

1933 REVISITED:
AMERICAN MASTERS
OF THE EARLY THIRTIES

**1933 REVISITED:
AMERICAN MASTERS
OF THE EARLY THIRTIES**

**SORDONI
ART GALLERY**

Wilkes College
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

**MARCH 20
~APRIL 24,
1983**

*Exhibition organized by
William Sterling and Judith O'Toole
in conjunction with the
Fiftieth Anniversary of the Founding of Wilkes College*

*Funded by grants from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts,
the John Sloan Memorial Foundation,
and the Andrew J. Sordoni Foundation.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Acknowledgments	4
Lenders to the Exhibition	5
American Art in the Early Thirties	6
Comments on the Exhibition	12
List of Works	17

INTRODUCTION

This exhibition, in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Wilkes College, is directed to the re-creation of the American artistic environment of 1933. The value of such a project lies in its potential of allowing us to ignore, for the moment, some of the stereotypes and, perhaps, distortions which have accrued to the period. It allows us to step back into the past and see what might have been seen, and valued, in 1933.

There was, of course, a great deal going on in the art world of the early Thirties, and any attempt to represent it faithfully would require an exhibition of enormous scope. Having neither the resources nor the space for such comprehensiveness, we must necessarily exercise our own historical selectivity in choosing works by some forty artists out of the several hundred who were truly eminent in that era. Our guiding principle in forming the exhibition has been authenticity to the period itself, as documented by contemporary sources, such as art periodicals and exhibition catalogues. Thus, some well-known artists, whom one might regard as more relevant to the present day, have been omitted in order

to make room for less well-known, but more characteristic, representatives of the period in question. The reputations of all the artists included in the exhibition were, however, well-established (or on the verge thereof) in the early Thirties. Artists like Sloan and Marin were already virtual "old masters." Others, like Gorky and Tomlin, were young "up-and-comers." Here, we see them all as contemporaries, responding to the varied but distinct influences of a particular moment in history.

For the purposes of continuity, we have concentrated on painting as a medium reflecting the gamut of artistic persuasions in the early Thirties. Prints or drawings have been used where appropriate paintings could not be obtained. The few sculptures have been included to suggest the dominant tastes in three-dimensional art in this period. The works range in date from 1927 to 1933. The only large group of artists not represented here is the traditional "academy," whose work changed little from generation to generation and remained largely immune to the intellectual and social issues of the period.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1933 Revisited: American Masters of the Early Thirties is an exhibition conceived and initiated one year ago by my predecessor, Dr. William Sterling. The theme was chosen in part as a celebration of the founding, fifty years ago, of Bucknell Junior College which was to become in 1947 Wilkes College. The exhibition serves also as a continuation of a series of exhibitions organized by the Sordoni Art Gallery to recognize, investigate, and celebrate the beginnings of modern art in the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Dr. Sterling and I discovered as plans progressed for this exhibition, that it is unusual to have a single year as a central theme to an exhibition. The record-keeping systems in museums and galleries are organized in a manner to accommodate searches by artist, school, or movement. Artists, too, are notoriously casual about dating works and rarely keep chronological records.

However, the validity and importance of an exhibition organized in this manner is clear. Our point has not been to

recreate a single school or style but to recreate the character of a very specific moment in time. We have included artists of different and sometimes opposing styles. We have caught some artists at the outset of their careers and others at their penultimate moment. We have tried to evoke the temper of the art scene centered in New York during the depths of the Great Depression and on the brink of the WPA projects.

Many people have contributed their efforts to make this exhibition a success. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Sterling for initiating the exhibition and providing the catalogue essay. Mrs. Helen Farr Sloan lent invaluable assistance by supplying primary research sources and suggesting possible loans. Miss Antoinette Kraushaar of Kraushaar Galleries and her assistant Carol Pesner generously availed their files for our research. I am indebted to all the institutions and private collectors who have made works available for loan. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the John Sloan Memorial Foundation, and the Andrew J. Sordoni Foundation through whose generosity this exhibition was made possible.

Judith H. O'Toole
Director
Sordoni Art Gallery

LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy
The Art Museum, Princeton University
Brooks Memorial Art Gallery
Butler Institute of American Art
March Avery Cavanaugh
Delaware Art Museum
Kennedy Galleries, Inc.
Kraushaar Galleries
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute
Museum of Art, Pennsylvania State University

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
The Newark Museum
New Britain Museum of American Art
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
The Phillips Collection
Robert Schoelkopf Gallery
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery,
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Vassar College Art Gallery
The Whitney Museum of American Art
Zabriskie Gallery

AMERICAN ART IN THE EARLY THIRTIES

1933 would seem to offer students of American art little to become aroused over. It saw no epic event like the great Armory Show of 1913, which first placed European modernism squarely before the American public. Nor did it proffer any exhibition so radically controversial as that of "The Eight" in 1908. Even when events of this magnitude cannot be singled out every year, the eras of the early Twenties or the late Forties, to cite two examples, were rich with far-reaching incidents in the world of art. It is difficult, however, to frame the early Thirties in the context of revolutionary innovation or climactic achievement.

After the fervid pace of the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Thirties opened less frenetically. It was a time for reflection, the refixing of one's bearings, and, in some cases, retrenchment. This situation was compounded by the Great Depression which had cast shadows across the most optimistic paths. While many artists, in their perpetual state of pecuniary doubt, were hardly affected by that event which drove some more affluent citizens to drastic acts, the art world was, nonetheless, subject to a marked decline in patronage. At the same time, any suggestions of self-absorption in one's art may have seemed frivolous when millions were out of work. During times of hardship, people tend to fall back on those traditions in their culture which express permanence and security. The drive for adventure and experiment must wait for less-troubled times.

The marking of time, which characterized the art of the early Thirties, occurred in Europe as well as in America. The heyday of Cubism, Fauvism, Futurism, and many other revolutionary movements was over, though certainly not forgotten. After the early Twenties, only one significant new art movement emerged prior to World War II, and that was Surrealism. Artists who had radically altered the course of art through their innovations in style before World War I — artists such as Picasso, Matisse, and Kirchner — frequently

seemed to turn back to earlier, more familiar modes of expression after the war. As an example of this shift, one can cite the widespread revival of Neoclassicism (albeit in a streamlined version). In America, such artists as Max Weber (no. 39) and Marsden Hartley, who had been among our first true abstract painters, reverted to more representational styles.¹

These apparent reversions were not necessarily repudiations of these artists' former radicalism. They resulted from many factors influencing the arts and society during the inter-war period. Among these may be listed a certain intellectual fatigue which probably overcame some modernists after the hectic opening decades of the century. For many, the constant push to expand the frontiers of artistic expression had either exceeded their resources or caused them momentarily to lose their sense of direction. It is also not unusual that, as the impetus of one trend begins to slow, the dialectic of culture replaces it with its opposite. At the same time, important changes of concern exerted great influence on the styles and aspirations of this era. That which was so compellingly urgent in 1913 or in 1923 no longer held the stage in 1933.

"Modernism is played out."
(Royal Cortissoz, conservative critic)

"The Academy is dead."
(Warren Cheney, progressive critic)²

A perusal of the art journals of the early Thirties reveals several prominent issues of the day. Although the battle between the modernists and the traditionalists had gone on publicly since the emergence of "The Eight" early in the century, it seemed to reach a stalemate in the Thirties. Debate on this issue remained popular but repetitious. The basic arguments had been made and the lines clearly drawn well before 1933. The mobile assaults of the Teens and Twenties, when modernism made strong advances in American culture, were replaced by trench warfare. It would require new strategies to enable one side or the other to mount a successful offensive once more. This, in fact, happened with the found-



17. EDWARD HOPPER
Farmhouse at Essex, Mass., 1929
Courtesy of
Kennedy Galleries, Inc. NY, NY

ing of the American Abstract Artists group in 1936, and the early signals of the Abstract Expressionist movement in the works of Jackson Pollock, Arshile Gorky, and Franz Kline.

In 1933, however, every sign suggested that modernism had gone about as far as it would go. Major and seminal abstract artists such as Stuart Davis and Arthur Dove were still working in that vein with considerable success, but their legions were hardly growing. Many other modernists, like the aforementioned Max Weber, had apparently made peace with the conservatives, even if they had not joined them outright. It was not just a matter of numbers either. The critic Ralph Flint, reviewing the large American show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1932, saw no one who could stand beside the greatest European modernists, except perhaps John Marin.³ Young American artists still headed for Paris by the boatload, but once there they were likely to favor Derain's quasi-cubism over Picasso's more radical variety, or Dufy's mild Fauvism over Matisse's. Critics viewing the 1933 Carnegie International noted the compromise between radical and conservative schools, with a more noticeable tilt toward the latter than had occurred for a number of years.⁴ Indeed, this very compromisiveness suggests a lack of real force on either side. As Margaret Breuning noted in her review of the Carnegie show, there was a "languor, a sad perfunctory note throughout the galleries . . . (an) aesthetic fatigue."⁵ As if to confirm this standoff in quite literal terms, two autonomous juries were chosen to select the 1933 Chicago Annual. One jury represented the conservatives, the other the progressives.⁶

*"Picasso's full-face profiles often give one the sensation of seeing double. Their place is not in the barroom."*⁷

Issues outside the realm of art clearly had an effect on the lives and attitudes of artists, but just how and to what extent these issues were translated into art often lack such clear definition. When Prohibition was repealed in 1933, the writer of the lines quoted above foresaw more work for artists, in the form of new paintings for all the resurrected bars. He then

went on to warn against the dangers of abstraction to the bloodshot eye. This facetious anti-modernist tract actually tells us more about the effects of the Depression than those of Prohibition, for it was the former which had seriously jeopardized the livelihood of many artists. We must delve beyond the economics of the situation, however, and ask how the styles and themes of American art were influenced by that most repercussive event of the interwar era.

Unquestionably, the Depression had created a climate of anxiety throughout society, and artists may have responded by staying with, or returning to, the tried and true. Reviewers of the 1931 American Annual at the St. Louis Museum observed a retreat from the more radical forms of modernism, and suggested that the Depression was the cause. They noted a return to an emphasis on craftsmanship which seemed very much tied to the "law of survival."⁸ It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this condition was universal. At the Minneapolis Annual of the same year, a strong modernist trend was noted, and the American Art Dealers Association found that the art market (as of 1931) had remained fairly stable despite the Depression.⁹

While the precise impact of the Depression upon American art requires further investigation, it is clear that an increasing number of artists turned to themes extolling the virtues of honest labor and the abundancies of the American landscape, as well as themes which captured the loneliness or poverty of the less fortunate. Although most of these themes had predated the Depression, they became far more common in the Thirties.

Overt political statements in the art of this period were less numerous than we might expect. Few American artists had anything to say about such events as the rise of Stalin in Russia or Hitler in Germany. The most politically controversial works of art in 1933 were probably the two murals executed by the Mexican painter Diego Rivera for the Ford Motor Company in Detroit and Rockefeller Center in New York City. His sympathetic references to Russian Com-

munist caused an uproar among critics and public alike.¹⁰ To be sure, there always flourished a cadre of artist-activists of one stripe or another. In the Thirties, men such as William Gropper, Ben Shahn, and Thomas Hart Benton created works with sharp political content, but no real groundswell of political expression took place, except in the realm of journalistic art. The relatively high social consciousness of the Roosevelt era (which began in 1933) seems rather to have found its main outlet in the more sublimated work of the American Scene painters. A new nationalistic positivism had begun to offset the economic negativism spawned by the Depression.

"No American art can come to those who do not live an American life, who do not have an American psychology, and who cannot find in America justification for their lives.

(Thomas Hart Benton)¹¹

After the tempering of modernist fervor and spurred on by a growing sense of nationalism, many artists sought fresh inspiration in the sweeping expanses and intimate corners of their native land. Like their contemporaries in music and literature, they engaged in a vast search for a distinctly American expression. Although preceded by earlier manifestations of a similar spirit, such as the Hudson River School and the Ash-Can style, the American Scene movement of the Thirties (sometimes called Regionalism) was more self-aware as a programmatic effort to fashion an indigenous American art of substance and uniqueness. From the plains to the mountains, from small towns to cities, artists as varied as Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, Isabel Bishop, Charles Sheeler, and countless others joined in this effort. After its first major impact during the 1931-32 exhibition season, the movement was in full swing by 1933.

Highminded nationalism notwithstanding, the American Scene movement also reflected economic isolationism. Well into our century, the American art consumer tended to do most of his shopping in Europe. It didn't matter if his tastes

were traditional or modern; Europe still represented for most Americans *haute culture* as well as *haute couture*. Only the less affluent had to resort to the collecting of "provincial" home-grown work. And even these collectors often sought the opportunity to buy third-rate European pictures rather than first-rate American ones. The cachet of a "Made in Paris" label remained irresistible to uninformed American entrepreneurs. This state of affairs gave rise to an energetic campaign by American artists and their dealers to promote their own interests. The National Commission to Advance American Art was established in 1933 in order to combat the inflated reputation and highpowered merchandising of European "masters." Similarly, the American Artists Professional League sought to terminate "a vicious system of which our artists . . . have been victims." Albert Reid, speaking for the League, referred to the "methods of dumping upon this country, in unbelievable quantities, worthless and questionable foreign art. Hoards of foreign artists, who were hard put to make any kind of living at home, discovered that our country was rich pickings."¹² The League's slogan, "Buy American Pictures First," was, therefore, more protectionist than chauvinistic. How ironic that fifty years later, American art is eagerly sought the world over, while those pillars of America's pre-war economy, steel and automobiles, now make the same plea for protectionism.

An important impetus for the cultivation of American art and for an American art public emerged in 1931 with the founding of the Whitney Museum in New York City, which devoted itself exclusively to the collection and exhibition of American art. An equally significant, though temporary, institution was the Federal Art Project, a government-sponsored program of the WPA which was authorized late in 1933 and commenced operation in 1934. Before it came to a close nine years later, the program provided commissions and stipends for more than five thousand artists. Most of the artists in this exhibition benefited to one degree or another from its support. The exhibition itself represents a cross-section of styles and themes which prevailed at the commencement of this largest single exercise in artistic patronage in history.



26. GEORGE BENJAMIN LUKS
Red Barn, Berkshire Hills, c. 1930
 Collection Museum of Art,
 The Pennsylvania State University

The Federal Art Project sustained and nurtured many of the future leaders of modern American art, but the majority of works produced for the program related to the American Scene movement and reflected that movement's emphasis on subject matter rather than style as a means of identifying an indigenous American expression. One of the ironies of the American Scene movement was its basic stylistic conservatism while constituting the dominant artistic persuasion of the politically liberal Federal Art Project. Although many of the artists involved fostered deep concerns for the social problems of the day, many others danced to the tune of right-wing nationalism. A splinter group of Social Realists, harboring strong leftist sympathies, emerged from the American Scene movement between 1933 and 1935. In their eyes, the Scene painters had become isolationists and even fascists.¹³

"The wave of deplorable nationalism (which we are witnessing) uses pseudoaesthetic arguments to arouse the lay mind against abstraction and other individualism in art because the latter stands in the way of political and racial and economic mass-passions."

(Morris Davidson, at the Whitney Symposium of 1933)¹⁴

Ultimately, it was the revival of aggressive modernist concerns, integrated and inflected in a peculiarly American way, which led to the future preeminence of American art. In 1933, this revival had not yet occurred. Nevertheless, some important groundwork was being laid. The Museum of Modern Art was founded in 1929 and opened its new building in 1932. The Carnegie International exhibitions in Pittsburgh continued to give exposure to important modernists. Picasso received honorary first prize in 1931 (though not with one of his more radical pieces). Segonzac took top honors in 1933, with the more conservative John Stuart Curry and Henry Varnum Poor in second and third places. Chicago's Century of Progress Exposition in 1933 concentrated on the *Art Deco* and *Art Moderne* styles in the design arts, which certainly helped to focus public attention on the modernist aesthetic. Ironically,

in the following year, one of the fountainheads of that aesthetic, the German Bauhaus, was shut down by the Nazi regime as a degenerate institution.

If the present exhibition is approximately reflective of the relative significance of the various styles and fashions in American art in the early Thirties, then it will be apparent that modernism in its radical forms held a minority position. It is clear that many of the traditionalists had faintheartedly adopted certain modernist elements (such as Miller's tendency to streamline his neo-Renaissance figures, no. 28, or Jones' simplification of tones and masses, no. 18); but at the same time, many of the modernists had turned back uneasily toward traditionalism (as in Weber's and Burchfield's landscapes, nos. 39 and 7). Even fully modernist statements, such as Davis' and Marin's, had been formulated ten to twenty years earlier. Modernism was by no means dying; it was momentarily stalled. In a sense, the early Thirties lacked an identifiable avant-garde. As mentioned earlier, the only major new style of this era was Surrealism, and that was poorly received in its first American appearance in 1931.

It is tempting to see a parallel between 1933 and 1983 in this regard. Much has been written recently about the "return to the figure" and the "return to realism" in contemporary art. A closer scrutiny of the situation suggests that these pronouncements are simplistic, at best. It is undeniable, though, that a greater quantity of representational art of various sorts is currently being shown in galleries normally reserved for the modernist avant-garde. Some critics see in these new representationalisms a self-conscious quoting of earlier styles, which depends more on fashion than on conviction.¹⁵

Similarly, no single movement, like Minimalism in the Seventies or Abstract Expressionism in the Fifties, appears to dominate the contemporary scene. 1983 and 1933 share, to some extent, a cultural pluralism, where diverse styles and critical positions jostle with each other in a state, more or less, of equivalence (although this is more evident in the Eighties than in the Thirties). Those conditions of fatigue, reaction,

and cultural vertigo cited as factors in the Thirties' situation may also be operative in the Eighties. But where the contemporary art world seems to be driven by a mechanism of anxiety and one-upmanship in the constant pressure for change (a mechanism well-oiled by dealers, critics, and art schools), the varied postures of the Thirties were based on a somewhat relativistic respect for the orthodoxies they represented. Taken as a whole, a certain placidity, indeed a "languor," as Ms. Breuning suggested at the time, seems to emanate from the art of that period. There are charm and interest and flashes of brilliance to be found there, but little hint of what was to come in the following decade.

COMMENTS ON THE EXHIBITION

The works comprising this exhibition have been chosen to reflect as faithfully as possible those styles and themes in American art which prevailed fifty years ago. Broadly considered, that era, like many others, supported progressive, moderate, and conservative tendencies. European modernism, which had begun to alter the direction of art in America by the early Twenties, continued to cast its rays, although its force had diminished. Indeed, many of the artists who were conspicuously avant-garde in the Thirties belonged to the first generation of modernism — people such as Stuart Davis, Arthur Dove, and John Marin. Younger artists, including Isabel Bishop, Aaron Bohrod, Joe Jones, and Bradley Walker Tomlin, showed little inclination to adopt the radical styles of their predecessors (although Tomlin, for one, joined the avant-garde later in his career).

Only Arshile Gorky, among the younger artists in this exhibition, was aggressively experimenting with the various possibilities of modernism. His *Landscape* (No. 15), with its combination of free drawing and sketchy brushwork approaching full abstraction, already suggests the mature abstract style which he evolved more than a decade later. Of the established modernists, most were committed to the

broad Cubist and Fauve traditions which had remained vital since their preeminence prior to World War I, as did their founders, Picasso and Matisse. These traditions had fostered, among other things, the simplification of form by means of geometry and bold color. This tendency to simplify was, indeed, pervasive in the Thirties, affecting progressives and conservatives alike.

Stuart Davis, one of the early proponents of modernism in America, had developed an energetic, planar style derived from Cubism. (The Braque-like *Still-Life*, No. 11, in this exhibition varies somewhat from his more familiar work, and probably reveals the renewed contact he made with Cubist sources during his visit to Paris in 1928.) John Marin, a virtual "old master" among the avant-garde, also continued to mine the rich vein he had struck two decades earlier, with its mingling of Cubism, Fauvism, and Futurism (No. 27).

Davis and Marin were hardly trendsetters in the Thirties, however. Their styles remained bold, but personal and self-generating. Perhaps their greatest influence at that time lay in providing an anchor for modernism in the midst of a wide current of indifference. The youthful Gorky, for example, cherished his contacts with Davis. Among the few artists who actually developed more radical styles in the early Thirties, Arthur Carles and Karl Knaths had moved from the orbit of Post-impressionism into that of Cubism. Carles (No. 8) blended into his Cubist space some of the explosive color and movement of Fauvism and Futurism, while Knaths (No. 20) developed a more linear Picassoesque manner.

European Cubism, itself, helped to produce two important new movements just after World War I — French Purism (led by the architect Le Corbusier and the painter Leger), and Dutch *De Stijl* (under the aegis of Mondrian). An American equivalent to these relatively austere styles emerged almost simultaneously, under the name of Precisionism. All three movements shared a predilection for streamlined surfaces, a love of modern machinery, and the belief that technology

would lead to a better world. The Precisionists are represented here by Louis Lozowick (No. 25), a Russian immigrant; Charles Sheeler (No. 31), and John Storrs (No. 35). These men had created pristine, semi-abstract styles in the Twenties, which evolved into somewhat more representational modes by the next decade. The geometric simplifications and streamlined surfaces of their earlier works remained constant, however.

The application of this style to the arts of design, often with an admixture of Neoclassicism, gave rise to the *art moderne* fashion which soon influenced the design of everything from refrigerators to movie houses. Many less avant-garde artists were also affected by this aesthetic, particularly Rockwell Kent and, among those in this show, Guy Pene Du Bois. Kent's heroic figures and spare landscapes asserted a hard, streamlined Neoclassicism, while Du Bois' softer, more simplified forms resembled somewhat phlegmatic versions of Oskar Schlemmer's Bauhaus figures (No. 13).

Neoclassicism had become a widespread influence in the Twenties, touching even Picasso. A related alternative was the Neo-Renaissance style, with its less severe manner of idealizing and streamlining the figure. Kenneth Hayes Miller, leader of the 14th Street group of artists, and his student Isabel Bishop were particularly partial to the art of Renaissance Italy, as can be seen in Miller's Raphaelesque shopper (No. 28) and Bishop's Perugino-like Union Square (No. 3). This somewhat more descriptive classicism nevertheless managed to look up-to-date in their works. Miller's surface design, held in pastel harmonies and undisturbed by the gentle chiaroscuro, mitigates the illusion of depth. Bishop unfurls her dense frieze of figures and its corresponding frieze of skyline geometry across the broad picture plane with only slight spatial interruptions. This subtle form of abstraction brought their work, however peripherally, into agreement with more radical styles. Indeed, it can be said of most of the artists in this exhibition that they tended to flatten space and call attention to surface.

Geometric simplification of form became a favored device among other moderates and conservatives as well. Tomlin (No. 37), Jones (No. 18), Leon Kroll (No. 21), Maurice Sterne (No. 34), Robert Brackman (No. 6), Henry Poor (No. 30), and William Zorach (No. 41) all used it to achieve a greater sense of volume and monumentality in their forms. Clarence Carter's and Edward Hopper's spare naturalism (Nos. 9 and 17), on the other hand, was more planar than volumetric, and ran closer to the austerities of Precisionism. Milton Avery's equally spare, but more abstract manner paralleled the art of Matisse (No. 1). Marguerite Zorach's almost *naif* style, rooted in Cubism, continued to explore the possibilities of full-surface patterning while reintegrating limited impressions of depth and mass (No. 40). John Sloan, operating from a more traditional position, also sought an interplay of volume and surface, through the parallel red modeling lines which he imposed upon his figures at this time (No. 32).

Although expressionistic elements appear in some of the works seen here, few American artists of this period were outright expressionists. The predominant emotional tone of art in the early Thirties is restrained. More often than not, artists strove for either classical reserve or romantic reverie in the moods and gestures of their figures. Color schemes tended to be muted or harmonious rather than saturated or shocking. Compositions similarly lacked uneasy tensions or conflicts, as a rule. Paint was usually applied with a gentleness of touch rather than with bravura sweeps of the brush. The pictures by Brackman (No. 6), Kroll (No. 21), and Sterne (No. 34) may be said to exemplify the "look" of the era.

Exceptions to this position of moderation were few and far between. Oscar Bluemner (No. 4) and Arthur Dove (No. 12), for example, created powerfully dramatic landscapes (both had ties with European expressionist movements prior to World War I), but John Marin (No. 27) and Charles Burchfield (No. 7) were usually more subdued in their use of emotive form in the Thirties than they had been a decade earlier. George Luks continued to wield a pugilistic brush, in

keeping with his lifestyle (No. 26), while Eugene Higgins called upon 19th century Romantic-Realism to animate his proletarians (No. 16).

One of the repeated criticisms of Franklin Watkins' *Suicide in Costume*, which took first prize in the 1931 Carnegie International, had been that it was overly dramatic. Looking back at it today, we might find it difficult to share that particular criticism. Tolerance for heavy emotional statements was apparently not widespread in the Thirties. Watkins' *Girl Thinking* (No. 38) seems to be one of the most overtly emotional figures in this exhibition, but hers is not an aggressive emotion; she appears more as a lost soul. Melancholy and resignation typified this period of American art more than hand-wringing angst. On the other side of the emotional median, heroic grace, as in the works of Rockwell Kent, was usually favored over exuberant animation. Post-depression America sought verity and stability in an art of moderation.

Only a few artists, such as Walt Kuhn (No. 22), injected an edge of psychic intensity into their figures, or in the case of the sculptor Gaston Lachaise, grandiose sexuality (No. 24). Even artists who were devoted to liberal causes — and many were — rarely exercised their activism aggressively in their "fine" art. Quite a few, like Benton, contributed cartoons and illustrations to progressive magazines and newspapers (No. 2), but only a handful imitated their admired Mexican colleagues Rivera and Orozco by creating politically potent "serious" art at this time (Higgins and Jones are examples). It is tempting to see the rise and spread of the passionate Abstract Expressionist style in the Forties as a reaction to the restrained Thirties. Of course, the creation of that weighty movement involved many factors, but there was clearly room in American art for the absorption of generous amounts of overt emotionalism, whether psychologically or politically motivated.

A kind of subdued romanticism rather than expressionism characterized the art of the early Thirties. Not surprisingly, a great deal of the American Scene painting falls into that

category, since this movement thrived on sentiments of nostalgia, affirmation, and optimism. No single style dominated the movement, although most of its members, concerned as they were with reportorial and allegorical aims, chose to work in unradical manners. Subject matter, rather than style, defined the movement. The ubiquitous themes were landscape, particularly involving farmlife (e.g. Burchfield, No. 7), cityscape, with special attention to ghetto life (e.g. Jones, No. 18), and the human figure, usually in genre contexts (e.g. Soyer, No. 36). Those artists inclined toward a romantic conception of the American scene included John Steuart Curry (No. 10), Morris Kantor (No. 19), Isaac Soyer (No. 36), and Francis Speight (No. 33). Lozowick and Sheeler (Nos. 25 and 31) also shared this approach with their immaculate and heroic urban studies.

Not all Scenists embraced the romantic, however. While the movement had firm roots in the evocative nineteenth century landscape tradition, it had even more immediate ties to the early twentieth century realist tradition, exemplified by members of "The Eight" and the "Ash-Can School." Clarence Carter (No. 9), Jerome Myers (No. 29), Kenneth Hayes Miller (No. 28), and Isabel Bishop (No. 3) seemed to pursue a course of objectivity, although sometimes in stylized terms. Actually, hard and fast categorizations along the lines of "romantic" or "realist" are difficult to make with the artists of the American Scene. The movement's complex aims of objective analysis and heroic or lyrical affirmation, coupled with an American tradition of pragmatic idealism, made for a continual crossover of attitudes. The realism in Bishop's *Dante and Virgil in Union Square* (No. 3), for example, is clearly mitigated by its Neo-Renaissance idealism, as well as its allegorical overtones. (The picture was inspired by the artist's reading in Dante's *Inferno* of passing multitudes which reminded her of the daily throngs in Union Square.)

One of the popular interpretations of the American Scene movement rests upon its "regionalist" character, in terms of styles and themes. The Museum of Modern Art helped to in-



27. JOHN MARIN
Marin Island, Maine, 1932
Courtesy of
Kennedy Galleries, Inc., NY, NY

itiate this line of thinking with its Sixteen Cities Exhibition in 1933. Some of the artists in the present show who were included in that event are Bohrod (Chicago), Carter (Cleveland), Speight (Philadelphia), Jones (St. Louis), and Burchfield (Buffalo). Taken as a whole, however, it would be difficult to discern regionally distinctive styles. Differences existed more amongst individual artists than amongst regions. (Jones could have passed for a New Yorker, Burchfield for a midwesterner, in their works shown here.) It is more important to remember that the American Scene movement, as a whole, addressed itself to both the realities and potentialities of American life. Broadly speaking, it showed less concern for the preoccupations with matters of form, which had characterized the previous decade.

Although our perception cannot but be colored by the extraordinary diversity and energy of American art in recent decades, a feeling of chasteness in style and expression seems to pervade the art of this exhibition. Few of the artists represented here sought to strain the emotions or tax the intellect. The art world of 1933 clearly tolerated a broad range of approaches, but with many conservatives assimilating once-heretical pronouncements of modernism, and many modernists tipping their hats to tradition, extremes were moderated. Older revolutions still glowed in the art of artists like Davis and Marin, and a forthcoming revolution lurked in the work of Gorky, but the impact of the newer European radicalisms, Surrealism and geometric non-objectivity, was as yet hardly felt. Established values and cautious change were the order of the day.

William H. Sterling
Chairman
Art Department
Wilkes College

NOTES

¹Not all artists followed this pattern. A few, like Arthur Dove and Stuart Davis, continued along their radial course. For a discussion of individual artists, see Milton Brown, *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression*, 1955.

²*Art Digest*, November 1, 1933, p. 25.

³*Art News*, October 8, 1932, p. 3.

⁴*Art Digest*, November 1, 1933, p. 17.

⁵ibid.

⁶*Art Digest*, January 15, 1933, p. 10.

⁷*Art Digest*, November 1, 1933, p. 19.

⁸*Art Digest*, October, 1931, p. 9.

⁹op.cit., p. 17.

¹⁰*Art Digest*, June 1, 1933, p. 1 ff.

¹¹*Art Digest*, July 1, 1933, p. 6.

¹²*Art Digest*, October 1, 1933, p. 9.

¹³For a discussion of this issue, see Matthew Baigell, *The American Scene Painting of the 1930's*, 1974.

¹⁴*Art Digest*, May 1, 1933, p. 3.

¹⁵*Art in America*, January, 1982, pp. 9-15.

LIST OF WORKS

1. MILTON AVERY (1893-1965)
Baby Avery, 1932
Oil on canvas, 30 x 25
March Avery Cavanaugh
- *2. THOMAS HART BENTON (1889-1975)
Coming 'Round the Mountain, 1931
Lithograph, 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{8}$
New Britain Museum of American Art
William F. Brooks Fund, 69.39
3. ISABEL BISHOP (b. 1902)
Dante and Virgil in Union Square, 1932
Oil on canvas, 27 x 52 $\frac{3}{8}$
Delaware Art Museum,
Gift of the Friends of Art
4. OSCAR BLUEMNER (1867-1938)
Radiant Night, 1933
Oil on canvas (mounted on aluminum), 34 x 47
Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy,
Andover, Massachusetts
- *5. AARON BOHROD (b. 1907)
Self-Portrait, 1932
Lithograph, 13 x 9
Butler Institute of American Art,
Youngstown, Ohio
6. ROBERT BRACKMAN (1898-1980)
Somewhere in America, c. 1933
Oil on canvas, 30 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 25 $\frac{1}{8}$
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Transfer from
U.S. Department of Labor
7. CHARLES BURCHFIELD (1883-1967)
Lilacs, 1927-29
Oil on canvas, 24 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 35 $\frac{3}{4}$
Delaware Art Museum
John L. Sexton Bequest
8. ARTHUR B. CARLES (1882-1952)
Bouquet Abstraction, c. 1930
Oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 36
Lent by the
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;
Purchase, 1953. 53.41
9. CLARENCE CARTER (b. 1904)
The Red Barn, 1931
Watercolor, 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 20 $\frac{1}{2}$
New Britain Museum of American Art
Gift of Norman Kent
10. JOHN STEUART CURRY (1897-1946)
Clyde Beatty, 1932
Oil on canvas, 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 30 $\frac{1}{2}$
Courtesy of
Kennedy Galleries, Inc., NY, NY
11. STUART DAVIS, (1894-1964)
Table With Pipe, c. 1929
Oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 21 $\frac{3}{4}$
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
Lambert Fund Purchase
12. ARTHUR G. DOVE, (1880-1946)
Silver Ball, 1929-30
Oil on canvas, 18 x 22
Vassar College Art Gallery
Poughkeepsie, New York
Gift of Paul Rosenfeld
13. GUY PENE DuBOIS (1884-1958)
People, 1927
Oil on canvas, 45 x 57 $\frac{1}{2}$
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
Temple Fund Purchase
- *14. JOHN BERNARD FLANNAGAN (1895-1942)
Mother and Child, c. 1933
Black crayon on paper, 17 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{3}{4}$
Vassar College Art Gallery,
Poughkeepsie, New York
Gift of the Weyhe Gallery
15. ARSHILE GORKY, (1904-1948)
Landscape, 1933
Oil on canvas, 25 x 21
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Gift of Dr. Meyer A. Pearlman,
1964

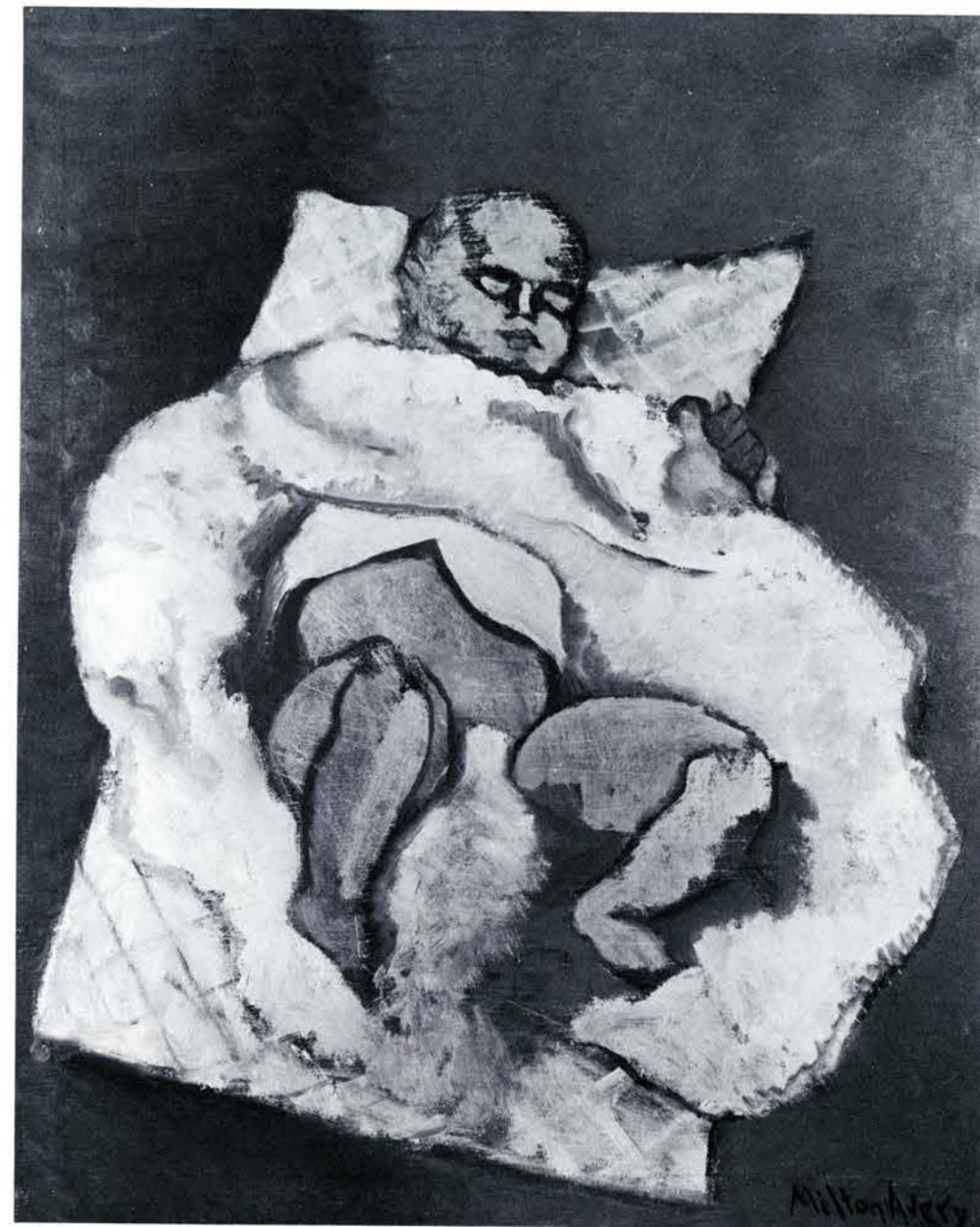


28. KENNETH HAYES MILLER
The Little Coat and Fur Shop, 1931
 Collection Museum of Art,
 The Pennsylvania State University

16. EUGENE HIGGINS (1874-1958)
The Black Cloud, c. 1930-31
 Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 $\frac{1}{8}$
 National Museum of American
 Art, Smithsonian Institution
 Bequest of Henry Ward Ranger
 through the National Academy of
 Design
17. EDWARD HOPPER (1882-1967)
Farmhouse at Essex, Mass., 1929
 Watercolor, 14 x 20
 Courtesy of
 Kennedy Galleries, Inc. NY, NY
18. JOE JONES (1909-1963)
Street Scene, 1933
 Oil on canvas, 25 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 36 $\frac{1}{8}$
 National Museum of American
 Art, Smithsonian Institution,
 Transfer from
 U.S. Department of Labor
19. MORRIS KANTOR (1896-1974)
Farewell to Union Square, 1931
 Oil on canvas, 36 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 27 $\frac{1}{8}$
 Collection of
 The Newark Museum
20. KARL KNATHS (1891-1971)
Maritime, 1931
 Oil on canvas, 40 x 32
 The Phillips Collection,
 Washington, D.C.
21. LEON KROLL (1884-1974)
A Road Through The Willows,
 1933
 Oil on canvas, 26 x 42
 Lent by the Whitney Museum of
 American Art, New York;
 Purchase, 1934. 34.17
22. WALT KUHN (1880-1949)
Grenadier, 1930
 Oil on canvas, 30 x 25
 Courtesy of
 Kennedy Galleries, Inc., NY, NY
23. YASUO KUNIYOSHI (1893-1953)
Fruit on Table, 1932
 Oil on canvas, 42 x 30
 Nebraska Art Association
 Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel
 Waugh; Courtesy Sheldon
 Memorial Art Gallery
 University of Nebraska-Lincoln
- *24. GASTON LACHAISE
 (1882-1935)
Woman, c. 1930
 Pencil on paper, 19 x 12 $\frac{1}{8}$
 Vassar College Art Gallery,
 Poughkeepsie, New York
 Gift of Agnes Rindge Claflin
- *25. LOUIS LOZOWICK (1892-1973)
Midair, 1932
 Lithograph 35/50, 16 x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$
 The Art Museum, Princeton
 University
 (Bequest of Henry K. Dick,
 Class of 1909)
26. GEORGE BENJAMIN LUKS
 (1867-1933)
Red Barn, Berkshire Hills, c. 1930
 Watercolor, 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{2}$
 Collection Museum of Art,
 The Pennsylvania State
 University
27. JOHN MARIN (1870-1953)
Marin Island, Maine, 1932
 Watercolor, 15 x 21 $\frac{1}{2}$
 Courtesy of
 Kennedy Galleries, Inc., NY, NY
28. KENNETH HAYES MILLER
 (1876-1952)
The Little Coat and Fur Shop,
 1931
 Oil on board, 42 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 30 $\frac{1}{2}$
 Collection Museum of Art,
 The Pennsylvania State
 University
29. JEROME MYERS (1867-1940)
Street Shrine, 1931
 Oil on canvas, 40 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 30
 National Museum of American
 Art, Smithsonian Institution
 Bequest of Henry Ward Ranger
 through the National Academy of
 Design
30. HENRY VARNUM POOR
 (1888-1970)
Paris Self-Portrait, 1930
 Oil on canvas, 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 30 $\frac{1}{2}$
 Collection Museum of Art,
 The Pennsylvania State Museum
 Gift of the Class of 1932

31. CHARLES SHEELER (1883-1965)
Delmonico Building, 1926
Lithograph, 10 x 7 $\frac{1}{8}$
Collection Museum of Art,
The Pennsylvania State
University
32. JOHN SLOAN (1871-1951)
Girl Back to the Piano, 1932
Oil on canvas, 20 x 24
Kraushaar Galleries
33. FRANCIS SPEIGHT (b. 1896)
Coal Slag Heap, 1932
Oil on canvas, 27 x 31 $\frac{1}{4}$
Collection Museum of Art,
The Pennsylvania State
University
34. MAURICE STERNE (1878-1957)
Portrait of Assunta, c. 1932
Oil on masonite, 25 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{16}$
Vassar College Art Gallery,
Poughkeepsie, New York
35. JOHN STORRS (1885-1956)
Opposing Forms, 1932
Bronz relief, 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{2}$
Courtesy Robert Schoelkopf
Gallery
36. ISAAC SOYER (1907-1981)
Cafeteria, 1930
Oil on canvas, 21 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 25 $\frac{3}{4}$
Brooks Memorial Art Gallery,
Memphis, TN;
Gift of Mr. E. R. Brumley 45-12
37. BRADLEY WALKER TOMLIN
(1899-1953)
Studio Window, c. 1928
Oil on canvas, 39 x 32
Pennsylvania Academy
of the Fine Arts
Lambert Fund Purchase
38. FRANKLIN WATKINS
(1894-1972)
Girl Thinking, 1933
Oil on canvas, 12 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 9 $\frac{7}{8}$
Munson-Williams-Proctor
Institute, Utica, New York
Bequest of Edward W. Root
39. MAX WEBER (1881-1961)
Straggley Pine, 1933
Oil on canvas, 24 x 32
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
George A. Hearn Fund, 1937
40. MARGUERITE ZORACH
(1887-1968)
The Picnic, 1928
Oil, 34 x 44
Kraushaar Galleries
41. WILLIAM ZORACH (1887-1966)
Artist's Daughter, 1932
Bronze, 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 15 x 11
Zabriskie Gallery

*No photograph available.



1. MILTON AVERY
Baby Avery, 1932
March Avery Cavanaugh



3. ISABEL BISHOP
Dante and Virgil in Union Square, 1932
Delaware Art Museum
Gift of the Friends of Art



4. OSCAR BLUEMNER
Radiant Night, 1933
Addison Gallery of American Art,
Phillips Academy
Andover, Massachusetts



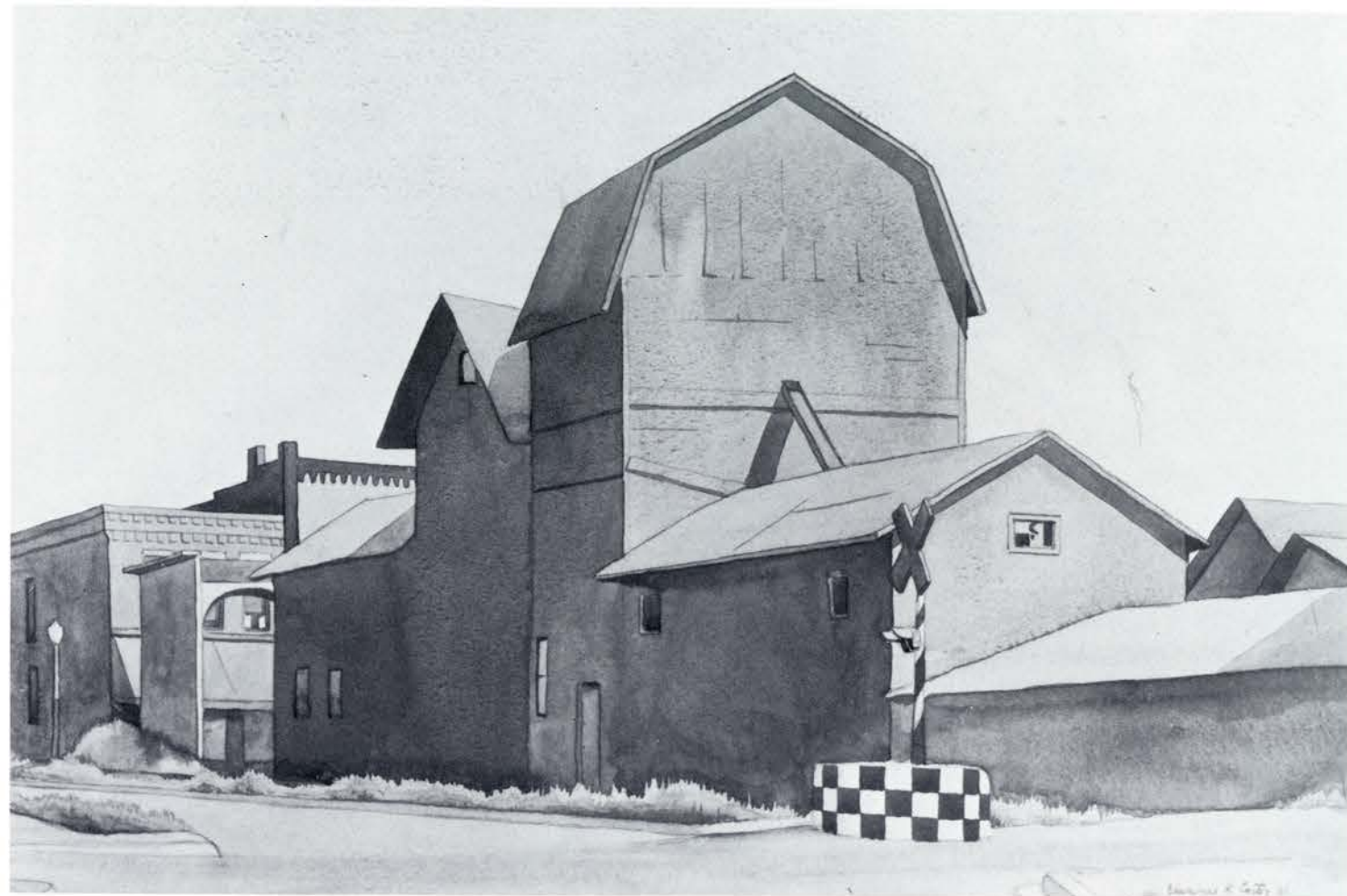
6. ROBERT BRACKMAN
Somewhere in America, c. 1933
National Museum of American Art,
Smithsonian Institution,
Transfer from
U.S. Department of Labor



7. CHARLES BURCHFIELD
Lilacs, 1927-29
Delaware Art Museum
John L. Sexton Bequest



8. ARTHUR B. CARLES
Bouquet Abstraction, c. 1930
Lent by the Whitney Museum of
American Art, New York;
Purchase, 1953. 53.41



9. CLARENCE CARTER
The Red Barn, 1931
New Britain Museum of American Art.
Gift of Norman Kent



10. JOHN STEUART CURRY
Clyde Beatty, 1932
Courtesy of
Kennedy Galleries, Inc., NY, NY



11. STUART DAVIS
Table With Pipe, 1930
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
Lambert Fund Purchase



12. ARTHUR G. DOVE
Silver Ball, 1929-30
Vassar College Art Gallery,
Poughkeepsie, New York
Gift of Paul Rosenfeld



13. GUY PENE DuBOIS
People, c. 1927
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
Temple Fund Purchase



15. ARSHILE GORKY
Landscape, 1933
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Gift of Dr. Meyer A. Pearlman, 1964



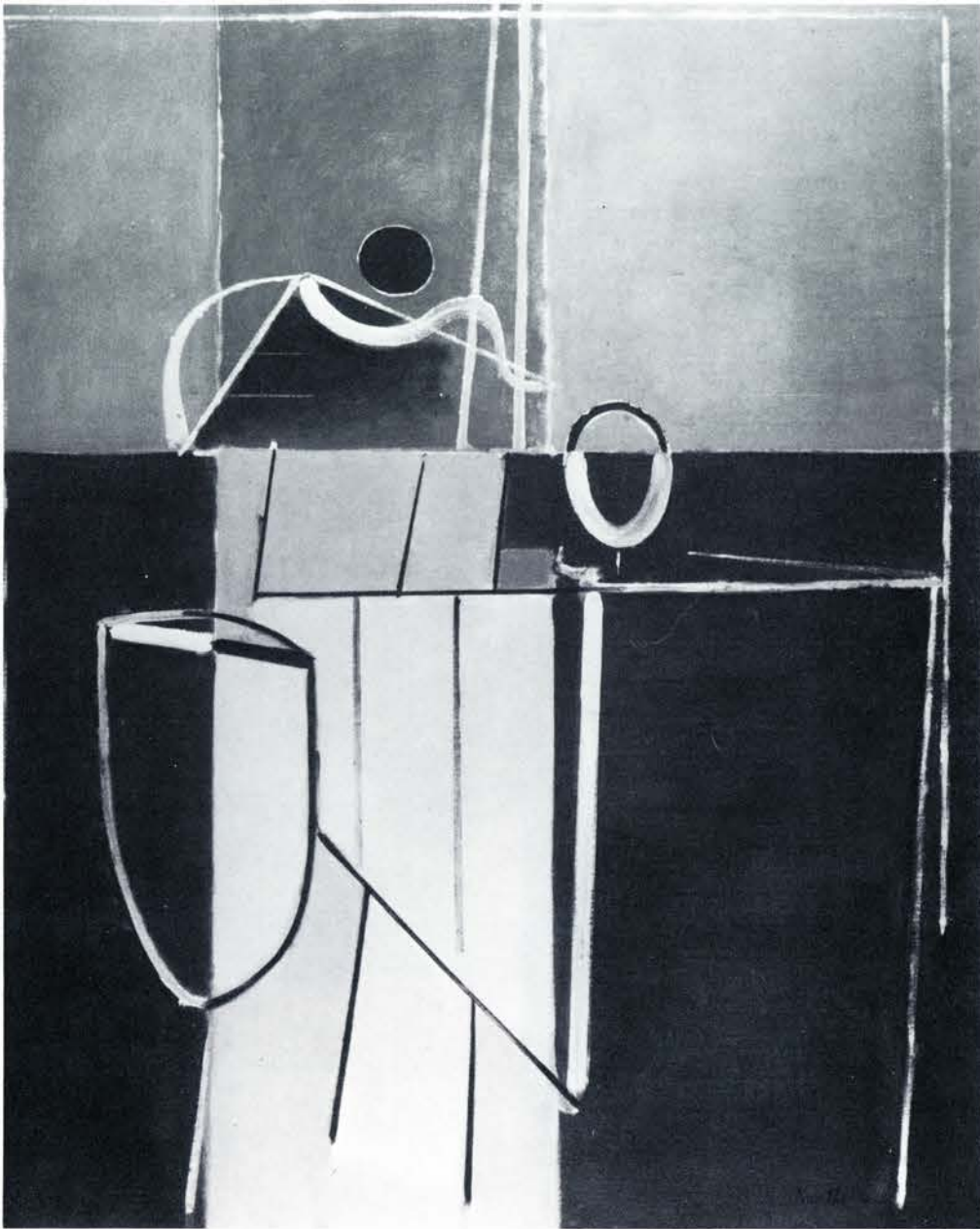
16. EUGENE HIGGINS
The Black Cloud, c. 1930-31
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
Bequest of Henry Ward Ranger through
the National Academy of Design



18. JOE JONES
Street Scene, 1933
National Museum of American Art,
Smithsonian Institution,
Transfer from
U.S. Department of Labor



19. MORRIS KANTOR
Farewell to Union Square, 1931
Collection of
The Newark Museum



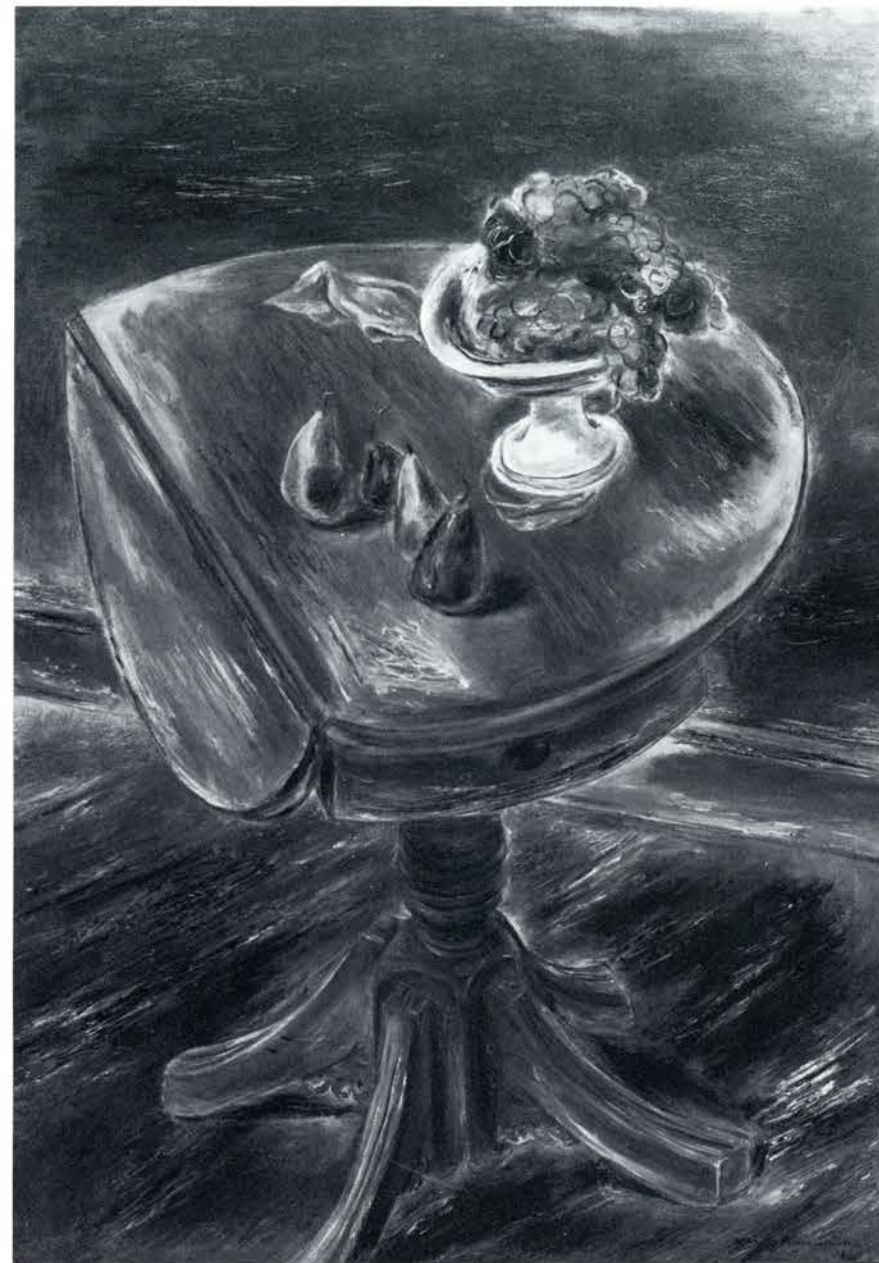
20. KARL KNATHS
Maritime, 1931
The Phillips Collection, Washington



21. LEON KROLL
A Road Through The Willows, 1933
Lent by the Whitney Museum of
American Art, New York;
Purchase, 1934, 34.17



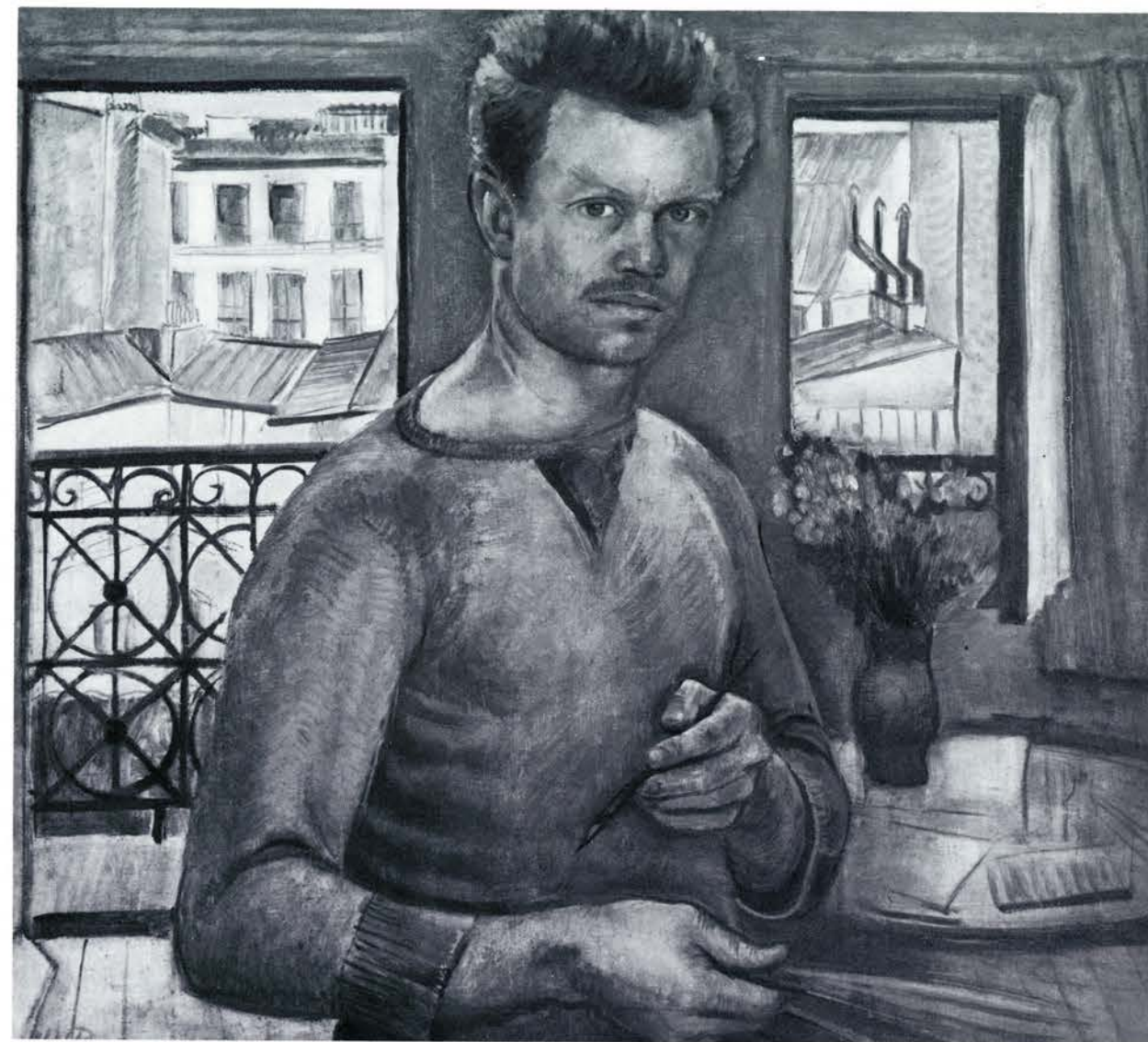
22. WALT KUHN
Grenadier, 1930
Courtesy of
Kennedy Galleries, Inc., NY, NY



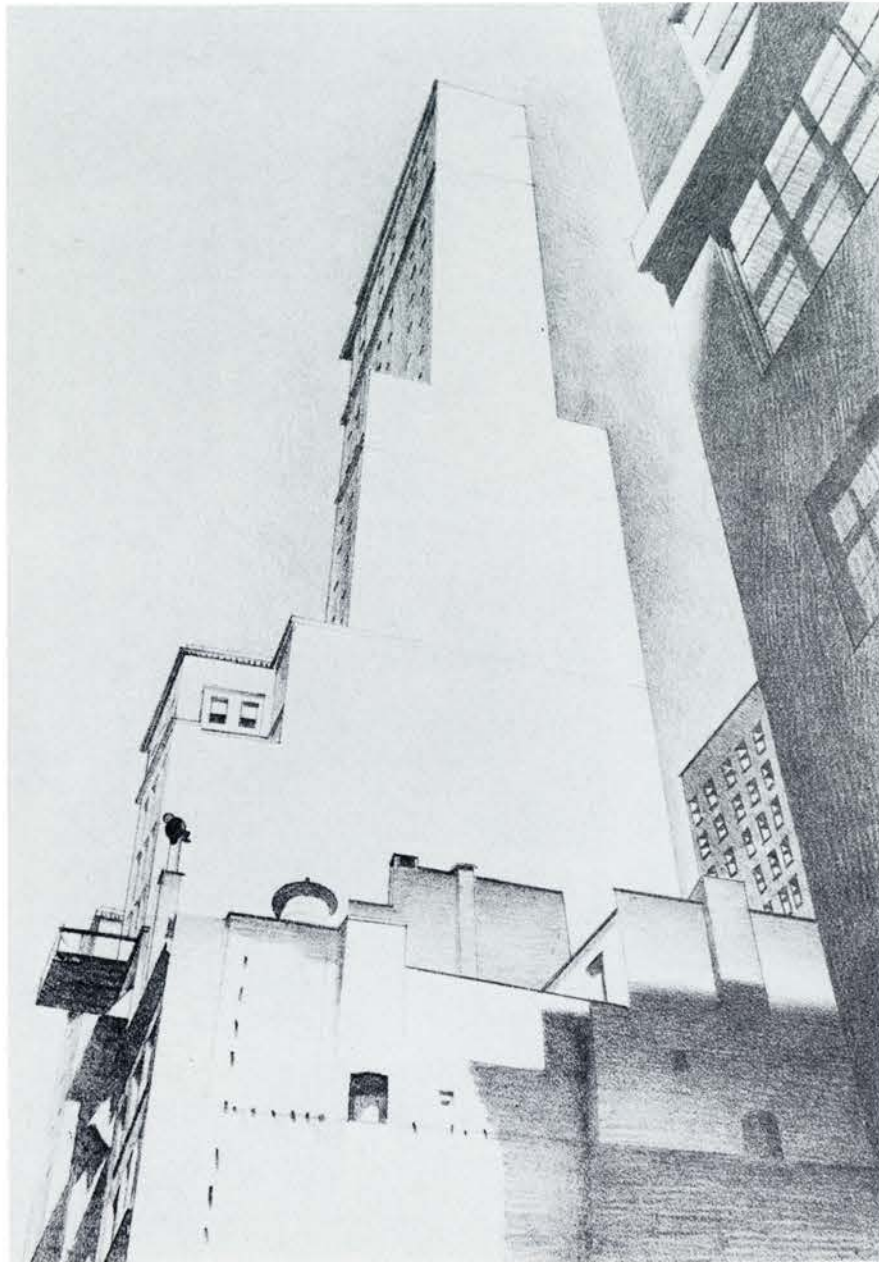
23. YASUO KUNIYOSHI
Fruit on Table, 1932
Nebraska Art Association
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Waugh
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery
University of Nebraska



29. JEROME MYERS
Street Shrine, 1931
National Museum of American Art,
Smithsonian Institution
Bequest of Henry Ward Ranger through the
National Academy of Design



30. HENRY VARNUM POOR
Paris Self-Portrait, 1930
Collection Museum of Art
The Pennsylvania State University
Gift of the Class of 1932



31. CHARLES SHEELER
Delmonico Building, 1926
Collection Museum of Art,
The Pennsylvania State University



32. JOHN SLOAN
Girl Back to the Piano, 1932
Kraushaar Galleries



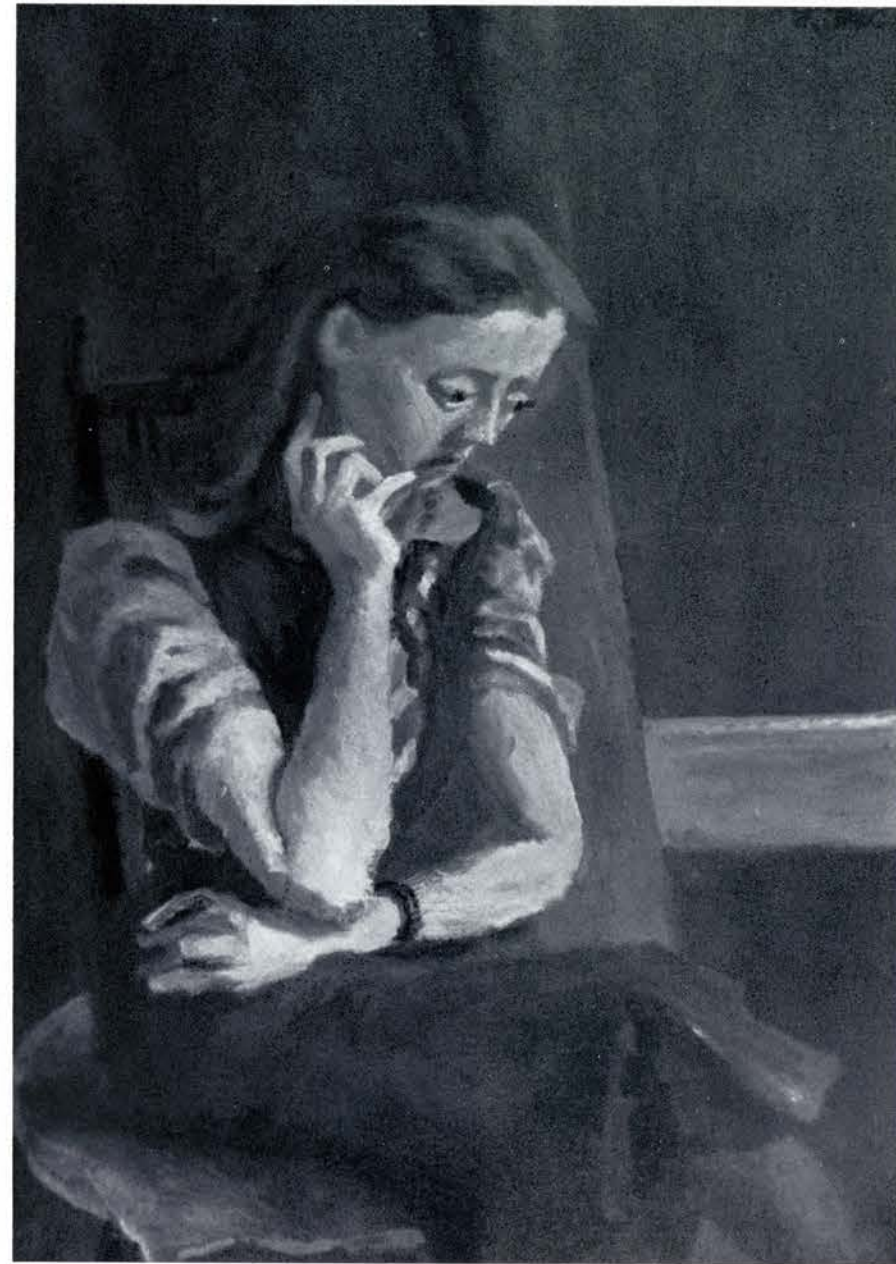
35. JOHN STORRS
Opposing Forms, 1932
Courtesy Robert Schoelkopf Gallery



36. ISAAC SOYER
Cafeteria, 1930
Brooks Memorial Art Gallery,
Memphis, TN;
Gift of Mr. E. R. Brumley. 45.12



37. BRADLEY WALKER TOMLIN
Studio Window, c. 1928
Pennsylvania Academy
of the Fine Arts
Lambert Fund Purchase



38. FRANKLIN WATKINS
Girl Thinking, 1933
Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York
Bequest of Edward W. Root



39. MAX WEBER
Straggly Pine, 1933
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
George A. Hearn Fund, 1937



40. MARGUERITE ZORACH
The Picnic, 1928
Kraushaar Galleries



41. WILLIAM ZORACH
Artist's Daughter, 1932
Zabriskie Gallery



SORDONI
ART GALLERY
WILKES COLLEGE

Director

Judith H. O'Toole

Advisory Commission

Albert Margolies, Chairman

Robert S. Capin

Aleta Connell

Patricia Davies

Juliette Epstein

Richard Fuller

Thomas Kelly

Shirley Klein

Sue Kluger

Paul Mailloux

Marilyn Maslow

Robert Ott

Sandy Rifkin

Jill Saporito

Helen Farr Sloan

Andrew Sordoni, III

William Sterling

150 South River Street

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 18766

(717) 824-4651, Ext. 388

