

The Alfred Stieglitz Collection

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THE COLLECTION of paintings, drawings, prints, a few sculptures, and many photographs that the Metropolitan Museum received in 1949 from the estate of Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) constitutes an exceptionally interesting document for the study of the relations between American art and the international modern movement in the first decades of the twentieth century. But the Stieglitz Collection is more than that—for those influences could be demonstrated, even today, by the conscientious acquisition of a series of relevant examples. It exists as tangible and visual evidence not only of the taste and activity of a remarkable individual—Alfred Stieglitz—but also of his faith in American art, in its ability to absorb the new developments from abroad while responding to contemporary American sensibilities and retaining its inherent American character. The collection also witnesses to Stieglitz's continual search for the sources of creative activity and for their emergent expression in works of art of high quality.

Of Alfred Stieglitz himself much has been said but little written. We still wait for a full-length biography, supported by searching studies of those aspects of his personality and achievement, especially as a photographer, that affected the development of American art. Such studies are essential, not only to set the record straight, but to deliver Stieglitz from his friends almost as much as from his enemies. Perhaps he never did want us to see him plain, but by now, more than twenty years after his death, we need no longer bother about the conversational mystifications with which he en-

trapped the unwary, embarrassed the ignorantly eager, and shamed the rich for their neglect of American art. Until we have such studies, the Stieglitz Collection, divided as it is, must serve as an image of the man, his taste, and his times.

Of Stieglitz the photographer we know a good bit, principally through his own superb photographs, which have been exhibited and admired for over sixty years. In them we can see his greatest creative accomplishment, the liberation of the photograph from the limitations of documentary recording and from archaic pictorial conventions, thereby revealing the existence of a photographic aesthetic independent of both science and the established “arts of design.” The consideration of Stieglitz as an artist is, however, the privilege of those whose competence is the history and evaluation of creative photography.

Our concern is with Stieglitz as the primary sponsor in this country of the modern movement in art. For such of his peers as John Quinn, Walter Conrad Arensberg, and Katherine S. Dreier, the transcendent revelation of modernism came only with the Armory Show of 1913, but Stieglitz had been exhibiting the works of certain prominent European artists and a number of unknown Americans since 1908. It is true that his friend and fellow photographer Edward Steichen may have first turned his attention to contemporary art, and certainly Steichen helped in the selection of the early exhibitions of Rodin, Matisse, and Picasso. Yet Stieglitz, to his everlasting credit, not only exhibited the new art at a time when to do so was to incur severe

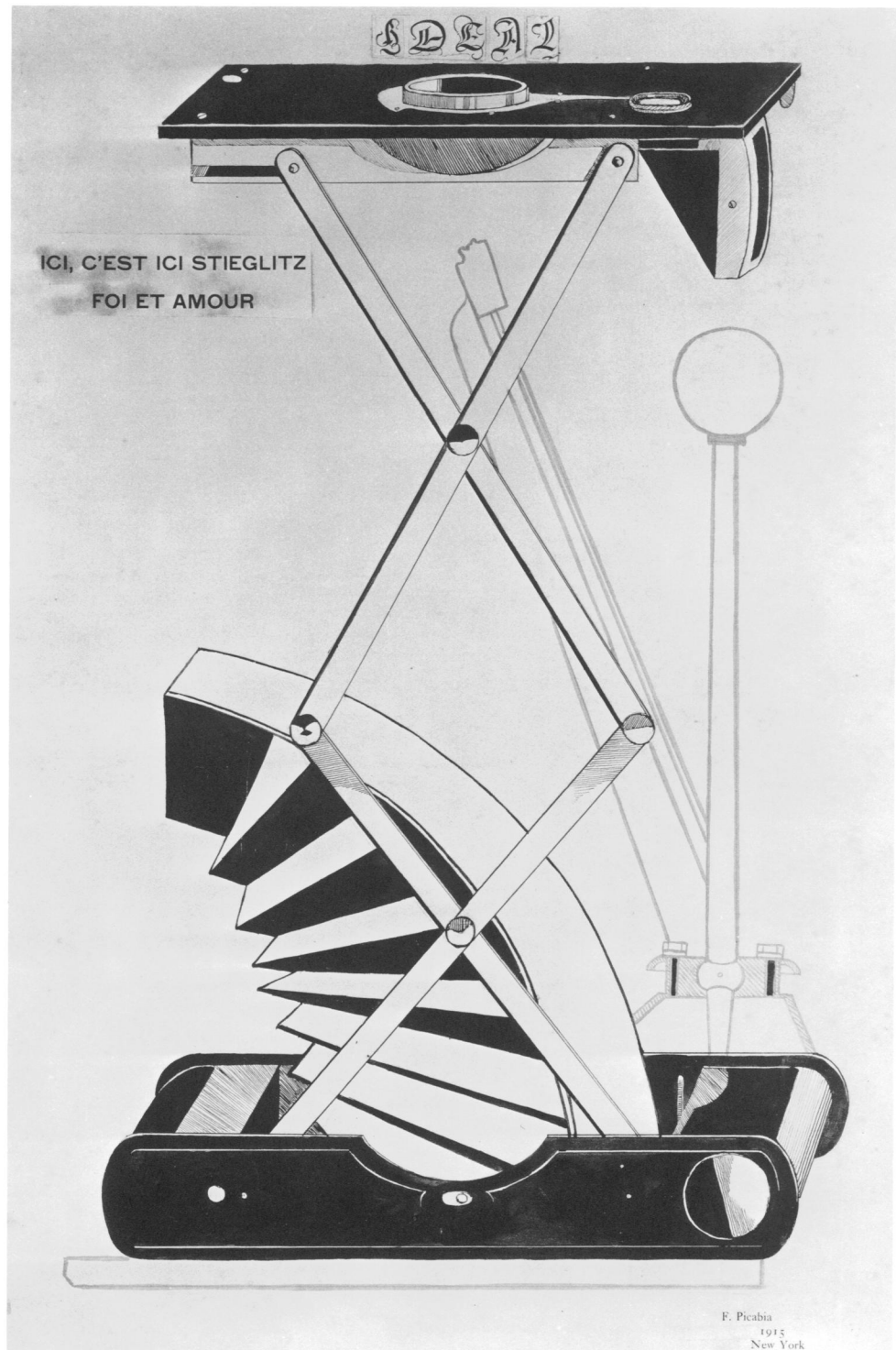


FIGURE 1

Ici, c'est ici Stieglitz, by Francis Picabia, 1915. Pen and red and black ink. 29 $\frac{7}{8}$ \times 20 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.14

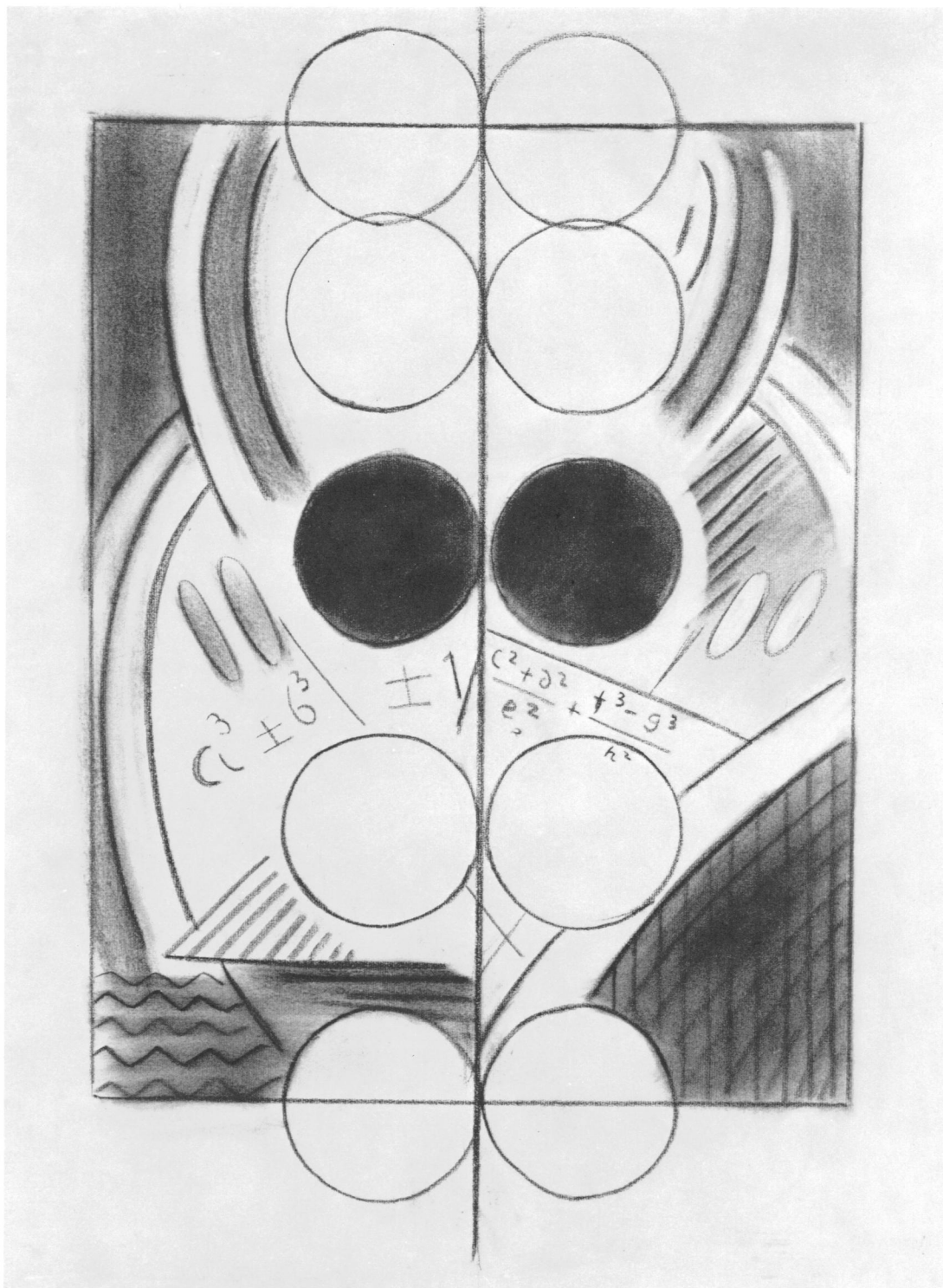


FIGURE 2
 Abstract Caricature of Alfred Stieglitz, by Marius de Zayas, about 1913. Charcoal. $24\frac{1}{4} \times 18\frac{1}{2}$ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.184

critical and popular disapprobation, to put it mildly, but also encouraged and exhibited certain younger American artists for the first time on equal terms with their more controversial European contemporaries.

The Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, where his exhibitions were held, actually consisted of two small rooms on the top floor of a converted brownstone at 291 Fifth Avenue, between Thirtieth and Thirty-first streets. Stieglitz had established his Photo-Secession at that address in 1905 as a center where creative photographers could meet and where their photographs could be seen both on request and in changing temporary exhibitions. The first exhibition, held November 24, 1905, through January 4, 1906, consisted of 100 photographs by members of the Photo-Secession. The next year six exhibitions were held, including work by French, German, and Austrian photographers, and one-man showings by such prominent Americans as Gertrude Käsebier, Clarence White, and Steichen. Stieglitz's aesthetic bias was already apparent; works by those whom he considered the best Americans were to be seen in conjunction and in comparison with the best European productions.

The term Photo-Secession had an intentionally rebellious ring, with overtones of the younger Central European artists' rejection of academic authority in Munich, Vienna, and Berlin in the years between 1890 and 1900, when the European secessions were founded as free, juryless exhibiting societies. The phrase Little Galleries, on the other hand, has now, and may have had then, perhaps too little flavor. At any rate the exhibition space, which Marsden Hartley later described as "probably the largest small room of its kind in the world," soon became affectionately known as 291. This was to be the best-known address in the annals of American art.

The walls of these two rooms, each of which was approximately fifteen feet square, were divided into plain vertical panels covered with fabric above a continuous counter whose shelves, holding boxes of prints and photographs, were concealed by curtains of dark green burlap. A dropped translucent cloth panel concealed the skylight; artificial light was provided by incandescent bulbs suspended from the ceiling and shielded by ordinary metal shades. In the center of the first room a square pedestal, also draped with burlap, supported a large brass bowl filled with an armful of

autumn leaves or spring flowers, when it wasn't needed for sculpture.

Today we can identify the sources of Stieglitz's taste in interior design, so different from the conventional dealer's preference for heavy draperies and ornate gold frames. In the exhibitions he had arranged for the Society of British Artists in the late 1880s, Whistler had been the first to insist on pictures simply framed and generously spaced on plain fabric-covered walls. The emphatic rectilinearity of the Little Galleries is also reminiscent of the Viennese version of *Jugendstil* strongly influenced by Mackintosh's Scottish work. There was also a measure of English "arts and craftsiness" as reinterpreted farther west in the style generically dismissed as California mission. Such were the Little Galleries at 291 Fifth Avenue: simple, clean, and direct, with a faint flavor of internationalism, an appropriate place for the excitements they were to hold.

The first nonphotographic exhibition, and the only one that year, was held during the second season of the Photo-Secession, in January 1907, when Stieglitz presented drawings by an unknown young woman, Pamela Colman Smith. She was described in *Camera Work* (July 1909) by Benjamin de Cassères as "a blender of visions, a mystic, a symbolist, one who transforms the world she lives in by the overwhelming simplicity of her imagination," and indeed at this distance her work does seem slightly overwrought. She was given to interpreting musical compositions, sketching her inspiration at concerts and the opera, and on the occasion of a second exhibition at 291 she recited West Indian nursery tales and chanted ballads by William Butler Yeats. Since her work has left so small a mark on modern art history, one may suspect that Stieglitz, who gave her three exhibitions in all, was impressed by her personality. Something of such an attitude can be read between the lines of his statement published in his quarterly *Camera Work* (July 1907), in which he explained that her drawings may have been "a departure from the intentions of the Photo-Secession," but a welcome opportunity to manifest its aim of presenting "honesty of self-expression, honesty of revolt against the autocracy of convention." Impressive she must have been, brooding, in Marius de Zayas's amusing caricature, like Wagner's Erda over the mysteries of her art (Figure 14). Although there are no examples of her work in the collection at the Metropolitan, eleven

drawings may be seen in the Alfred Stieglitz Collection in the Yale University Library.

During the following season, 1907–1908, there were three art exhibitions alternating with three of photography. In January Stieglitz presented drawings by Auguste Rodin, which Steichen, who was in Paris, had brought to his attention the previous fall. In February there was a show consisting of drawings by Miss Smith and of prints by Donald Shaw MacLaughlan, an American etcher, and Willie Geiger. The latter, the only German artist ever so featured by Stieglitz, was to have a long career as a teacher in Munich and Leipzig. The absence of German artists at 291, apart from the photographers whose work was seen in group shows, is the more curious in that Stieglitz had spent the years 1881–1890 in Europe, principally in Berlin. Then and on succeeding visits up to the last in 1911 he might have been thought to have become aware of contemporary developments in German and Austrian painting. Finally, on April 6 Stieglitz opened the exhibition that was to establish his reputation as one who had dared more than most for modern art. This was a show of drawings, lithographs, and watercolors by Henri Matisse, which Steichen had brought from Paris. In January some visitors had of course been dismayed by Rodin's unconventional treatment of the nude, but still and all he had to be acknowledged as the leading sculptor of the age. Matisse was quite another matter. He had been unknown in America except by hearsay as one of the "wild beasts" of contemporary French painting, and his powerful and elliptical draftsmanship infuriated many of the four thousand visitors who came to the tiny rooms, especially those who wrote for the press.

Before such a storm of disapproval and dislike another man might have retreated to the safety of photography, but Stieglitz pursued a different course. After 1907–1908 the balance between exhibitions of photography and the other arts was not to recur. The following season the art exhibitions outnumbered those of photography by six to four, and even among the latter, one was of exceptional artistic, and not purely photographic, interest. This was a showing of eight photographs by Steichen of Rodin's Balzac, certainly among the most sensitive ever of a work of sculpture, which had been taken outdoors at Meudon during the full moon of October 1907. The art exhibitions that season

included, in addition to the third and last showing of drawings by Pamela Colman Smith, caricatures by the gifted Spaniard Marius de Zayas, oils by Alfred Maurer, watercolors by John Marin, and paintings by Marsden Hartley, all first exhibitions for those artists, and Japanese prints from the collection of F. W. Hunter. This was a program of which a more seasoned exhibitor could well be proud.

In 1909–1910 Steichen's color photographs accounted for the only photographic exhibition. Otherwise there were a second exhibition of drawings by Rodin and Matisse, new work by Marin and de Zayas, and in March an exhibition of work by younger American painters, including Hartley, Marin, Maurer, and among the newcomers Arthur B. Carles, Arthur G. Dove, and Max Weber. The critics thought of these new painters as Matisse's "supposed American disciples," but actually, and despite the still tentative character of their work, most of the artists Stieglitz had selected were to become the principal members of the first generation of American modernists.

Steichen also showed his paintings on that occasion—flat in pattern and color, with a strong art-nouveau flavor—and the association of the cosmopolitan photographer with the younger painters suggests what these artists had in common: they had all spent some time in Europe in the earliest years of the new century and had seen at first hand what was happening in Paris. However much Stieglitz would later insist on the specifically American strength of American art, it is worth noting that from the first he saw, even if with Steichen's help, that the best American art would develop best when fortified by the developments abroad.

By 1910 the Little Galleries had become so thoroughly identified with the modern movement in painting that Stieglitz could redefine the intentions of his Photo-Secession. In the April issue of *Camera Work* he wrote that

the exhibitions which have been held during the past years, and those which are announced for the season of 1910–11 show the logical evolution of the work of the Association. Its name, while still explanatory of its purpose, has taken a somewhat different meaning. The Photo-Secession stood first for a secession from the then accepted standards of photography and started out to prove that photography was entitled to an equal footing among the arts with the production of painters whose attitude was photographic. Having proved con-

clusively that along certain lines, preeminently in portraiture, the camera had the advantage over the best trained eye and hand, the logical deduction was that the other arts could only prove themselves superior to photography by making their aim dependent on other qualities than accurate reproduction. The works shown at the Galleries in painting, drawing and other graphic arts have all been non-photographic in their attitude, and the Photo-Secession can be said now to stand for those artists who secede from the photographic attitude toward representation of form.

The list of exhibitions held at 291 between 1907 and 1917 is too long to describe in detail, but one cannot ignore the fact that it contained an extraordinary number of "firsts." In addition to those already mentioned, Stieglitz in 1910 showed the first works by Cézanne to be seen in the United States (the two lithographs of *The Bathers* now in the Stieglitz Collection at Fisk University in Nashville), and simultaneously he held the first American exhibition of paintings and drawings by Henri Rousseau *Le Douanier*, lent by Max Weber, who had just returned from Paris. In 1911 came the first American exhibitions of Cézanne's watercolors and of Picasso's work from the Blue Period through early cubism. In 1912 Stieglitz held the first exhibition here or abroad of Matisse's sculpture, selected by the artist with Steichen's assistance, and in 1913 he arranged Picabia's first American exhibition. In 1914 there were Brancusi's first one-man exhibition anywhere, drawings and paintings by Picasso and Braque, and the first American exhibition of African Negro sculpture; in 1917, the first American one-man show for Severini. In 1912 and again in 1914 and 1915 he presented exhibitions of work by children—in the first show the exhibitors ranged in age from two and one-half to twelve years. If these exhibitions were not the very first of their kind, at least they followed closely upon the children's work seen at the *Mostra d'Arte Libera* in Milan in 1911 and the publication of children's drawings by Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky in the *Blaue Reiter* almanac in Munich in 1912. A final indication of his continuing interest in the early sources of creativity was the showing in 1916 of watercolors and drawings by Georgia S. Engelhard, a ten-year-old New Yorker, "unguided, untaught." In addition to Marin, Maurer, and Hartley, Stieglitz presented one-man exhibitions for the first time in the United States or any-

where else of the American artists Dove, Carles, Weber, Abraham Walkowitz, Stanton Macdonald-Wright, and Georgia O'Keeffe. This surely was a record difficult if not impossible to match in Paris, London, the German and Austrian capitals, and New York, even if notice is taken of the pioneering support of modern art in the latter city by the Montross and Daniel Galleries and by Stephan Bourgeois in the years immediately following Stieglitz's first efforts.

Merely to list the hits, however, would be to give a false impression of infallibility, for there were also a number of misses, in the sense that certain artists in whom Stieglitz was at one time interested did not, for one reason or another, continue to elicit his support. Some are those he included only in two-man or group exhibitions. Such were MacLaughlan, D. Putnam Brinley, the mural painter, Lawrence Fellowes, Katharine N. Rhodes, Marion Beckett, Charles Duncan, and René Lafferty. A second group consisted of those who received only a single one-man exhibition: Allen Lewis, a graphic artist, Eugene Higgins, Gelett Burgess, Albert J. Frueh, the caricaturist, and Frank Burty (Haviland), a friend of Picasso and the brother of the critic and coeditor of *Camera Work* Paul Haviland.

However estimable these artists were—and some among them, Burgess and Higgins for example, have their modest place in the history of American art—their work on the whole differed from those whose names are better known to the degree that they may be said to have remained for the rest of their lives more or less at the stage they had reached when Stieglitz met them. They were tied to conventions of their own devising, whereas those to whom Stieglitz later committed himself were to change and grow, to develop into artists quite other than what they were when he first showed them. Stieglitz's taste, therefore, may seem inseparable from the evolutionary concept of human progress, which has shaped so much of both our Western philosophy of history and our history of art. Perhaps we do such so-called minor artists a great wrong when we accuse them of having failed to evolve, but the fact remains that Stieglitz lost interest in them. Except for Pamela Colman Smith no artist in either of the two categories seems ever to have been shown a second time at 291.

The Photo-Secession and the Little Galleries were disbanded at the end of the 1916–1917 season. The

immediate cause was the fact that the building had been sold and was soon to be demolished. By that time there had been in all some fifty-eight art exhibitions as against fifteen of photography. But these statistics, while indicating Stieglitz's increasing interest in modern art and his determination to lead America toward an understanding of the modern movement, are deceptive to the extent that his own concern with creative photography never faltered. Photographs were always available and often on view at 291, and at his later galleries, and although *Camera Work*, his sumptuous quarterly, contained more and more pages on art, he continued to publish it as a journal of fine photography until the end of the Photo-Secession.

Such are some of the historical facts of Alfred Stieglitz's achievement between 1907 and 1917. His later activities are quickly noted. After the First World War he arranged exhibitions for Marin at the Montross and Daniel Galleries and for O'Keeffe at the Anderson Galleries. In 1925, at the invitation of Mitchell Kennerley, the president of the Anderson Galleries, he created his Intimate Gallery in Room 303 of the building at the northeast corner of Park Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street. Here through 1929 he presented nineteen exhibitions, all of American artists with the exception of Picabia in 1928. Also, aside from Charles Demuth, Gaston Lachaise, and Peggy Bacon, they were familiars from 291. In order of frequency, O'Keeffe was shown four times, Dove and Marin three times, and the following once each: Hartley, Oscar Bluemner, and Paul Strand, who was the first of the younger photographers to have been shown at 291.

In 1929 Stieglitz moved to the seventeenth floor of the office building at 509 Madison Avenue. In this gallery, which he called An American Place, he continued, until the end of his life, to present regularly each year new work by Marin, Dove, and Georgia O'Keeffe, who had become his wife. There were also occasional exhibitions of Demuth, Hartley, and Strand, and his own photographs could always be seen. But there were no surprises, as there had been at 291, only the ripening maturity of the painters who for Stieglitz represented the best of the American tradition. In the midst of the pure white walls on which the paintings of his favorite artists were carefully spaced, Stieglitz practiced for hours on end another art of which he is said to have been a master, that of conversation, un-

fortunately one of the most ephemeral forms of human expression. Nevertheless, in the memories and published recollections of those who frequented it, An American Place came to have a very special meaning within the complexity of American art. Here was indeed a new tradition, nurtured in cubism and the early forms of European abstraction, but which in the hands of Hartley, Marin, Demuth, Dove, and O'Keeffe had proved capable of creating authentically artistic statements of American experience.

The historical record of Stieglitz's activities, however unusual, would be little more than a statistical account if we did not have access to the works produced by the artists named therein. Happily his collection survives, even though in several different places, to give visual substance to the historical account. According to his will, his collection of works of art and photographs was to be divided by Georgia O'Keeffe among American museums. In addition to the objects received by the Metropolitan Museum, smaller collections were given to the Art Institute of Chicago, the National Gallery of Art and the Library of Congress in Washington, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Fisk University in Nashville. His own photographs were distributed among eleven institutions, notably the National Gallery of Art, the Library of Congress, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in addition to the Metropolitan. The Yale University Library received the literary archives and a few other pieces, including a number of children's drawings.

Of the portion that the Metropolitan received, the photographs, supplementing Stieglitz's gift of a large selection of his own work in 1933, confirm the earlier and essentially photographic activities of the Photo-Secession.

For Stieglitz, who painstakingly printed his own photographs and had, after his return from Germany in 1890, managed his own printing company, the graphic arts held a special interest. The exhibition of Toulouse-Lautrec's lithographs at 291 in 1909, one of the first extensive showings of the artist's work in this country, is perpetuated in the Metropolitan Museum by thirty-four prints, including a fine example of the portfolio *Elles*. Recalling other events at 291, there are also scattered prints by Eugene Higgins, MacLaugh-



FIGURE 3
 Woman by the Seashore, by Henri Matisse, about 1904. Watercolor and pencil. 10 $\frac{5}{8}$ \times 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.6

lan, and Geiger, and portfolios by Frueh and by Gordon Craig, whose first American exhibition was held at 291 in 1910.

The paintings, watercolors, drawings, and sculptures in the collection vary in quality as well as interest. For this reason, on at least one occasion—when selections from the entire collection were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1947—many objects were dismissed by one critic as leftovers, the unsalable or unsold works that a dealer inevitably accumulates. Such a description is not strictly accurate. Certain objects—the small watercolor by Henri Cross, the cubist painting by Diego Rivera—are known to have been acquired by Stieglitz independently of his activities at 291. Similarly, the paintings he owned by Alfred Maurer appear to date from the 1920s, some time after Stieglitz ceased to show Maurer's work. But a more important con-

sideration is the fact that Stieglitz did not profess to be a dealer in the strict sense of the word. Having a private income, he did not depend upon his galleries to show a profit, nor did he, in the usual manner, claim a stipulated commission for each work sold. Rather he acted more as an agent for his artists, as their private banker, finding sympathetic patrons, often arranging that the price to be paid should suit the patron's purse—provided always that the latter seemed truly to understand and want the work in question—and then holding the funds received until the artist needed them. Therefore it would seem proper to consider the works remaining in Stieglitz's possession as objects that he kept from preference, not from necessity.

Of the works that recall the earlier activities at 291, the most memorable are the groups of drawings by Matisse and Picasso. From the first Matisse exhibition of 1908 two small watercolors survive, a study of the

FIGURE 4
 Nude, by Henri Matisse, 1910. Pencil. 12 \times 9 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.8



nude, sketchy but executed in brilliant fauve colors, and the even earlier *Woman by the Seashore* (Figure 3), painted in broad neo-impressionist blocks of color. In technique as well as subject it belongs with the pivotal paintings of 1904–1905, of which the best known is *Luxe, Calme et Volupté* (Paris, private collection). Among the other five Matisse drawings, which are probably related to the second exhibition of 1910, perhaps the finest is the study of the posed model (Figure 4). This was one of the two (the other is a reclining nude, seen from the rear) that Stieglitz himself admired enough to reproduce in *Camera Work* in October 1910. The fact that the first Mrs. George Blumenthal bought two drawings from this same exhibition and presented them to the Metropolitan would seem to give the lie to the thought that drawings as superb as those that Stieglitz kept were entirely unsalable, even in 1910.

Stieglitz stated of his first Picasso exhibition, held in April 1911, that it represented the artist's complete evolution through cubism, but in the absence of any catalogue or checklist we can only assume that the works in the Metropolitan's collection do, to some extent, represent the character of that first exhibition. Although the exhibition itself, according to the remarks published in *Camera Work*, seems to have been limited to drawings, there is in the collection a small oil, *Girl Ironing*, and a study of a harlequin in pen and ink that represent the Blue and Circus Periods. The latter work is of some historical interest, for on the reverse in Picasso's handwriting is a list of addresses including the name of his lifelong friend Julio González. More commanding are seven drawings of 1909 and 1910, which include the majestic *Nude* of 1910 (Figure 5), surely one of the finest of all Picasso's cubist works, the female body seeming to turn inside out before one's eyes to become a still life, or an architectural vista, and in the crisp definition of the planes prophetic of the process whereby Mondrian within three years transformed such structures still based on empirical vision into the architecture of invented abstraction. Stieglitz admired the drawing enough to reproduce it twice in *Camera Work*. By so doing, he not only established the drawing within modern art history, but began, for America at least, the history of Picasso as a modern master.

Of almost equal interest for the development of Picasso's cubist aesthetic is the male *Head No. 1* of 1909,

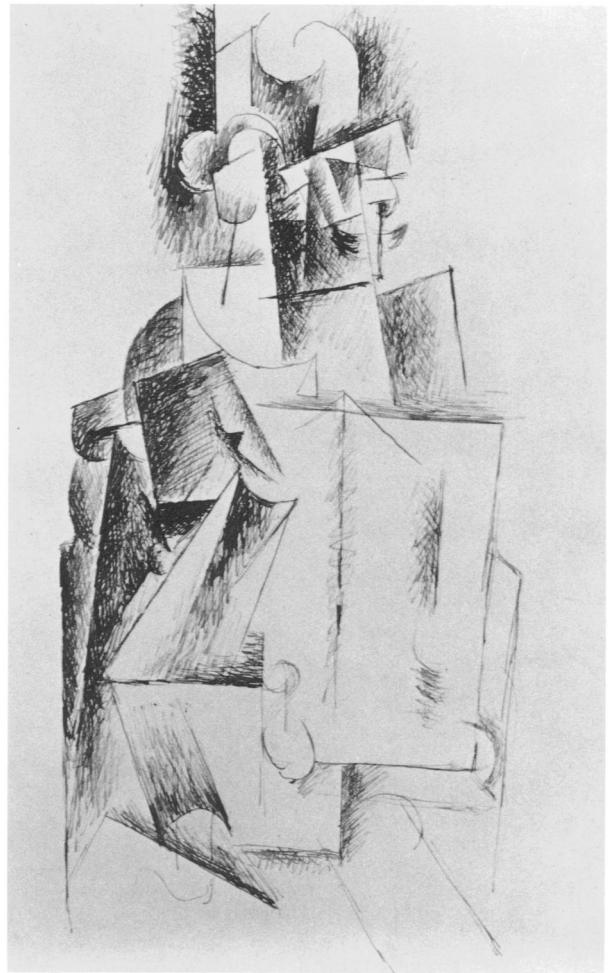


FIGURE 5
Nude, by Pablo Picasso, 1910. Charcoal. 19 × 12 ¼ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.27

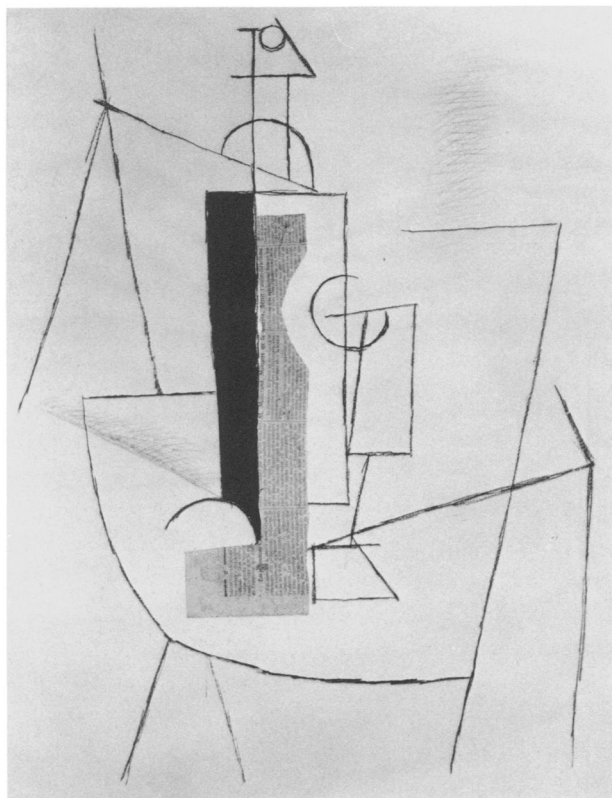
in brush and ink (Figure 6). The division of the physical mass by heavily accentuated planes intersecting at sharp angles on the one hand derives from Picasso's interest in African sculpture in the years after 1906 and on the other leads directly into the famous bronze *Head* of 1909. A similar proto-cubist study is the female *Head No. 2*, also in brush and ink and only slightly less powerful than the man's.

The later development of such cubist studies appears in two large drawings of 1912–1913. The earlier, a *Head of a Man* in charcoal, is typical of the more loosely as well as more abstractly analytical works of



FIGURE 6

Head No. 1, by Pablo Picasso, 1909. Brush and ink. $23\frac{3}{4} \times 18\frac{7}{8}$ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.35



1912. The other drawing, a Still Life in charcoal and pasted paper (Figure 7), can be seen hanging on the rear wall of the Little Galleries in a photograph¹ of the exhibition of December 1914 (to the right hung a Gabun ancestral figure, which had undoubtedly been included in the exhibition of African sculpture held the previous month; a very similar one is now, with four other carvings, at Fisk University). For those curious enough to read the texts of the newspaper cuttings that Picasso incorporated in his cubist *papiers collés*, this Still Life has a certain poignancy. The newsprint that represents part of the body and the label of the wine bottle (or siphon) carries the headline "M. Millerand, Ministre de la Guerre, flétrit l'antimilitarisme." At the time of the work's exhibition at 291 the First Great War was already in its fifth month.

Of the other important exhibitions of European artists at 291 not so much remains. The Picabia exhibition of January 1915 may have included the water-color *Danseuse étoile et son école de danse* (The Star Dancer and her Dance School) (Figure 8), which must have been the result of Picabia's infatuation with a dancer, Mlle Napierkowska, whom he had seen on shipboard on his way to the United States two years before. The flattened, abstracted cubist planes closely relate it to the important oils of that period, such as *I See Again in Memory My Dear Udnie*, of about 1914 (New York, Museum of Modern Art). Of more historical interest is the pen-and-ink drawing *Fille née sans mère* (Girl Born Without a Mother), of about 1915, a first study for one of the early "machine" paintings of the same title, now in the collection of Mr. and

1. Reproduced as pl. xiii in Waldo Frank et al., eds., *America and Alfred Stieglitz, A Collective Portrait* (New York, 1934).

FIGURE 7

Still Life, by Pablo Picasso, 1912-1913. Charcoal and pasted newspaper. $24\frac{1}{2} \times 18\frac{3}{4}$ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.33

Mrs. Arthur A. Cohen of New York. Stieglitz's exhibitions of Picabia in 1913 and 1915 put 291 in the very forefront of the modern movement, because Picabia, through his close association with Marcel Duchamp, was one of the principal generators in New York of the antiartistic current that in Zurich in 1916 became known as Dada. Picabia's *Ici, c'est ici Stieglitz* (Here, This is Stieglitz Here) (Figure 1), a symbolic portrait of Stieglitz as a broken camera, signifying Stieglitz's thought of closing 291 after the Armory Show in the belief that his work had been accomplished, is a purely Dadaist design. It was first published on the cover of the July–August 1915 issue of *291*, the satirical journal edited by Stieglitz and de Zayas in 1915–1916.

The proof that Stieglitz was impressed by the Armory Show can still be seen in the magnificent Kandinsky, *Improvisation 27 (Garden of Love)* of 1912 (Figure 9), which was exhibited there and which he acquired at that time. This was a daring purchase in a day when Kandinsky's work was even less familiar in America than that of Matisse and Picasso.

The final exhibition of a European artist, held in March 1917, was devoted to the work of Gino Severini. The choice of an Italian futurist may seem eccentric today, but one should remember that a group of futurist paintings created something of a sensation at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco in 1915. Presumably from the Severini exhibition are a typical

FIGURE 8

Danseuse étoile et son école de danse, by Francis Picabia, 1913. Watercolor. 22 × 30 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.12

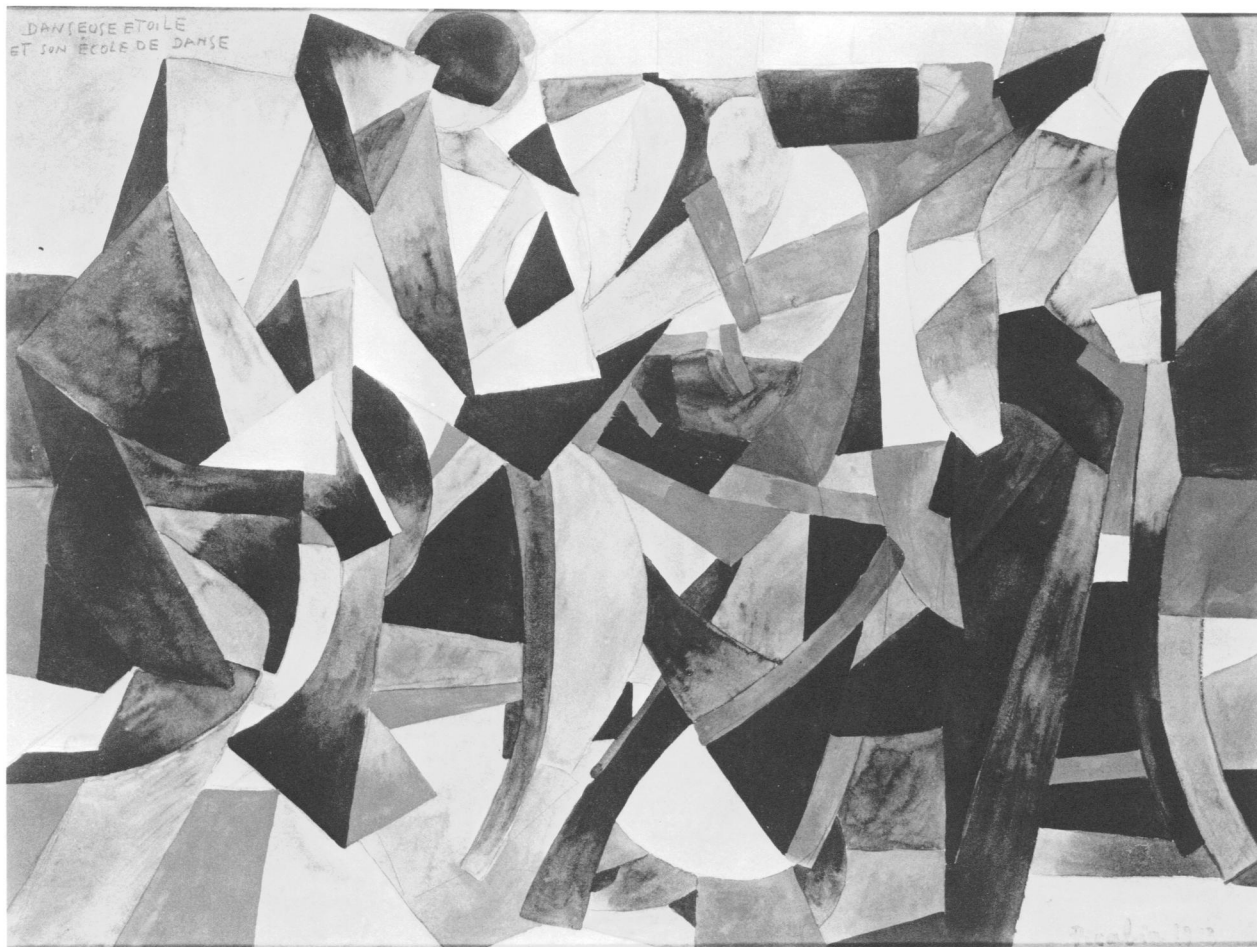




FIGURE 9

Improvisation 27 (Garden of Love), by Wassily Kandinsky, 1912. Oil on canvas. 47 $\frac{3}{8}$ \times 55 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.1

oil, *Danseuse-Hélice-Mer* (Dancer-Propeller-Sea) of 1915 (Figure 10), and four drawings, among which a *Still Life* in charcoal and pasted paper (Figure 11) is an excellent example of Severini's more strictly cubist work, while *Le Train dans la Ville* and *En Volant sur Reims* project the futurists' obsession with the dynamic *velocità* of contemporary life.

Earlier, in March 1914, Brancusi's first one-man show anywhere had been held at 291. It consisted of eight sculptures, among them, apparently, bronze and marble versions of *Mlle Pogany*, of which an example

in plaster had been one of the superior irritants at the Armory Show the year before. There was also *The First Step*, an important wood sculpture, primitivistic in technique and design, and one of the earliest indications of Brancusi's interest in African sculpture, which has since been destroyed (only the head survives, in the Musée de l'Art Moderne in Paris). The collection contains a version of the *Sleeping Muse* in bronze from the exhibition, and a large drawing in blue crayon, *Torso* (Figure 12), in which we can see Brancusi's hand groping for the ultimate reductive form.



FIGURE 10

Danseuse-Hélice-Mer, by Gino Severini, 1915. Oil on canvas. 41 1/2 x 43 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.3

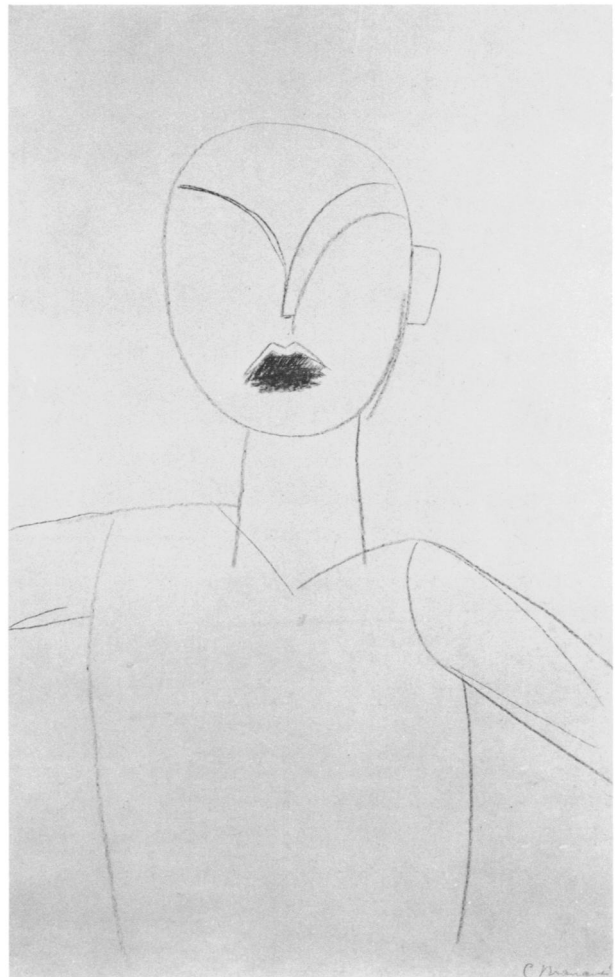
FIGURE 12

Torso, by Constantin Brancusi, before 1914. Blue crayon. 20 x 12 1/4 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.25



FIGURE 11

Still Life (Bottle, Vase, and Newspaper on a Table), by Gino Severini, 1914. Charcoal and pasted newspaper. 22 1/4 x 18 3/4 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.20



The next to the last exhibition at 291 was devoted to paintings and sculpture by Stanton Macdonald-Wright, who with Morgan Russell had created in Paris the movement they called synchromy, based upon Delaunay's coloristic mutation of cubism, and the proposition that color could be the principal means of creating form, light, and space. Wright's *Aeroplane Synchromy in Yellow and Orange* (Figure 13) dates from 1920, so it could not have been seen in the 1917 exhibition; but it is a worthy example of this short-lived experiment, the machine forms of the plane simultaneously dissolving into and being formed from the luminously colored atmosphere.

Two artists whom Stieglitz showed three times each at 291, surely a token of his continuing interest in them, have had little place left for them in recent histories of modern art, but at 291 between 1909 and 1917 they had at least a local habitation and a name. The drawings of the Spanish caricaturist Marius de Zayas bring vividly to life after more than half a century the people

FIGURE 13

Aeroplane Synchromy in Yellow and Orange, by Stanton Macdonald-Wright, 1920. Oil on canvas. 24 $\frac{1}{4}$ \times 24 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.52



FIGURE 14

Pamela Colman Smith, by Marius de Zayas. Charcoal. 21 $\frac{7}{8}$ \times 16 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.221

and personalities who surrounded Alfred Stieglitz. We have already noticed his amusing caricature of Pamela Colman Smith (Figure 14), which may just possibly tell us more about her work than the work itself does.

The second exhibition of de Zayas's work in 1910 must have been unusually sprightly. According to one of the critical accounts reprinted in the issue of *Camera Work* for July of that year,

On a stage built for the purpose nine feet wide and fifteen feet long, well known New York characters from the theatrical world and the world of art and letters and prominent people from the social world were represented in silhouettes cut out of thick cardboard, disporting themselves up and down Fifth Avenue on foot, in hansoms, taxicabs, private carriages, or public buses.

In his *Abstract Caricature of Stieglitz* (Figure 2), first reproduced in *Camera Work* in 1913, de Zayas factored out the details of his subject's physiognomy

until all that was left was a hint of the hypnotic expression of Stieglitz's eyes in the midst of arcane algebraic equations. The latter recall the times as much as the man, for this was the period when Picabia's mathematical symbols had already been adopted by a young American painter, John Covert, a cousin of Walter Conrad Arensberg, whose nightly receptions during the first years of the war were a ribald counterattraction to the serious conversations on lower Fifth Avenue.

For many years before his death in 1965 Abraham Walkowitz was better known as an indefatigable gallerygoer than as the artist he had been a half-century before. Like those to whom Stieglitz would finally and exclusively commit himself, Walkowitz had been in Europe early on, and when he returned to New York,

FIGURE 15

The Kiss, by Abraham Walkowitz, 1906. Pencil. $9\frac{3}{8} \times 6\frac{3}{4}$ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.179



he brought with him proofs of the new spirit abroad in Paris. His talent was perhaps fatally superficial, because he never succeeded in driving his pictorial ideas to a secure conclusion, but that Stieglitz recognized in his work something as yet not found in American painting we can perhaps still see in the pencil drawing of *The Kiss*, done in Paris in 1906 (Figure 15). The influence of Maillol is overwhelming, and of Maurice Denis as well, but the feeling for enlarged simple masses also predates Brancusi's first ovoid simplifications. On the basis of such a drawing one could have predicted further adventurous formal explorations, but Walkowitz settled for an easier direction. The lax lines and unsettled spotting of color, which are characteristic of his later watercolors, are like parodies of Rodin's disciplined example. Nonetheless, his thousand or so Rodinesque drawings of Isadora Duncan (of which there are seven in the collection) have considerable historic interest. So closely do they conform to the existing written descriptions of Isadora dancing that one wonders whether it might not be possible, by photographing them in sequence (there is another series in the Collection of the Société Anonyme at Yale), to achieve some sort of cinematic recreation of the great dancer in motion.

After these glimpses of the activities at 291 the perspective shifts, and the climax of the collection, so to speak, is reached with the groups of works by the five artists who claimed Stieglitz's attention in his later years. Stieglitz gave Marsden Hartley five one-man exhibitions at 291, only one less than Marin, and he showed him also, although less often, at the Intimate Gallery and An American Place. Of the five oils and two pastels by Hartley in the collection, the early *Portrait of a German Officer*, painted in Berlin in 1914, is one of his most famous works, an abstractly symbolic statement of German militarism executed with a powerful brush in the harsh colors of the imperial German flag. But the beginnings of Hartley's expressionism lay further back than his sojourn of 1914 in Berlin. As early as 1909, under the influence of Albert Pinkham Ryder, he had painted *Dark Mountain No. 1* (Figure 16), which carries on the reverse of the composition board the revealing inscription by Stieglitz: "In Mr. Hartley's opinion the finest, most expressive example of his work that year. Never exhibited." By 1916 Hartley was back in America and at Provincetown where he



FIGURE 16

Dark Mountain No. 1, by Marsden Hartley, 1909. Oil on composition board. $13\frac{3}{8} \times 11\frac{1}{8}$ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.47

painted Movement No. 5, Provincetown Houses (Figure 17). The prim colonial cottages of that old American seaside town have a strongly Hanseatic look, reminiscent of Feininger, who had chosen to remain in Germany, but for all this, in his passionate acceptance of the New England landscape Hartley had found the subject matter that from then on formed the basis for his remarkably personal yet unmistakably American brand of expressionism.

Charles Demuth first appeared in an exhibition Stieglitz arranged at the Anderson Galleries in 1925 to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of 291 (the others included Marin, O'Keeffe, Dove, Hartley, and Strand), and he was given two one-man exhibitions at the Intimate Gallery, in 1926 and 1929. By then Demuth was master of his own crisp brand of Americanized cubism, in which he executed his immaculate but bleak cityscapes of the decaying industrial architecture and machinery of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Machinery of 1920 (Figure 18) is not only a characteristic but also an eminently successful example of Demuth's ability to equate accurate—in this connection one wants to say "photographic"—observation with an abstract design that has its own independent power. The Metropolitan's collection, which includes seventeen of his watercolors, also contains one of Demuth's best-known oils, "I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold" of 1928, based on a poem by William Carlos Williams

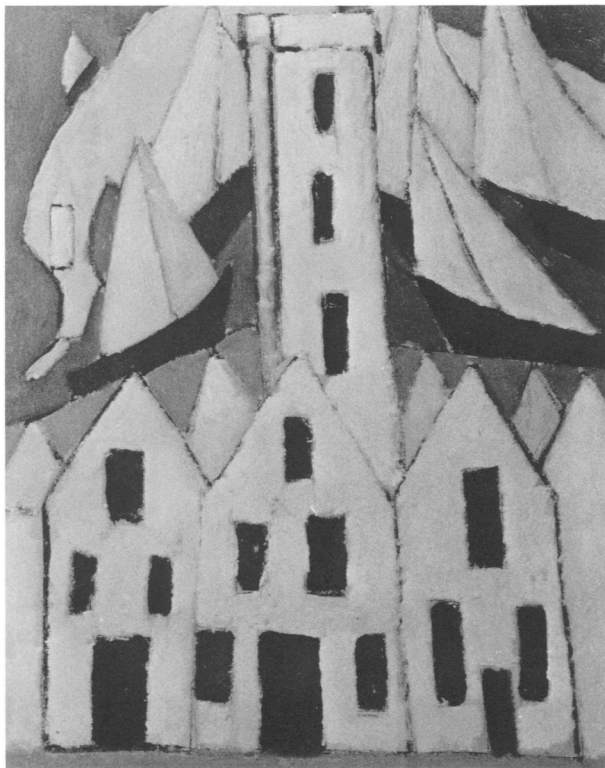


FIGURE 17

Movement No. 5, Provincetown Houses, by Marsden Hartley, 1916. Oil on composition board. 20×16 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.43

FIGURE 18

Machinery, by Charles Demuth, 1920. Tempera and pencil on cardboard. $24 \times 19\frac{3}{8}$ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.59.2

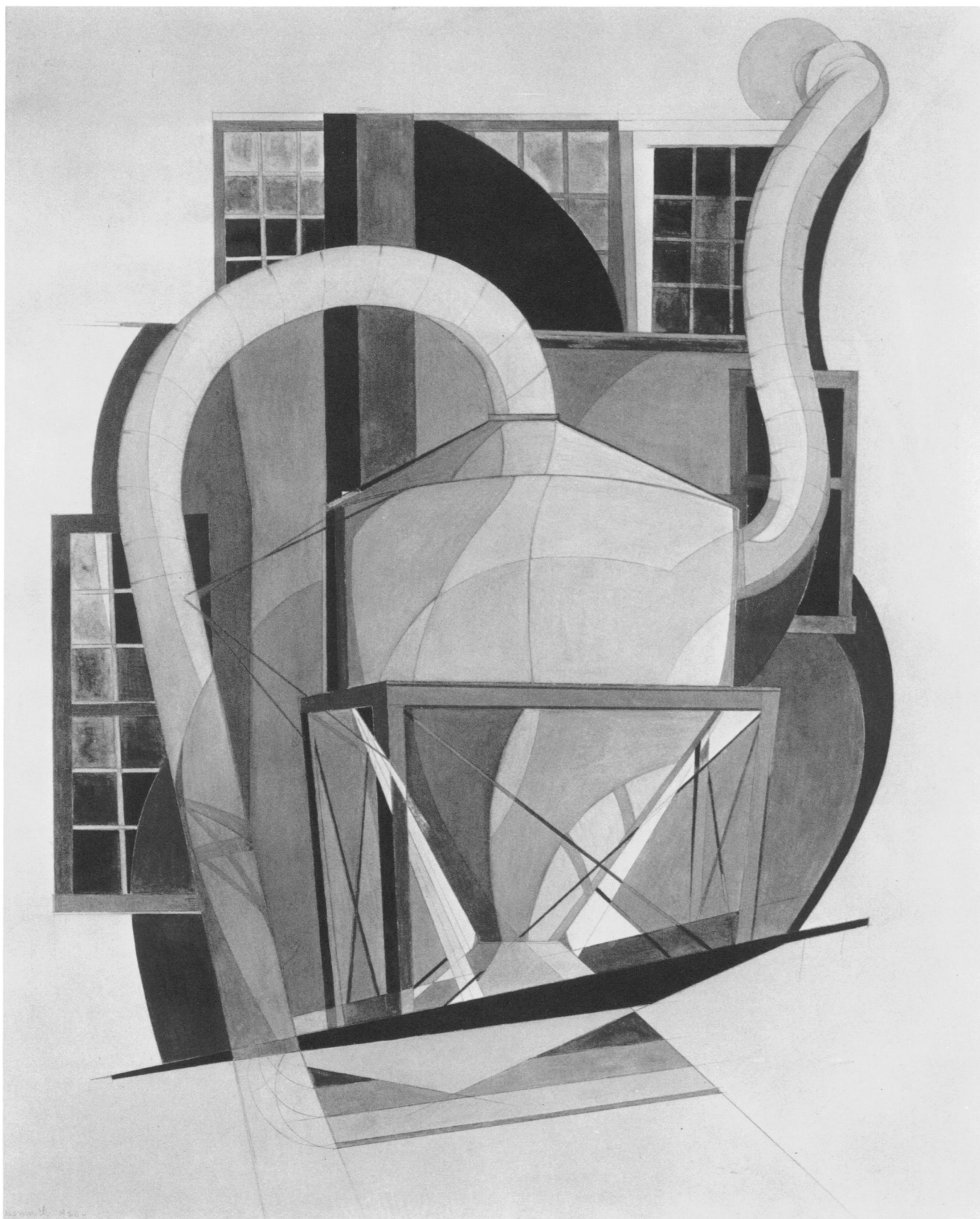


FIGURE 19
Red Cabbages,
Rhubarb, and
Orange, by
Charles Demuth,
1929. Water-
color. $13\frac{1}{2} \times 19\frac{3}{8}$
in. The Metro-
politan Museum
of Art, Alfred
Stieglitz Collec-
tion, 49.70.57

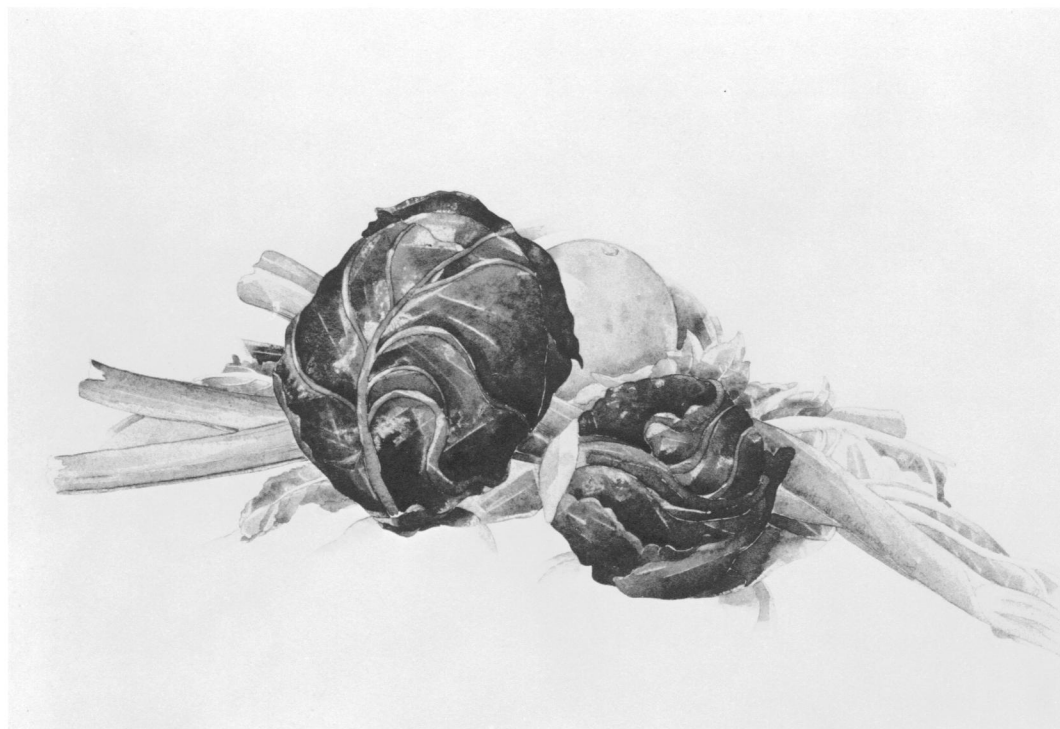
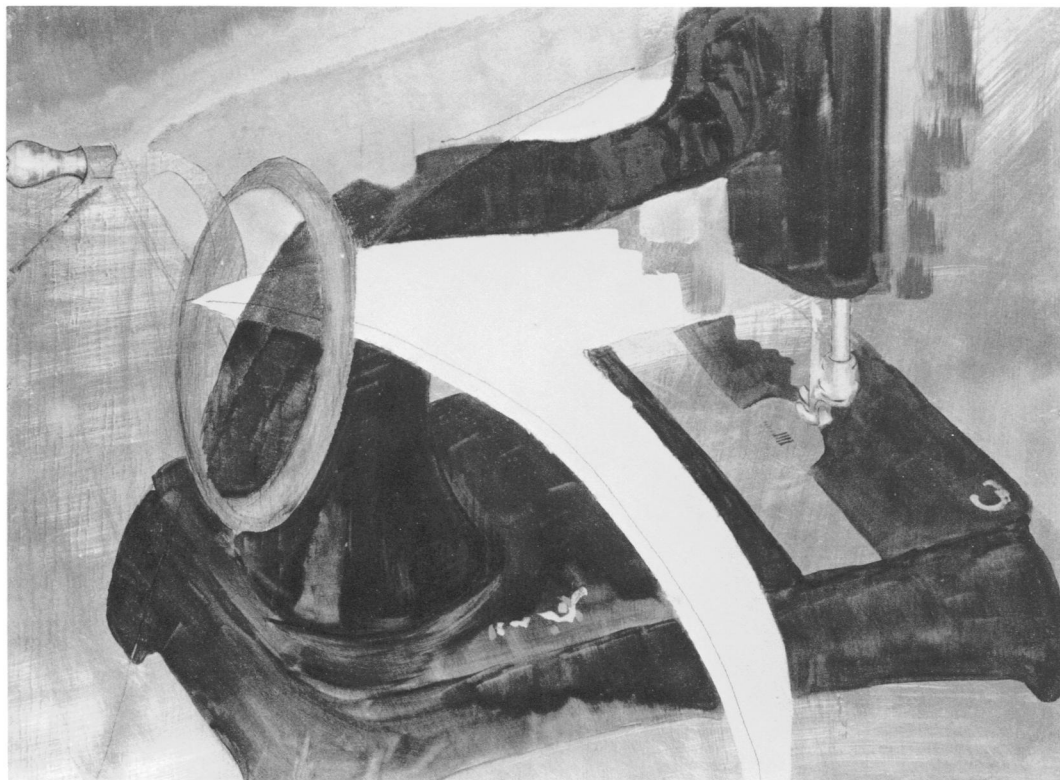


FIGURE 20
Hand Sewing
Machine, by
Arthur G. Dove,
1927. Oil on
metal with ap-
plied cloth. $14\frac{7}{8} \times 19\frac{3}{4}$ in. The
Metropolitan
Museum of Art,
Alfred Stieglitz
Collection,
49.92.2



and intended as a tribute to the poet in the form of a "poster portrait." A contrasting aspect of Demuth's talent appears in the watercolor *Red Cabbages, Rhubarb, and Orange* of 1929 (Figure 19). It may not be the most complex of Demuth's impeccably ordered still lifes of fruit and flowers, but in its simplicity and clarity it has its own perfection, suggesting the similar qualities that Stieglitz admired so much in the work of Georgia O'Keeffe.

The interest in machinery, and in the invention of machinelike forms, which we can trace from Picabia through Macdonald-Wright to Demuth, appears again in Arthur G. Dove's curious collage in cloth and paint on metal, *Hand Sewing Machine* of 1927 (Figure 20), where the sweep of the design, and the equivocal treatment of the separate shapes, which vacillate between abstract and representational, are unmistakably Dove's. The much earlier *Pagan Philosophy* (Figure 21), a pastel of 1913, reminds us that Dove had been one of the first American painters to conceive of a completely abstract or nonobjective design, based upon the experience of nature, but a nature purged of natural appearances. Such is the important *Nature Symbolized, No. 2*, of 1911, which is now in the Stieglitz Collection in the Art Institute of Chicago, one of the first total abstractions painted by an American, and within less than a year of Kandinsky's breakthrough of 1910. The collection also includes, among thirty-two paintings, watercolors, and drawings by Dove, the *Portrait of Ralph Dusenberry*, one of Dove's humorous collages, in this instance constructed of bits of wood and paint, the whole framed by a carpenter's folding rule.

John Marin commanded Stieglitz's affection and esteem longer than any other artist, in fact from 1909, when he first showed his work at 291, until his death in 1946. It seems proper then that the group of Marin's works should be the largest in the collection, fifty-nine in all, including representative examples of every period, from a watercolor of a London omnibus of 1908 to the watercolor of *Bathers, Addison, Maine*, of 1941. To this list may be added the seventy-four etchings and five paintings, two in oil, from 1929 to 1942, which Marin presented to the collection in exchange for works he considered too tentative to be retained permanently. Among the early New York paintings is an interesting association item, a watercolor of 1911 of the view looking down Fifth Avenue from 291, executed



FIGURE 21
Pagan Philosophy, by Arthur G. Dove, 1913.
Pastel. 21 1/2 x 17 7/8 in. The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.74

in Marin's earlier impressionist manner. More characteristic of the modern note that Marin introduced at 291 is the 1914 watercolor of St. Paul's (Figure 22), in which the dynamics of cubist disintegration that Marin had seen in Delaunay's views of the Eiffel Tower have been used to interpret the peaks of Manhattan.

Among the noble watercolors of the 1920s and 1930s the *Two-Master Becalmed* of 1923 (Figure 23) reveals Marin's mature control both of the watercolor medium and of the architecture of design. There are suggestions here of Cézanne, rather than of Delaunay, in the balance between abstract and representational forms, be-

tween color and space, so that the often feverish restlessness of the New York views is replaced by the monumental dignity of a unified image. The same effect prevails in *White Mountains, Autumn*, of 1927 (Figure 24), so opposite in its effect of sweeping objectivity to Hartley's much earlier *Dark Mountain No. 1* (Figure 16), with its aggressive and gloomy introspection.

The fourteen paintings and drawings by Georgia O'Keeffe were selected by Miss O'Keeffe herself to become a part of the Stieglitz Collection. There are three early abstract drawings of 1915, from the period

FIGURE 22

St. Paul's, Manhattan, by John Marin, 1914. Watercolor. 15½ × 18¾ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.110

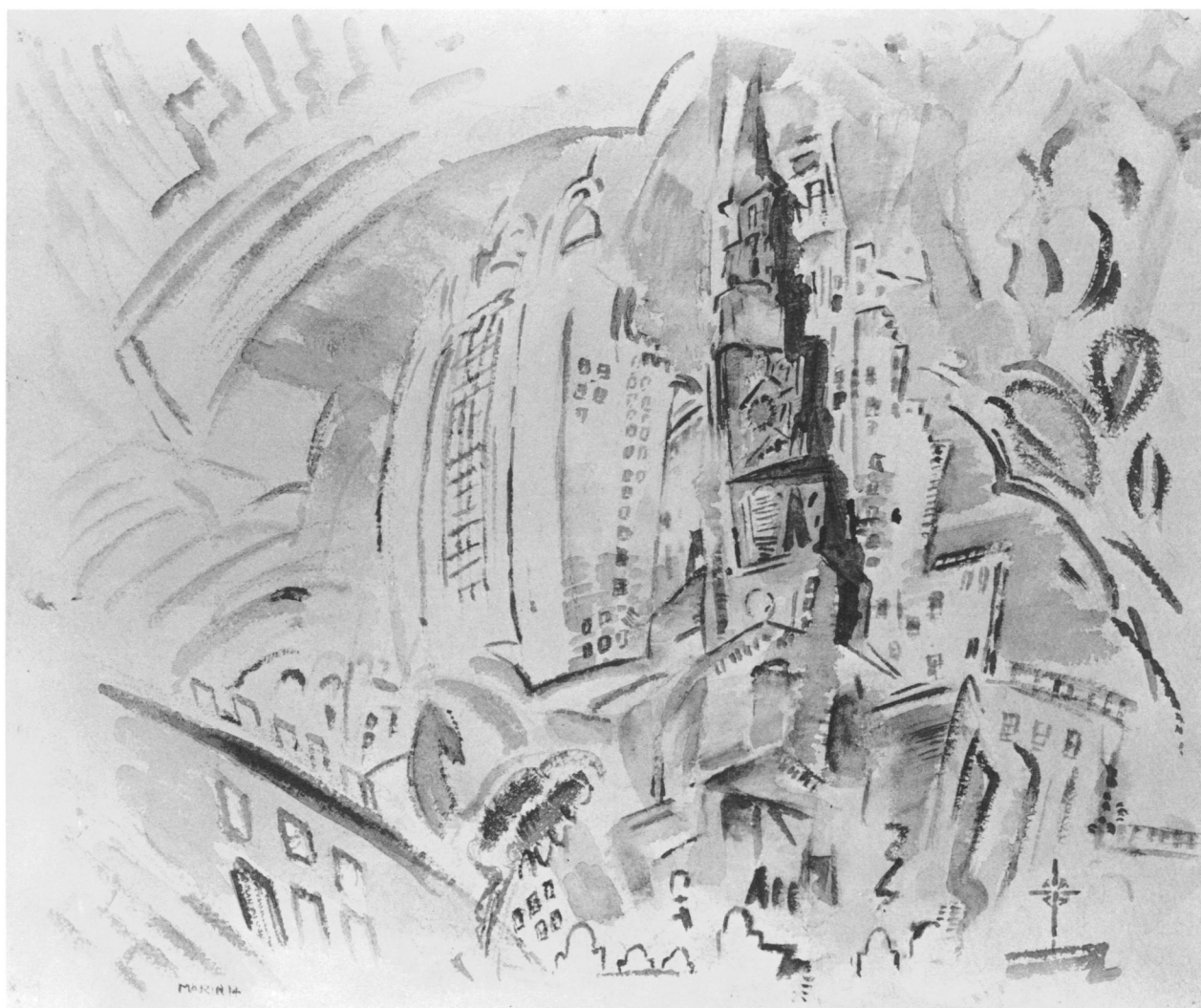


FIGURE 23
Two-Master Becalmed,
Maine, by John Marin,
1923. Watercolor. 16 $\frac{3}{8}$ ×
19 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, Alfred
Stieglitz Collection,
49.70.128

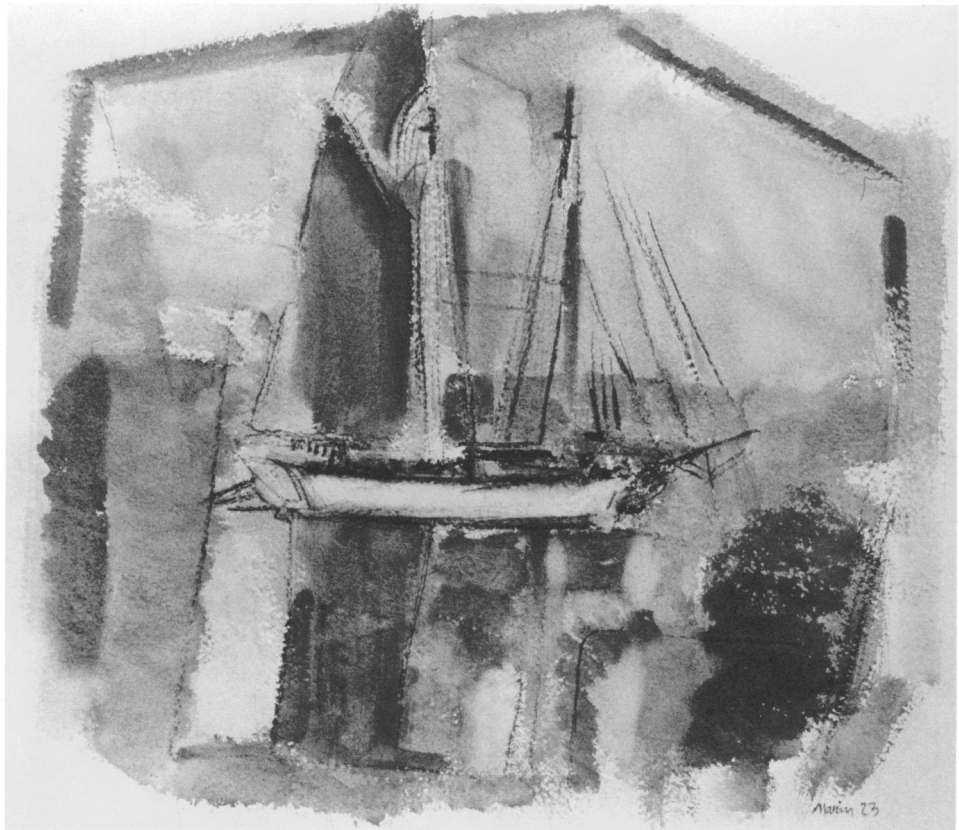


FIGURE 24
White Mountains, Au-
turnn, by John Marin,
1927. Watercolor. 19 $\frac{1}{4}$ ×
24 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, Alfred
Stieglitz Collection,
49.70.136

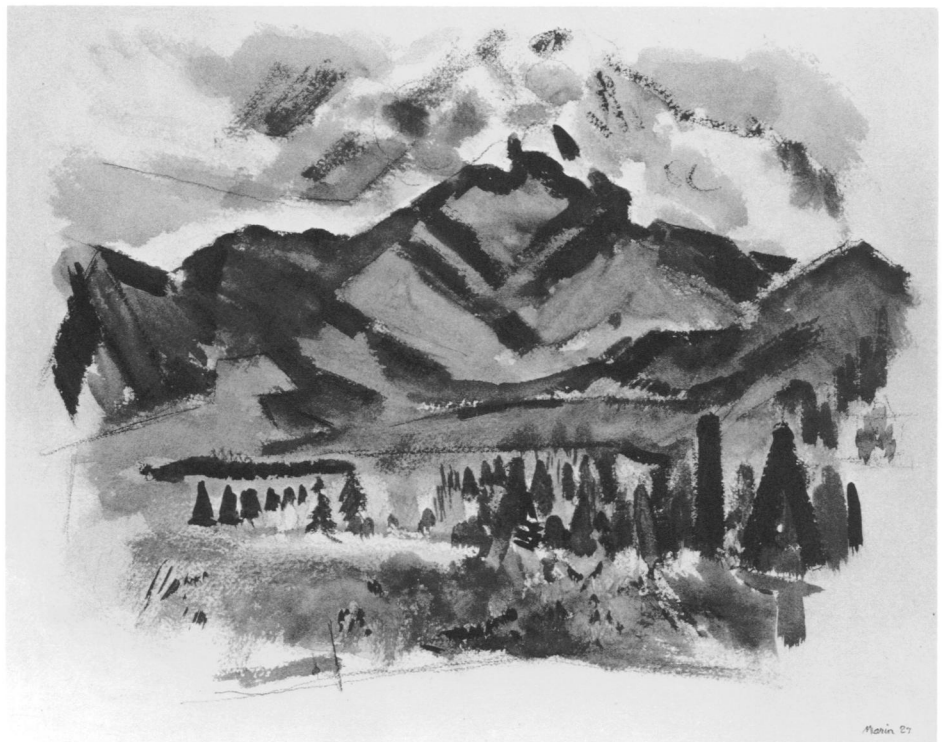




FIGURE 25
Deer's Horn, near Cameron (From *The Faraway Nearby*), by Georgia O'Keeffe, 1938. Oil on canvas. 36 × 40 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.37.11

when her work first came to Stieglitz's attention, and just before he included her drawings in a group show of 1916 and her first one-man exhibition the following year. Among the oils, which date from 1924 to 1944, are such familiar and important paintings as *Black Iris* of 1926, *Black Abstraction* of 1927, *Ranchos Church* of 1930, and *White Canadian Barn No. 2* of 1932. These are deservedly well known as masterpieces of structural clarity, comparable in their own way to the achievements of Stieglitz himself in his photographs of trees and clouds taken during his summers at Lake George. *Deer's Horn, near Cameron* (Figure 25) of 1938 may be taken as a paradigm of O'Keeffe's style in those years when *An American Place* harbored that special tradition of American painting between the wars. The subtitle of the painting, *From the Faraway Nearby*, communicates that mystical quality in O'Keeffe's vision, enhanced by the clarity of the New Mexican atmosphere, where objects far away, in this instance the

barren butte in the distance, impinge upon the nearer vision.

Before Alfred Stieglitz died in 1946, the activities of 291 had already become part of our country's historical past, and the tradition that he had fostered at *An American Place* was being eclipsed by the ruthless power and massive scale of American abstract expressionism. More recently it has seemed as if the values that Stieglitz upheld have also gone the way of history, but to say that Stieglitz's efforts were of only historical importance would be to claim too little, as well as to becloud the issue. American art must constantly re-appraise American sensibilities, and for the 1940s and 1950s there had to be a new kind of painting. Stieglitz's accomplishment was to help us to discover what American painting could be in a period when few collectors, critics, or curators had confidence in the validity of strictly American forms of expression. That he created this confidence and by so doing helped his chosen painters to create their best work can never go unrecognized.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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