photographs project a carefully crafted image of a scholarly man.

The full-page lead image for the two page article on page 48 of the April 11, 1938 number of *Life* was a head-and-shoulders color studio portrait of Einstein wearing a dark suit with a pipe in his mouth, looking directly into the camera, taken by Gösta P. G. Ljungdahl (who is honored with a portrait and a brief bio on p. 61 of the magazine). Einstein's *The Evolution of General Physics*, a general audience introduction to his theory of relativity, had just been published.



Figure **2.11.4.3**: The full-page lead image for the two page article on page 48 and 49 of the April 11, 1938, *Life* Magazine

Lotte Jacobi contributed three black and white photographs to the spread on page 49: a close-up of Einstein's hands resting on a cleared surface, in which we glimpse his leather jacket, a portrait of his house exterior in New Jersey, and an image of Einstein in his leather jacket, grasping his chin with a world-weary expression, standing over a pile of unopened mail. The caption for the last image states: "The daily mail pile harasses the scientist." For *Life* magazine's editors, Einstein's disorderly home milieu and leather jacket attire were acceptable as long as there was a specific focus on the daily deluge of correspondence. Jacobi's photograph of Einstein's hands was captioned "Hands and brains are the only tools Einstein uses" with the photograph reinforcing the labor of his hands rather than the time he spent thinking. Jacobi's portrait of Einstein as lost in contemplation and seemingly unaware of the camera was deemed an undignified portrayal. [2]

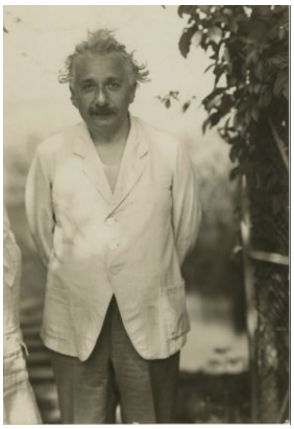


Figure **2.11.4.4**: Lotte Jacobi, *Albert Einstein in Caputh Germany*, 1928 (Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton)

A decade earlier, Jacobi took a series of photographs of Einstein at his house in Caputh, Germany—comparably close to Berlin as Princeton is to New York City. This series featured the Einsteins sailing on the lake, and relaxing in somewhat-rumpled knit leisurewear. In these photographs from a decade earlier than the Princeton portrait, we are confronted with a leisure-time Einstein in his most comfortably casual attire. These photographs were taken seven years after he won the Nobel Prize for Physics, and would have been among the few that Jacobi was able to take with her from Germany. She was forced to leave most of her photographic prints and negatives behind, and they were destroyed by Nazis or lost.

Their friendship and collaborations continued in the U.S. Once there, Einstein helped Jacobi meet other prominent exiles in New York City, like German writer Thomas Mann, Austrian director Max Reinhardt, and his Austrian actress wife Helene Thimig, who all became Jacobi's earliest U.S. portrait subjects.

Life Magazine and Photography



Figure **2.11.4.5**: Jacobi too adopted the "messy hair, don't care" look for her own self-portrait in Berlin. Lotte Jacobi, *Self-Portrait*, Berlin, platinum print, c. 1930, printed c. 1980, 36.2 × 26.35 cm (LACMA)

Jacobi's intimate and revealing style of portraiture did not meet with the approval of *Life* magazine's photo editors. Publisher Henry R. Luce required images of prominent people that reaffirmed the American public's preconceived perceptions of them, rather than prompting new insights about their characters or inner lives. Jacobi's portrait of Einstein in his casual bomber jacket did not convey enough gravitas for his social position.

Beginning weekly publication in 1936, *Life* magazine quickly became a window on the world for its largely American, white, upper middle-class, urban—and subsequently, suburban—readership. With *Life*, Luce, already successful with *Time* magazine, sought to "reveal, every week, aspects of life and work which have never before been seen by the camera's miraculous second sight. By giving pictures their own magazine, [Life] intends that the camera shall at last take its place as the most convincing reporter of contemporary life." [3]

Perhaps what we now find most interesting about Jacobi's portrait is the way she captured the action of thinking performed by one of our most historically prominent thinkers. Jacobi seems to have been able to see more facets of Einstein than the editors of *Life* cared to share with their readership.

Notes:

1. "Original Silver Print Signed Photograph of Albert Einstein by Lotte Jacobi," Einstein Archives: Letters, Manuscripts, Photographs, and Scientific Papers – Manhattan Rare Book Company
2. James A. Fasanelli, "Lotte Jacobi: Photographer" in *Lotte Jacobi*, Kelly Wise, ed. (Danbury, New Hampshire: Addison House, 1978), p. 23.
3. Henry R. Luce, "A Prospectus for a New Magazine," August 1936, as quoted in Katherine A. Bussard and Kristen Gresh, "Life Magazine and the Power of Photography," in *Life Magazine and the Power of Photography*, Katherine A. Bussard and Kristen Gresh, eds. (Princeton University Art Museum/New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), pp. 15-16.

Additional Resources:

Life Magazine and the Power of Photography, ed. Katherine A. Bussard and Kristen Gresh. (Princeton University Art Museum/New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

Gaylen Moore, "Lotte Jacobi: Born with a Photographer's Eye," New York Times (September 16, 1979). Accessed July 14, 2021.

Lotte Jacobi, Kelly Wise, ed. (Danbury, New Hampshire: Addison House, 1978).

Barbara Probst Solomon, "PHOTOGRAPHY: Ghosts of Weimar Preserved on Film," New York Times (February 2, 2004). Accessed June 16, 2021.

Original Silver Print Signed Photograph of Albert Einstein by Lotte Jacobi, Einstein Archives: Letters, Manuscripts, Photographs, and Scientific Papers – Manhattan Rare Book Company. Accessed July 14, 2021.

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2.11.5: Harold Edgerton, Milk-Drop Coronet Splash

by **DR. KRIS BELDEN-ADAMS**

Page ID

188459



Figure **2.11.5.1**: Harold Edgerton, *Milk-Drop Coronet Splash*, 1936, gelatin silver print. 17-15/16 x 14-5/16 inches (SFMOMA)

Harold Edgerton's strobe-illuminated photographs of familiar objects shown in awkward, infinitesimal slices of time captivated the public with pictures of bullets cutting through bananas, lightbulbs, and playing cards, footballs springing from contact with a foot, tennis balls pushing against the racket before taking flight, and golf clubs hitting balls. They revealed the wondrous appearances of commonplace items as they never look to the unaided eye. But Edgerton's stroboscopy was the culmination of a larger project: photography's struggle to surpass the "speed" of human vision.

For the first seven decades of its existence as a medium, many practitioners of photography were preoccupied with capturing ever-shorter durations of time. Exposure times steadily diminished in the nineteenth century, thanks to more reactive photochemistry, and advances in lens and shutter design. From 1870 to 1900, this endeavor culminated in the fraction-of-a-second motion studies of photographers such as **Eadweard Muybridge**, whose batteries of cameras captured subjects in 1/1,000th of a second (far surpassing the sensitivity of human vision, which has an eye-to-brain relay response of 1/10th of a second). [1]



Figure **2.11.5.1**: Harold Eugene Edgerton, *Tennis Ball Impact*, 1938, gelatin silver print, 47.6 x 37.4 cm (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco)

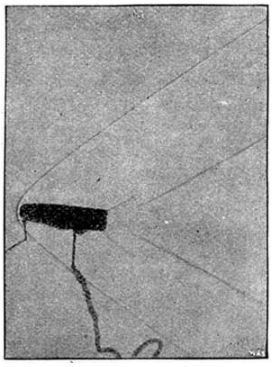


Figure **2.11.5.2**: Charles Vernon Boys, *Shadow of a Bullet from a Magazine Rifle, 1,400 Miles Per Hour*, 1893. Source: William G. FitzGerald, "Some Curiosities of Modern Photography, Part II," *The Strand*, No. 191 (February 1895)

But other photographers pursued a path first suggested in 1851 by **William Henry Fox Talbot**, one of the pioneering inventors of the medium. Talbot was the first to experiment with open shutters to photograph fast-moving objects in a dark room using spark illumination from Leyden jars. [2] Talbot's experiments—reiterated by later nineteenth-century Leyden-flash photographers including Arthur Mason Worthington and Charles Vernon Boys—suggested that the speed of photography no longer needed to be limited by the rapid movement of mechanical shutters, but by the speed of light itself.

Making the familiar unfamiliar

It was not until Massachusetts Institute of Technology electrical engineering graduate student Harold Edgerton—known as "Papa Flash"—started becoming interested in these earlier techniques that spark-illumination photographic experiments using strobe lighting became a mass-cultural fascination.

In 1931, Edgerton developed stroboscopic flash tubes filled with xenon, a conductive gas that creates amazingly bright flashes when triggered by an electrical charge. Strobe lighting allowed him to create highly controlled, bright, durations of light as brief as one microsecond (1/1,000,000th of a second) which he used to create photographs in a pitch-black room, using a camera with an open shutter.

Edgerton's stroboscope captured thin slices of accessible, familiar objects in a microsecond—including milk drops (as seen in *Milk-Drop Coronet Splash*, above), hummingbirds in flight, golf clubs and tennis rackets hitting balls, footballs being kicked, water drops and streams, shock waves, bullets in motion, and dancers in mid-step. In *Milk-Drop Coronet Splash*, a drop of milk landing into a bowl makes an elegant crown shape as tiny droplets rise from its spiky extensions. [3] Another milk drop approaches and promises to repeat this dramatic performance that, to our unaided eyes, would go unnoticed and unappreciated.

After trial and error, Edgerton discerned that a 1/1,000th-of-a-second exposure was sufficient to still a falling drop and a rising splash. It took even more trial and error to trigger the flash to capture the right 1,000th of a second that revealed—in *Milk-Drop Coronet Splash*—tiny round droplets crowning a dramatic splash.



Figure **2.11.5.3**: Harold Eugene Edgerton, *Milk Drop Coronet*, 1957, dye transfer print, 50.5 cm x 40.64 cm (SFMOMA)

Edgerton photographed milk drops for more than two decades. But perhaps his most famous version, made in 1957, features a reaching crown springing from its collision with the surface of a bright red table. This image was selected by *Time* magazine as one of the 100 most important photographs of all time. [4] Edgerton also received the Bronze Medal from the Royal Photographic Society of London for his contributions to expanding the boundaries of the medium's views of time, and for contributing to the development of modern electronic flash technology. Edgerton's stroboscopy has been lauded as a technological milestone in the medium's mastery of the temporal fragment.

"Papa Flash" and the Popularization of Stroboscopic Photography

The public was mesmerized by Edgerton's photographs' views of commonplace objects frozen in infinitesimal moments inaccessible to the unaided human eye and they were regularly included in the recurrent feature "Speaking of Pictures" in *Life* magazine from 1936 to 1941. "Speaking of Pictures" appeared near the front of each issue, where reader attention was the highest. Edgerton photographs became so popular that he was invited to have a kiosk at the 1939 World's Fair in New York City, where visitors could take stroboscopic photographs after pushing a button to shoot a baseball from a cannon through a sheet of glass. It was a noted popular attraction at the World's Fair. His work also appeared in *American Golfer* (1933); Edgerton's life and work were featured in *American Magazine* (1934); and he was profiled in *Fortune* magazine (1936).



Figure **2.11.5.4**: Harold Eugene Edgerton, *Football Kick*, 1938, Dye imbibition print, 42.5 × 35.6 cm (Art Institute of Chicago)



Figure **2.11.5.5**: Harold Eugene Edgerton, *Cutting the Card Quickly*, 1964, dye transfer print, 40.97 cm x 50.8 (SFMOMA)

Museums and photography organizations also recognized Edgerton's work and contributions. In 1933, three of his photographs were exhibited for the first time in the Royal Photographic Society's annual exhibition in London. Also, along with photographs of a foot kicking a football, a hammer smashing a lightbulb, and a club hitting a golf ball, a similar close-up view of a splash of another milk drop (*Drop of Milk Dropping into Saucer of Milk*), was included in the earliest exhibition of photography at New York's Museum of Modern Art, organized by the curator Beaumont Newhall in 1937. In the accompanying catalog, Newhall wrote that until then, "[n]o eye has ever seen the form of a drop of milk splashing into a pan of milk . . . , or the indentation made in a football by the toe of the kicker's boot." [5] With its appearance in this landmark exhibition, Edgerton's work immediately was accepted into the canon of the history of photography.

Notes:

[1] Max Perchick, "Extending the Frontiers of Photographic Vision," PSA Journal 62, No. 11 (1996): p. 26.

[2] For more on Talbot's Leyden-jar experiments and Arthur Mason Worthington's 1894 photographs of drops of milk, see: Larry J. Schaaf, "Sparks, Spinning Wheels & Whites of Egg," *The Talbot Catalog Raisonné/Bodleian Library* (June 17, 2016)

[3] In 1894, Arthur Mason Worthington captured a crisp image of a splash of a drop of milk by discharging spark illumination from a bank of Leyden jars to achieve a ten-millionths-of-a-second exposure. His work circulated in scientific circles, rather than being published for an audience of the general public. To read more, see: ***Arthur Mason Worthington, A Study of Splashes*** (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908). Available at:

[4] "Milk Drop, 1957: The Story Behind Harold Edgerton's Photography," *Time/100 Photos* (Dec. 5, 2016)

[5] Beaumont Newhall, *Photography, 1839–1937* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1937), 88. The exposure time is identified in the caption as 1/100,000th of a second in duration, which is ten times longer than the duration of the flash of light that Edgerton later claimed he used.

Additional resources:

1939 World's Fair in New York City

earliest exhibition of photography at New York's Museum of Modern Art

Joyce Bedi, Roger R. Bruce, and Douglas Collins, *Seeing the Unseen: Dr. Harold E. Edgerton and the Wonders of Strobe Alley* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994).

Harold Edgerton, "Stroboscopic Research," Research Laboratory of Electronics – Massachusetts Institute of Technology Archive, Item: RLE_QPR_048_VIII (Jan. 15, 1958).

Harold Eugene Edgerton, Gus Kayafas and Martin Barnes, "Flashback: The Photography of Dr. Harold Eugene Edgerton: Interview with Gus Kayafas," *Aperture*, No. 158, (Winter 2000), pp. 22-29.

Harold Edgerton and James Killian, *Moments of Vision: The Stroboscopic Revolution in Photography* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1979).

Harold Edgerton, Eugene Tsai, et al., *Quicker than a Wink: The Photographs of Harold Edgerton* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1997).

Video: "Milk Drop, 1957: The Story Behind Harold Edgerton's Photography," *Time/100 Photos* (Dec. 5, 2016).

Beaumont Newhall, *Photography, 1839–1937* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1937.

This page titled 2.11.5: Harold Edgerton, Milk-Drop Coronet Splash is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Dr. Kris Belden-Adams, "Harold Edgerton, Milk-Drop Coronet Splash," in Smarthistory, January 21, 2022, accessed January 12, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/edgerton-milk/..

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Postwar American art

From Abstract Expressionism to Pop, the United States was the epicenter of the postwar art world

1945 - 1980

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.1: Abstract Expressionism

Dripping, flinging, rolling, soaking—the Abstract Expressionists did everything academic tradition said not to do with paint.

1945 - 1980

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3.1.1: Abstract Expressionism, an introduction

by DR. VIRGINIA B. SPIVEY

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Figure **3.1.1.1** : Mark Rothko, *No. 16 (Red, Brown, and Black)*, 1958, oil on canvas, 8′ 10 5/8″ x 9′ 9 1/4″ (The Museum of Modern Art) (photo: **Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The group of artists known as Abstract Expressionists emerged in the United States in the years following World War II. As the term suggests, their work was characterized by non-objective imagery that appeared emotionally charged with personal meaning. The artists, however, rejected these implications of the name.

What's in a name?

They insisted their subjects were not "abstract," but rather primal images, deeply rooted in society's collective unconscious. Their paintings did not express mere emotion. They communicated universal truths about the human condition. For these reasons, another term—the New York School—offers a more accurate descriptor of the group, for although some eventually relocated, their distinctive aesthetic first found form in New York City.

The rise of the New York School reflects the broader cultural context of the mid-Twentieth Century, especially the shift away from Europe as the center of intellectual and artistic innovation in the West. Much of Abstraction Expressionism's significance stems from its status as the first American visual art movement to gain international acclaim.

Art for a world in shambles

Barnet Newman, an artist associated with the movement, wrote:

"We felt the moral crisis of a world in shambles, a world destroyed by a great depression and a fierce World War, and it was impossible at that time to paint the kind of paintings that we were doing—flowers, reclining nudes, and people playing the cello."*11*

Although distinguished by individual styles, the Abstract Expressionists shared common artistic and intellectual interests. While not expressly political, most of the artists held strong convictions based on Marxist ideas of social and economic equality. Many had benefited directly from employment in the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project. There, they found influences in Regionalist styles of American artists such as Thomas Hart Benton, as well as the Socialist Realism of Mexican muralists including Diego Rivera and José Orozco.

The growth of Fascism in Europe had brought a wave of immigrant artists to the United States in the 1930s, which gave Americans greater access to ideas and practices of European Modernism. They sought training at the school founded by German painter Hans Hoffmann, and from Josef Albers, who left the Bauhaus in 1933 to teach at the experimental Black Mountain College in North Carolina, and later at Yale University. This European presence made clear the formal innovations of Cubism, as well as the psychological undertones and automatic painting techniques of Surrealism.

Whereas Surrealism had found inspiration in the theories of Sigmund Freud, the Abstract Expressionists looked more to the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung and his explanations of primitive archetypes that were a part of our collective human experience. They also gravitated toward Existentialist philosophy, made popular by European intellectuals such as Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Given the atrocities of World War II, Existentialism appealed to the Abstract Expressionists. Sartre's position that an individual's actions might give life meaning suggested the importance of the artist's creative process. Through the artist's physical struggle with his materials, a painting itself might ultimately come to serve as a lasting mark of one's existence. Each of the artists involved with Abstract Expressionism eventually developed an individual style that can be easily recognized as evidence of his artistic practice and contribution.

What does it look like?

Although Abstract Expressionism informed the sculpture of David Smith and Aaron Siskind's photography, the movement is most closely linked to painting. Most Abstract Expressionist paintings are large scale, include non-objective imagery, lack a clear focal point, and show visible signs of the artist's working process, but these characteristics are not consistent in every example.

In the case of Willem de Kooning's *Woman I*, the visible brush strokes and thickly applied pigment are typical of the "Action Painting" style of Abstract Expressionism also associated with Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline. Looking at Woman I, we can easily imagine de Kooning at work, using strong slashing gestures, adding gobs of paint to create heavily built-up surfaces that could be physically worked and reworked with his brush and palette knife. De Kooning's central image is clearly recognizable, reflecting the tradition of the female nude throughout art history. Born in the Netherlands, de Kooning was trained in the European academic tradition unlike his American colleagues. Although he produced many non-objective works throughout his career, his early background might be one factor in his frequent return to the figure.

In contrast to the dynamic appearance of de Kooning's art, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman exemplify what is sometimes called the "Color Imagist" or "Color Field" style of Abstract Expressionism. These artists produced large scale, non-objective imagery as well, but their work lacks the energetic intensity and gestural quality of Action Painting. Rothko's mature paintings exemplify this tendency. His subtly rendered rectangles appear to float against their background. For artists like Rothko, these images were meant to encourage meditation and personal reflection.

Adolph Gottlieb, writing with Rothko and Newman in 1943, explained, "We favor the simple expression of the complex thought."*22*

Barnett Newman's *Vir, Heroicus, Sublimis* illustrates this lofty goal. In this painting, Newman relied on "zips," vertical lines that punctuate the painted field of the background to serve a dual function. While they visually highlight the expanse of contrasting color around them, they metaphorically reflect our own presence as individuals within our potentially overwhelming surroundings. Newman's painting evokes the 18th century notion of the Sublime, a philosophical concept related to spiritual understanding of humanity's place among the greater forces of the universe.

Abstract Expressionism's legacy

Throughout the 1950s, Abstract Expressionism became the dominant influence on artists both in the United States and abroad. The U.S. government embraced its distinctive style as a reflection of American democracy, individualism, and cultural achievement, and actively promoted international exhibitions of Abstract Expressionism as a form of political propaganda during the years of the Cold War. However, many artists found it difficult to replicate the emotional authenticity implicit in the stylistic innovations of de Kooning and Pollock. Their work appeared studied and lacked the same vitality of the first generation pioneers. Others saw the metaphysical undertones of Abstract Expressionism at odds with a society increasingly concerned with a consumer mentality, fueled by economic success and proliferation of the mass media. Such reactions would inevitably lead to the emergence of Pop, Minimalism, and the rise of a range of new artistic developments in the mid 20th century.

1. Barnett Newman, "Response to the Reverend Thomas F. Mathews," in *Revelation, Place and Symbol (Journal of the First Congress on Religion, Architecture and the Visual Arts)*, 1969.

2. Letter from Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb to Edward Alden Jewell Art Editor, *New York Times*, June 7, 1943.

Additional resources:

Abstract Expressionism on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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3.1.2: Finding meaning in abstraction

by SARAH ALVAREZ, THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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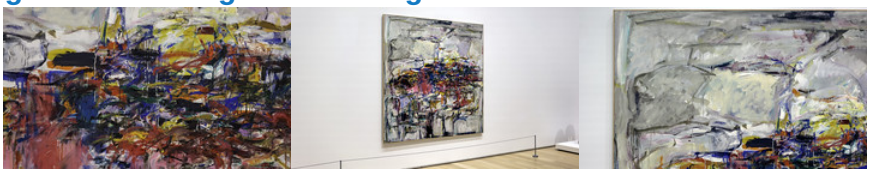


Video **3.1.2.1**: Joan Mitchell, *City Landscape*, 1955, oil on linen, 203.2 × 203.2 cm (Art Institute of Chicago 1958.193, ©The Estate of Joan Mitchell), a Seeing America video

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This painting at the Art Institute of Chicago

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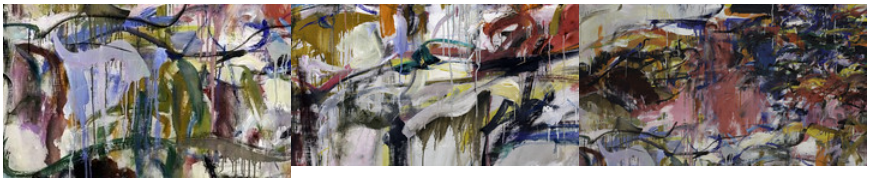
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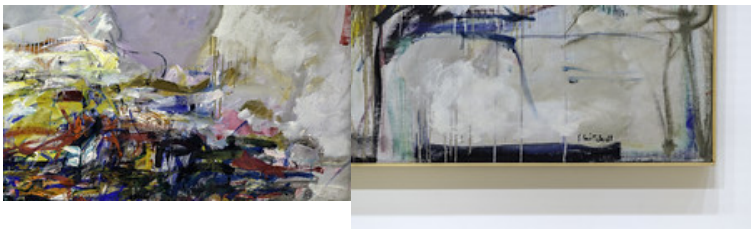
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3.1.3: Norman Lewis, Untitled

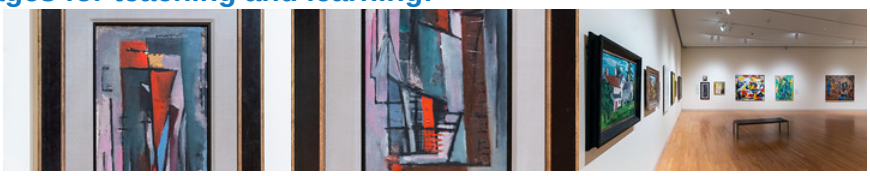
by DR. SHAWNYA L. HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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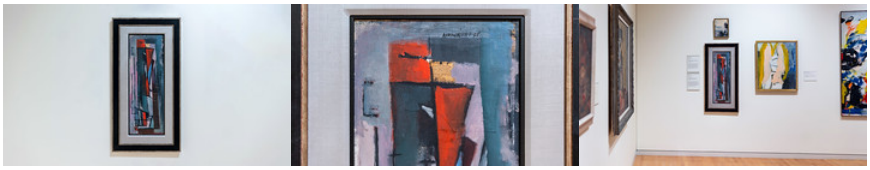


Video **3.1.3.1**: Norman Lewis, *Untitled*, 1945, oil on canvas with collage, 33-1/2 x 11-1/2 inches (Georgia Museum of Art, © Estate of Norman Lewis)

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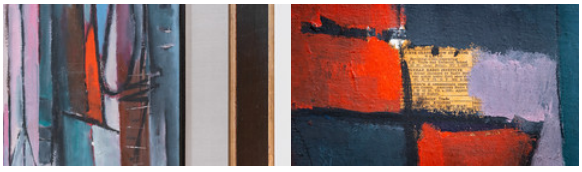
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3.1.4: Willem de Kooning, Woman, I

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **3.1.4.1**: Willem de Kooning, *Woman, I*, 1950-52, oil on canvas, 192.7 x 147.3 cm (The Museum of Modern Art) © The Willem de Kooning Foundation. A conversation between Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

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3.1.5: Hedda Sterne, Number 3—1957

by DR. SARAH ECKHARDT and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **3.1.5.1**: Hedda Sterne, *Number 3–1957*, 1957, oil, spray paint on canvas, 86-1/8 x 50-1/4 inches (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond) © The Hedda Sterne Foundation, Inc.

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



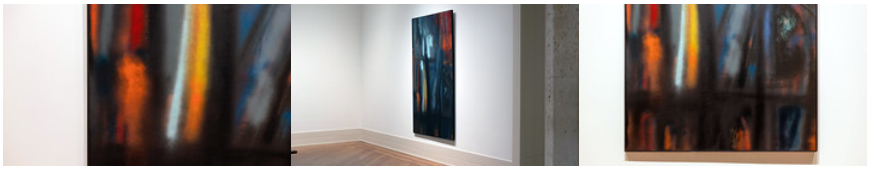
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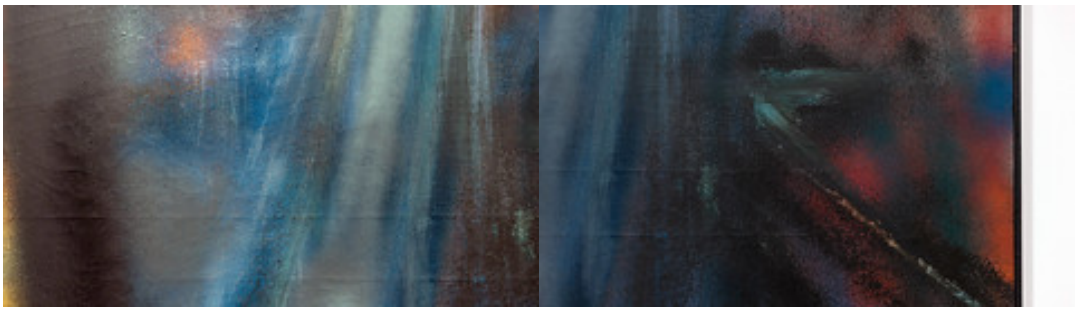
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3.1.6: Lee Krasner, Untitled

by **DR. THOMAS FOLLAND**

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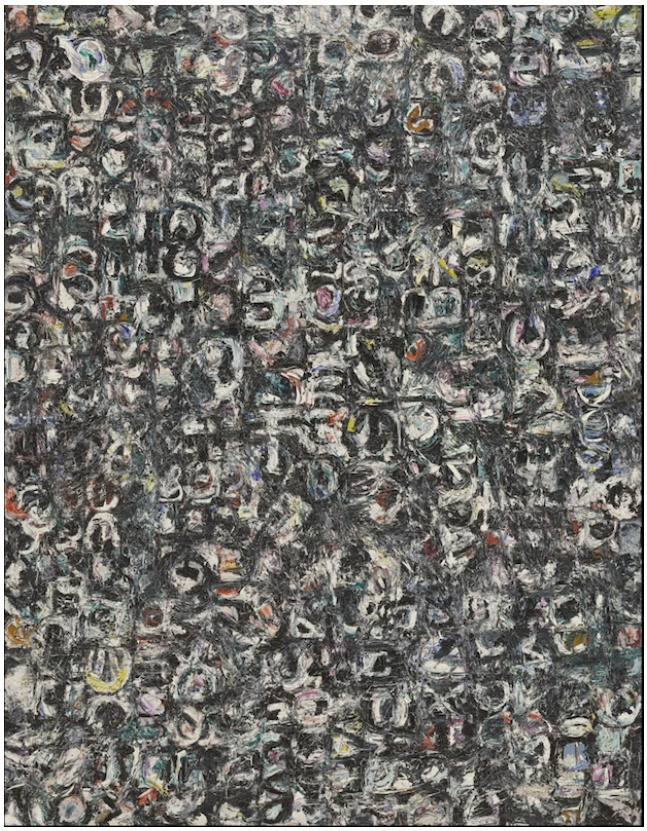


Figure **3.1.6.1**: Lee Krasner, *Untitled*, 1949, oil on composition board, 121.9 x 93.9 cm (MoMA) (photo: Matthew Mendoza, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Little images

By the standards of the New York School (an umbrella term for post-World-War II American abstract artists), *Untitled* is a relatively small work—vertically oriented and consisting of tightly painted, gridded crescents of black and white paint with flecks of vibrant color, it measures 48 x 37 inches. This painting belongs to a series from the late 1940s that Krasner called "Little Images." An ironic title, no doubt, when one considers how large and heroic were the paintings of that period's leading figures like Jackson Pollock (whom Krasner married in 1945), Willem de Kooning, and Barnett Newman.



Figure 3.1.6.2: Figures in front of Jackson Pollock, *One: Number 31, 1950*, 1950, oil and enamel paint on canvas, 269.5 x 530.8 cm (MoMA)(photo: Devyn Caldwell, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Painting large meant that one worked with large—almost comically so—brushes and the resulting meshes of abstract form and color encapsulated this muscular new approach to art. Pollock's method of laying out large sheets of canvas upon the floor or Barnett Newman's use of broomstick-length brushes stands in marked contrast to Krasner's approach—hers were done on a tabletop. Thus, the tightly woven and interlocking shapes of *Untitled* had little of the drip and sweep of Pollock or de Kooning. Were the "Little Images" a breakthrough as she would later state—the beginnings of a feminist commentary on the part of Krasner? She would, after all, incorporate strips of Pollock's discarded canvases into a mid-50s' collage series, an act that art historian David Hopkins described as a "muting of [Pollock's] painterly heroics." Her name has in fact became virtually synonymous with the topic of "women and art," despite the fact that on its face at least, abstract painting has nothing to do with gender.

Women generally not invited

The reason for this has a lot to do with how we now understand this period in art history. Women artists faced inordinate obstacles. There was a machismo that characterized the painters and sculptors who frequented the famous Cedar Tavern and took part in "The Club," the organization that Phillip Pavia founded in 1948 and that served as an informal meeting space for members. Women were generally not invited. Despite her centrality to the New York School and her friendship with many leading figures in the New York art world of the 1940s and 50s, it would take a number of years for Krasner to receive the kind of attention Pollock seemed to warrant almost immediately. Is this why the artist adopted the name "Lee Krasner" instead of her birth name Lena Kreisner? Lee was suitably ambiguous in terms of gender. Krasner would sometimes just sign her paintings with the initials "L.K." or otherwise diminish her signature. In Ann Eden Gibson's study of this period, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics*, the author suggests that the "anonymity made possible by the gallery system—the dealer was visible but the artist was not—provided female artists with the chance to pass as men."



Figure **3.1.6.3**: Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner in front of his work, c. 1950 (photo: Archives of American Art)

The influence of Cubism and Surrealism

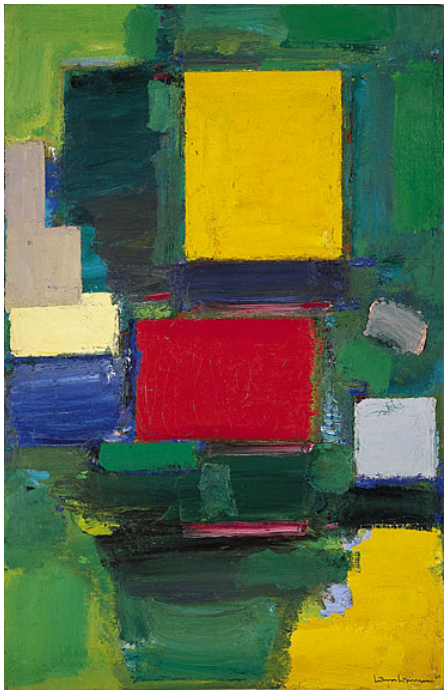


Figure **3.1.6.4**: Hans Hofmann, *The Gate*, 1959-60, oil on canvas, 190.5 x 123.2 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum)

The notion that work of women artists could achieve a universal significance was often dismissed. “Little Images” nevertheless issued from the same set of pictorial concerns faced by her male counterparts. Grappling with the legacies of Cubism and Surrealism in the post-war years, American artists pushed through to dramatically new configurations of abstraction.

Untitled shows the influence of Cubism’s radical reordering of Renaissance perspective. The space of the painting is shallow; the overall palette is black and white. Krasner had studied with the German expatriate Hans Hoffman in the 1930s whose influence on the post-world II generation of artists cannot be over-stated (see image, left). Hoffman advocated a “push-pull” approach to

painting (which emphasized both the flatness of the painting's surface and the creation of abstract forms that could move forward and back into space) and took its cues from Cubist geometry.

The work in the series "Little Images" represents a break from the over-arching influence of Cubist art whose geometric forms were still rooted in the study of nature. In the postwar years this "hard-edged" approach was softened by the influence of the organic abstraction of surrealist artists, many of them living in New York (see Gorky's *Diary of a Seducer*, below for an example).

Surrealism represented an art of the unconscious mind; it seemed perfectly suitable to the unreality of the war years and after when artists started to grapple with the possibility or impossibility of representing the war's aftermath. Krasner described her interest in Surrealism emerging around 1945 as a result of the large emigrant population of European Surrealists in New York City. But surrealism, like Cubism was still rooted in the observation of nature—however distorted. When Krasner first met Pollock she saw that, instead of abstracting his forms from nature, he began with a blank canvas upon which he would begin to arrange skeins of color in the all-over technique for which he became famous. Abandoning nature as a source for art allowed for greater freedom of choice.



Figure **3.1.6.5**: Arshile Gorky, *Diary of a Seducer*, 1945, oil on canvas, 126.7 x 157.5 cm (MoMA)

Nature is not the source



Figure **3.1.6.6**: Lee Krasner, *Untitled*, 1949, oil on composition board, 121.9 x 93.9 cm (MoMA) (photo: Matthew Mendoza, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

But if nature is no longer a source for artists, then what is? In the postwar years the focus shifted to myth or inward to a deeply personal realm. Krasner's painting appears hieroglyphic—as if the artist were repeatedly tracing numbers or letters over and over again across the surface. Her painting may be based on Hebrew letters from her childhood studies but dissembled in such a way that *Untitled* seems akin to the Cold War scrambling of codes. The personal was often connected to larger historical realities. Krasner's abstract rendition of Hebrew could thus be read as a reference to the Holocaust, which represented for many the almost unimaginable horror, along with the Atom bomb, of contemporary life in the 1950s.

But if art historians now read these works of art within larger critical and historical frameworks, it is important to remember that artists of the postwar period resisted such interpretations. They stressed instead private symbolism. Artists sought to sever the link between the work of art and the everyday world. The post-war art critic Clement Greenberg, whose name is synonymous with the term "formalism," advocated a non-representational approach to art. For Krasner, well versed in advanced theories of art, "Little Images" represented a breakthrough into this new realm, a post-Cubist and post-Surrealist abstraction. The one reality she could never escape was the fate bestowed upon women artists in an era dominated by the heroic male.

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3.1.7: Robert Motherwell, Elegy to the Spanish Republic No. 57

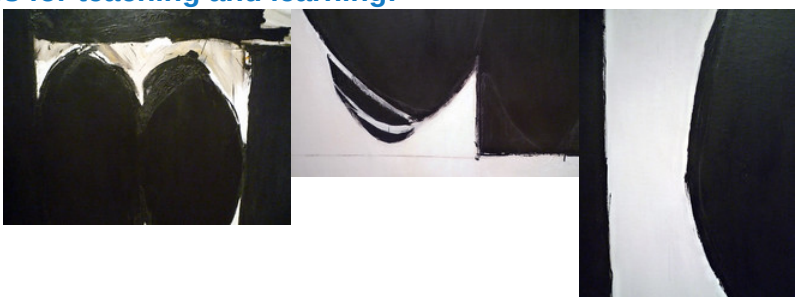
by **DR. BETH HARRIS** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

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Video **3.1.7.1**: Robert Motherwell, *Elegy to the Spanish Republic No. 57*, 1957-60, oil on canvas, 84 x 109-1/8″ (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.1.8: Jackson Pollock

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3.1.8.4: Why is that important? Looking at Jackson Pollock

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3.1.8.1: Autumn Rhythm

by **DR. BETH HARRIS** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID
188469

Jacks



Video **3.1.8.1.1**: on Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, 1950, enamel on canvas, 266.7 x 525.8 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, © Pollock-Krasner Foundation)

Additional Resources

This painting at the The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Pollock Krasner Foundation

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3.1.8.2: Mural

- *by KATRINA KLAASMEYER*

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Figure **3.1.8.2.1**: Jackson Pollock and Peggy Guggenheim in front of *Mural*, c. 1944, in Guggenheim's New York City townhouse, (photo: George Carger)

Imagine living in New York in the early 1940s. Your friend, the art dealer Peggy Guggenheim, is excited to show you her latest acquisition by an up-and-coming artist. You can't miss it on the right-hand wall in the long, narrow corridor of her townhouse. Nearly twenty feet in length and eight feet high, it consumes the space and takes your breath away. In the words of art critic Clement Greenberg, "I took one look at [*Mural*]…and I knew Jackson was the greatest painter this country had produced."

Creative decisions

The artist, Jackson Pollock, had studied with the American muralist Thomas Hart Benton as well as with the Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros at his experimental workshop. Later Pollock was employed through the Federal Art Project, part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration. That ended in January 1943 and, desperate to make a living, Pollock took a job as a janitor and handyman at The Museum of Non-Objective Art (which is now named the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum for its principal benefactor, Peggy's uncle). Peggy Guggenheim's assistant Howard Putzel became aware of Pollock's work, and introduced him to the art patron who would champion his career. For this first commission she envisioned a mural painted directly on the wall, but her friend, the artist Marcel Duchamp, wisely suggested a painting on canvas that could be removed and transported in the future. She purchased the oversized Belgian linen canvas, thereby dictating the size of the work, but all other creative decisions were at the artist's discretion. Pollock received this commission mid-July 1943, and by the end of that same year the painting was hanging in her townhouse. In 1951 Peggy Guggenheim gifted the painting to the University of Iowa.

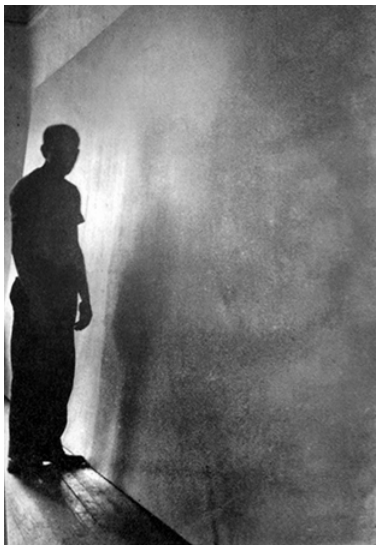


Figure 3.1.8.2.2: Jackson Pollock beside the canvas for *Mural*, 1943 (photo: Bernard Schardt)

Conservation

Mural began to deteriorate in the 1970s. Paint was starting to flake, and the weak original stretcher caused the canvas to sag. In 1973, conservators at the University of Iowa adhered a lining canvas with wax-resin to the reverse side for stability, replaced the original stretcher, and applied varnish to the surface of the painting. However, in recent years *Mural*'s need for additional care was apparent, and in July 2012 the painting was transported to the Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles for an in-depth study and conservation treatment. GCI conservators first removed the aged varnish on the surface, which restored the original brilliance and depth of color. They also built a new stretcher to accommodate the slightly curved canvas. Additionally, the Getty Conservation Institute's scientific analysis revealed several important discoveries regarding Pollock's process and methods.



Figure 3.1.8.2.3: Jackson Pollock, *Mural*, 1943, oil and water-based paint on linen, 242.9 x 603.9 cm (University of Iowa Museum of Art)

Technique

A number of myths surrounding the creation of this painting were debunked by GCI conservators. First among them is the idea that *Mural* was completed in a single night, in a sudden burst of inspired creativity. Instead, careful analysis of the canvas unmistakably revealed multiple layers of dried paint. All but one of the colors used in *Mural* were traditional oil paint, which takes days or even weeks to dry. If an artist were to apply paint over a layer of still wet paint, there would be a distinct blending or swirl of colors. Several areas of this canvas reveal this blending, but many other areas do not, indicating a much longer timeframe than a single night.

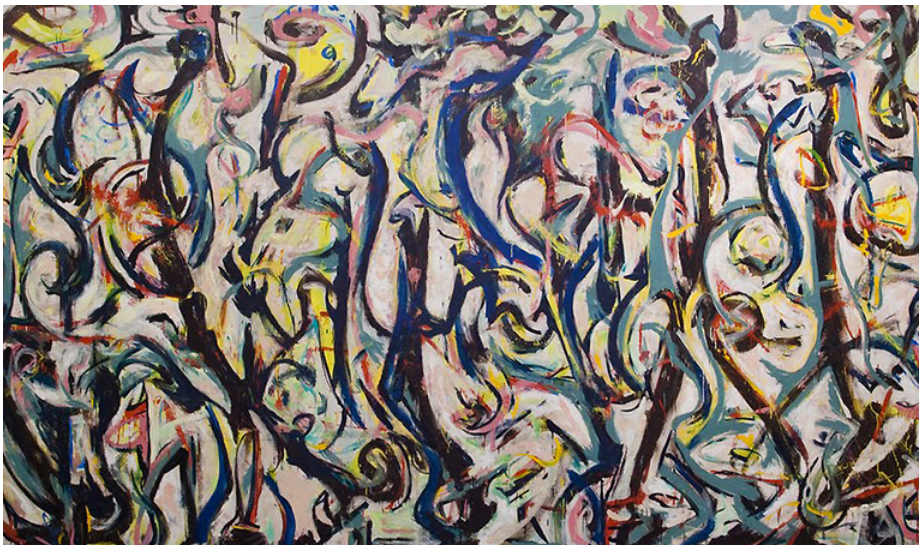


Figure 3.1.8.2.4: Jackson Pollock, *Mural* (detail), 1943, oil and water-based paint on linen, 242.9 x 603.9 cm (University of Iowa Museum of Art)

The only paint to be identified as water-based is off-white, which Pollock may have applied in the final stages of the painting. Its quick-drying nature may have been the reason for its use, although, significantly, this anticipates his later well-known experimentation with house paint. The areas of white provide visual space in between the vibrant curvilinear brushstrokes, as well as unifying the composition as a whole.



Figure 3.1.8.2.5: Jackson Pollock, *Mural* (detail), 1943, oil and water-based paint on linen, 242.9 x 603.9 cm (University of Iowa Museum of Art)

Another myth is that Pollock used his signature drip technique, wherein the canvas is placed flat on the studio floor while the artist flicks paint in a seeming haphazard manner. However, the drips are always flowing in the downward direction, indicating that the canvas was standing upright. Additionally, GCI conservators were able to replicate the shape and size of these drips on an upright canvas with a vigorous flick of the wrist. Although Pollock may not have used his “action painting” technique on this canvas, it does point in that direction.

Significance

Why is this painting important and what was Pollock trying to paint? *Mural* is the largest canvas Pollock ever painted and is often seen by art historians as a moment of liberation as the artist pushes beyond the restrictive traditions of easel painting. Stylistically this marks a moment of transition from his earlier surrealist-inspired biomorphic abstraction to more gestural, more active painting.

The pronounced brushwork and occasional drip point to an energetic, rhythmic creative expression that Pollock will explore more fully in the future.

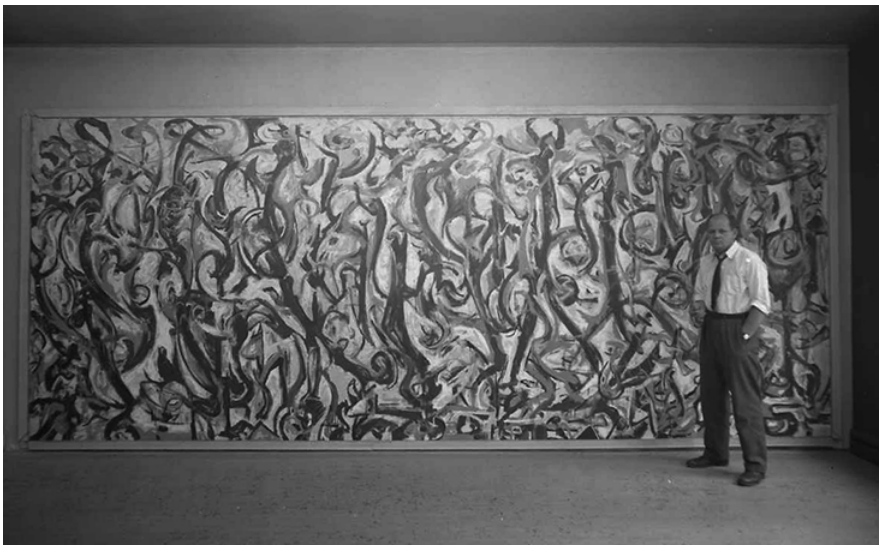


Figure **3.1.8.2.6**: Jackson Pollock standing beside *Mural* at Vogue Studios © Estate of Herbert Matter (Special Collections and University Archives Department, Stanford University Libraries)

What do you see in *Mural*? Faces, figures, birds, numbers, letters—all are partly visable, partly hidden within this massive painting. However, given Pollock's interest in the Surrealist concept of automatism (automatic actions, used to express the creative force of the unconscious), as well as Jungian concepts such as the collective unconscious, he may well have been interested in opening the viewer's mind to universal archetypes. What can be seen inside *Mural*? The answer may provide more insight into viewer as an individual, than a simple decoding of the artist's brushstrokes.

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3.1.8.3: The Case for Jackson Pollock

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Video **3.1.8.3.1**: Speaker: Sarah Urist Green

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3.1.8.4: Why is that important? Looking at Jackson Pollock

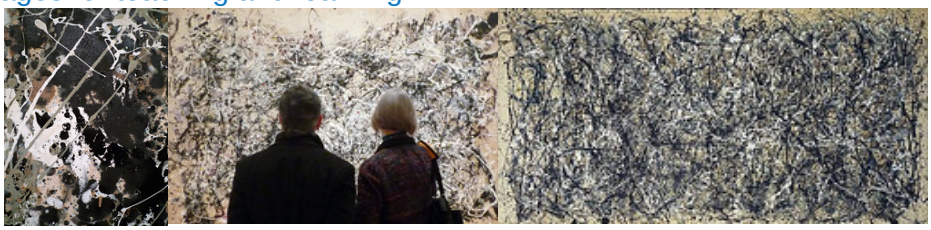
- *by SAL KHAN, DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

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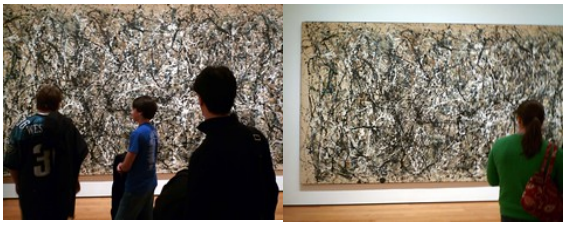


Video **3.1.8.4.1**: Jackson Pollock, *Number 1A, 1948*, 1948, oil and enamel paint on canvas, 68″ x 8′ 8″ / 172.7 x 264.2 cm (MoMA)

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3.1.8.5: The Painting Techniques of Jackson Pollock

- *by THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART*

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Video **3.1.8.5.1**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

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3.1.8.6: Conservation- Jackson Pollock, One- Number 31, 1950

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Video **3.1.8.6.9**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

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3.1.8.7: Paint Application Studies of Jackson Pollock’s Mural

- *by THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM*

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Video **3.1.8.7.1**: Video from The J. Paul Getty Museum

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.1.9: Mark Rothko

3.1.9.1: No. 210/No. 211 (Orange), 1960

3.1.9.2: No. 3/No. 13

3.1.9.3: The Case for Mark Rothko

3.1.9.4: Mark Rothko (at MoMA)

3.1.9.5: Restoring Rothko

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3.1.9.1: No. 210/No. 211 (Orange), 1960

by DR. MARGARET C. CONRADS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **3.1.9.1.1**: Mark Rothko, *No. 210/No. 211 (Orange)*, 1960, oil on canvas, 175.3 x 160 cm (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art). Speakers: Dr. Margi Conrads and Dr. Steven Zucker

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3.1.9.2: No. 3/No. 13

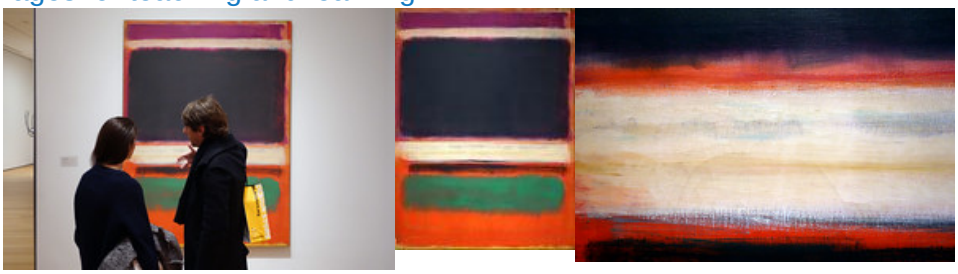
- *by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

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Video **3.1.9.2.1**: Mark Rothko, *No. 3/No. 13*, 1949, oil on canvas (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

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3.1.9.3: The Case for Mark Rothko

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Video **3.1.9.3.1**: Speaker: Sarah Urist Green

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3.1.9.4: Mark Rothko (at MoMA)

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Video **3.1.9.4.1**: Video from **The Museum of Modern Art**

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3.1.9.5: Restoring Rothko

- *by TATE*

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Video **3.1.9.5.1**: Video from **Tate**.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.1.10: Barnett Newman

3.1.10.1: Onement, I

3.1.10.2: Barnett Newman at MoMA

3.1.10.3: The Painting Techniques of Barnett Newman

3.1.10.4: Representation and abstraction- looking at Millais and Newman

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3.1.10.1: Onement, I

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS



Video **3.1.10.1.1**: Barnett Newman, *Onement, I*, 1948, oil on canvas, 27 1/4 x 16 1/4″ / 69.2 x 41.2 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

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3.1.10.2: Barnett Newman at MoMA

- *by THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART*

Page ID

188485



Video **3.1.10.2.1**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

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3.1.10.3: The Painting Techniques of Barnett Newman

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Video **3.1.10.3.1**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

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3.1.10.4: Representation and abstraction- looking at Millais and Newman

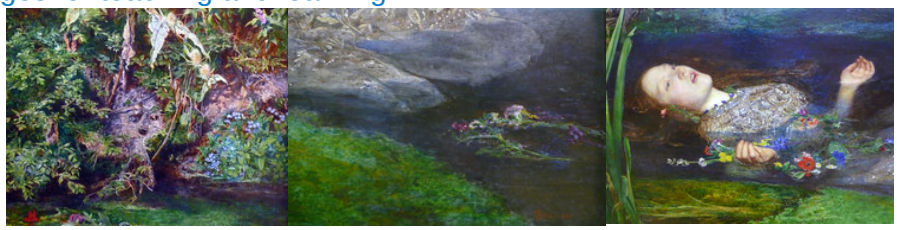
by SAL KHAN, DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video **3.1.10.4.1**: *Vir Heroicus Sublimus*, 1950-51 (MoMA)

What's "heroic" about a painting that looks like a craft project on HGTV? This comparison suggests an answer.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.1.11: Franz Kline

3.1.11.1: Franz Kline at MoMA

3.1.11.2: The Painting Techniques of Franz Kline

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3.1.11.1: Franz Kline at MoMA

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Video **3.1.11.1.1**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

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3.1.11.2: The Painting Techniques of Franz Kline

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Video **3.1.11.2.1**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

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3.1.12: Beauford Delaney, Marian Anderson

by DR. SHAWNYA L. HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
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Video **3.1.12.1**: Beauford Delaney, *Marian Anderson*, 1965, oil on canvas, 160.02 x 130.81 cm (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond)

Additional resources

More about Beauford Delaney from MoMA

Patricia Sue Canterbury, *Beauford Delaney: From New York to Paris* (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2005)

Stephen C. Wicks, *Beauford Delaney and James Baldwin: Through the Unusual Door* (The Knoxville Museum of Art, 2020)

The Marian Anderson Papers collection at the University of Pennsylvania

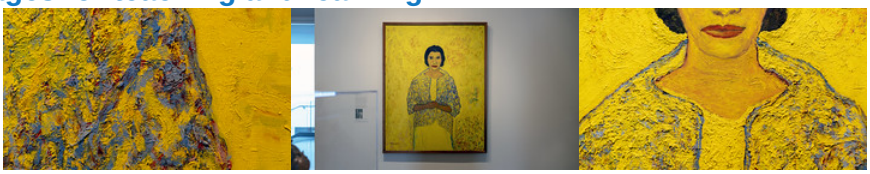
Listen to Marian Anderson's full performance at the Lincoln Memorial on April 9, 1939

Marian Anderson resources at the Smithsonian

Icons, an introduction

Abstract expressionism, an introduction

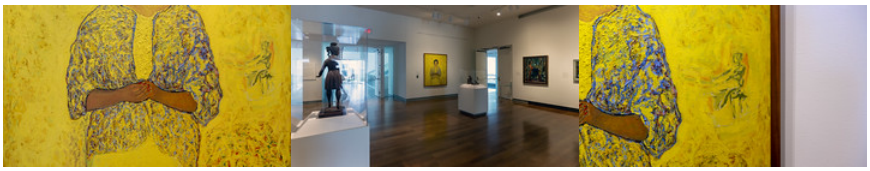
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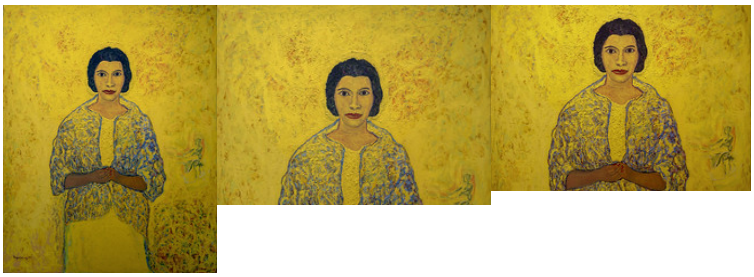
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This page titled 3.1.12: Beauford Delaney, Marian Anderson is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Dr. Shawnya L. Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker, "Beauford Delaney, Marian Anderson," in Smarthistory, January 12, 2022, accessed January 13, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/beauford-delaney-marian-anderson/..

3.1.13: Mark Bradford on Clyfford Still

- by **THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART**

Page ID

188493



Video **3.1.13.1**: The Artist Project is an online series in which artists respond to works of art in The Met's encyclopedic collection. **http://artistproject.metmuseum.org/4/mark-bradford/**

This page titled 3.1.13: Mark Bradford on Clyfford Still is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Mark Bradford on Clyfford Still," in Smarthistory, January 20, 2021, accessed January 13, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/mark-bradford-on-clyfford-still/..

SECTION OVERVIEW

3.2: New York School

Collage, copying, and color: the New York School was about more than just gestural abstraction.

1945 - 1980

3.2.1: The Impact of Abstract Expressionism

3.2.2: Sari Dienes, Star Circle

3.2.3: Jasper Johns

- 3.2.3.1: Flag
- 3.2.3.2: White Flag

3.2.4: Robert Rauschenberg

- 3.2.4.1: Erased de Kooning Drawing
- 3.2.4.2: Canyon
- 3.2.4.3: Bed
- 3.2.4.4: Retroactive I
- 3.2.4.5: Robert Rauschenberg, Signs

3.2.5: Ed Kienholz and Nancy Reddin Kienholz, Useful Art #5- The Western Motel

3.2.6: Ad Reinhardt

- 3.2.6.1: Abstract Painting
- 3.2.6.2: Ad Reinhardt at MoMA
- 3.2.6.3: The Painting Techniques of Ad Reinhardt

3.2.7: Helen Frankenthaler

- 3.2.7.1: Mountains and Sea
- 3.2.7.2: The Bay

3.2.8: Frank Stella, The Marriage of Reason and Squalor

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3.2.1: The Impact of Abstract Expressionism

by OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS



Figure **3.2.1.1**: Jackson Pollock, *One: Number 31, 1950*, 1950, oil and enamel paint on unprimed canvas, 269.5 x 530.8 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Painters in Postwar New York City

The end of World War II was a pivotal moment in world history and by extension the history of art. Many European artists had come to America during the 1930s to escape fascist regimes, and years of warfare had left much of Europe in ruins. In this context New York City emerged as the most important cultural center in the West. In part, this was due to the presence of a diverse group of European artists like Arshile Gorky, Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalì, Piet Mondrian, and Max Ernst, and the influential German teachers Josef Albers and Hans Hofmann (see also Black Mountain College). American artists' exposure to European modernist movements also resulted from the founding of the Museum of Modern Art (1929), the Museum of Non-Objective Painting (later the Guggenheim Museum, 1939), and galleries that dealt in modern art, such as Peggy Guggenheim's *Art of this Century* (1941). Both Americans and European expatriates joined *American Abstract Artists*, a group that advanced abstract art in America through exhibitions, lectures, and publications.

These institutions and the art patrons affiliated with them actively promoted the work of New York City artists. During the 1940s and '50s, the scene was dominated by the figures of Abstract Expressionism, a group of loosely affiliated painters participating in the first truly American modernist movement (sometimes called the New York School), championed by the influential critic Clement Greenberg. Abstract Expressionism's influences were diverse: the murals of the Federal Art Project, in which many of the painters had participated, various European abstract movements, like De Stijl, and especially Surrealism, with its emphasis on the unconscious mind that paralleled Abstract Expressionists' focus on the artist's psyche and spontaneous technique. Abstract Expressionist painters rejected representational forms, seeking an art that communicated on a monumental scale the artist's inner state in a universal visual language.

Action Painting

These painters fall into two broad groups: those who focused on a gestural application of paint, and those who used large areas of colour as the basis of their compositions. The leading figures of the first group were Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, Lee Krasner, and above all Jackson Pollock. Pollock's innovative technique of dripping paint on canvas spread on the floor of his studio prompted critic Harold Rosenberg to coin the term action painting to describe this type of practice. Action painting arose from the understanding of the painted object as the result of artistic process, which, as the immediate expression of the artist's identity, was the true work of art. Helen Frankenthaler also employed experimental techniques by pouring thinned pigments onto untreated canvas.



Figure 3.2.1.2: Barnett Newman, *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, 1950-51, oil on canvas, 242.2 x 541.7 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Color Field Painting

The second branch of Abstract Expressionist painting is usually referred to as Color Field painting. Two central figures in this group were Mark Rothko, known for canvases composed of two or three soft, rectangular forms stacked vertically, and Barnett Newman, who, in contrast to Rothko, painted fields of colour with sharp edges interrupted by precise vertical stripes he called "zips" (see *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, 1950–51). Through the overwhelming scale and intense colour of their canvases, Colour Field painters like Rothko and Newman revived the Romantic aesthetic of the sublime.

Influence

Because of the huge influence of Abstract Expressionism in postwar New York City, other artists and movements are generally understood in relation to it. Ad Reinhardt in the early 1950s and then Frank Stella later in the decade painted abstract canvases, but rejected the Abstract Expressionist emphasis on gesture and the painting as a means of communing with the artist (see Stella's *Die Fahne Hoch!*, 1959). They instead reinforced the essence of the painting as a physical object through precise geometric forms and smooth application of paint, presaging Minimalism.



Figure 3.2.1.3: Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962, synthetic polymer paint on thirty-two canvases, each 50.8 x 40.6 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

The other principal movement of postwar New York was Pop art. Although Pop had begun in England (see, for example, Richard Hamilton), postwar America provided a meaningful context for the movement's emphasis on mass media and consumer culture. American adherents also saw Pop art as a welcome alternative to pure abstraction. The artists Jasper Johns and his close friend Robert Rauschenberg rejected Abstract Expressionism's attachment to the universal meaning expressed in a work of art, instead creating multiple or fluid meanings through combinations of everyday objects and images. Johns depicted "things the mind already knows," such as American flags, targets, numerals, and beer cans, and incorporated newsprint and plaster casts into his works (see *Target with Four Faces*, 1955). Rauschenberg also blurred the boundaries between painting and sculpture with his combines, such as *Bed* of 1955. These works are related to both assemblage and collage in their use of found three-dimensional objects (bedding, furniture, taxidermied animals) and layering of printed material (product packaging, newspaper, photographs) on painted surfaces.

Both Johns and Rauschenberg provided a critical departure from the pure abstraction of the dominant painters of the 1950s, setting the stage for the flourishing of Pop art in the '60s. Andy Warhol was unquestionably the central figure of the American Pop art movement. He first worked as a highly successful advertising artist in New York before exhibiting paintings and silkscreen prints beginning in the early 1960s. Best known for his images of Campbell's soup cans, Coke bottles, and American public figures, Warhol's work seems to celebrate icons of consumer culture – both actual products and celebrities who were marketed and sold as such, like Marilyn Monroe – but is also often interpreted as a critique of passive, unthinking consumption. James Rosenquist, a contemporary of Warhol, also took inspiration from his work in advertising as a billboard painter. His huge canvases depicting images from print media and advertisements, such as *Marilyn Monroe I* (1962), are rooted in the vulgarity of contemporary life, but reminiscent of Surrealism in their juxtaposition of disparate, fragmentary imagery.

The success of abstract and Pop painters in postwar New York established the city's international importance as an artistic center, in the ensuing decades drawing to it some of the world's most talented and innovative artists.

Text by Kandice Rawlings, PhD (Associate Editor, Oxford Art Online)

This content was first developed for Oxford Art Online and appears courtesy of Oxford University Press.

Additional Resources:

Abstract Expressionist New York, The Museum of Modern Art, NY (2010)

"Jackson Pollock on his Process", *Making Sense of Modern Art*, video, SFMOMA (2000)

Justin Wolf, "Abstract Expressionism", theartstory.org

de Kooning: A Retrospective, The Museum of Modern Art, NY (2011)

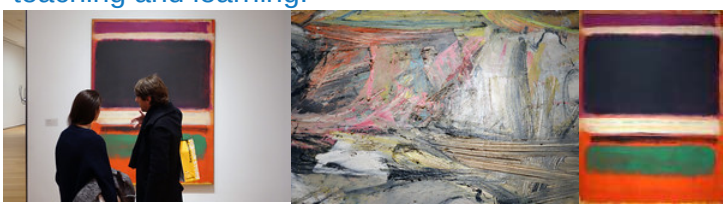
"De Stijl", Tate Glossary

David Anfam, "Surrealism", *Grove Art Online*, © 2009 Oxford University Press

David Anfram, "Action Painting", Grove Art Online, © 2009 Oxford University Press

Justin Wolf, "Clement Greenberg", theartstory.org

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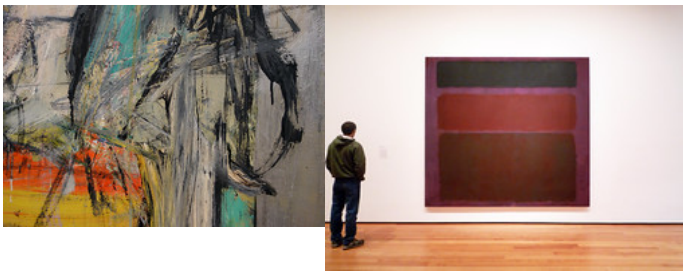
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J

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3.2.2: Sari Dienes, Star Circle

by DR. SARAH ECKHARDT and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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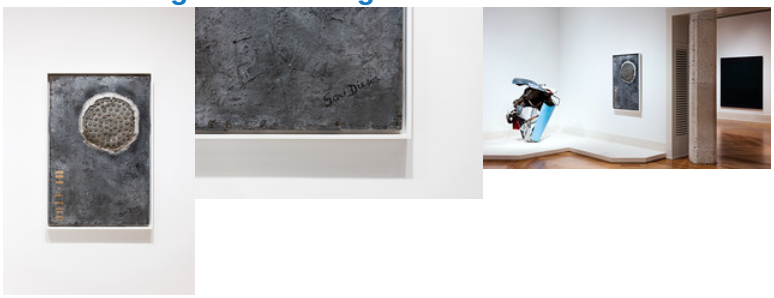


Video **3.2.2.1**: Sari Dienes, *Star Circle*, 1953–59 (assembled as late as 1959), plaster and paint on foam board, 121.92 x 81.28 x 3.49 cm (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts) © Sari Dienes Foundation

Additional resources

This work at the VMFA
The Sari Dienes Foundation

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.2.3: Jasper Johns

3.2.3.1: Flag

3.2.3.2: White Flag

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3.2.3.1: Flag

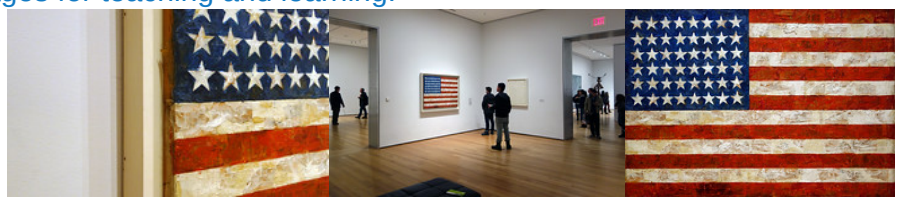
- *by SAL KHAN and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

Page ID
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Video **3.2.3.1.1**: Jasper Johns, *Flag*, 1954-55 (dated on reverse 1954), encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric mounted on plywood, three panels, 42-1/4 x 60-5/8″ / 107.3 x 153.8 cm (MoMA)

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3.2.3.2: White Flag

- *by THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART*

Page ID

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Video **3.2.3.2.1**: Video from The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.2.4: Robert Rauschenberg

3.2.4.1: Erased de Kooning Drawing

3.2.4.2: Canyon

3.2.4.3: Bed

3.2.4.4: Retroactive I

3.2.4.5: Robert Rauschenberg, Signs

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3.2.4.1: Erased de Kooning Drawing

by DR. TOM FOLLAND

Page ID

188501



Figure **3.2.4.1.1**: Robert Rauschenberg, *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953, traces of drawing media on paper with label and gilded frame, 64.14 cm x 55.25 cm (© Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, **SFMOMA**)

That's right, the *Erased de Kooning Drawing* is… an erased drawing by **Willem de Kooning**. It is also a statement that the "erasing" artist, **Robert Rauschenberg**, made about the artistic culture of his time and about his own artistic practice.



Figure **3.2.4.1.2**: Community meeting, Black Mountain College (photo: **Black Mountain College Museum**)

How It Happened

In the Fall of 1952, the young artist Robert Rauschenberg visited the New York studio of Willem de Kooning. Rauschenberg met de Kooning and befriended him as a student at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. By 1952, de Kooning was a leading figure, along with Jackson Pollock, in Abstract Expressionism, one of the first modernist art movements in post-World-War II New York. Both de Kooning and Pollock had forged a radically new style of **abstract painting**, and de Kooning would become particularly well known for a painting series that dramatically distorted the female form. The so-named "de Kooning style," in fact, became a template for modernist painting for years to come.



Figure **3.2.4.1.3**: Rauschenberg with Jasper Johns, John Cage, and others in Rauschenberg's or Johns's Pearl Street studio, New York, c.1955 (photo: Jerry Schatzberg)

But Rauschenberg was not interested in painting like de Kooning; his plan, as he told the elder artist, was to erase one of his drawings. And de Kooning agreed, after having chosen one that might prove difficult to undo, as it had been done in charcoal, oil paint, pencil, and crayon. Rauschenberg dutifully erased it over the ensuing weeks.

Fellow artist and Rauschenberg's longtime friend, Jasper Johns would later provide a gilded frame and mat, onto which was placed an inscription for the re-titled drawing: "*Erased de Kooning Drawing*, Robert Rauschenberg, 1953."

Cultural Context of **Abstract Expressionism**

Rauschenberg's erasure was at odds with the prevailing sensibility in art during the 1950s in America. Abstraction had emerged as the defining characteristic of Modernism. In fact, it became a kind of post-war call-to-arms, vigorously promoted by the influential art critic Clement Greenberg. Accordingly, all art, whether it be painting, sculpture, or photography, was to pursue a path that eliminated subject matter and narrative, whilst focusing instead upon the expressive qualities of the medium. This often took the form of highly gestural and non-representational mark-making. Since it was painting that best embodied this new approach, it was painting that reigned as the dominant artistic medium of the Post-World-War II years.



Figure **3.2.4.1.4**: Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, 1950, enamel on canvas, 266.7 x 525.8 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Whether it was the overall effect of **Jackson Pollock**'s so-called "drip" paintings (in which paint had been flung or dripped across large canvases), or the stained pools of color in the work of **Helen Frankenthaler**, or even the distorted images in **de Kooning's *Women* series**, the unifying force was a will to abstraction. Pollock once famously remarked that if what he was painting veered too closely to resemblance, he would paint it out.

Even photography tried to mimic painting's abstract qualities. The documentary photographer Aaron Siskind had created portraits of rural America in the 1930s, but by the 1950s his photographs were reduced to black and white arrangements of form. Abstraction was seen by many artists as a liberating force, especially in the context of American realist painting of the preceding decades. Folkish American subjects and themes now seemed provincial compared to what had been achieved in Europe and particularly France since the early twentieth century.

Most significantly, abstraction embodied a specifically postwar American sense of individualism. Through the gestural and often theatrical or performative act of making marks upon the large, flat expanse of canvas, the artist was freed from the constraints of subject matter. In Abstract Expressionist painting, the subject matter, if there can be said to be one, was the artist himself. I use the

gendered pronoun “himself” purposively here since it was male artists who were the celebrated authors of these muscular paintings, requiring large brushes and massive canvases. This is not to say that women did not produce powerful bodies of work in this period —indeed Lee Krasner, Janet Sobel, Buffie Johnson, Anne Ryan, Hedda Sterne, and others did just that.



Figure **3.2.4.1.5**: Lee Krasner, *Untitled*, 1953, oil paint, gouache and paper, 57 x 76.2 cm (**National Gallery of Australia** © estate of Lee Krasner)

Erasing conformism: Rauschenberg’s Neo-Dada

One of the Black Mountain Poets, Robert Duncan described the “bravura brushstroke” as evidence of “the power and movement of the arm itself” and of the “involvement of the painter in the act.”[1] It is hard not to see in this statement evidence of the gender bias that reflected a prevalent idea according to which painting powerfully on large surfaces meant painting like a man.

In this regard, it is important to point out that Rauschenberg was gay, and like women and even artists of color, invariably deemed too far outside the extremely conformist culture of 1950s America to produce the requisite kind of art that was needed to prove America’s place on the international stage. Metaphorically therefore, it could be argued that Rauschenberg was erasing not just a drawing, but this very idea of artistic, masculine authorship.



Figure **3.2.4.1.6**: Example of Neo-Dada work by Robert Rauschenberg, *Almanac*, 1962, showing the artist's continuous use of erasure as a formal and conceptual tool (© Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, image: **Tate**)

Erased de Kooning Drawing thus had symbolic force. Though, as one can imagine, that force was mostly viewed by critics as negative. Rauschenberg's erasure was a destructive act, to be sure, one that seemed to harken back to a World-War-I movement called **Dada**, in which traditional ideas of art were challenged in often absurd ways. Rauschenberg's seeming nihilism would, in the later 1950s, be called "Neo-Dada," and he would be linked to **Marcel Duchamp** whose anti-art objects had resurfaced in New York during the 1950s. But Rauschenberg saw the erased drawing in very different terms and possibly as a follow up to a series of white paintings in which canvases were entirely painted white.

> ***"It was nothing destructive…. I was trying to purge myself of my teaching…so I was doing monochrome no-image."Robert Rauschenberg in conversation with Tanya Grosman, Interview, vol. VI, no. 5, 1976***

Of course we must always weigh the proclamations of artists against the cultural climate in which they work. Rauschenberg's coy statement would not mark the first time an artist feigned indifference or ignorance of the larger meanings of their work. American artists had finally achieved what they believed to be a truly modern art that could rival Paris. It was also no coincidence that America had emerged as a superpower in the world at large. There was, as a result, a heroic sense about the whole affair; artists inadvertently became cultural cold warriors. Rauschenberg seemed cavalier about it all. In the words of one critic: "We have finally won, are we going to throw it all away?"[2]



Figure **3.2.4.1.7**: Label (detail), Robert Rauschenberg, *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953, traces of drawing media on paper with label and gilded frame, 64.14 cm x 55.25 cm (© Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, SFMOMA)

Notes

[1] Robert Duncan, *Black Mountain Review*, 1956. The *Black Mountain Review* was a literary magazine associated with the community of poets and artists active at Black Mountain College, and seen by its founders as a way of continuing the legacy of the College after its closure.

[2] Leo Steinberg paraphrasing the art critic Robert Rosenberg. Interview by Tom Folland with Leo Steinberg, January 16, 2008, New York, New York.

Additional resources

This drawing at SFMOMA
Rauschenberg discussing *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (short video)
This drawing on the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation website

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3.2.4.2: Canyon

by DR. TOM FOLLAND



Figure **3.2.4.2.1**: Robert Rauschenberg, *Canyon*, 1959, oil, pencil, paper, metal, photograph, fabric, wood, canvas, buttons, mirror, taxidermied eagle, cardboard, pillow, paint tube and other materials, 207.6 x 177.8 x 61 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) © 2014 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Is *Canyon* a painting or sculpture? Its upper half is a mass of materials that include bits of a shirt, printed paper, a squashed tube of paint, and photographs all seemingly held in place by broad slashes of house paint, while its lower half consists of a stuffed bald eagle with outstretched wings about to lift off from an opened box. The box seems to balance precariously upon a beam that tilts downward to the right; its end point meets the frame. As if that were not enough, that beams suspends a pillow dangling below the frame and squeezed in half by the cloth string that holds it.

Combines

Canyon belongs to a group of artworks called "Combines," a term unique to this artist who attached extraneous materials and objects to canvases in the years between 1954 and 1965. What makes Rauschenberg so significant for this period—the postwar years—is how he challenged conventional ways of thinking about advanced modern art; especially the art of "The New York School," a group of émigré Europeans and like-minded American artists (including Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and their followers), who were praised for their heroic abstraction. Rauschenberg' s art violated the rules.

While the the word "Combine" has no known origin in an art context, it describes Rauschenberg's hybrid approach to art making which dismantled the rigid medium-specific categories so dear to modernist culture. In the American art critic Clement Greenberg's influential theory, so-called true painting was to explore only the properties inherent to painting: gesture, flatness and color. Sculpture was to adhere strictly to the delineation of volume and mass. Both would necessarily be abstract since the truth-to-materials maxim of post-war modernism meant that any kind of illusionism (bronze pretending to be flesh or paint attempting to resemble the thing it represented) was anathema. "Subject matter," in Greenberg's infamous declaration, "becomes something to be avoided like a plague."[1] With *Canyon*, like any number of Combines the artist created during this period, all of this was put into question. Not only did the artist subvert the distinction between painting and sculpture, he reintroduced subject matter and narrative back into art. The art historian Leo Steinberg declared that Rauschenberg's Combines "let the world back in again."[2]



Figure 3.2.4.2.2: Rembrandt, *Abduction of Ganymede*, 1635, oil on canvas, 177 x 129 cm (Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden)

Reading *Canyon*

Canyon is not an entirely abstract work of art. But what exactly is the subject matter? On the face of it, it seems to be a wryly comic re-telling of the Greek myth in which the god Zeus, disguised as an eagle, abducts a youth named Ganymede. The subject had of course appeared in art before. There are, for example, Greek vases, Roman reliefs and European oil paintings dedicated to this story. Rembrandt's *Abduction of Ganymede*, 1636—to which Rauschenberg's version might readily be compared—paints the story in the lurid richness of oil with a dramatically diagonal arrangement of the figures. Or could it even be a reference to the "scales of Justice" so often found in the art and architecture of Europe and America? It would be a mistake to read *Canyon* narrowly using only conventional iconography. Although some art historians have sought to "read" *Canyon* as one would a traditional representional artwork, Rauschenberg's work seems to resist fixed decoding in favor of a more open-ended play of meaning.



Figure 3.2.4.2.3: Robert Rauschenberg, Canyon (detail), 1959, oil, pencil, paper, metal, photograph, fabric, wood, canvas, buttons, mirror, taxidermied eagle, cardboard, pillow, paint tube and other materials, 207.6 x 177.8 x 61 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) © 2014 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Rauschenberg combined disparate elements in a random fashion perhaps responding to his urban environment (New York City) and a world of ephemera: the flotsam and jetsam of mass culture in the years after the Second World War. Look, for example, at the top right: here is a slab of cardboard with commercial lettering, probably the discarded packaging for a shipment of goods found on the street in his lower Manhattan neighborhood. In this sense he anticipated the later work of Pop artists such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist who would, a few years later, make such commercial imagery the focus of their art.

Cultural debris

Rauschenberg did know other artists who took a similar approach and challenged the narrow parameters of the formalists wing of the New York School and its rejection of popular culture and illusionism. His immediate circle included the painter Jasper Johns, the choreographer Merce Cunningham and the avant-garde composer John Cage. On the West Coast Edward Keinholz and Wallace Berman were creating artworks that would come to be called “Assemblage”—think collage on a large scale. In Paris, Arman, Jean Tinguley and Jacques de la Villeglé incorporated the debris of the city; junk and cast off commodities incorporated into artworks that became know as Nouveau réalism (New realism).

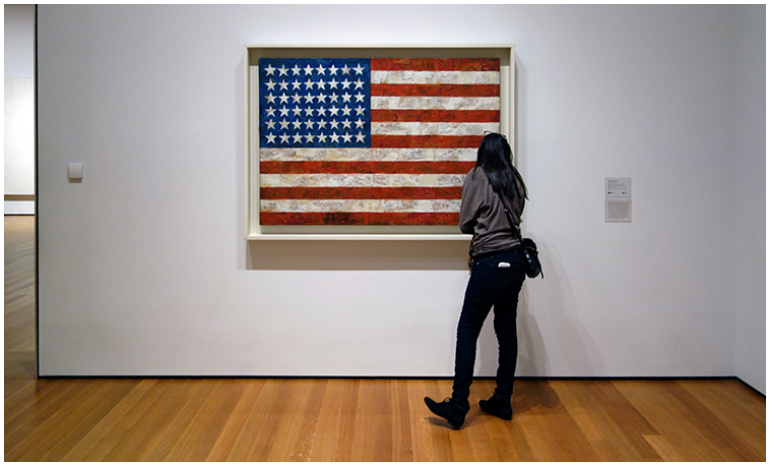


Figure **3.2.4.2.4**: Jasper Johns, Flag, 1954-55 (dated on reverse 1954), encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric mounted on plywood, three panels, 42-1/4 x 60-5/8″ /107.3 x 153.8 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Canyon is more than an accumulation of debris, however. Note the skeins of paint, brushed, scribbled, clotted, dripping in the style of the abstract expressionists. Rauschenberg was also closely aligned with the New York School—particularly the older abstract expressionists—whose work he admired. But he nevertheless expressed a profound ambivalence towards this group: “There was something about the self-assertion of abstract expressionism that personally always put me off, because at that time my focus was as much in the opposite direction as it could be.”[3]



Figure **3.2.4.2.5**: Robert Rauschenberg, Canyon (detail), 1959, oil, pencil, paper, metal, photograph, fabric, wood, canvas, buttons, mirror, taxidermied eagle, cardboard, pillow, paint tube and other materials, 207.6 x 177.8 x 61 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) © 2014 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Rauschenberg’s self-conscious handling of paint intertwined with often-outrageous objects can be construed as parody. In this way, *Canyon* can be seen as a counter to the overblown rhetoric of abstract expressionism with its stress on heroic individualism and the formal purity of abstract art. The eagle (with its testicular appendage hanging below the frame)—like Jasper Johns’ American flag (see above) from the same period—may be an ironic commentary on heroic masculine identity and even cold-war era American power. As a gay artist during a deeply repressive era that sought to expel both the threat of communism and of homosexuality, Rauschenberg distanced himself from cultural orthodoxy.

1. Clement Greenberg, “Avant Garde and Kitsch,” (1939), *Art And Culture: Critical Essays* (Beacon Press: Boston): 5.

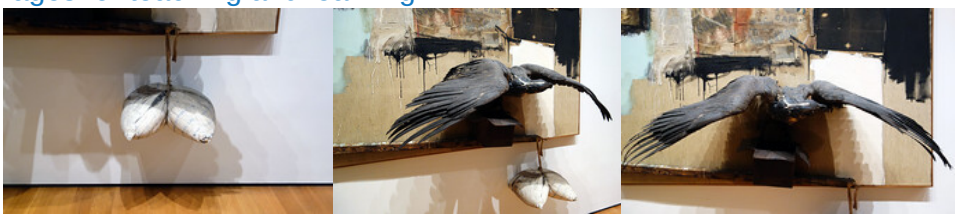
2. Dorothy Seckler, “Oral history interview with Robert Rauschenberg,” 1965 December 21. Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

3. Leo Steinberg, “Other Criteria,” *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972): 90.

Additional resources:

This painting at The Museum of Modern Art

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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3.2.4.3: Bed

- *by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

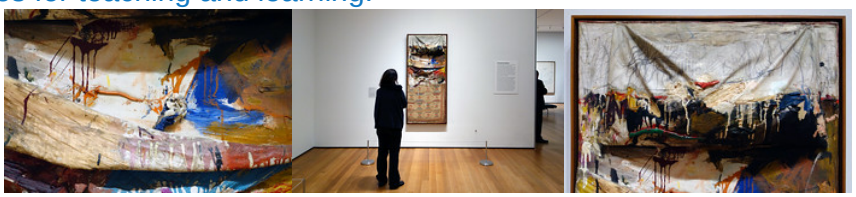
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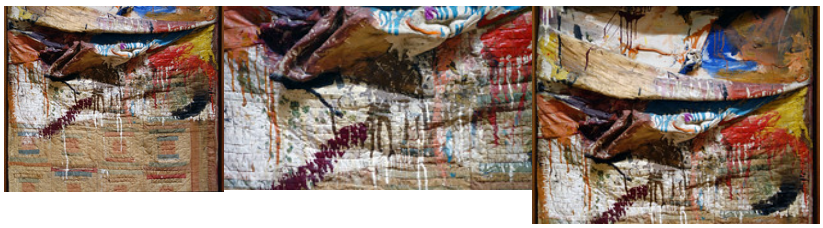


Video **3.2.4.3.1**: Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed*, 1955, oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet on wood supports, 191.1 x 80 x 20.3 cm (MoMA) © 2013 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

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3.2.4.4: Retroactive I

by PATRICIA HICKSON, WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **3.2.4.4.1**: Robert Rauschenberg, *Retroactive I*, 1963, oil and silkscreen-ink print on canvas, 213.4 x 152.4 cm (Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art) All works © Robert Rauschenberg

Additional resources

This painting at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut
This painting on the Rauschenberg Foundation website
Robert Rauschenberg, Note on painting, October-November 1963

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3.2.4.5: Robert Rauschenberg, Signs

by **DR. THOMAS FOLLAND**

Page ID

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Figure **3.2.4.5.1**: Robert Rauschenberg, *Signs*, 1970, screenprint, 109.22 x 86.36 cm (MoMA)

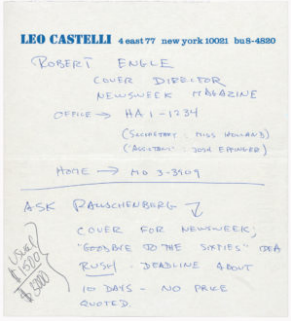


Figure **3.2.4.5.2**: Note from the Castelli Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery records (Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, box 17, folio 34. Image courtesy of the Rauschenberg Foundation)

In 1970, *Newsweek* magazine commissioned and ultimately rejected a cover image from Robert Rauschenberg. The artist was asked to create an image that commemorated the 1960s, a tumultuous decade defined by violence and by protests over the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, feminist and gay rights advocacy, and an emergent counter culture. The theme was "Goodbye to the Sixties," according to a note penned on letterhead from the Castelli Gallery.

Signs is a montage of iconic symbols of 1960s culture. Figures of differing size appear to float and overlap as if they are the occupants of a distorted dream landscape. A convoy of American soldiers on the upper left and a group of students who protest the Vietnam War in black-and-white on the right bookend a cascade of figures: the Blues singer Janis Joplin (who died of a drug overdose in 1970) and who is overlaid in a wash of red the color of blood; the slain senator Robert (Bobby) Kennedy is just below her partially enveloped by that same red. In profile view, dominating the bottom right side of the composition, is his brother John F. Kennedy whose presidency was ended by assassination in 1963. If one detected a morbid sensibility emerging here, it would only

be intensified by the addition at center of a wounded soldier assisted by two uniformed ones, and below this, the figure of a bloodied Black figure reaching over the body of slain civil-rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. whose prone position anchors the print at bottom.

Did *Newsweek* perceive the work to be too darkly political or even anti-war? After the image was rejected, Rauschenberg's dealer Leo Castelli decided to issue the work as a limited edition of screenprints entitled *Signs*.



Figure **3.2.4.5.3**: Robert Rauschenberg, detail of astronaut, *Signs*, 1970, screenprint, 109.22 x 86.36 cm (MoMA)

Is the astronaut, who looms large at bottom left, an attempt to balance this rather despairing view of the sixties? The glass face covering of his helmet reflects an image of the moon landing. But the remainder of his body, sheathed in a space suit with an American flag prominent on his left shoulder, is splattered with circles of red suggesting splatters of blood, as if a decade of war and social upheaval had sullied the euphoria that had greeted President Kennedy's expansion of the U.S. space program in 1961.



Figure **3.2.4.5.4**: Robert Rauschenberg, detail of the center-right side, *Signs*, 1970, screenprint, 109.22 x 86.36 cm (MoMA)

There are few buoyantly optimistic "signs" in this work. Partially obscured on the lower middle right of the print is the fragment of a work by the **Pop artist** **Roy Lichtenstein** whose cartoon-inspired paintings were meticulously constructed to resemble the benday dot printing technique used in advertising imagery. Below that is a fairly typical American scene of baseball. But both are crowded to the right and dominated by the profile image of Kennedy.

Is it any wonder that *Newsweek* declined to put the image on its cover? Instead of a cleanly graphic image with a clear point of view, the usual *Newsweek* cover of that time, Rauschenberg had given them the bad dream of a long decade: war, civil unrest, and

racial injustice. It is important to note that despite its somewhat incendiary imagery, *Signs* represents no singular political viewpoint. This is consistent with the artist's work as a whole. While often controversial, Rauschenberg was never an overtly political artist. There is no commentary here; indeed, the haphazard arrangement of imagery without a clear hierarchy, center, or any other kind of compositional ordering complicates any traditionally **iconographic approach**.



Figure **3.2.4.5.5**: Martha Rosler, "Red Stripe Kitchen," from the series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*, c. 1967–72, photomontage (© Martha Rosler)

As a point of comparison, Martha Rosler's photo-montage work *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*, c. 1967–72, adopted a similar tactic in mashing together disparate images from *Life Magazine* of home interiors and wounded Vietnamese citizens, hers was clearly an activist intervention and an anti-war statement. Rauschenberg's work was much more ambiguous, a trait that he had continued since the 1950s when he began creating artworks known as ***combines*** (these were primarily assemblages of found objects, images, fabrics, and other sundry items).

After the 1950s, Rauschenberg began producing flat images (such as *Signs*) alongside the three-dimensional, sculptural *combines*. The process was similar, but instead of found objects, he used media sources. Rauschenberg's collaging of imagery abandoned compositional hierarchy in favor of seemingly arbitrary placement. This led the art critic and historian Leo Steinberg to describe this new direction in the artist's work as a "Flatbed picture plane," conjuring an image of the horizontal bed of a printing press. Rauschenberg availed himself of various technologies of image-making often used commercially, like silkscreen or screen-printing, and popularized by Pop artists during the 1960s. Often interspersed with his own photographs, these images were splayed next to one another in random fashion.



Figure **3.2.4.5.6**: Robert Rauschenberg, *Retroactive II*, 1963, oil and silkscreen ink on canvas, 213.4 x 152.4 cm (Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago)

While some were abstract, in others discernible narratives often emerged, such as in *Retroactive II*, 1963, which suggests something of a *zeitgeist* of the times—a spirit of the ages in other words. In this work, John F. Kennedy, whose magnetic charm in the first televised presidential election secured his election victory (as historians would argue), and a parachuting astronaut dominate the composition. *Retroactive II* seems to herald a decade of technological marvels, however Rauschenberg was likely less interested in any symbolism the work might have.

Rauschenberg's work (along with Pop Art with which Rauschenberg was loosely aligned) was ultimately a response to the saturation of electronic media in the 1960s. *Signs* is best understood—I would argue—in this context. The Vietnam War became the first war to be televised, along with presidential elections and rocket launches (and all sandwiched between advertisements for shampoo and washing machines). Rapid advancement in all areas of technology was argued by theorists like Marshall McLuhan to not only alter perception of reality but also to become that very means of perception. Rauschenberg's screenprints track that process of perception. Laid upon the flat bed of prints, a dizzying, and newly immersive experience of televised seeing become frozen fossils that can be studied. *Newsweek* magazine had likely wanted a window onto recent history. Rauschenberg's *Signs* draws us, instead, towards the process by which that history was being made and represented.

Additional resources:

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1964 (MIT Press, 1994).

Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria*: *Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (Oxford University Press, 1972).

Robert Rauschenberg, *Retroactive I*, 1963 (**Smarthistory video**)

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3.2.5: Ed Kienholz and Nancy Reddin Kienholz, Useful Art #5- The Western Motel

by PORTLAND ART MUSEUM



Video **3.2.5.1**: Ed Kienholz and Nancy Reddin Kienholz, *Useful Art #5: The Western Motel*, 1992 (Portland Art Museum). Video from Portland Art Museum (speakers: Dr. Christina Olsen and Bruce Guenther).

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.2.6: Ad Reinhardt

3.2.6.1: Abstract Painting

3.2.6.2: Ad Reinhardt at MoMA

3.2.6.3: The Painting Techniques of Ad Reinhardt

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3.2.6.1: Abstract Painting

by SAL KHAN and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video **3.2.6.1.1**: Ad Reinhardt, *Abstract Painting*, 1963, oil on canvas, 60 x 60″ (MoMA)

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3.2.6.2: Ad Reinhardt at MoMA

- *by THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART*

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Video **3.2.6.2.1**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

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3.2.6.3: The Painting Techniques of Ad Reinhardt

- *by THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART*

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188510



Video **3.2.6.3.20**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.2.7: Helen Frankenthaler

3.2.7.1: Mountains and Sea

3.2.7.2: The Bay

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3.2.7.1: Mountains and Sea

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
188512



Video **3.2.7.1.1**: Helen Frankenthaler, *Mountains and Sea*, 1952, oil and charcoal on unsized, unprimed canvas, 219.4 x 297.8 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington)

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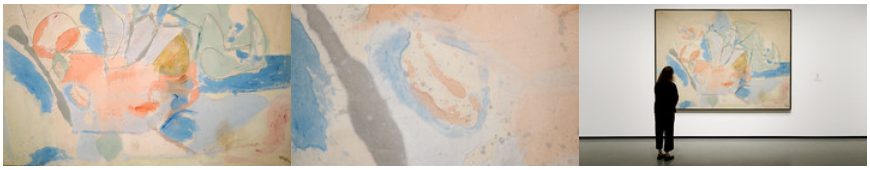
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This page titled 3.2.7.1: Mountains and Sea is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker, "Helen Frankenthaler, Mountains and Sea," in Smarthistory, June 19, 2018, accessed August 17, 2020, https://smarthistory.org/frankenthaler-sea/..

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3.2.7.2: The Bay

by FARISA KHALID

Page ID
188513



Figure **3.2.7.2.1**: Helen Frankenthaler, *The Bay*, 1963, acrylic on canvas, 6′ 8-7/8″ x 6′ 9-7/8″ (Detroit Institute of Arts)

Violet to Indigo

At first glance, it's hard to know what to make of Helen Frankenthaler's heaving, atmospheric painting, *The Bay*.

We see an imposing fluid blue promontory suspended in front of us. Its colors ranging from violet to indigo run into one another with a clear zone of navy near the top of the canvas that draw our eyes up to it. The blurring of the colors gives an immediate sense of the artist's process: paint poured onto the canvas when it was wet. We can almost watch as the blues meld into one another during this early stage giving the image its blurred and smooth finish.

Is its subject what the title suggests—a landform of some kind with certain emblematic associations? Is the swelling amorphous blue mass floating amid that moss green and cream border meant to stand for something beyond itself? With many Abstract Expressionist paintings of the 1950s and 60s, it's important not to get too caught up with possible social and historical contexts and biography, but to focus on what's before us—the physical elements of the work itself because those elements can tell us so much about the painting.

When Helen Frankenthaler painted *The Bay*, she was already a well-regarded artist. She'd been the subject of a *LIFE Magazine* profile in 1956 and was one of the handful of women among the traditional all-boys' club of the New York Abstract Expressionists. *The Bay* was chosen as one of the paintings for the American pavilion of the 1966 Venice Biennale. Looking closely you can see that the shades of blues that run into one another are part of a specific process of pouring paint on to the canvas rather than painting the colors onto the surface with a brush, as the leading Abstract Expressionist painters, like Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Franz Kline, were so famous for doing.

Soak-stain

Frankenthaler's approach here was to use a soak-stain method with diluted acrylic paint. Acrylics gave her more flexibility with viscosity and movement than oils, and allowed her more control as she poured that thinned paint onto the taut unprimed canvas so that it would get absorbed into the weave of the fabric. As a substitute for the action of the brush, Frankenthaler would lift the canvas and tilt it at various angles so that the paint would flow across the surface. She had to account for gravity and the ebb and flow of a liquid across a flat surface, so a fascinating aspect of Frankenthaler's method is the blend of the artist's control paired with the unpredictability of the forces of nature.

This kind of painting is often classified as Color Field painting, painting characterized by simplicity of line and a focus on color as the subject rather than as an add-on. The first generation of Abstract Expressionists, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman were the first important Color Field painters, while Helen Frankenthaler is often classified as a second-generation member of the group.

Frankenthaler was inspired by the drip method of Jackson Pollock who began painting on the floor in the late 1940s, but she knew she wanted to work differently. Pollock and other artists such as de Kooning and Franz Kline had made the painted gesture too famous and recognizable by the early 1950s. In 1952, at the age of 23, Frankenthaler's experiments lead her to produce her first major painting, *Mountains and Sea*, an expansive luminous depiction of the landscape of Nova Scotia, where she'd recently taken a holiday.



Figure **3.2.7.2.2**: Helen Frankenthaler, *Mountains and Sea*, 1952, charcoal and oil on canvas, 220 x 297.8 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washingon D.C.)

Devotion to color

Mountains and Sea in turn inspired other painters to use this soak-stain method to great success, painters like Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis and Paul Feeley, whose canvases of floating thinned color heralded in a new era of abstract painting. The sense of natural spontaneity and devotion to color is part of what makes *The Bay* and the work of the Color Field painters so compelling. The basic formal elements of a painting speak for themselves as the viewer experiences the work in a fundamental, direct manner.

The influential mid-20th century art critic, Clement Greenberg, a close friend of Frankenthaler (and Pollock), believed that if art made after the trauma of the second world war was going to have any real impact on the social consciousness of Americans it would have to radically change and move towards the abstract. For Greenberg, abstraction could reach a more universal and expansive mode of visual communication.

In a 1965 interview for *Artforum Magazine* with the art critic Henry Geldzahler, Helen Frankenthaler described her process of conceptualizing her work:

> ***When you first saw a Cubist or Impressionist picture there was a whole way of instructing the eye or the subconscious. Dabs of color had to stand for real things. It was an abstraction of a guitar or a hillside. The opposite is going on now. If you have bands of blue, green and pink, the mind doesn't think sky, grass and flesh. These are colors and the question is what are they doing with themselves and with each other. Sentiment and nuance are being squeezed out.***

That last sentence, "sentiment and nuance are being squeezed out," is crucial. The colors on the canvas don't have to represent something in particular, but can have a more ambiguous, emblematic quality for the viewer. The basic act of responding to color, the way one would respond to a sunset, or to light from a stained-glass window, simplicity and pure emotion through clarity of color and form.

The same year she painted *The Bay*, Frankenthaler painted a series of similar soak-stain paintings with titles referring to water and geography: *Canal*, *Low Tide*, *Blue Tide*, inspired by the landscape of her country home in Provincetown, Massachusetts. As Frankenthaler said, it's important for us not to be too encumbered by context and speculation when we look at her work. We're to take from it what we will on our own terms.

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3.2.8: Frank Stella, The Marriage of Reason and Squalor

by DR. VIRGINIA B. SPIVEY

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188514



Figure **3.2.8.1**: Frank Stella, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II*, 1959, enamel on canvas, 230.5 x 337.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

The best known American abstract painting of the 1950s was gestural and emotionally expressive (see below). This art, known as Abstract Expressionism was just that. It was abstract, but more to the point, it was subjective—it was about the experience and the very being of the artist. Frank Stella's early series, the "Black Paintings" of 1958-1959 (below), was none of these things. *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor II*, one of that series, is characterized by thick black lines painted to alternate repeatedly with thin "stripes" of exposed canvas—with no room for gesture. The series features an array of designs made by differently arranging these same elements in symmetrical rectilinear patterns.



Figure **3.2.8.2**: Willem de Kooning, *Woman I*, 1950-52, oil on canvas (MoMA)

Stella's early paintings are often associated with **Minimalism** which also begins at about this time. Like the Minimalists, Stella heralds the literal presentation of spare abstract forms. His technical approach—constructing each stroke with a wide housepainter's brush and enamel house paint—highlights the shift among many artists of the time to reject the gestural style of action painting typical of **Abstract Expressionism**, the preeminent American art movement of the 1950s. By contrast, works like *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor II* exhibit a controlled sensibility that speaks to the systematic planning and conceptual framework that belie their simplistic appearance.

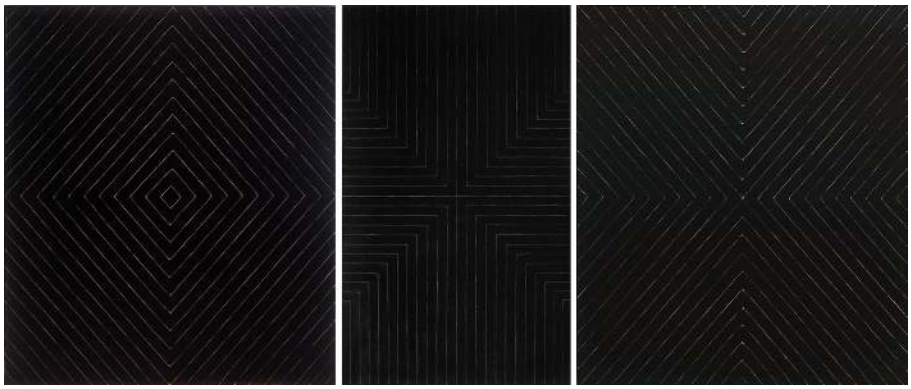


Figure **3.2.8.3**: Selected Black Paintings (from left to right): Frank Stella, *Jill*, 1959, enamel on canvas, 229.6 x 200 cm (Albright Knox Art Gallery); Frank Stella, *Die Fahne Hoch!*, 1959, enamel on canvas, 308.9 × 184.9 cm (Whitney Museum of American Art); Frank Stella, *Zambezi*, 1959, enamel on canvas, 230.51 x 200.03 cm (SFMOMA)

Rejecting emotion

Stella wanted to eliminate the personal reference and symbolic meaning associated with modernist abstract painting. In this way, his paintings differ from those of European modernists like **Piet Mondrian** who used reductive geometrical forms to communicate spiritual ideals. Stella criticized the work of these earlier painters as too "relational," a term he used to describe their subjective process of arranging distinct parts in relation to one another in order to create what they saw as a harmonious and balanced composition.[1]

Jasper Johns was an important influence on Stella in these formative years. Working in the 1950s, Johns had also rejected the metaphysical overtones of Abstract Expressionism in his ironic use of encaustic, an ancient media that requires careful application to build up layers of wax and pigment, and reference to everyday objects. Johns' deliberate mark-making denied action painting's insistence on the spontaneity of individual expression, and his rendering of easily recognizable targets and flags mocked one of Abstract Expressionism's claims—to communicate universal meaning through archetypal images.



Figure **3.2.8.4**: Jasper Johns, *Flag*, 1954-55 (dated on reverse 1954), encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric mounted on plywood, three panels, 107.3 x 153.8 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

For Stella, Johns's art hinted at a way to eliminate the subjectivity inherent to the artist's task. Representing an existing object meant that the appearance and structure of the thing itself determined the painted imagery. Johns's use of repetition further appealed for its visible adherence to the artist's subject matter, and suggested to Stella a systematic, detached approach to artmaking based on a predetermined motif.

"What you see is what you see"

Stella adapted these ideas for his own non-objective imagery (images that don't depict recognizable forms) by looking to the rectangular shape of the canvas as the basis for his compositions. He explained this rationale in 1960 to students at Pratt Institute in

Brooklyn:

> ***I had to do something about relational painting . . . . The obvious answer was symmetry —make it the same all over. The question still remained though, of how to do this in depth. A symmetrical image or configuration symmetrically placed on an open ground is not balanced out in the illusionistic space. The solution I arrived at . . . forces illusionistic space out of the painting at constant intervals by using a regulated pattern. The remaining problem was simply to find a method of paint application which followed and complemented the design solution. This was done by using the house painter's technique and tools.[2]***

Although painted by hand, the image's methodical regularity erased any sign of the artist's individuality or emotional investment in his work. In adopting "the house painter's technique and tools," Stella replaced the romanticized notion of an artist's creative act with the actual labor used to make a painting. In this way, the Black Paintings challenged the assumption that a painting must represent an ideal or communicate profound meaning to the viewer—a position summed up best in Stella's famous quip, "What you see is what you see."



Figure **3.2.8.5**: Gallery view: Frank Stella, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II*, 1959, enamel on canvas, 230.5 x 337.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

Stella's solution not only eliminated the subjectivity of abstract painting, it also forced the viewer's attention to the materials of the painting itself. Repeating the striped pattern to fill the canvas emphasized the flatness of the painted surface, an effect heightened by building up thick layers of dense black enamel to obscure brushstrokes and texture. The result was to deny the viewer the illusion of depth usually perceived in paintings, and to highlight the symmetrical design that echoed the rectangular shape of the canvas itself.

For artists like Donald Judd, who also wanted to rid art of its metaphysical meaning and illusionistic tradition, Stella's Black Paintings appealed for their object-like appearance. Stella used deep stretcher bars which caused his paintings to stand out further from the wall. Judd, who is best known for his **Minimalist sculpture**, argued that Stella's paintings emphasized the three-dimensionality of the painting as a real object that extended into the space of the gallery itself. Likewise, the human scale of the canvas seemed to heighten the art's physical relationship to the viewer, a characteristic of Minimalism in sculpture. Stella rejected these interpretations, however, insisting that his primary interest was the viewer's optical experience.

The title

For all of Stella's emphasis on painting's formal properties (that is how the painting looks as opposed to what it represents), the provocative titles of his Black Paintings compel speculation about deeper meaning. These includes Nazi references such as *Arbeit Macht Frei* and *Die Fahne Hoch*, and places such as **Arundel Castle** (a favorite subject of English Romantic painters). The general tendency of the titles to reflect what Stella called "'downbeat' and 'depressed political' situations" suggests they say more about the artist and the world around him than the paintings themselves.[3] In the case of *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor II*, Stella's orderly pairing of identical halves plays on the contrasting terms in the title. It was Carl Andre, Stella's long-time friend and fellow artist, who first invented the title in 1957 for a series of his own pastel drawings that he destroyed. Because both men agreed the phrase was an apt characterization of their lives as artists in New York City, Andre suggested Stella use the title for his painting.[4]



Figure **3.2.8.6**: Frank Stella, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II* (detail), 1959, enamel on canvas, 230.5 x 337.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

Art historian Caroline Jones believes *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor II* sums up contradictions that are pervasive throughout all the Black Paintings. She writes, "It is precisely the marriage of reason and squalor—the union of control and flow, the matings between differences, the pleasures of conjugation—that allows the procreation of meaning in the Black Paintings (to pursue Andre's analogy.)"[5] Noting that the painting was the second of two versions of the same composition, Jones shows that, despite Stella's mechanical stance, close looking (see detail above) reveals tell-tale signs of the artist's hand: small drips of paint, blurred edges in the black lines, varying widths of the white space in between, and tonal shifts in the layers of color. She even points out how the overall configuration pulls ever so slightly to the right as evidence of Stella's dominant hand at work.[6]

Like Pop Art, which developed around the same time, Stella's Black Paintings challenge viewers by representing imagery that is self-evident and lacks expressive impact. For art historians like Jones, this detached approach to art making reflects the economic shift toward mass production and the growing commodity culture of the United States in the 1960s. However, by asking us to consider Stella's creative process and his motivations for so strongly denying it, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor II* also forces us to treat the painting like a traditional work of art, demanding focused attention to its visual effect and intellectual engagement with the conceptual issues it raises.

Notes:

[1] Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd." *Art News* 65.5 (1966), pp. 55-61.

[2] Frank Stella, "The Pratt Lecture," reprinted in Brenda Richardson, *Frank Stella: The Black Paintings* (The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1976), p. 78.

[3] William Rubin, *Frank Stella* (NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), quoted in Brenda Richardson, *Frank Stella: The Black Paintings* (The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1976), p. 3.

[4] Richardson, 46.

[5] Caroline Jones, *The Machine in the Studio* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 149.

[6] Ibid., p. 148.

Additional resources:

This painting at MoMA

Frank Stella 1972, YouTube

Frank Stella, Black Series I (Prints), National Gallery of Art

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.3: Postwar figurative art

3.3.1: Thelma Streat, Girl with Bird

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3.3.12: Lin Tianmiao on Alex Katz's Black and Brown Blouse

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3.3.1: Thelma Streat, Girl with Bird

by **DR. SHAWNYA L. HARRIS** and **DR. BETH HARRIS**

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Video **3.3.1.1**: Thelma Johnson Streat, *Girl with Bird*, 1950, oil and collage on paper, 51.4 x 36.8 cm (Georgia Museum of Art, Athens), a **Seeing America** video

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3.3.2: Charles Sebree, The Mystic

by **DR. SHAWNYA L. HARRIS**, **DR. JEFFREY RICHMOND-MOLL** and **DR. BETH HARRIS**

Page ID

188518



Video **3.3.2.1**: Charles Sebree, *The Mystic*, c. 1940s, tempera and oil on board, 10 x 12 inches (Georgia Museum of Art), a Seeing America video. Speakers: Dr. Jeffrey Richmond-Moll (Curator of American Art, Georgia Museum of Art), Dr. Shawyna L. Harris (Larry D. and Brenda A. Thompson Curator of African American and African Diasporic Art, Georgia Museum of Art), and Dr. Beth Harris

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- **2.3: Ancient Egypt** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

3.3.3: George Tooker, Highway

by DR. PETER JOHN BROWNLEE, CURATOR, TERRA FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **3.3.3.1**: George Tooker, Highway, 1953, egg tempera on gesso hardboard, 58.1 x 45.4 cm (Terra Foundation for American Art, Daniel J. Terra Collection, 1992.134 © Estate of George Tooker), a Seeing America video. Dr. Peter John Brownlee, Curator, Terra Foundation for American Art, and Dr. Steven Zucker

Additional resources

This painting at the Terra Foundation for American Art

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3.3.4: Jess, If All the World Were Paper and All the Water Sink

by EMMA ACKER AT THE FINE ARTS MUSEUMS OF SAN FRANCISCO and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
188520



Video **3.3.4.1**: Jess (Burgess Franklin Collins), *If All the World Were Paper and All the Water Sink*, 1962, oil on canvas, 96.5 x 142.2 cm (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco) © estate of the artist

This page titled 3.3.4: Jess, If All the World Were Paper and All the Water Sink is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Emma Acker at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and Dr. Beth Harris, "Jess, If All the World Were Paper and All the Water Sink," in Smarthistory, March 22, 2019, accessed August 26, 2020, smarthistory.org/jess-all-the-world/..

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3.3.5: Benny Andrews, Flag Day

by ROBYN FARRELL, THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO and DR. BETH HARRIS

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Video **3.3.5.24**: Benny Andrews, *Flag Day*, 1966, oil on canvas, 53.3 x 40.6 cm ©The Benny Andrews Estate (The Art Institute of Chicago), a Seeing America video

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3.3.6: Romare Bearden, Three Folk Musicians

- by **DR. LEO G. MAZOW** and **DR. SARAH ECKHARDT**

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Video **3.3.6.1**: Romare Bearden, *Three Folk Musicians*, 1967, collage of various papers with paint and graphite on canvas, 50 x 60 x 1 ½ inches (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts) A conversation with Dr. Sarah Eckhardt, Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Dr. Leo Mazow, Louise B. and J. Harwood Cochrane Curator of American Art, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and Dr. Steven Zucker

Additional resources

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Romare Bearden Foundation

Romare Bearden at the Smithsonian American Art Museum

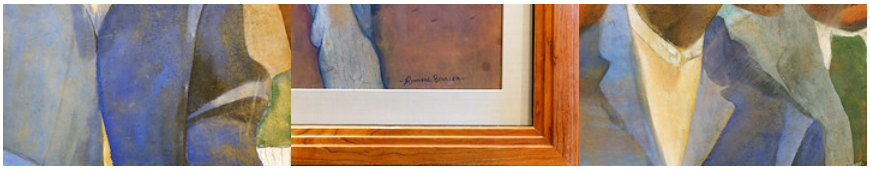
Romare Bearden from SFMOMA

"Artist with Painting and Model" by Romare Bearden from the High Museum

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3.3.7: Brummett Echohawk (Pawnee), An Island of Redbuds on the Cimarron

by **DIANA FOLSOM** and **DR. LAUREN KILROY-EWBANK**

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188523



Video **3.3.7.1**: Brummett Echohawk (Pawnee), *An Island of Redbuds on the Cimarron*, 1968, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 116.4 cm (Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa)

Additional resources

This work at the Gilcrease Museum

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3.3.8: Duane Hanson, Executive

by DR. HALONA NORTON-WESTBROOK, TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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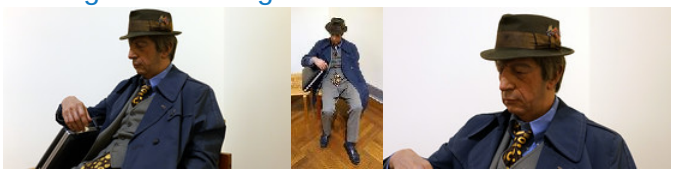


Video **3.3.8.1**: Duane Hanson, *Executive*, originally titled, *Another Day*, 1971, polyester resin and fiberglass, oil paint, mixed media with accessories, life size (Toledo Museum of Art, ©estate of the artist)

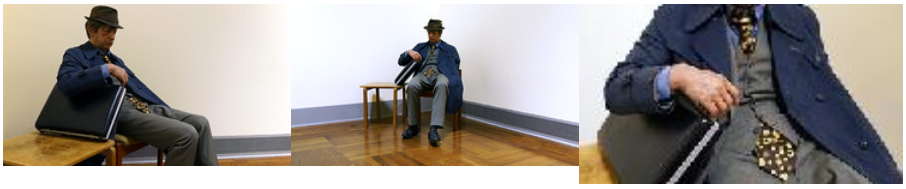
Additional resources

This sculpture at the Toledo Museum of Art

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3.3.9: Faith Ringgold, Dancing at the Louvre

by DR. VIRGINIA B. SPIVEY

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Marcia and her three little girls took me dancing at the Louvre. I thought I was taking them to see the Mona Lisa. You've never seen anything like this. Well, the French hadn't either. Never mind Leonardo da Vinci and Mona Lisa, Marcia and her three girls were the show.

— Willa Marie Simone, Dancing at the Louvre

Breaking rules

Faith Ringgold's *Dancing at the Louvre* is all about breaking the rules, and having lots of fun while doing it. Combining representational painting and African-American quilting techniques with the written word, *Dancing at the Louvre* is the first in Ringgold's series of twelve "story quilts" called *The French Collection*.



Figure **3.3.9.1**: Faith Ringgold, *Dancing at the Louvre*, 1991, acrylic on canvas, tie-dyed, pieced fabric border, 73.5 x 80″, from the series, The French Collection, part 1; #1 (**Gund Gallery, Kenyon College**)

The series tells the fictional story of Willa Marie Simone, a young black woman who moves to Paris in the early 20th century. Told through text written around the margin of each quilt, Willa Marie's adventures lead her to meet celebrities such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, Josephine Baker, Zora Neale Hurston, Sojourner Truth, and Rosa Parks on the road to becoming an artist and businesswoman.

Drawing on her own struggle for recognition in an art world dominated by European traditions and male artists, Ringgold uses this narrative format to literally rewrite the past by weaving together histories of modern art, African-American culture, and personal biography. This practice reflects the shift toward postmodernism in art of the 1980s and 1990s. In deliberate contrast to Modernism's emphasis on autonomy and universal meaning, artists like Ringgold highlighted the implicit biases in accepted forms of art, especially in their treatment of race and gender. Characteristic is her use of appropriation, narrative, biographical references, and non-Western traditions. Through these devices, Ringgold offers an alternative to the European and masculine perspectives that are prevalent in art history.

Story-quilts

Ringgold's story-quilting technique is important to meaning in her work. She creates the central image using acrylic paint on canvas, reflecting her knowledge of western art history in both style and subject matter, and surrounds it with a patchwork cloth

border that includes her hand-written text. She then uses traditional quilting methods to sandwich a layer of batting by stitching the decorative front to the plain cotton backing.



Figure **3.3.9.2**: Faith Ringgold, *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?* (1983), acrylic on canvas, dyed, painted and pieced fabric, 90 x 80″ (private collection)

She first developed this format in *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima* (1983), a large quilt that transformed the marketing stereotype into Jemima Blakey, a successful black businesswoman. Comprised of squares of fabric, painted portraits, and text, Ringgold's quilt draws on Afro-Caribbean storytelling practices to create the Blakey's family folklore. Made soon after the death of Ringgold's mother Willi Posey (a seamstress and fashion designer in Harlem), the quilt also serves as personal tribute to the inspiration and creative skills she passed on to her artist-daughter.

Ringgold's technique positions her work more in the world of folk art and craft than European traditions of fine art. Associated with women's domestic work, quilt making has historically been important to maintaining female relationships. Quilting is often done collectively, allowing women time to gather and have conversations away from men or others outside their community. Young girls watch and participate in the activity in order to learn family stories, cultural background, shared knowledge, and technical skills associated with their maternal and domestic roles. Although quilts are common in a number of cultures, Ringgold's African-American heritage recalls their historical role, especially within the Underground Railroad, to communicate codes and hidden messages that remain unrecognized by outsiders to the community. (The Underground Railroad was a network of secret routes and safe houses in the 19th century that allowed slaves of African descent to move northward to freedom.)

Rewriting the past

Typical of much postmodern art, Ringgold's work appropriates recognizable imagery and alternative artistic practices to offer critical cultural commentary. She challenges us to consider expectations of gender and race, as well as traditional expectations and values of what art might be. Through image and text, Ringgold rewrites history to make a place for women like herself in its historical development.

The transformative power of Ringgold's message led her to translate her work into picture books for children. Her first *Tar Beach* (1991), based on a 1988 story quilt in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, received the 1992 Caldecott Honor Award. She has since published several others including *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* (1992) and *If A Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks* (1999) inspired by African-American history and her own life story.

Additional Resources:

The website of Faith Ringgold

Faith Ringgold at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

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3.3.10: Faith Ringgold, Ben

by DR. HALONA NORTON-WESTBROOK, TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART and DR. BETH HARRIS

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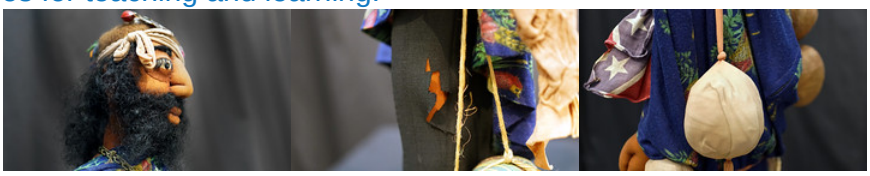


Video **3.3.10.1**: Faith Ringgold, *Ben*, c. 1978, soft sculpture/mixed media, 99.1 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm (Toledo Museum of Art, ©Faith Ringgold)

Additional resources

This sculpture at the Toledo Museum of Art

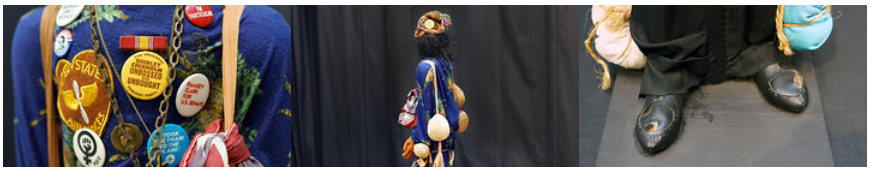
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3.3.11: Ruthe Blalock Jones (Delaware, Shawnee, Peoria), Medicine Woman

by **DR. CHELSEA HERR** and **DR. LAUREN KILROY-EWBANK**

Page ID

188527



Video **3.3.11.1**: Ruthe Blalock Jones, *Medicine Woman*, late 20th century, gouache on poster board, 58.8 x 50.7 cm (Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa)

Additional resources

This work at the Gilcrease Museum

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3.3.12: Lin Tianmiao on Alex Katz’s Black and Brown Blouse

- by **THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART**

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Video **3.3.12.1**: The Artist Project is an online series in which artists respond to works of art in The Met’s encyclopedic collection. **http://artistproject.metmuseum.org/6/lin-tianmiao/**

Cite this page as: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Lin Tianmiao on Alex Katz’s *Black and Brown Blouse*," in *Smarthistory*, January 21, 2021, accessed January 13, 2023, **https://smarthistory.org/lin-tianmiao-on-alex-katzs-black-and-brown-blouse/**.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

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3.4.1: Josef Albers, Homage to the Square

by SHAWN ROGGENKAMP

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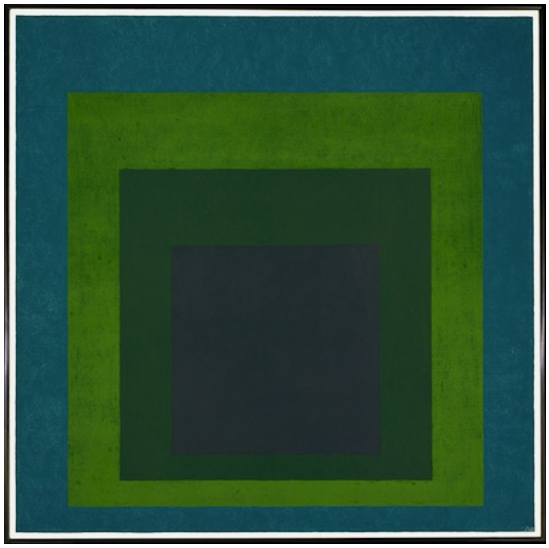


Figure **3.4.1.1**: Josef Albers, *Homage to the Square: Soft Spoken*, 1969, oil on masonite, 121.9 x 121.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Looking deeply

Take a moment to really look deeply at this example of Josef Albers' extensive series, *Homage to the Square*. The composition of this painting is simple enough – four progressively smaller squares within each other, each in a different color, and all aligned closer to the bottom of the composition than to the top.

So stand back from this *Homage to the Square* and look at the whole thing. What is the relationship between the squares? Are they stacked on top of each other, like cut out pieces of construction paper? Are they sinking underneath each other, as if you are looking at a painting of a tunnel? Do some appear to push toward you and others to fall away? And how does it change between each version of the painting? Looking at the pieces, you may find that you are able to force your eyes to see a stack of blocks or a tunnel, or you may find that you are instinctively drawn to one interpretation of how the squares are arranged. This is exactly the principle that Albers experimented with as he produced hundreds of variations on this theme over a period of about 25 years. These included paintings, drawings, prints, and tapestries—but each explored the same basic question: can an artist create the appearance of three dimensions, using only color relations?

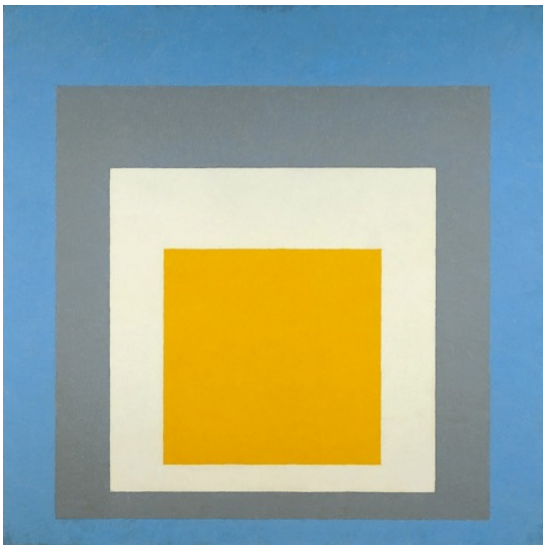


Figure **3.4.1.2**: Josef Albers, *Homage to the Square: "Ascending,"* 1953, oil on composition board, 110.5 × 110.5 cm (Whitney Museum of American Art)

Though Albers began work on the *Homage* paintings in 1950, he was introduced to color theory very early in his career, when he enrolled as a student at the Bauhaus in 1920. The Bauhaus was a revolutionary school of art and design in Germany, founded by Walter Gropius in 1919. Its philosophy was to integrate the principles of fine art and functional design, and many of the most important artists in Europe were teachers there. When Albers was a student, the foundation for all Bauhaus education was the *Vorkurs*, or preliminary course, taught by Johannes Itten. The course covered the fundamentals of material, composition, and color theory, and was one of the most influential and widely disseminated aspects of Bauhaus curriculum.



Figure **3.4.1.3**: Left to right: Josef Albers, Marcel Breuer, Gunta Stölzl, Oskar Schlemmer, Wassily Kandinsky, Walter Gropius, Herbert Bayer, László Moholy-Nagy and Hinnerk Scheper on the roof of the Bauhaus, Dessau, 1928

Many studies done by students as part of the *Vorkurs* can be seen in museums and exhibitions, and they often bear a resemblance to Albers' *Homage* paintings: a repeated series of shapes, each in different color combinations. The goal of these exercises was for the students to understand how colors related to each other. Many years later, Albers used the *Homage* paintings to go into even more depth with those lessons, and bring them to audiences, as well as art students.



Figure **3.4.1.4**: Josef Albers, *Study for Homage to the Square*, 1950, oil on artist board 26.67 x 26.67 cm

In 1925, the year that the Bauhaus moved from Weimar to their iconic building in Dessau, Gropius invited Albers to be the first student of the Bauhaus to join the faculty. Albers worked with Paul Klee in the stained glass workshop and was the longest-serving member of the faculty when the school was shut down by the Nazis in 1933. But the Bauhaus was to be only the first of Albers' celebrated and influential teaching positions. When that school was shut down, Albers' and his wife, Anni—herself an influential artist and Bauhaus alumna—emigrated to the United States, where he was invited to teach at the revolutionary Black Mountain College in North Carolina, and later Yale University, where he began the first *Homage* paintings in 1950. An encouraging but strict teacher, Albers brought Bauhaus ideas to a new country, introducing his disciplined approach to color theory to the next generation of the artistic vanguard in America.



Figure **3.4.1.5**: Mark Rothko, *Orange and Red on Red*, 1957, oil on canvas, 174.92 x 168.59 cm (The Phillips Collection)

For all their variety of color, the *Homage* paintings are relatively cold and clinical. It is interesting to compare them to paintings by Mark Rothko, who produces canvasses that have strong similarities to the *Homage* series. Albers and Rothko both use roughly square or rectangular forms in solid colors, and both take the relationship between colors as their subject matter. But while Rothko's paintings use variation of color to suggest or inspire certain emotional reactions, Albers' paintings are exploring the creation of space through the use of color. He experiments with subverting the limits of two-dimensional space.



Figure **3.4.1.6**: Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin of the Rocks*, c. 1491-1508, oil on panel, 189.5 x 120 cm, (National Gallery, London)

The idea of creating space through color goes back to a technique known as atmospheric perspective. The best examples can be seen in landscapes of the Dutch Golden Age and Italian Renaissance artists such as Leonardo da Vinci. The principle of atmospheric perspective is that objects that are far away are less saturated in color, and have less contrast. Looking at the mountains behind Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks*, each set of mountains that is farther away is closer in color to the sky than the set of mountains in front of it.

This technique had been used to create space in representative paintings going back to antiquity, but Albers was revolutionary in applying it to abstract art. His experiments in the *Homage* series paved the way for artists such as Bridget Riley and a whole generation of Op artists, who also pushed the limits of two-dimensional media by creating large-scale optical illusions. Though *Homage to the Square* may seem boring and repetitive to some, their simple beauty is often compared to classical music, like the work of Bach: a study on theme and variation.

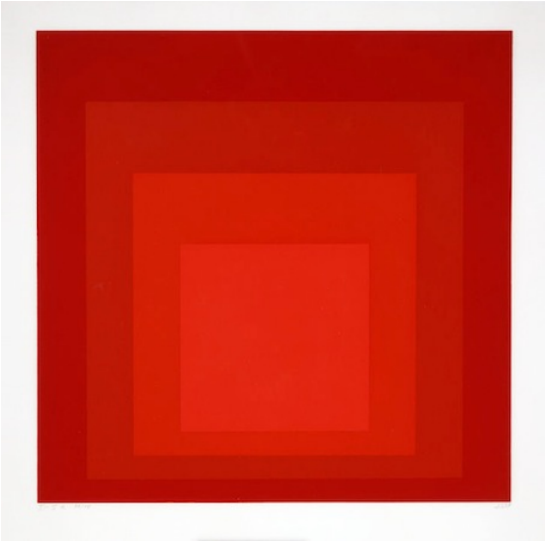


Figure **3.4.1.7**: Josef Albers, *Homage to the Square I-Sa*, 1968, silkscreen, 54.6 × 54.6 cm (Dallas Museum of Art)

"If one says "Red" (the name of a color) and there are 50 people listening, it can be expected that there will be 50 reds in their minds. And one can be sure that all these reds will be very different." —Josef Albers, *Interaction of Color* (1963)

Additional Resources:

Josef and Anni Albers Foundation

Holland Cotter, Harmony, “Harder Than It Looks ‘Josef Albers in America: Painting on Paper,’” *The New York Times*, July 26, 2012

Josef Albers entry in Wikipedia

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3.4.2: Ruth Asawa, Untitled

by ALLISON GLENN, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, and DR. BETH HARRIS

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Video **3.4.2.1**: Ruth Asawa, *Untitled*, c. 1958, iron wire, 219.7 × 81.3 × 81.3 cm (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, © Estate of Ruth Asawa)

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- **10.11: Postwar American art (I)** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

3.4.3: Rita Mae Pettway, Housetop (fractured medallion variation)

by VALERIE CASSEL OLIVER, VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID

188532



Video **3.4.3.1**: Rita Mae Pettway, *Housetop (fractured medallion variation)*, 1977, corduroy, 80 x 76 inches (Virginia Museum of Fine Art). A conversation with Valerie Cassell Oliver, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and Beth Harris.

Additional resources

The quilting tradition at Gee's Bend from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Gee's Bend from the Souls Grown Deep Foundation

Gee's Bend in the Library of Congress

This page titled 3.4.3: Rita Mae Pettway, Housetop (fractured medallion variation) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Valerie Cassel Oliver, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and Dr. Beth Harris, "Gee's Bend, quilting over generations," in Smarthistory, June 5, 2022, accessed January 13, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/gees-bend-quilting-over-generations/..

3.4.4: Alma Thomas, Lunar Rendezvous—Circle of Flowers

by **ALEJO BENEDETTI, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID
188533



Video **3.4.4.1**: Alma Thomas, *Lunar Rendezvous—Circle of Flowers*, 1969, acrylic on canvas, 127 x 121.9 cm (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville)

This page titled 3.4.4: Alma Thomas, Lunar Rendezvous—Circle of Flowers is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Alejo Benedetti, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and Dr. Steven Zucker, "Alma Thomas," in Smarthistory, September 19, 2022, accessed January 13, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/alma-thomas-lunar-rendezvous-circle-of-flowers/..

3.4.5: Sam Gilliam, Purpled (Chasers Series)

by VALERIE CASSEL OLIVER, VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID

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Video **3.4.5.1**: Sam Gilliam, *Purpled (Chasers Series)*, 1980, acrylic on canvas, 203.2 x 228.6 cm (Virginia Musem of Fine Arts, © Sam Gilliam)

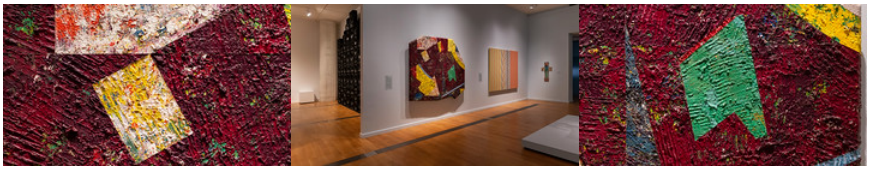
Additional resources

Learn more about Sam Gilliam from the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



Click on image for larger picture (External link to flickr)



Click on image for larger picture (External link to flickr)



Click on image for larger picture (External link to flickr)



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This page titled 3.4.5: Sam Gilliam, Purpled (Chasers Series) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Valerie Cassel Oliver, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and Dr. Steven Zucker, "Sam Gilliam, Purpled (Chasers Series)," in Smarthistory, June 13, 2022, accessed January 13, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/sam-gilliam-purpled/..

SECTION OVERVIEW

3.5: Photography

3.5.1: Gordon Parks, Off on My Own (Harlem, New York)

3.5.2: LaToya Ruby Frazier on Gordon Parks's Red Jackson

3.5.3: Garry Winogrand, Democratic Convention, 1960

3.5.4: Richard Avedon, Audrey Hepburn, New York, January 1967

3.5.5: New Topographics

3.5.6: How Photographs of Poverty in the Americas Ignited an International Battle over Propaganda

3.5.7: Richard Misrach's early work and Border Cantos

3.5.8: Robert Frank

- 3.5.8.1: An interview with Robert Frank
- 3.5.8.2: Rashid Johnson on Robert Frank's The Americans

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3.5.1: Gordon Parks, Off on My Own (Harlem, New York)

by MICHAL RAZ-RUSSO, ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **3.5.1.1**: Gordon Parks (American, 1912-2006), *Off on My Own (Harlem, New York)*, 1948. Gelatin silver print. The Art Institute of Chicago, Amanda Taub Veazie Acquisition Fund, 2016.125. © The Gordon Parks Foundation. From “Harlem is Nowhere,” a collaborative project between Gordon Parks and Ralph Ellison. A Seeing America video. Speakers: Michal Raz-Russo, David and Sarajean Ruttenberg Associate Curator of Photography, Art Institute of Chicago and Dr. Steven Zucker Special thanks to Michal Raz-Russo, Sarah E. Alvarez, The Gordon Parks Foundation, the Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, and the Art Institute of Chicago.

This page titled 3.5.1: Gordon Parks, Off on My Own (Harlem, New York) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Michal Raz-Russo, Art Institute of Chicago and Dr. Steven Zucker, "Gordon Parks, Off on My Own (Harlem, New York)," in Smarthistory, May 16, 2018, accessed January 13, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/parks-ellison/..

3.5.2: LaToya Ruby Frazier on Gordon Parks's Red Jackson

- by **THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART**

Page ID

188538



Video **3.5.2.1**: The Artist Project is an online series in which artists respond to works of art in The Met's encyclopedic collection. **http://artistproject.metmuseum.org/3/latoya-ruby-frazier/**

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3.5.3: Garry Winogrand, Democratic Convention, 1960

by DR. ROBERT COZZOLINO, MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **3.5.3.1**: Garry Winogrand, *Democratic National Convention, Los Angeles, 1960* (printed c. 1980), gelatin silver print, 45.88 x 30.8 cm (Minneapolis Institute of Art, © The Estate of Garry Winogrand). A Seeing America video.

A conversation with Dr. Robert Cozzolino, Patrick and Aimee Butler Curator of Paintings, Minneapolis Institute of Art, and Dr. Steven Zucker

Additional resources:

This work at Mia

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3.5.4: Richard Avedon, Audrey Hepburn, New York, January 1967

by **DR. GRETCHEN GASTERLAND-GUSTAFSSON**

Page ID

188540



Figure **3.5.4.1**: Richard Avedon, *Audrey Hepburn, New York, January 1967*, 1967, collage of gelatin silver prints, 40.6 x 59.1 cm (Collection of The Richard Avedon Foundation, New York)

Avedon and Hepburn

A bouquet of five variously sized Audrey Hepburn faces emerge from impossibly elongated necks, shrouded in light-absorbing black amorphous knit, like an organic rhizome sending up oddly shaped flowers. This obviously manipulated composite photograph (made by cutting and pasting photographs together two decades before Photoshop would be invented) compels us to look closer while offering the reward of Audrey Hepburn's celebrated visage—she is third on the American Film Institute's Greatest Female Screen Legends—with five slightly different glamorous expressions. [1]

We recognize the familiar fashionable face, lightened dramatically and adorned with lush, exaggerated false eyelashes, plucked arches for eyebrows, Hepburn's signature large eyes, a faraway glance—and, befitting for the late 1960s—pale, lipstick-coated lips. The tallest of the Audrey Hepburn flowers features gently closed eyelids. Some faces are slightly more upturned than others, some mouths are just barely open, while others are closed. Some Hepburn faces edge toward three-quarter profile, while others are closer to full-face views. Nevertheless, they are all standard-issue constructions of feminine beauty made, and challenged here, by one of fashion's most celebrated photographers, Richard Avedon, who had photographed Hepburn for more than a decade before making his collage.

Avedon's emphasis on Hepburn's elongated neck recalls the graceful and sensuous distortions of Parmigianino's *Madonna of the Long Neck* (c. 1535) and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *La Grande Odalisque* (1814). Like these artists, Avedon raises the question: Is this altered female form beautiful, or is it provocatively leaning—via its extreme distortion—toward caricature? Avedon's composite photograph leaves viewers wondering if his representation of fashion and movie icon Hepburn subtly critiques the very beauty standards that fashion photography celebrated (or does he further encourage them)?



Figure 3.5.4.2: Collage of gelatin silver prints and Mylar, 1967

From a composite photograph

Avedon never made this image for use in a fashion publication (which would not have been appropriate for such a parody of beauty standards), but as an experimental illustration for a class he taught. In 1967, Avedon shot images of Hepburn and female dress forms in silhouette, re-sized them, and assembled them into the composite design while he was teaching at the Famous Photographer's School in Westport, Connecticut, a correspondence school for photography that featured prominent faculty members such as Alfred Eisenstaedt, Philippe Halsman, and Irving Penn. The curriculum offered hardbound volumes with a total of twenty-four illustrated lessons that were sold by subscription and mailed to students across the United States. Avedon created the collage as an example of composite photography for an assignment.

The collage reproduced here was a guide for his printers. To make the final image (see large image, above), Avedon worked with technician Bob Bishop, who retouched and printed the final images, added a darkened shared body for all of the Hepburn faces, and obscured the seams of his construction with an **airbrushed** sheet of Mylar that he laid over the collaged prints.

The resulting image was printed in the premier issue of *Famous Photographers* magazine. In the accompanying article, Avedon traced his interest in photographic collage back to "years of looking at contact sheets and being limited by the reality of what was in front of the camera." [2] It is unclear whether the garment that cloaks Hepburn's head, neck, and body was worn by the model/actress or if it was the fantasy product of Avedon's black marking pen; it forms a dense black featureless silhouetted shape, reserving all focus for her more-important face.



Figure 3.5.4.3: Audrey Hepburn and Fred Astaire as Jo Stockton and Dick Avery in the film *Funny Face*, directed by Stanley Donen, 1957

Richard Avedon, fashion photographer

By 1967, Avedon was well-established as a fashion photographer, having worked at *Harper's Bazaar* and then as a staff photographer and Lead Photographer at *Vogue*. He was so well-known that he was the prototype for the Dick Avery character

played by Fred Astaire in the 1957 musical *Funny Face*. Avedon worked on the film and provided the fashion still-photography frames that were integrated into the plot. Hepburn was romantically paired in the film with Astaire, thirty years her senior. While the film has not aged well due to the age gap between the romantic couple, their May-December romance, and the dated gender roles in it, *Funny Face* made the point that the fashion industry was regarded as superficial.

Avedon and Warhol

For Avedon, embracing the superficiality of fashion photography was paramount: "My photographs don't go below the surface. They don't go below anything. They're readings of the surface. I have great faith in surfaces. A good one is full of clues." [3] Avedon, like artist Andy Warhol, was fascinated by surface-deep cultural phenomena such as celebrity, and the two were paired in a Gagosian London exhibition in 2016.

The fascination with celebrities and star power that Avedon shared with Warhol conditioned both the making of this composite photograph as well as its reception. If the repeated face, a compositional conceit Warhol shared, had not been the identifiably famous face of Hepburn emphatically reproduced by Avedon, and further disseminated by the media—this experimental photograph might not still resonate with us in the twenty-first century.

Notes:

[1] "**AFI's 100 Years…100 Stars: The 50 Greatest American Screen Legends – Women**," American Film Institute

[2] Richard Avedon as quoted in Mia Fineman, *Falkng it: Manipilated Photography before Photoshop* (National Gallery 2012), p. 167.

[3] Richard Avedon as quoted in Cynthia Freeland, *Portraits and Persons: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Oxford University Press USA, 2010), 97.

Additional resources

The Richard Avedon Foundation

Richard Avedon: Darkness and Light, directed by Helen Whitney (PBS: American Masters, Eagle Rock Entertainment, WNET Channel 13, New York, 1996)

Emily Ackerman, "Richard Avedon, Audrey Hepburn, New York, January 1967," in Mia Fineman, ed. *Faking It: Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), p. 156, 246.

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3.5.5: New Topographics

by **EMILIA MICKEVICIUS**

Page ID
188541



Figure **3.5.5.1**: Installation view, *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape*, 1975, George Eastman Museum

When you think of "landscape photography," what comes to mind? Whatever pictures you're imagining, they likely look different from the photographs in the 1975 exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape*. Organized at the George Eastman Museum in Rochester, New York, the show featured ten photographers who examined the American landscape in a new way.[1] Instead of focusing on pristine or exceptional scenery found at national parks, they trained their cameras on the byproducts of postwar suburban expansion: freeways, gas stations, industrial parks, and tract homes. They furthermore rendered these banal subjects with a style that suggested cool detachment. While visiting the exhibition, people voiced a range of reactions:

> ***"I don't like them—they're dull and flat. There's no people, no involvement, nothing."***
>
> ***"At first it's stark nothing, but then you look at it, and it's just about the way things are."***
>
> ***"I don't like to think there are ugly streets in America, but when it's shown to you—without beautification—maybe it tells you how much more we need here."[2]***

Preserved within these comments are the expectations these visitors held about the American landscape and its representation. Given that people largely found the work off-putting and difficult to interpret, how did *New Topographics* come to be regarded as one of the most important photography exhibitions of the 20th century?

Landscape as the built environment

On the one hand, *New Topographics* represented a radical shift by redefining the subject of landscape photography as the built (as opposed to the natural) environment. To comprehend the significance of this, it helps to consider the type of imagery that previously dominated the genre in the United States.

Beginning in the 1920s, Ansel Adams cultivated an approach to landscape photography that posited nature as separate from human presence. Consistent with earlier American landscape painting, Adams photographed scenery in a manner intended to provoke feelings of awe and pleasure in the viewer. He used vantage points that emphasized the towering scale of mountain peaks, and embraced a wide tonal range from black to white to record texture and dramatic effects of light and weather.



Figure **3.5.5.2**: Ansel Adams, *"The Tetons—Snake River," Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming*, 1942 (National Archives)

Adams wanted his pictures' viewers to feel as uplifted as he had when looking at the scenery in person. His heroic, timeless photographs contributed to the cause of conservationism—the environmental approach that seeks to preserve exceptional landscapes and protect them from human intervention.



Figure **3.5.5.3**: Robert Adams, *Tract house, Boulder County, Colorado*, 1973, gelatin silver print (George Eastman Museum, © Robert Adams)

By contrast, when visitors walked into *New Topographics*, they encountered subject matter that was all too commonplace, represented in an unfamiliar manner. Consider Robert Adams's (no relation to Ansel) 1973 image *Tract house, Boulder County, Colorado*. The photograph pictures a two-story house whose half-timber framing appears decorative rather than structural, a kitschy imitation of an earlier architectural style.[3] Recorded under bright noon sunlight, the house's shadow barely extends into its grassless yard. The flag on the mailbox is up, perhaps to signal the presence of outgoing mail, but there are few other signs of habitation. The hazy, organic contour of the distant mountain range—which the house's roofline nearly interrupts—appears more durable than the newly constructed neighborhood. The sense of place is Colorado, but this is not the open frontier of myth. Here—as in John Schott's photographs along Route 66, or Frank Gohlke's views of paved-over Los Angeles—postwar suburban sprawl has overtaken nature (both Schott's and Gohlke's work was represented in the exhibition).



Figure 3.5.5.4: Frank Gohlke, *Landscape, Los Angeles*, 1974 (George Eastman House, © Frank Gohlke)

What was both novel and challenging about *New Topographics* was not only the photographs' content, but how they made viewers feel. By foregrounding, rather than erasing human presence, the photographs placed people into a stance of responsibility towards the landscape's future—a position that resonated with ecology, the branch of environmental thought that was gaining traction in the 1970s.



Figure 3.5.5.5: John Schott, *Untitled (from Route 66 Motels)*, 1973, gelatin silver print, 19.3 x 23.9 cm (George Eastman Museum, © John Schott)

A "Neutral" style

In addition to subject matter, style was a major component of what distinguished *New Topographics* photography. In the exhibition's catalog, curator William Jenkins described the photographs as "neutral" and "reduced to an essentially topographic state, conveying substantial amounts of visual information but eschewing entirely the aspects of beauty, emotion, and opinion."[4]

He wondered: was it possible to make pictures without style? The exhibition's photographers all engaged with this question and pursued it through a variety of means.

Working in square format, Joe Deal photographed new homes and construction sites in Albuquerque, New Mexico from the steep foothills of nearby mountains. Eliminating the horizon from his pictures, he filled each square frame with a dense patchwork of surfaces: driveways, newly cut roads, empty lots, and expanses of brush yet to be tamed. The effect was that the terrain appeared compressed into flatness, encouraging viewers to study the photographs as if looking at topographical maps. Their eyes suspended in a state of scanning, viewers could read the landscape as bearing traces of human decision-making. Moments of too-perfect symmetry in the patterns of rocks and bushes expose the landscaping as unnatural. Traces of ongoing development in the form of construction sites are juxtaposed with piles of refuse and empty lots that suggest the wastefulness of abandoned projects. By framing the land in this way, Deal enabled his viewers to consider the cost of rapid growth in the fragile desert.

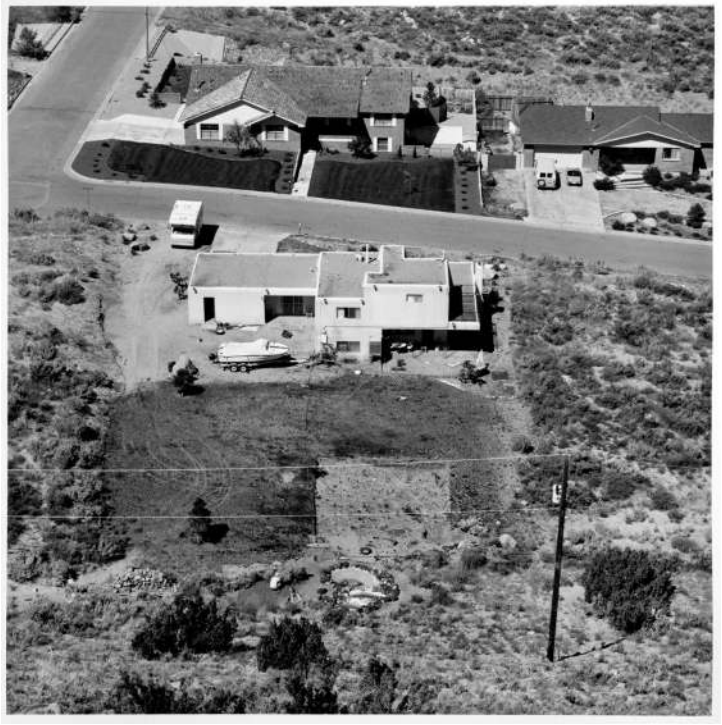


Figure **3.5.5.6**: Joe Deal, *Untitled View (Albuquerque)*, 1973, gelatin silver print (George Eastman Museum, © Estate of Joe Deal)

New Topographics established that neutrality is as much a matter of convention as the expressivity of Ansel Adams's photographs. If the photographs looked "neutral," it was because they simultaneously resembled visual materials we associate with anonymity and information (such as topographical maps or real estate photographs), and activated the kind of looking we typically deploy to interpret those materials. Other *New Topographics* photographers also referred to fine art sources to inform their "neutral" style. For example, Lewis Baltz's photographs of new industrial parks in Southern California invoked Minimalism. By photographing blank, corporate façades head-on, Baltz placed his viewers into a subtly critical confrontation with the homogeneity they represented.

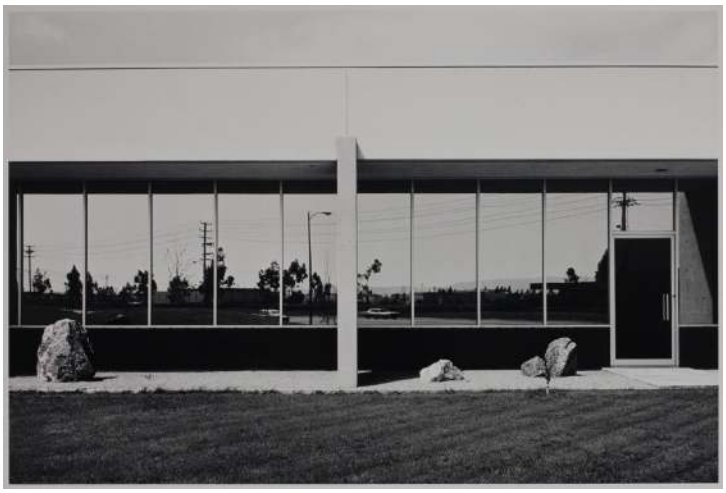


Figure **3.5.5.7**: Lewis Baltz, *South Wall, Mazda Motors, 2121 East Main Street, Irvine*, 1974, gelatin silver print (George Eastman Museum, © Estate of Lewis Baltz)

Influence and legacy

Though it received a lukewarm reception in 1975, *New Topographics* has been enormously influential in contemporary photography, both in terms of its attention to vernacular architecture and its cool, cerebral style. The exhibition was restaged in its entirety at multiple museum venues in 2009, a testament to its historical importance. Its photographers never considered themselves a school or movement, but the name of the show has come to serve as a kind of shorthand for the approach to landscape photography that they initiated. Many younger photographers collected and shared the exhibition's catalog over the past several decades, and the ideas from the exhibition circulated among photography students—particularly influential were Stephen Shore (the exhibition's sole color photographer) and Bernd and Hilla Becher (the only international photographers in the show). The Bechers' students at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in Germany became known as the Düsseldorf School of Photography, and include the photographers Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, and Thomas Struth, who have each photographed the built environment using a similarly detached, unsentimental style that also harkens back to the New Objectivity tradition.



Figure **3.5.5.8**: Stephen Shore, *Church and 2nd Streets, Easton, Pennsylvania, June 20, 1974*, 1974, chromogenic color print, © Stephen Shore

What *New Topographics* reinvented was both the subject matter of landscape and the kind of response we can have to such pictures: not just awe or uplift, but a sense of responsibility. As long as humans continue to intervene upon nature, this will remain a vital avenue of inquiry in contemporary photography.

Notes:

[1] The New Topographics photographers were Robert Adams, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Lewis Baltz, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore, and Henry Wessel Jr.

[2] Tape-recorded interviews conducted by Bess Abel, a photography student of Joe Deal, on December 13 and 14, 1975. Tape and transcripts: Joe Deal Archive, Center for Creative Photography.

[3] For more on the phenomenon of contemporary architecture referencing history, see Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966). *New Topographics* photographer Stephen Shore in fact created several of his most well-known photographs while on a summer 1975 cross-continental road trip commissioned by Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, who subsequently included Shore in their 1976 exhibition “Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City” at the Smithsonian Institution’s Renwick Gallery.

[4] William Jenkins, “Introduction,” in *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape* (Rochester: International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, 1975), p. 5.

Additional resources

Britt Salvesen, ed. *New Topographics*, ed. Britt Salvesen and Alison Nordström (Göttingen: Steidl; Tucson, AZ: Center for Creative Photography; Rochester, NY: George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film, 2009).

Reframing the New Topographics, eds. Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: The Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2010).

Charlotte Cotton, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004).

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3.5.6: How Photographs of Poverty in the Americas Ignited an International Battle over Propaganda

by **SÉRGIO BURGI**

Page ID
188542



Figure **3.5.6.1**: O fotógrafo Henri Ballot com Ely-Samuel, à esquerda, e seus irmãos (Photographer Henri Ballot with Ely-Samuel and his brothers), 1961, Henri Ballot. 6.9 x 9.3 in. Copyright Instituto Moreira Salles Collection

In late July 1961, *O Cruzeiro* magazine—Brazil's answer to the American magazine *Life*—sent photographer Henri Ballot to document poverty in New York City. Ballot's assignment had been issued in direct response to "Freedom's Fearful Foe: Poverty," a photo-essay *Life* had published the month before featuring reporting, diary entries, and photographs by **Gordon Parks** about the living conditions of young Flávio da Silva and his family in the favela of Catacumba in Rio de Janeiro.

O Cruzeiro had taken issue with the suggestion in the *Life* photo-essay, popularly known as "the Flávio Story," that poverty was endemic to Brazil and to Rio, the country's best-known city.

On October 7, 1961, *O Cruzeiro* published Ballot's photographs and reporting as a page-by-page comparison with "Freedom's Fearful Foe," heralding the report on the issue's cover with a headline just as sensationalist: "Nôvo recorde americano: Miséria" (New American Record: Poverty"). Two weeks later, the October 20, 1961 issue of *Time* (a sister publication to *Life*) included an article titled "Carioca's Revenge," which attacked the veracity of Ballot's story. In November, *O Cruzeiro* responded by accusing Parks of staging his reportage.

The clash continued for months. Why? In order to better understand this battle between magazines, we can look at the motivations of *O Cruzeiro*, Ballot, and *Life* at the time. Taken together, they convey a story about photography as a significant form of representation, interpretation, and documentation, and about the often ambiguous role it plays in what sociologist Herbert J. Gans has called the "symbolic arena" of the international news media.



Figure **3.5.6.2**: Edifício onde morava a família Gonzalez (The Building Where the Gonzalez Family Lived), 1961, Henri Ballot. Gelatin silver print, 7.1 x 9.5 in. Copyright Instituto Moreira Salles Collection

Origins and Evolution of *O Cruzeiro*

O Cruzeiro began as a standard illustrated magazine produced in Rio de Janeiro and distributed nationwide. It was part of the media group *Diários Associados*, which had been founded and led by the journalist Francisco de Assis Chateaubriand Bandeira de Mello, Brazil's most powerful press baron in the 1930s. In the first period of its existence, from 1928 to 1940, it made extensive use of illustrations and photography in a wide range of articles and reports, with regular contributions from writers, poets, and visual artists.

In the early 1940s, *O Cruzeiro* underwent a change in its editorial policy, strengthening the link between journalism and photography. It contracted French photographer Jean Manzon, who had worked for both *Paris Match* and *Vu*, to reorganize the magazine's photography department. From 1941, Manzon emphasized photojournalism, but in the service of providing spectacle and sensationalist commentary rather than factual, objective, and impartial reportage. Despite its tendency to stage content to fit its chosen themes—or perhaps precisely because of it—*O Cruzeiro*'s circulation grew in the 1940s, achieving a weekly readership of more than 700,000 in the mid-1950s.

Such growth encouraged the magazine to invest heavily in hiring new photographers and journalists. Between 1946 and 1951, when Jean Manzon left the magazine, many new photographers joined its staff, including Henri Ballot, Luiz Carlos Barreto, Luciano Carneiro, Flávio Damm, and José Medeiros. This new generation arrived just after the end of Getúlio Vargas's strong and dictatorial regime (particularly the Estado Novo period of 1937 to 1945), and following the country's first free elections, which initiated nearly 20 years of democracy.

Working together with a new crop of reporters and graphic artists, they contributed to a significant change in direction for *O Cruzeiro*, producing a more engaged and humanist style of journalism and photojournalism.

The new photographers were inspired and influenced by the international photography and journalism of the 1940s and 1950s, which included famous photo-essays in *Life* by photographers such as W. Eugene Smith, the work of French photographers such as Robert Doisneau and Willy Ronis, as well as events like the establishment of the Magnum Photos agency in 1947.



Figure **3.5.6.3**: Quarto na casa da família Gonzalez (Room at Gonzalez Family House), 1961, Henri Ballot. Gelatin silver print, 7.2 x 9.5 in. Copyright Instituto Moreira Salles Collection

Photographer Henri Ballot and His Side of the Flávio Story

Photographer Henri Ballot joined the staff of *O Cruzeiro* in the early 1950s. The son of a Brazilian woman and a French engineer and aviator, he was born in Pelotas, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. When he was two years old, his parents moved the family to France. By the time he was 17, Ballot was already—like his father—a trained pilot, one of the first to work for Aéropostale, the French airmail service and predecessor of Air France (alongside well-known author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry).

At the beginning of World War II, Ballot was imprisoned by German armed forces in Spain for four months for removing French airplanes from the path of the invading army. After he was released, he became a pilot in the Free French Air Force in England. He had a serious crash at the end of the war, when his aircraft was hit by German anti-aircraft fire, and landed in an area controlled by American troops.

Taken to a hospital in Colorado in the United States, Ballot was in a coma for months after the crash. After regaining consciousness, and during his long recovery, he learned photography in the hospital alongside other patients. Ballot returned to France, but in 1949 decided to relocate to Brazil. Soon after arriving, he secured work as a photographer for *O Cruzeiro* based at the magazine's São Paulo office.

Between 1949 and 1968, Ballot produced many historically significant documentary photo-essays. For instance, between 1952 and 1957 he accompanied the brothers Villas-Bôas on their pioneering Roncador-Xingu expeditions to the rainforest-rich state of Mato Grosso, recording some of their first moments of contact with the indigenous peoples of the Xingu. He also documented the negotiations that culminated in 1961 in the creation of the Xingu National Park (today the Xingu Indigenous Park).

Among the other subjects Ballot covered as a photojournalist were migrants from the northeast of Brazil to São Paulo (*retirantes*), the coastal peoples of the Southeast (*caiçaras*), the samba schools and favelas of Rio de Janeiro, and the building of the Transamazônica highway. Ballot's archive of more than 13,000 photographs is now part of the collection of **Instituto Moreira Salles**.



Figure **3.5.6.4**: Criança brincando em meio ao lixo (Child Playing in the Trash), 1961, Henri Ballot. Gelatin silver print, 7.1 x 9.5 in. Copyright Instituto Moreira Salles Collection

Ballot Takes on Poverty in the United States

For his assignment in New York in 1961, Ballot conducted research and consulted with various organizations and associations that supported the city's underprivileged Hispanic communities. The photographer walked through areas of Harlem and the Lower East Side, depicting the neighborhoods and families living there.

His early explorations of New York focused on impoverished and marginalized residents found on East 100th Street, whom American photographer Bruce Davidson would also later feature in his famous series bearing the name of that street. Despite some false starts that yielded little, Ballot was determined to make an objective and impartial record of the social inequalities that existed in the United States.

After more than 20 days of walking the streets of New York in search of a potential subject, he chose to interview and photograph the Gonzalez family: parents Félix and Esther and their six children, including nine-year-old Ely-Samuel. Originally from Puerto Rico, they lived in a small tenement apartment on Rivington Street in the Bowery, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan—not far from Wall Street, the financial heart of the US.



Figure 3.5.6.5: Crianças brincando no pátio interno do edifício (Kids Playing in the Courtyard of a Building), 1961, Henri Ballot. Gelatin silver print, 9.5 x 7 in. Copyright Instituto Moreira Salles Collection

Ballot recorded his first walks, daily impressions of the city, and his encounters with the Gonzalez family in a revealing diary. This artifact, along with correspondence, news clippings, and a unique set of approximately 150 vintage photographs, provides a comprehensive report of his stay in New York and is preserved in his archive at Instituto Moreira Salles.

Also included among his photographs is an additional project that appears to have been triggered by the publication of "Carioca's Revenge." Several images document visits Ballot paid to the da Silva family in Brazil during the early fall, after he returned from New York. These were complemented by interviews with José da Silva and some of his children, both in their new home (purchased with donations from *Life*'s readers), as well as in their former Catacumba shack and the kerosene stall that José managed.

These images were ultimately published just one month later, in the November 18, 1961 issue of *O Cruzeiro*, and illustrate the magazine's efforts to uncover fabrication and manipulation in Parks's original coverage of Flávio and his family.

A Battle in Print—with Real Consequences

The dispute that developed between *O Cruzeiro* and *Life* resulted in mutual disparagement of both Parks's and Ballot's original stories. It also marked the future paths of the photographers. Both faced monumental challenges as they sought to defend and maintain the integrity of their original narratives while their respective publications waged a larger ideological war.

Parks and Ballot produced photographs under the auspices of photojournalism. The dossier Ballot put together on his reportage in New York is fortunately preserved in his archive. An analysis of his photographs, diary, and other documents does not reveal any intended desire to alter the facts. Rather, his work echoes contemporary exemplars such as Davidson, Helen Levitt, and members of the Photo League, who made detailed documentations of street life and social issues in New York City following World War II.

Editors at *O Cruzeiro* chose to publish Ballot's images in a layout that directly corresponded to how *Life*'s editors had sequenced and edited Parks's photo-essay. The unabashed comparison suggests that *O Cruzeiro*'s editors felt it necessary to issue an unequivocal response to "Freedom's Fearful Foe," which would reinforce how poverty could be found in the largest city in the United States, just as it existed in Rio de Janeiro.

In retrospect, this was a questionable editorial decision. The layout in *O Cruzeiro* invited accusations that Ballot's reportage was manipulated, in part because it seemed visually weaker and less powerful than Parks's, but primarily because it was clearly

rhetorical and propagandistic. By failing to present Ballot's work as independent and critical, the editors inadvertently exposed the Brazilian photographer—and the magazine itself—to criticism. This made it easy to ignore the content itself.



Figure **3.5.6.6**:*Família Gonzalez (Gonzalez Family)*, 1961, Henri Ballot. Gelatin silver print, 6.6 x 9.5 in. Copyright Instituto Moreira Salles Collection

Despite Ballot's and Parks's respective efforts to report on the unassailable fact that both the Gonzalez family and the da Silva family struggled to survive below the poverty line, Ballot and Parks were effectively trapped in an editorial duel that exemplified how communication can be easily transformed into propaganda in the symbolic arena of the press. The two major illustrated magazines operated in a specific geopolitical context and moment, marked by the Kennedy administration's first moves following the recent Cuban Revolution and its reverberations throughout the world, specifically in Latin America. At the very same time, *Life* and *O Cruzeiro* were also competing for domination of the Latin American news market by distributing their respective Spanish-language editions throughout the region.

In this context, the original intention of many photojournalists who worked for these magazines, including Parks and Ballot, to communicate facts directly and objectively was often lost; instead, their content was edited and published with a strong symbolic and ideological slant.

The episode reveals how such approaches by the press can override and contaminate the subjects portrayed. It also had two important consequences for Ballot: he was forced to live with *Time*'s accusation—which he emphatically denied—that he had modified images in his report, especially a shocking image of Ely-Samuel Gonzalez in bed as cockroaches crawled over his body, and was also refused entry to the US after *O Cruzeiro* published the report.

Today, photographic images continue to be powerful, particularly given corporate journalism networks and social media. They contend with many of the same issues evident in the confrontation between *Life* and *O Cruzeiro*: questions of authorship, documentation, editing, ethics, staging, ideology, and propaganda.

To understand the role of photography, now and then, we must be capable of critically discerning how every photographic image is presented to us. This is still a significant challenge, especially in a world struggling with the increasing pervasiveness of "fake news."



Figure **3.5.6.7**: Vista dos edifícios de Wall Street (View of Wall Street Buildings), 1961, Henri Ballot. Gelatin silver print, 9.5 x 7.1in. Copyright Instituto Moreira Salles Collection

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Additional resources:

Gordon Parks at Smarthistory

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3.5.7: Richard Misrach's early work and Border Cantos

- by ART21

Page ID

188543



Video **3.5.7.1**: From Art21. A pioneer of large-format color photography, Richard Misrach has photographed the American desert for decades, examining the impact of human activity on the natural landscape. From his Berkeley studio, the artist recounts his early work, "Telegraph 3 AM," in which he depicted the homeless population of 1970s Berkeley. Disillusioned with the commercial success of his photographs that he hoped would instigate social change, Misrach turned to the deserts of southern California, Nevada, and Arizona. Creating otherworldly images of cacti and rock formations and unsettling pictures of military bombing ranges, nuclear test sites, and man-made fires, for his ongoing "Desert Cantos" series, Misrach explains how "our culture stands out in very clear relief in the desert." The artist recounts the origins of his "Border Cantos" series, which focuses on the U.S.-Mexico border wall and the artifacts left behind by migrant crossings. This segment follows the artist as he travels to remote parts of the desert, photographing the visual contradiction of the ominous wall against beautiful landscapes and collaborating with the composer Guillermo Galindo to create installations and musical performances that utilize the items found in the desert. Collectively, Misrach's work chronicles the places where nature and culture collide, highlighting where beauty and ugliness exist side-by-side.

"Borderlands" premiered in October 2020 on PBS. Watch now on PBS and the PBS Video app: **https://www.pbs.org/video/borderlands-4m0kef/**

Learn more about the artist: **https://art21.org/artist/richard-misrach/**

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.5.8: Robert Frank

3.5.8.1: An interview with Robert Frank

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3.5.8.1: An interview with Robert Frank

- by **SFMOMA**

Page ID

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Video **3.5.8.1.1**: Photographer and filmmaker Robert Frank recalls his experience as a young artist, picking up and moving from a small town and Switzerland to New York City. He describes his early struggles, his determination, and how Beat Generation writers Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac showed him a different way of life. Video by San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.



Video **3.5.8.1.2**: In this rare interview, photographer Robert Frank discusses his seminal book *The Americans* (1958). He reflects on specific images from the series and gives insight into his process at the time. Video by San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

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3.5.8.2: Rashid Johnson on Robert Frank’s The Americans

- by **THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART**

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Video **3.5.8.2.1**: The Artist Project is an online series in which artists respond to works of art in The Met’s encyclopedic collection. **http://artistproject.metmuseum.org/5/rashid-johnson/**

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