

Art

INTERRUPTED

Advancing American
ART *and the* POLITICS
of Cultural Diplomacy



Art INTERRUPTED

Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art, Auburn University
SEPTEMBER 1, 2012–JANUARY 5, 2013

Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma
MARCH 1–JUNE 2, 2013

Indiana University Art Museum
SEPTEMBER 13–DECEMBER 15, 2013

Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia
JANUARY 25–APRIL 20, 2014

The exhibition, accompanying catalogue, educational programs, and national tour of *Art Interrupted: Advancing American Art and the Politics of Cultural Diplomacy* are made possible by grants from the Henry Luce Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts as part of American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius.



Art

INTERRUPTED

Advancing American
ART *and the* POLITICS
of Cultural Diplomacy

©2012 Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia

Published by the Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without the written consent of the publishers.

Printed in Canada in an edition of 2,000 by Friesens.

Design: Grant Design Collaborative

Department of Publications: Hillary Brown and Mary Koon

Publications Interns: Noah Adler, Nicolette Higgs, and Sarah Schatz

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Art Interrupted : Advancing American Art and the Politics of Cultural Diplomacy.

pages cm

Issued in connection with an exhibition held at the Georgia Museum of Art, Athens, Georgia, and three other institutions.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-915977-78-9 -- ISBN 0-915977-78-8

1. Painting, American--20th century--Exhibitions. 2. Art--Political aspects--United States--Exhibitions. 3. United States--Cultural policy--History--20th century--Exhibitions. I. Georgia Museum of Art.

ND212.A698 2012

759.13'07473--dc23

2012009700

Partial support for the exhibitions and programs at the Georgia Museum of Art is provided by the W. Newton Morris Charitable Foundation and the Georgia Council for the Arts through the appropriations of the Georgia General Assembly. The Council is a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts. Individuals, foundations, and corporations provide additional support through their gifts to the University of Georgia Foundation.

Cover: Walt Kuhn, *Still Life with Red Bananas*, cat. no. 60.

Table of Contents

6	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS Ghislain d'Humières, William Underwood Eiland, and Marilyn Laufer
8	ADVANCING AMERICAN ART LeRoy Davidson's "Blind Date with Destiny" DENNIS HARPER
30	ONE WORLD Advancing American Art, Modernism, and International Diplomacy MARK ANDREW WHITE
46	WEIRD JUNK What Ended Advancing American Art? PAUL MANOQUERRA
56	CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION Scott Bishop (SB), Robert Ekelund (RE), Danielle Mohr Funderburk (DF), Dennis Harper (DH), J. Andrew Henley (JAH), Jessica Hughes (JH), Marilyn Laufer (ML), Paul Manoguerra (PM), Daniel Scott Neil (DN), Heather Read (HR), Sunny Stalter-Pace (SSP), and Mark Andrew White (MW)
268	AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES
270	APPENDICES I. Works from the War Assets Administration sale not included in this catalogue, locations unknown II. Advancing American Art checklist for the Eastern Hemisphere III. Advancing American Art checklist for the "other American Republics" IV. Contemporary American watercolors for exhibition in the "other American Republics" V. Contemporary American watercolors for exhibition in China and the Far East

Acknowledgments

In 1946, the U.S. State Department planned a project of cultural diplomacy as a clear demonstration of America's artistic coming of age. The program called for the acquisition of works of art by the leading American modernists of the time with the intention of traveling the art through the Latin American republics, Europe, and Asia. Very soon after the project began its tours, however, the State Department had to recall the collections to the United States, where they were later auctioned off to public and private buyers. Among them were the present organizers of this exhibition. For quite some time, those three institutions (the Georgia Museum of Art at the University of Georgia, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma, and the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art at Auburn University), which collectively hold eighty-five of those works of art, have wanted to recreate the original exhibitions. We are pleased to realize this shared vision through the dedicated efforts of various lenders, our hard-working staffs, and our generous funding partners.

The original exhibitions, part of a new direction in international diplomacy, enjoyed good reviews for the most part from art critics here and abroad. Unfortunately, American conservative groups assailed the various programs of the project. These virulent opponents used the national media and their bully pulpits in Congress to vilify the art's modernist slant as subversive and un-American and to target individual artists whom they deemed politically dangerous. The controversy over these well-intended exhibitions and the subsequent sale of the objects by the War Assets Administration as government surplus have provoked research by various scholars, most notably in the exhibition and accompanying catalogue entitled *Advancing American Art: Politics and Aesthetics in the State Department Exhibition 1946–1948* (1984) with essays by Margaret Lynne Ausfeld and Virginia M. Mecklenburg. We thank them and acknowledge the many other scholars, including Serge Guilbault, Taylor D. Littleton, Leon F. Litwack, Louis Menand, and Maltby Sykes, for the groundwork they laid for this project. Our curatorial objective is to build on their earlier research, to investigate the imbroglio, and to examine the works of

art as such rather than as political weapons. As you will read in the essays that follow, the originators of the exhibitions hoped they would promote democracy in a postwar world of continuing conflict and uncertainty.

The range of artists included in the original exhibitions illustrates the State Department's agenda as well as an inherent desire to balance the works of such well-established artists as John Marin, Arthur Dove, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, and Ben Shahn with the works of such artists as Nahum Tschacbasov, Mitchell Siporin, Karl Zerbe, and David Burliuk, who were equally innovative but are not as well known today. All were a vital part of the nation's zeitgeist and help illuminate a transitional period of American art. Also significant was the inclusion of the work of African American artists such as Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden, who would continue to build solid reputations in the second half of the twentieth century, and the very few women artists represented, such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Irene Rice Pereira, who nonetheless presaged in their paintings the imminent dominance of abstraction.

We are grateful to both the Henry C. Luce Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, which have assisted us with the necessary funding for this project. Their generosity and belief in the project has been invaluable and inspiring.

Others who have offered kind assistance to us as we prepared the initial research and organization of this project include: Katherine Dehn, of Kraushaar Galleries; Freda and Richard Durrett, of Durrett Studios; Jason Schoen; Stephen Murphy, of New Trier Township High School; Kevin and Cheryl Vogel and the Valley House Gallery of Dallas; Paul D. Schweizer, of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute; Allison Whiting, of Christie's New York; Andrew V. LaLonde and Kathy Houghton of the New York Mills Union Free School District; and Pamela Bransford, of the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts.

We also wish to thank the following institutions and individuals for their cooperation and willingness to loan essential pieces: Robert Ekelund; Claude Albritton; Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Seidel; Eve Granick and David Wheatcroft; Wendy Blazier of the Boca Raton Museum; Don Bacigalupi, Chris Crosman,

and Jennifer De Martino of the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art; Maxwell Anderson and Trisha Dixon of the Dallas Museum of Art; Suzanne Delahanty, Donna Gustafson, and Margaret Molnar of the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey; Linda Dodson of the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts; Carol Herr of the Lancaster County Art Association; Judy Sourakli of the Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington; Pauline Sugino of the Honolulu Academy of Arts; Karen Rosner of the New York City Department of Education; and Grace Ramirez Gaston of the Public Art for Public Schools, New York City School Construction Authority.

We extend special thanks to Mark A. White, Eugene B. Adkins Curator of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma, and Dennis P. Harper, Curator of Collections and Exhibitions of the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art at Auburn University, for spearheading the research and writing for this project. Their work has inspired all of us who participated in this project to very high standards.

We must also acknowledge the various staff and individuals from each of our institutions who worked diligently to make this exhibition possible. From Auburn University that includes: Janice Allen, Grace Scott Bishop-Wagoner, Colleen Bourdeau, Michael Cortez, Danielle Funderburk, J. Andrew Henley, Jessica Hughes, Daniel S. Neil, and Sunny Stalter.

Paul Manoguerra, Tricia Miller, and Hillary Brown at the Georgia Museum of Art embraced the project with enthusiasm and passion, as they do with all the museum's projects. We all recognize the extraordinary contribution of Betty Alice Fowler, who wrote the successful grant applications that ensured the project's success.

Thank you to the numerous staff members of the University of Oklahoma who helped make the project possible: Gail Kana Anderson, Susan Baley, Michael Bendure, Miranda Callander, Deborah Rudy, Brad Stevens, Robyn Tower, and Becky Zurcher Trumble, as well as Heather Read for writing many entries. We would also like to recognize Mike Pullin and the Fred Jones

Jr. Museum of Art Association for their support in acquiring one additional work from the original checklist of Advancing American Art and one watercolor in the accompanying group that was sold in the WAA auction. We also extend our gratitude to Roger and Joyce Lethander for making possible the acquisition of an additional work from Advancing American Art to the collection of the Jule Collins Smith Museum. Finally, thank you to Luis Salamanques of UNESCO for his assistance in research efforts.

We convey our most sincere appreciation to Adelheid M. Gealt, director, and Jenny McComas, curator of Western art after 1800, at Indiana University Art Museum, for signing on their institution as the third venue of four for this exhibition.

How and why these works of art ended up as part of a surplus sale is an intriguing story, one that involves politics, censorship, and how we measure the worth of artistic expression in a democratic society. From our perspective, the organizers were perhaps naïve in their optimism when they decided to create this series of exhibitions to promote a greater awareness and understanding of American democracy and freedom. These pages investigate the curatorial motivations and ideas that generated the original project as well as the socio-economic, political, and cultural context from which they arose. It is evident that a confluence of untoward events interrupted what was an ambitious undertaking, one whose good intentions precipitated a clash of cultural issues. Many of those same disputes continue to confront us today.

Ghislain d'Humières, Wylodean and Bill Saxon Director
Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma

William U. Eiland, Director
Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia

Marilyn Laufer, Director
Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art, Auburn University

Advancing American Art

LEROY DAVIDSON'S "BLIND DATE WITH DESTINY"

DENNIS HARPER

IN THE COLD WAR SPRING OF 1946, Joseph LeRoy Davidson, visual-arts specialist at the State Department in Washington, D.C., began assembling a collection of paintings by contemporary American artists for the government to use as a political tool abroad. Davidson was tasked with developing a set of touring exhibitions that would demonstrate the ascendance of modern American art and its liberation from European roots and exemplify the freedom of expression enjoyed by diverse artists in a democratic country. Directed in large part toward audiences within the growing sphere of Soviet hegemony east of the Iron Curtain, Davidson's project represented an innovative type of cultural diplomacy and instrument of American foreign policy. Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs William B. Benton described the department's art programs as "[bearing] testimony, to all those abroad who thought of the United States as a nation of materialists, that the same country which produces brilliant scientists and engineers also produces creative artists."¹ At the heart of this initiative was a project called Advancing American Art.

Under the aegis of the State Department's newly established Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs (OIC), Davidson purchased seventy-nine "oils" by established and emerging artists to constitute *Advancing American Art*.² They were augmented by two groups of "water colors" comprising another seventy-three works. (Actual media in all three collections included encaustic, tempera, casein, and gouache, in addition to oil and watercolor.) The plan, as devised by Davidson and his immediate supervisor, Richard H. Heindel, chief of the Division of Libraries and Institutes at the Department of State, was to circulate selections from these 152 works of art and others to follow to embassies and institutions around the globe in a mission of cultural diplomacy, not unlike the department's *Voice of America* radio programs. In less than a year, following initial, well-received showings in New York, Paris, Czechoslovakia, and Latin America, the project was aborted, its organizers and artists ridiculed in the media and before Congress. Davidson was out of a job, his position abolished. Before another year had passed, the entire collection of oils and a majority of the watercolors

were sold at auction as war surplus. The project's rise and spectacular fall captured the attention of the American public as had few other domestic art enterprises, engendering passionate debate about the value of modern art, government's role in patronage of the arts, and what constitutes a truly American art form. *Advancing American Art*'s ill-fated story offers important clues to understand better the unsettled period in American history immediately following World War II. The parameters of the debate and tone of the imbroglio within which it occurred may also strike a familiar chord to contemporary followers of art and perhaps offer insights to inform twenty-first-century deliberations on the same issues.

LeRoy Davidson's selection of paintings for *Advancing American Art* reflected changing times in the state of American art and American society at large in the mid-twentieth century. Davidson came of age during the Great Depression and began his career in the arts amid New Deal efforts at societal and economic reconstruction. Born in 1908 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he received his undergraduate education at Harvard, graduating in 1930. He earned a



Fig. 1

Fig. 1
Franz Marc
Die grossen blauen Pferde
(*The Large Blue Horses*), 1911
Oil on canvas
43 x 73 x 1 3/4 inches (framed)
Collection Walker Art Center,
Minneapolis
Gift of the T. B. Walker Foundation,
Gilbert M. Walker Fund, 1942

master's degree in 1936 at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts before taking a position at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, where he served as curator and assistant director from 1939 to 1943. He was fluent in French and German and read Chinese. During World War II, Davidson served in the Army Signal Corps and was involved with graphic arts at the War Department in Washington, D.C. In 1945, he joined the State Department to direct the international art programs at OIC. Having solid experience in academic, cultural, and governmental milieus, Davidson appears to have been particularly well suited for the job. His scholarly interests ranged from Asian art, a subject he returned to later for doctoral studies and teaching, to European and American modernism.³ One of his acquisition coups at the Walker was the purchase of Franz Marc's *The Large Blue Horses* (fig. 1), an important painting from the German Expressionist movement *Der Blaue Reiter* (the Blue Rider) and the first major modernist work to enter the Walker's collection.

The idea at OIC to develop and travel *Advancing American Art* did not arise spontaneously. The State Department had circulated exhibitions of art prior to 1946, often put together by such organizations as the American Federation of Arts (AFA) and the Council for Inter-American Cooperation or rented from *Life* magazine, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Baltimore Museum of Art. One such exhibition of forty-five loaned American watercolors was selected by the Whitney Museum of American Art, assembled and mounted by the Walker Art Center, and presented by the Inter-American Office of the National Gallery to travel to the "other American Republics." The relationship between the National Gallery and the State Department, however, had grown unsatisfactory to personnel within OIC. Davidson and Heindel maintained that the exhibitions the National Gallery organized

were too conservative and did little to promote American art and living artists.⁴ In addition, contracting exhibitions to the National Gallery was a costly venture. The fiscal year 1946 (FY46) budget for OIC, following its establishment in January of that year, reflected a \$35,000 obligation to the National Gallery as grants-in-aid for exhibitions, and the first half of FY47 included \$21,600. Total exhibition grants for FY46 amounted to \$47,500, and all other departmental expenses numbered just over \$54,000. The latter figure included purchases of paintings for *Advancing American Art* and other exhibitions, plus the costs for touring exhibitions of photographs, art reproductions, and industrial design; shipping and installation fees; and other miscellaneous charges. Grants to the National Gallery consumed more than a third of the budget. In the first half of FY47 its portion was better than half of total expenditures.⁵ Furthermore, OIC increasingly found itself unable to raise curatorial objections regarding National Gallery-organized projects. Davidson met with the National Gallery's director, David Finley, on several occasions after joining the State Department, but ultimately the institution demanded that it manage "all or none of the art program." The latter option prevailed.⁶

This new autonomy at OIC provided Art Specialist Davidson a stronger curatorial role. Among the OIC-organized exhibitions to tour in 1947 were *Sixty Americans Since 1800*, selected from the corporate collection of International Business Machines (IBM), and *American Industry Sponsors Art*, described by Davidson as "a cross-section of late nineteenth and twentieth century American oil and watercolor painting . . . lent to the Department by various American business firms for exhibition in Europe."⁷ Both exhibitions utilized loaned objects and integrated examples of modern art into historical context. OIC also

toured *Fifty American Serigraphs*, featuring a then-new commercial process that had developed into a fine art medium under Works Progress Administration programs. Prints for the serigraphy exhibition were purchased as four identical sets and toured widely—in 1946 the exhibition was hosted in Algiers, Ceylon, Copenhagen, and Prague. Four other exhibitions of contemporary prints traveled to South America. They included lithographs, etchings, serigraphs, mono-prints, woodcuts, wood engravings, and aquatints by dozens of leading American printmakers. The decision to purchase all those prints, rather than borrow them, was to a large degree a financial consideration. Justification for the purchases appeared in an OIC memo from February 21, 1947: "It was found that at a cost of approximately \$500.00 the Department could organize an excellent print exhibition, which would be the permanent property of the United States Government. A comparable exhibit, when rented, was found to cost \$850.00 per year."⁸

Favorable responses abroad to the printmaking exhibitions and requests from host sites to see more of the advanced American styles spurred the creation of a similar survey of modern American painting. The department offered justification for the project in a memorandum of July 1947 from the Division of Libraries and Institutes (ILI): "In July 1944 the mission at Sao Paulo wrote: 'It is believed that an exhibit of modern American painting would be very successful and this office strongly recommends that every effort be made to organize such an undertaking.'" Similarly, "In 1945 the Cultural Relations Attache in Buenos Aires urged the Department to send 'a group of original paintings by our best modern painters' to Argentina." Moreover, the mission at Buenos Aires, quoting an unnamed "outstanding art critic," expressed grave apprehensions that "if the col-

lection is labeled as 'modern art in the United States' and if the selection is left to official or semi-official committees, the result will seem hopelessly academic and 'unmodern' as compared to modern art as it is understood in Argentina." The critic urged that the collection "be thoroughly advanced in style and might indeed include a few examples of the abstract."⁹

In response to those and similar entreaties, Davidson conceived the idea of Advancing American Art, which would "place emphasis on the creative and experimental aspects of painting" by the "leading exponents of modern trends" working in the United States.¹⁰ From their experience in organizing earlier loan exhibitions, it was apparent to Heindel and Davidson that borrowing works of art would not be practical for a project of the scope and duration they intended. A "Statement on the direct purchase technique" described several additional reasons that supported purchase. Borrowed exhibitions were generally only available for short periods, requiring frequent replacement of individual loans and a costly repetition of packing and shipping charges. Insurance premiums for purchased art could be eliminated, as the government would assume all risk. Travel expenses for specialists to escort and unpack private collectors' loaned objects would also be eliminated as such couriers would not be required. Whereas some lenders only allowed their works to be displayed in major metropolitan museums, purchased art could be shown in smaller towns and art centers. Furthermore, priority requests could be accommodated without prolonged and sometimes unsuccessful negotiations with owners.¹¹ As mentioned previously, the State Department had demonstrated the efficacy of purchasing art in the case of its print exhibitions. At an opening reception in January 1946 for the serigraphy collection, Benton, Heindel, Davidson, and others in

the department discussed at length the relative merits of borrowing versus purchase. Benton endorsed the idea of buying works for exhibition and expressed approval for the type of art that was on view, which was predominantly modernist in style.¹² As owner, publisher, and chairman of the board of Encyclopaedia Britannica (from 1943 until his death in 1973), Benton developed an impressive corporate collection of art, which included some of the same artists who would constitute the State Department collections. Selections from Encyclopaedia Britannica's collection were toured, and Benton referred to that experience when administering the art programs developed by Davidson and Heindel.

Funding to acquire Davidson's initial selections, the seventy-nine "oils" mentioned earlier, came from four sources in 1946 and 1947, according to a State Department memo dated April 7, 1947, itemizing the charges. Appropriations from the Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs, War Information Functions covered thirty-four paintings at a cost of \$25,950 (1946); Cooperation with the American Republics, twenty-five paintings for \$11,027 (1946) and nine paintings for \$6,400 (1947); Cultural Relations with China and the Neighboring Countries and Countries of the Near East and Africa (Emergency Funds of the President), five paintings for \$2,510 (1946); Contingent Expenses, Department of State, two paintings for \$1,100 (1946) and four paintings for \$2,925 (1947). Total appropriations for these purchases amounted to \$49,912, making the average price per painting just under \$632.¹³ Although it is uncertain whether Davidson had a fixed budget or a predetermined number of paintings to acquire, OIC planned for two separate touring exhibitions. One would be circulated across Eastern Europe (referred to in State Department documents as "the Eastern

Hemisphere") and the second to countries in Latin America ("the other American Republics," or the "OAR"). Judging from the sources of allocated funds, a complete tour itinerary may very well have included other continents.

Although Davidson's knowledge of modern art was already well grounded, he sought advice from leading specialists in the private sector, perhaps in recognition of the gravity of his task. While preparing a list of artists to be represented, he consulted with Hudson Walker, president of the American Federation of Arts; Herman More, curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art; James Johnson Sweeney, director of painting at the Museum of Modern Art; Maude Kemper Riley, art critic and editor of *MKR's Art Opinion*; and Alfred Stieglitz, photographer and owner of the influential modern art gallery An American Place.¹⁴ Undoubtedly, he had also established contacts with other gallery owners while at the Walker Art Center and when purchasing prints for OIC. Walker and More were involved in the selection of watercolors, of which a group of thirty-five was assembled to tour the OAR and thirty-eight for exhibition in China and the Far East; however, Davidson alone selected the oils and acted as curator of the collection and exhibitions, which would earn him both praise and harsh criticism in the months to come. OIC had arranged to premiere *Advancing American Art* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in October 1946 prior to shipping the works abroad. This deadline may have spurred a more rapid assembly of the collection than the agency would otherwise have employed. Selection of works almost certainly would have been slower with a more time-consuming deliberation by committee.¹⁵ A second venue was scheduled on the heels of the Met exhibition. State Department officials had been pressed to find a more



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Fig. 2
Advertisement for an exhibition by
Romare Bearden at Kootz Gallery,
Art News, April 1946.

Fig. 3
Advertisement for an exhibition
by Louis Bouché at Kraushaar,
Art News, April 1946.

modern American contribution to the international exhibition to be held in Paris that November for the first meeting of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) than the survey of paintings from collections of American museums that was then on view at the Tate Gallery in London.¹⁶ On short notice, the group of oils for the Eastern Hemisphere, supplemented by the set of thirty-five watercolors, was chosen to represent the United States during UNESCO Month.

Several names were clear choices for inclusion: artists who held long-established reputations in 1946, such as Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, Walt Kuhn, John Marin, and Georgia O'Keeffe. Davidson would naturally have wanted to include examples by the best-known modernist painters, if such works were available and affordable. He also wanted to feature newer and emerging artists. Except for Hartley, who had died three years earlier, all his choices were living artists. Current exhibitions provided an obvious resource to identify significant artists. For example, the AFA, with which Davidson consulted, was planning a touring exhibition of works to be drawn

from recent acquisitions (1943–46) by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney. Its checklist included Paul Burlin, Julio de Diego, Joseph de Martini, O. Louis Guglielmi, Kuhn, Julian Levi, Loren MacIver, Marin, George L. K. Morris, Irene Rice Pereira, Gregorio Prestopino, Abraham Rattner, Ben Shahn, Nahum Tschacbasov, Franklin Watkins, Max Weber, and Karl Zerbe, all of whom Davidson included in *Advancing American Art*. Another ten artists on the AFA checklist were featured in the two OIC watercolor exhibitions: William Baziotis, Charles Burchfield, Adolf Dehn, Lyonel Feininger, George Grosz, John Heliker, Edward Hopper, Dong Kingman, Jacob Lawrence, and Jean Liberté.¹⁷ Concurrently, at the New York commercial galleries that spring, one could view solo exhibitions by Romare Bearden at Samuel M. Kootz (fig. 2), Louis Bouché at C. W. Kraushaar (fig. 3), and Burlin and Ralston Crawford at the Downtown Gallery. Bouché's *Gallery K* (cat. no. 11), Bearden's *At Five in the Afternoon* (cat. no. 3), and Crawford's *Wing Fabrication* (cat. no. 21), all of which Davidson purchased, were among the paintings on display.

One World

ADVANCING AMERICAN ART, MODERNISM, AND INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

MARK ANDREW WHITE

THE CRITICAL HISTORY of Advancing American Art has focused primarily on the national controversy created by the conservative press, members of Congress, and the executive branch. Although previous criticism has helped preserve the history of the project and its role in the cultural politics of the United States, authors have been less concerned with how it informed, and was informed by, American global aspirations in the postwar period. Advancing American Art hoped to foster cultural goodwill abroad, and the State Department, in its promotional statements, emphasized individualism and freedom of expression as demonstrable values of the exhibition by arguing that “Only in a democracy where the full development of the individual is not only permitted but fostered could such an exhibition be assembled.”¹ The exhibition was one of a number of important cultural programs endorsed by Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs William Benton and informed indirectly by politician Wendell Willkie’s influential book *One World*, which emphasized international cooperation and cultural exchange in the wake of World War II. A cursory examination of the checklist of Advancing American Art reveals that the art

and artists drew upon stylistic and thematic influences from around the globe: American folk art, American Indian art, Dutch De Stijl, the School of Paris, German Expressionism, and Russian Constructivism. In this regard, the project demonstrated a heterogeneous modernism that emphasized both intellectual freedom and the multiculturalism of the United States, as opposed to a nationalist "American" style.

In citing intellectual freedom as a goal of Advancing American Art, Benton and his staff continued the legacy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's cultural programs under the New Deal; however, they departed from the rhetoric of the Federal Art Project and other programs, which actively sought a distinctively American art, rooted in the soil of North America. The survey of American modernism the project created also differed from the more homogeneous picture promoted in the 1950s by supporters of Abstract Expressionism in that it included both experimental and conservative tendencies. Modernism for the organizers and promoters of Advancing American Art was not defined by a single aesthetic ideology but by a plurality of expression created in response to the conditions of modern life by artists of varying intellectual dispositions and different racial, social, and cultural backgrounds. In turn, the State Department hoped to promote this notion of modernism as an example of the individualism and freedom of expression available under American democracy.

Advancing American Art was an important part of a much larger program of traveling exhibitions that the State Department's Division of Libraries and Institutes Art Program organized following World War II. Most exhibitions were created externally by grants supplied to such institutions as the National Gallery of Art, which assembled a show of watercolors for Latin America, or the American Federation of

Arts, which planned to send a group of thirty-eight watercolors to China and other countries in East Asia. Other touring exhibitions sponsored by the State Department included *Sixty Americans Since 1800*, organized out of the collection of International Business Machines Corporation and sent to the Middle East and Europe, and *American Industry Sponsors Art*, which included fifty-three oils and watercolors lent by various industrial sponsors for a tour of Northern Europe.² J. LeRoy Davidson, the principal curator of Advancing American Art, and division chief Richard H. Heindel were dissatisfied with the largely conservative nature of most of the exhibitions, and the State Department had allegedly received complaints about their quality. Davidson decided to organize Advancing American Art himself and purchase the paintings instead of borrowing them from an external entity.³ Benton reportedly agreed to the idea at a meeting of the Pan American Union in January 1946, especially if the work was "predominantly modern in character."⁴

Davidson selected seventy-nine oils representing the heterogeneous nature of American modernism in the 1940s. Artists with established reputations, such as Stuart Davis and Georgia O'Keeffe, for example, were included alongside such emerging artists as Ben-Zion and Gregorio Prestopino. Stylistically, the show demonstrated Davidson's interest in the diverse and global character of American modernism. In his description of Advancing American Art, he argued that "the American artist has not relied solely upon contemporary Europe for inspiration but like the European has drawn directly upon Africa, the primitives, and the Near and Far East. In addition, for America there has been a source not as yet thoroughly explored by the critics—American folk art of the 18th and 19th centuries, on which many American artists have based their approach."⁵

The checklist bears out Davidson's assertion. Influences from both the School of Paris and German Expressionism were obvious in many of the works included. European study and exposure to Fauvism, Cubism, and Expressionism had an impact on many of the most prominent modernists of an earlier generation such as Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, and Max Weber, who were represented by recent works to acknowledge both their place in the history of American art and their continuing influence. Hartley had died in 1943 and was the only nonliving artist featured in the exhibition; his influence on many of its younger artists must have necessitated his inclusion. Other artists included had close relationships with many of the most prominent members of the European avant-garde. George L. K. Morris studied with Fernand Léger, and the former's painting demonstrated clear influence from the hard-edged Cubism of his instructor. Abraham Rattner developed close relationships with Le Corbusier, Alberto Giacometti, and Pablo Picasso during his numerous sojourns in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s, and his works demonstrated affinities for Georges Rouault and Marc Chagall. Irene Rice Pereira had studied with Amédée Ozenfant in Paris, but her work had much more in common with the Russian Constructivism of El Lissitzky and the Neo-Plasticism of Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg. Artists such as Byron Browne and Romare Bearden were not as well connected, but their debt to Picasso was abundantly clear. Bearden's *At Five in the Afternoon* (cat. no. 3) refers to the Spanish Civil War and the death of Spanish poet Federico García Lorca, similar in many respects to Picasso's painting *Guernica* (1937). French Surrealism influenced William Baziotes, Adolph Gottlieb, and Charles Howard, although Baziotes's vaporous color was somewhat beholden to Chilean painter Roberto Matta, and Gottlieb's com-

partmentalized abstractions were informed by Northwest Coast American Indian textiles and houseposts.

German influence was equally represented in *Advancing American Art*. Both Karl Zerbe and Werner Drewes were German-born. Zerbe had been condemned as a "degenerate" by the Third Reich and was a close colleague of Max Beckmann's; Drewes had trained at the Bauhaus with László Moholy-Nagy and Wassily Kandinsky. Expressionism had widely influenced American social realists and is evident in the works of Philip Evergood, Jack Levine, and Ben Shahn. Finally, Davidson's interest in American folk and naïve painters was represented by artists such as Loren MacIver, Everett Spruce, and even Yasuo Kuniyoshi, whose *Circus Girl Resting* (cat. no. 62) is directly inspired by folk painting.

Davidson purposely included more conservative artists such as Louis Bouché, Walt Kuhn, and Reginald Marsh "so that the entire gamut of contemporary production may be estimated."⁶ His approach to contemporary art anticipated "A Statement on Modern Art" issued in 1950 by the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. In that statement, the three museums defined modernism as a "multiform movement" and stated emphatically that "The field of contemporary art is immensely wide and varied, with many diverse viewpoints and styles. We believe that this diversity is a sign of vitality and of the freedom of expression inherent in a democratic society. . . . We hold that American art which is international in character is as valid as art obviously American in subject matter. We deplore the revival of the tendency to identify American art exclusively with popular realism, regional subject and nationalistic sentiment."⁷ *Advancing American Art* advocated the diversity,

Modernism for the organizers and promoters of Advancing American Art was not defined by a single aesthetic ideology but by a plurality of expression created in response to the conditions of modern life by artists of varying intellectual dispositions and different racial, social, and cultural backgrounds.

freedom of expression, and internationalism this statement endorsed.

The State Department planned a more ambitious exhibition schedule than usual for the project to help fulfill its mission as both a demonstration of the heterogeneous, global nature of American art and a weapon against the suppression of intellectual freedoms under communism. On October 4, 1946, Advancing American Art premiered at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a singular event for State Department exhibitions. The editor of *Art News*, Alfred M. Frankfurter, recognized that the exhibition stressed the global origins of modern American art and promoted individualism: "[These painters] stem from sources as wide as the whole globe of which each segment becomes daily more indebted to another as they come closer together. Their names themselves are an ethnic cross-section. As the idea of America has subordinated the concept of racial origins, so the growing international fabric of culture has subordinated nationality in art to the poetics of the individual. Hence the individual is emphasized here."⁸

Not long after Advancing American Art opened at the Met, the State Department began to receive numerous requests for the exhibition from embassies around the world, including those in Ottawa, Rome, Oslo, Poland, Caracas, and Belgrade.⁹ It was also suggested that the exhibition might travel to Moscow and Kiev, but the Moscow Embassy questioned whether it would have any impact, considering Josef Stalin's affection for socialist realism. Ultimately, the State Department recalled Advancing American Art before any decision was finalized.¹⁰

The State Department hoped to include these additional venues but decided to delay confirmation until the early schedule had been completed. After the exhibition closed at the Met, on October 27, it was split into two touring groups and sent to regions considered political and intellectual battlegrounds between democracy and communism: forty-nine oils were slated for the Eastern Hemisphere and the remaining thirty for the Western Hemisphere. The Eastern Hemisphere exhibition traveled from New York to Paris, where it opened November 18

Weird Junk

WHAT ENDED ADVANCING AMERICAN ART?

PAUL MANOQUERRA

WHY, IN 1947, did the State Department shut down its art program and the most visible component of that program, a project called Advancing American Art? Why did the exhibitions and the collection fall from critical success in the art world to a very public, politically charged, inglorious end? The quick answer is that the project was caught up in a gradual shift from cogent discussions about the role of government in economic affairs at home and abroad to a new, simplistic dichotomy of freedom versus communism. For Americans, Soviet-led communism replaced fascism as the major threat to capitalism and the republic. Yet, that change does not fully account for the ultimate decision of Secretary of State George C. Marshall and the State Department to close the Advancing American Art exhibitions abroad in 1947, to order the return of the works to the United States, and to sell those works via the War Assets Administration at extremely low prices to institutions in 1948. The complex relationship between fine art, popular culture, and a democratic ethos often intersects with politics in American history. As curator for the collection and the exhibitions, Joseph LeRoy Davidson, visual-arts specialist at the State Department, made specific

aesthetic and stylistic decisions. His singular, personal vision for the collection, thanks in part to his autonomy from previous State Department art projects organized by the National Gallery, failed to include many of the American artists, mostly Regionalists and American Scene painters, already popular in mainstream American culture. The elements of abstraction and Surrealism in many of the works Davidson chose established a mood reflective of pain, fear, and loss. Meanwhile, the leftist political and the Central and Eastern European ethnic backgrounds of many of the artists represented in the collection conflicted with William Randolph Hearst and his media conglomerate's long-standing, powerful, pointed, and dogged vilification of leftist and communist political viewpoints in the United States and with sweeping Republican gains in the House and Senate during the midterm elections of November 1946. The internationalism characteristic of Wendell Willkie's *One World* and Henry Luce's "The American Century," and not the new trope of "containment" articulated by President Harry S. Truman in postwar American society, guided Davidson, the collection, and its exhibitions.

Advancing American Art fits into a world-view that saw "experts" attempting to transform political problems into solvable technical ones. In the February 17, 1941, issue of his magazine *Life*, with a cover image featuring the young American actress Cobina Wright Jr., Luce wrote a lengthy editorial titled "The American Century." Nine months before the Japanese would bomb Pearl Harbor, Luce attempted to persuade his fellow Americans to join the world war and that American civilization was critical for the future of that world and its fight against fascism. Arguing over five successive pages (noted for their complete lack of advertisements) that there was a great gap between "the reasonable hopes of our

age" and the realities of "failure and frustration," Luce called on Americans to lead, "to accept whole-heartedly our duty and our opportunity as the most powerful and vital nation in the world and in consequence to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence." He called for a new age of internationalism—"an internationalism of the people, by the people and for the people"—and America "as the dynamic center of ever-widening spheres of enterprise, America as the training center of the skillful servants of mankind, America as the Good Samaritan, . . . the powerhouse of the ideals of Freedom and Justice."¹ Americans, Luce explained, could no longer remain aloof and enjoy their isolation from the horrible problems of the world.

Just how entrenched American Scene painters were with the American public in the prewar years becomes evident in the same issue of *Life*. The Regionalism of artists like Thomas Hart Benton became associated with republicanism, the New Deal, and corporate America through the patronage of *Life* and the Associated American Artists (AAA) agency. Among images featuring Oldsmobiles, Bendix laundry machines, and Birds Eye frozen vegetables, *Life* presented an advertisement for AAA's free, sixty-four-page catalogue (fig. 1). Established by Reeves Lewenthal, a former reporter and artists' agent, in 1934, AAA hired American artists to produce etchings and lithographs to sell at inexpensive prices to a middle-class audience.² For a mere five dollars, everyday Americans could own an original print by famous American artists—Benton, John Steuart Curry, Peter Hurd, Joe Jones, Luigi Lucioni, Boardman Robinson, Grant Wood, and sixty others mentioned in the advertisement. "[V]irtually taking fine art out of the museums and putting it into your home," AAA wanted to make sure that now "every cultured person can own a Genuine Original!"³ The stable of AAA the advertisement

INCREDIBLE—but true! *Only \$5* for a
SIGNED ORIGINAL BY GRANT WOOD
THOMAS BENTON or 65 other great artists
... if you act promptly!

IMAGINE OWNING
Signed Original Etchings
and Lithographs by these
Famous Living Artists



Thomson Express
the normally an
something to do
the great work
something to do
of our day. In
California, you
it. For the work



Ground Wood
(This sample was
found in the
sample's general
collection. See
Page 11 of the
Inventory.)



Single Express
dialled "palm
bureau" at 10
minutes left, 5
minutes before
New York's
at Washington
See page 11
the business

FADED ART CRITIC FRAGILE: PROBABLY
Edward Allen Jones, creator of *Art Critic* of the New York Journal, writes: "The worthy magazine has been dedicated to the task of reading a column into pictures, artists, and public. . . . Jones has been graciously with care, among these critics to make their work being placed in the freedom of American graphic performance."

ASSOCIATED AMERICAN ARTISTS
711 Fifth Avenue, Studio 502, New York, N.Y.

Read why many of the nation's most celebrated artists are cooperating in this vital new Program in being you museum-perfect, signed Originals for only \$5 each—a mere fraction of their actual value!

SEND FOR FREE 64-PAGE CATALOGUE

ARE you aware of the exciting new Movement—sponsored by 67 of America's most famous artists—that now makes it possible for you to own and to enjoy the same collée of Signed Original Engravings and Lithographs produced by famous Masters?

And the price—you will hardly believe—is only \$5 each! . . . a mere fraction of their actual value! So, far less than you would have to pay if you acquired them through regular channels.

Why Is This a Price Pass?

The artists themselves organized this new, modern method of bringing you their superb Originals for this amazingly low price—virtually taking them out of the museum and putting it into your home! Realizing that under the old art prices necessarily were kept high . . . restricting ownership to wealthy collectors . . . they now are selling direct to you. Now every cultured person can own a Genuine Original.

But the incredibly low price is only one reason why you want act quickly. Being near-perfect Originals (and nearly reproduction), each is strictly limited to a small edition and, once exhausted, no more can be had.

Remember, these Originals are of such extraordinarily fine quality that even the world's most famous libraries—the Metropolitan, the Chicago Art Institute, U. S. Library of Congress, Yale University and 20 others noted as collections—have purchased them from this same program. Thus, if the original works of America's contemporary masters were famous beyond your

reach, this is your rare opportunity to acquire the beginnings of a real collection — and, in their individuality, originals become increasingly rare. It is quite possible that your small treasure chest will be enhanced correspondingly. This has proved the case many times.

We urge you to send, immediately, for your FREE copy of the beautiful, full-illustrated Catalogue, just off the press. It tells the fascinating story of this Program and illustrates 148 of those magnificent signed Originals. Don't fail to send the coupon (above) under the title "Send for our catalogue as well as the Originals (illustrated) will not long be available."

1.40 Subjects . . .

Nanny Price-Winners

You will be delighted with the great variety of subjects available; and agree that a masterpiece Original, personally signed by the artist, cannot be surpassed for beauty and the enjoyment it gives. Preside the subject you prefer—for home or office, for gift or collector's portfolio—is pictured among the outstanding pictures offered.

Many of these Originals are second prize-winners. Each subject is presented and summarized because only when the artist considers a finished, truly representative of his finest work, does he personally sign his name. All subjects are of generous proportions, each comes in two sizes and with each you receive a complete biographical sketch of the artist.

Act. Summ.

Send for Free Catalogue

If you live within easy distance of our galleries (21 FIVE Avenue at Midtown, New York City), we urge you to visit our exhibition now on view. Otherwise, mail the coupon below and receive FREE our beautiful catalogue from which you may make your selection and order direct. It shows all subjects, size of each, gives names and biographies of artists, prices, sizes, etc.

All selections are guaranteed perfect and shipped with the understanding that you may return them within 45 days if not completely satisfied. Unless the is change with the coupon to cover return and handling costs.

Mail This Coupon for FREE Catalogue



ASSOCIATED AMERICAN ARTISTS,
Studio 142, 131 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Please mail me your FREE, fully illustrated 40-page Catalogue, describing this important new American Artists Movement, featuring 100 Original Engravings and Lithographs now offered, including artists' biographies and prices with comments by connoisseurs, critics and collectors. I enclose \$6 in stamps to cover handling and mailing.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____

Fig. 1

Fig. 1
Life magazine advertisement
for AAA's free, sixty-four-page
catalogue.

features includes just four artists—Adolf Dehn, William Gropper, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, and Robinson—of the sixty-seven selected for the State Department's project half a decade later. In the ad, Regionalism and American art are completely domesticated, made evident by the man and two women looking at their very own framed lithograph, *February*, by Wood. It was the lack of what the Hearst newspapers would call "truly American, modern and able painters"—these American Scene image-makers like Wood and Benton—that became one rallying cry for the opponents of Davidson's collection and exhibitions.⁴

Life magazine represents a strong example of the shift in mainstream American consciousness from appreciation of the narrative styles of American Scene painting prior to and during World War II to recognition of abstract art as "the exemplar of the much-touted American virtues of individuality and freedom."⁵ Unfortunately for Davidson and *Advancing American Art*, that shift would not occur until well after the appearance in the magazine of "A *Life* Round Table on Modern Art" in October 1948, and, especially, "Jackson Pollock, Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?" in August 1949. Even then, *Life's* treatment of Pollock "was typically dualistic, celebratory and cynical," as art historian Erika Doss writes. Doss argues that the "condescending tone" of *Life's* article on Pollock was "obviously patriarchal and served to objectify and hence domesticate Pollock's potentially threatening art."⁶ Today, we see Abstract Expressionism as a high-art illustration of American military, industrial, and technological might in the West during and after World War II. Yet, Pollock and his fellow artists became emblems of American freedoms and individual expression and exemplars of the distinct, heroic struggle between reason and unreason much too late to save *Advancing American Art*.⁷

At the same time Davidson was accumulating works of art for inclusion in *Advancing American Art*, an antileftist, antigovernment discourse came to dominate political debate in late 1946 and beyond and provided Republicans with a powerful weapon with which to influence policy. Hearst's newspapers, which had not shied away from sensationalism, isolationism, and conservatism since the 1930s, hounded the exhibitions and the collection. Hearst built the nation's first media conglomerate by extending his newspaper empire to include wire services, magazines, newsreels, films, and radio. At the peak of his power, in the mid-1930s, *Time* magazine estimated Hearst's audience at twenty million, and his papers were important as vehicles of popular opinion in the United States. In the 1930s, Hearst and his newspapers saw threats to the foundations of the American republic, capitalism, and the free press in communist and left-wing activists during the Depression, and they waged a media battle against communists in American universities in the mid-1930s. Throughout the 1930s, Hearst was also unabashedly isolationist in his views with regard to American foreign policy. With the opening of the Cold War and the end of World War II, the Hearst newspapers continued their strident anti-communist activities. Richard Berlin, president of the Hearst Corporation, in accordance with a policy Hearst himself established, assembled a list of reporters, columnists, and editorial writers whose specialty was anticommunist commentary. The corporation had a "special assistant for subversive activity" who had assembled files for the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1940. Eventually, in early 1950, the Hearst papers championed the cause of Senator Joseph McCarthy.⁸ It was Hearst's media conglomerate, especially the *New York Journal-American*, and the like-minded Cowles publishing family in its news-

Byron Browne

American, 1907–1961

Byron Browne was an early investigator of abstracted images of reality while maintaining the structure and composition of previous generations. He destroyed his student works, which were no doubt grounded in realistic rendering, but his disdain for pure abstraction put him at odds with the younger generation of Abstract Expressionists. Browne is a key figure in the push for abstraction in American art in the 1930s and 1940s, but he stopped just short of the more aggressive proponents of nonrepresentational painting. He taught at the Art Students League and New York University through the 1950s.¹

Browne was deeply inspired by the work of European modernists. Together with Arshile Gorky, Ilya Bolotowsky, and Rosalind Bengelsdorf, his wife, he helped form the American Abstract Artists (AAA) group in 1936. The press had harshly criticized abstraction throughout the 1930s, and the work of the group identified the misunderstandings of critics by publishing brochures like "The Art Critics! How Do They Serve the Public? What Do they Say? How Much Do They Know? Let's Look At the Record!"²

Social realism and Regionalism were popular trends, and AAA called them an affront to a confused public, an offense perpetrated by what Browne referred to as "professional amateur" art critics, who were assumed to be amateurish in their misunderstanding of modernism despite professionally critiquing works.³ Browne's letters to the editor of the *New York Times* hint at one perpetual problem of art: the difference in perspective of artist and viewer. For Browne, the

public's desire for pleasant images for its sitting rooms missed the point of art as a personal experience. Artists should move past pleasing the general populace: "If an artist must paint because he has been born with that ruthless inner urge to do so, he should couple it with a tremendous reservoir of faith and courage, which must last to his dying day. He should not expect his fellow-men to jump up and pat him on the back."⁴ The circle of artists with whom Browne exhibited included Fernand Léger, whose work also employs the bold colors and heavy lines evident here. Both artists exhibited at the Samuel Kootz Gallery in the late 1940s, along with Hans Hofmann, Robert Motherwell (cat. no. 78), and Romare Bearden (cat. nos. 3 and 4).

In this painting, Browne reconstructs the format of a still-life, although the objects he depicts are nearly indecipherable. Thorny vines and perhaps floral or avian shapes bend and curve playfully, making for an animated composition despite its label. The impasto betrays the flatness of the color, and the artist inscribes his name in the thick white paint. Limiting his palette to red, green, and yellow, toned with white on the right-hand grouping of objects, Browne unifies a rather divided composition. To balance the intensity of the colors on the left, the lines to the right are heavy and dynamically interwoven. A repeated spiral further bridges the two halves, as do arching black curves in the upper middle portion of the canvas.

JAH

¹ Virginia M. Mecklenburg, *The Patricia and Phillip Frost Collection: American Abstraction, 1930–1945*, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Museum of American Art, 1989).

² Americanabstractartists.org.

³ As described in "The Art Critics" pamphlet.

⁴ Byron Browne, "Artist and his market," *New York Times*, August 11, 1940.



14 Still Life in Red, Yellow,
 and Green, 1945
 Oil on canvas
 23 3/4 x 28 inches
 Jule Collins Smith
 Museum of Fine Art,
 Auburn University;
 Advancing American
 Art Collection
 1948.1.4
 Courtesy of Stephen
 Bernard Browne

William Gropper

American, 1897–1977

In a blood-drenched landscape scattered with spent rifles, two men clash at the apex of a pyramid formed by their fallen comrades near the conclusion of a relentless battle. The wind tears at their clothes as the man in ragged blue pants begins to gain ground. He leans forward, knife poised and hand clenched around the throat of his foe, in what could be a final push for victory. The thronelike forms found in the red and white rock outcroppings on either side of the skirmish suggest a partisan struggle, although the figures' respective allegiance is ambiguous.

Gropper began his career as a political cartoonist before moving to the realm of painting and social realism in the 1930s. He saw himself as an advocate for the oppressed, and, when the U.S. government failed to respond to the Spanish Civil War and its resultant refugee crisis, Gropper began a series featuring exhausted people in an endless search for shelter. These figures, like the ones in *They Fought to the Last Man*, continue to appear in his paintings even after the collapse of

Spain's republican Popular Front in 1939, leading some scholars to argue that they are not specifically Spanish but general types that symbolize the persecuted and displaced.¹ Similarly, the recurring image of a dry, inhospitable environment comes to signify a “sinister, mutilated world” where external forces impel humans to act immorally.²

Gropper maintained this visual vocabulary throughout the war as his message became more allegorical.³ Thus, *They Fought to the Last Man* functions as a metaphor for humanity's intrinsically brutal nature and propensity for violence—a theme that occupied American artists throughout the 1940s. Gropper omits national emblems, leaves the two thrones vacant, and removes any sense of leadership to emphasize the battle's futility, reminding viewers of the contradiction in employing war to achieve peace. As Bertrand Russell once said, “War does not determine who is right—only who is left.”

HR

¹ Cécile Whiting, *Antifascism in American Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 137.

² Don D. Walker, “American Art on the Left, 1911–1950,” *Western Humanities Review* 8 (Autumn 1954): 345.

³ Norma Steinberg, “William Gropper: Art and Censorship from the 1930s through the Cold War Era” (PhD diss., Boston University, 1994), 98.



42 **They Fought to the Last Man**, ca. 1945
 Oil on canvas
 30 x 40 1/2 inches
 Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma; purchase, U.S. State Department Collection
 1948.1720
 Courtesy the Gropper family

O. Louis Guglielmi

American, b. Egypt, 1906–1956

In *Subway Exit*, a woman and child emerge from a trapezoidal stairwell. At the center of the picture the woman gazes up with an awed but wary expression. With abstract shapes in maize, vermillion, and purple, the painting's background contrasts sharply with the stripped-down realism of the subway exit. Both are marked by bright colors and acute angles, however, easing the transition between the two spaces. In this way, Guglielmi expresses the hesitance and the exuberance of New Yorkers in the face of a bustling postwar city.

Born in Cairo to Italian parents, Osvaldo Louis Guglielmi immigrated to the United States in 1914. His family settled in Italian Harlem, a neighborhood that piqued his interest in depicting the lives of the urban poor. He attended the National Academy of Design while still in high school and spent the 1930s employed by the government as part of the New Deal. Throughout that decade and the early 1940s, Guglielmi painted in a style that combined precise draftsmanship with mysterious imagery and a liberal social conscience. His work was featured in a number of important exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, including *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (1936), *New Horizons in American Art* (1936), and *American Realists and Magic Realists* (1943). This adulation was not universal; Guglielmi's *Tenements* (cat. no. 44), also included in *Advancing American Art*, was sharply criticized for its pessimistic depiction of working-class housing.

Guglielmi's postwar work is more optimistic and more indebted to early modernists than his earlier paintings.¹ *Subway Exit* undoubtedly

fits that description. The figures both have masklike faces reminiscent of early Cubism, and the unnatural coloration and relation of masses suggests the paintings of Henri Matisse and Paul Cézanne. The painting emphasizes a tension between motion and stasis, highlighted by the woman's hands—one cut off by the subway steps, the other gripping the child's arm as if to hold him back.

The New York City subway system was a popular subject for modern artists, including Reginald Marsh (cat. no. 74), Walker Evans, and Mark Rothko.² Placing his subjects on the steps of a subway exit, Guglielmi emphasizes their separation from the crowd. The relation between body and city calls to mind his *Waiting Woman* of the same year, in which a female figure's elongated body in the foreground mimics the lines of the wall behind her and the streetlight next to the subway entrance in the background. The subway serves a dual purpose in his paintings: as a source of freedom and as a representation of how the modern city shapes the body to its demands.

Because he borrowed styles and subjects from a number of movements, Guglielmi has been called everything from a Precisionist to a magic realist to a social surrealist. One unchanging quality throughout his career is his representation of the felt reality of urban life. In the catalogue for *American Realists and Magic Realists*, he declares, "I thoroughly believe that the inner world of our subjective life is quite as real as the objective."³ *Subway Exit* shows us the inner world of two typical passengers.

SSP

¹ John Baker, "O. Louis Guglielmi: A Reconsideration," *Journal of the Archives of American Art* 15, no. 2 (1975): 19.

² See Tracy Fitzpatrick, *Art and the Subway: New York Underground* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2009).

³ Dorothy Canning Miller and Alfred Barr, *American Realists and Magic Realists*, exh. cat. (1949; repr. New York: Arno Press, for the Museum of Modern Art, 1969), 38–39.



43 Subway Exit, 1946
 Oil on canvas
 29 7/8 x 28 inches
 Jule Collins Smith
 Museum of Fine Art,
 Auburn University;
 Advancing American
 Art Collection
 1948.1.17

Dong Kingman

American, 1911–2000

In 1942, buoyed by his recent acceptance of a Guggenheim Fellowship, Dong Kingman left his home in San Francisco to set out on his first sketching tour of the United States.¹ His journey started in New York City, where, unsure of where to go or what to do on his first day there, he got on the subway: "When I came out, I was stunned to find myself at the bottom of a canyon surrounded by towering buildings—City Hall, the old Herald Tribune . . . the Brooklyn Bridge. I was completely overwhelmed by their immense power. . . . I decided then and there that this was my kind of subject," he writes.² Four years, two cross-country trips and one military stint later, Kingman's fascination with the speed and technology of the modern United States still dominates his subject matter, as evidenced by *Piqua, Ohio*.

The Chinese-American artist, born in California and raised in Hong Kong, had a brief but comprehensive art education under the tutelage of Szetu Wei, an artist who had trained as a modernist in Paris in the 1920s.³ Kingman's

work represents a distinctive crosscultural style in which the Chinese landscape tradition of sacrificing specific detail for larger rhythmic harmony combines with the French Modernists' method of using color as a compositional element.⁴ This marriage of Eastern and Western aesthetics is particularly apparent in *Piqua, Ohio*, in which the calligraphic application of small amounts of color directs the viewer's focus to the center of the image, effectively unifying the composition.

Kingman also employs this method to describe the town's modernity. Dark strands of swaying cable strung from leaning posts dominate the foreground and frame the Victorian hotel, painted garishly with green trim and defaced by a red hazard pattern. Together, they offer a complex picture of modernization in postwar Piqua. Kingman's message is far from critical; instead, he positions himself as an impartial observer of the jarring juxtaposition of old and new.

HR

¹ Alan D. Gruskin, *The Water Colors of Dong Kingman, and How the Artist Works* (New York: Studio Publications, 1958), 30.

² Dong Kingman and Helena Kuo, *Dong Kingman's Watercolors* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1980), 90.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.



ss Piqua, Ohio, 1946
 Watercolor on paper
 15 1/2 x 22 1/2 inches
 Fred Jones Jr. Museum
 of Art, The University
 of Oklahoma; purchase,
 U.S. State Department
 Collection
 1948.1743
 Courtesy of Dong
 Kingman Jr.

Karl Knaths

American, 1891–1971

"When I first saw the paintings of Karl Knaths . . . what impressed and charmed me were the integrated qualities of fresh vision and self-reliant invention. Then, too, I was fascinated by the unusual combination of angular calligraphy with subtle color and sensitive brushwork. I seemed to understand the artist's urgent need for a 20th century economy of means to convey his sense of the simple seafaring life he had found in his Cape Cod environment."¹ Thus reflected Duncan Phillips, the seminal collector of modern art who in 1921, in concert with his mother, Marjorie Acker Phillips, established the Phillips Memorial Art Gallery (now known as the Phillips Collection) in Washington, D.C. In 1926, Phillips bought the first painting Knaths ever sold, initiating a patronage that lasted until the collector's death forty years later.² Phillips eventually came to own the largest and most representative collection of works by the artist.³

Born in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and christened "Otto," Knaths attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago before moving to Provincetown, Massachusetts, in May 1919. He exhibited that summer at the Provincetown Art Association as Otto Knaths but by the following year had adopted the name by which he is now known.⁴ Provincetown, described as "the biggest art colony in the world" just three years before Knaths's arrival, long attracted avant-garde writers, actors, and artists in great numbers, and many like Knaths took year-round residence.⁵ Several art schools operated in the thriving community, in-

cluding Charles Webster Hawthorne's Cape Cod School of Art (1899), Ambrose Webster's Summer School of Painting (1900), and Hans Hofmann's Summer School of Art (1935). Among the most distinctive artists to flourish in this bohemian milieu were a group of printmakers who settled or summered there beginning around 1915: Blanche Lazzell, Ethel Mars, Bror Julius Olsson Nordfeldt, and others who developed a unique method of making color woodcut prints. Known as the Provincetown Printers, they created Cubist-inspired imagery produced from a multicolor matrix carved into a single block. When printed, the blocks' thinly incised and unpigmented lines separate the different areas of color, giving rise to the works' characterization as "white line prints." Although chiefly a painter in oils and watercolors, Knaths, one of the most advanced modernists in the community, influenced the imagery of the Provincetown Printers and occasionally created prints using that technique. *Clam Diggers*, an undated watercolor likely painted in the early 1940s, reveals that the influence was reciprocal.

Knaths's lively rendering of Cape Cod fishermen, a subject he depicted frequently, bears a strong resemblance to the Provincetown Printers' white line prints, both in surface appearance and manner of construction. Most striking is Knaths's jigsaw-like placement of color planes, each laid down broadly with few overlaps, leaving a thin white line between sections of differing hues. His veils of gauzy, transparent color glow with an inner brilliance

derived from the paper's bright surface. The Provincetown Printers similarly used watercolor paints rather than opaque printing inks to achieve the same luminous effect. Of course, Knaths is not necessarily attempting to mimic such prints in this work, and his gestural black and dark gray lines describe forms in a manner not obtainable through the white line technique. Yet, the similarities of composition and color manipulation make clear their kinship, as may be discerned in comparison to the work of another Provincetown Printer, Mabel A. Hewit (fig. 1). Knaths also found resonance in the art of Wassily Kandinsky, perceiving a musical correspondence with color and space in painting. In carefully measured proportions and intervals, he made use of Wilhelm Ostwald's system of organizing color to give a conceptual and practical foundation to his otherwise spontaneous compositions.⁶

DH



Fig. 1

¹ Duncan Phillips, intro. to Paul Mocsanyi, *Karl Knaths* (Washington, DC: Phillips Gallery, 1957), 7.

² Isabel Patterson Eaton, *Karl Knaths—Five Decades of Painting*, exh. cat., (Washington, DC: International Exhibitions Foundation, 1973), 142. The painting is *Geranium in Night Window*, 1922, oil on canvas, 24 x 20 1/8 inches, Phillips Collection.

³ "The Knaths Unit," www.phillipscollection.org/research/american_art/miscellaneous/knaths-unit.htm (accessed December 8, 2011) adapted from Erika Passantino and David Scott, *The Eye of Duncan Phillips* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

⁴ Eaton, 141.

⁵ "Provincetown History: The Art Colony, A Brief History" www.iamprovincetown.com/history/art-colony-history.html (accessed December 8, 2011) adapted from Nyla Ahrens, *Provincetown: The Art Colony, A Brief History and Guide* (Provincetown, MA: Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 2000). The description comes from a *Boston Globe* headline, August 27, 1916, "Biggest Art Colony in the World at Provincetown."

⁶ Mocsanyi, 33.

Fig. 1

Mabel A. Hewit
(American, 1903–1987)
Village Well, 1955
White line woodcut
Edition unknown, probably 10
17 x 12 1/2 inches
Jule Collins Smith Museum of
Fine Art, Auburn University;
museum purchase
2010.4.01



58 Clam Diggers, n.d.
 Watercolor on paper
 18 1/4 x 17 3/4 inches
 Jule Collins Smith
 Museum of Fine Art,
 Auburn University;
 Advancing American
 Art Collection
 1948.1.21

12 1/4 A
10 5/8 up

TO AVOID CONFUSION PLEASE
MAKE NO CHANGE IN TITLE

" STILL LIFE WITH
RED BANANAS "

CHRISTIE'S
AMP
5571/2
Painting
2824 0754

18-MAY-11
Sale 2444
Lot 51
CHRISTIE'S

Item 1-E



Montgomery Museum of Fine Art

440 SOUTH MADISON STREET / MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36104 / TELEPHONE (205) 834-

Advancing American Art
Walt Kuhn, Still Life with Bananas
Cat. No. 46

18-MAY-11
Sale 2444
Lot 51
CHRISTIE'S

ISBN 978-0-915977-78-9



Printed in Canada