# American Prints 1900–1950

*An exhibition in honor of*
*the donation of John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968*

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# Foreword

University art museums have always depended upon the interest and support of alumni collectors. At Yale, the print collection would scarcely exist had it not been the recipient, earlier in this century, of many fine and extensive collections: the Achelis Collection of Dürer and Rembrandt prints, the Edward B. Greene Collection of old master portrait prints, and the print collections of Francis P. Garvan, Allen Evarts Foster, J. Paul Oppenheim, and G. Allen Smith, to name but a few. It is a pleasure to add John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968, to this roster, and to express gratitude to him for his many recent gifts to Yale in the field of American prints. Mr. Axelrod has collected with perspicacity in a field which was long neglected but which is now increasingly the subject of scholarly attention and of energetic collecting.

　　Like many of our recent print exhibitions, this one was prepared by several museum staff members and graduate students under the direction of Curator Richard S. Field. Dick Field sets high standards for his colleagues and associates, assuming that the preparation of an exhibition should be a serious learning experience for the organizers as well as for the eventual visitors to the exhibition. In recent years, our print department has presented many shows which challenge us to look at the art of the past and present with fresh eyes and an open mind. This exhibition presents a fascinating array of American prints which, in their diversity and unity, provide many clues about American cultural values and attitudes in the first half of the 20th century.


*Alan Shestack*
The Henry J. Heinz II Director

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# Acknowledgments

The most fitting manner in which to honor a donor is to exhibit the works he has given. Not only has John P. Axelrod promised his entire collection of American prints to Yale, but he has urged us to use his gift as a spur toward a better understanding of the whole field. For his generosity and his deep interest we are doubly indebted. It was also his intelligence and openness that allowed us to enlarge upon the core of this exhibition by drawing from our own holdings and borrowing from other collections. To these lenders–The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Davison Art Center of Wesleyan University, The William Benton Museum of Art of the University of Connecticut, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Museum of American Art, Associated American Artists, and Ruth and Jacob Kainen–we offer our very deepest appreciation; in every case they permitted us to have precisely what we needed. Special thanks are also due to Sampson and Miriam Field, who have over many years supported our exhibitions and research.

Even the most modest of exhibitions depend upon the good offices of many persons. Some rendered small favors, others were required to give generously of their time, but all who follow willingly undertook to lend a helping hand. They include, first and foremost, John Axelrod who endured many visits; the staff of the printroom at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, especially Ellen Jacobowitz and Alison Stewart; Janette Boothby and Ellen D'Oench at the Davison Art Center; and David Kiehl and Suzanne Boorsch at the Metropolitan. Over the past two years they have made our investigations into American prints a great pleasure. As a scholar, artist and intellectual, however, no one could have been more helpful and inspiring than Jacob Kainen. To Jacob and Ruth I owe gratitude and more than the mere sharing of knowledge and experience. Similarly, we are all indebted to the knowledge and example of Janet Flint of the National Museum of American Art, undoubtedly the most informed scholar in the field.

*Richard S. Field*
Curator of Prints, Drawings and Photographs

# Introduction to A Study of
# American Prints 1900–1950

Richard S. Field

American painting has been in the forefront of the International
avant-garde since the end of World War II, while American prints
assumed that position after 1960. But it was not so long ago that
European modernism, in the form of the great Armory Show of
1913, evoked pangs of inferiority in the heart of the American artist.
Looking back to those days, painter Jerome Myers wrote: ". . . more
than ever before, our great country had become a colony; more than
ever before, we had become provincials."[1] While American
accomplishments of the past forty years have certainly erased that
old stigma of provincialism, art historians have begun to recognize
the virtues of less heralded work that some had regarded with
embarrassment. The plethora of styles and ideas that have shaped
the art of the past decade has softened our elitist (i.e., formalist)
prejudices. We are once more receptive to the many functions that
art serves (not simply art for art's sake). The new interest in the full
range of American prints may well reflect current nostalgia for the
more innocent and simpler America they seem to depict.[2]

   Such an emphasis on the communicative function of American
prints of the first half of this century seems entirely justified.
Whether employed as images of social protest, international
modernism, or just plain reflections of city and country life,
American prints were invariably more direct, more reductive, more
literal, and even more literary than American paintings. It is the
thesis of this exhibition that almost all American prints of 1900-1950
presented recognizable images of America to a broad public, and
further, that the vast majority of these prints were informed by the
subjects, techniques, styles and even the audiences of the illustrator.

Despite the considerable attention that has been bestowed on
American prints in exhibitions and monographic catalogues, few
viable overviews have appeared. Historic accounts seem to follow
three basic approaches, none of which has yet provided any real
continuity. The first of these follows a simplified model of the

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sequence of American painting: Impressionism, Realism, Modernism, Precisionism, Hopper/Burchfield, Fourteenth-Street & Social Realism, American Scene Regionalism, Works Progress Administration and early Abstract Expressionism.[3] Such a scheme offers a layered, chronological framework but one that lacks cohesiveness: one that separates, for example, John Marin from James McNeill Whistler, Stuart Davis from John Sloan, Mabel Dwight from George Bellows, Grant Wood from Louis Lozowick, or Howard Cook from Joseph Pennell. By isolating stylistic matters from those of technique, subject and social content, this approach constructs a fragmented and pedestrian picture of American printmaking. Furthermore, its chronological divisions invite a selection of prints based on formal quality, a method that tends to repeat time-tested judgments. While not seeking to detract from the "masters" of American printmaking–who are, after all, represented in abundance in this exhibition–we do feel that such a selection process often operates to the detriment of other ideas equally significant to an overview of American prints.[4]

The second traditional mode of organizing American prints of this century is by medium: etching, woodcut, lithograph and, occasionally, screenprint. Although this methodology obscures thematic and stylistic questions, it underscores the fact that prints share a technical history, one that frequently determines the style and content of the work of art.[5] But rarely have connections, patrimonies and parentages been fully explored: what in fact are the relationships between Edward Hopper's technical approach to etching and Childe Hassam's? What were the models for Stuart Davis' flat, black lithographs? What did the woodcuts of Max Weber derive from those of Arthur Wesley Dow or André Derain, or those of Reginald Marsh from Werner Drewes and Fernand Léger? What are the technical/stylistic connections between Louis Lozowick and Benton Spruance?

The third approach to the study of American prints is full of promise and has given rise to the present effort: treatment by subject matter. Aside from studies dedicated to a single artist, which often do isolate and discuss subjects favored by that artist, there have been but a handful of thematically focused presentations.[6] This exhibition proceeds along similar lines, but not so much to survey the range of subject matter as to emphasize its fundamental importance. While the exhibition may provide a working schematic for the content of American prints, its main objective is to generate a

means by which the totality of American printmaking, 1900-1950, might be conceived as a single enterprise.[7]

The insistence upon subject matter and its corollary, communicability, returns our discussion to the commercial illustrator and his influence. Let it be understood, however, that there is neither any one function nor any one model of the illustrator to which we refer. When, in this essay, we speak of the influence of the illustrator, we are alluding to a group of ideas, any one of which may be regarded as an important determinant for the work of a given artist. These ideas are concerned with the following: (1) choice of subject, usually from contemporary life or its environment; (2) the existence of iconographic prototypes for many subjects in the illustrated magazines (and sometimes newspapers) of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; (3) factual or realist treatment of these subjects; (4) fast, summary forms often verging on caricature or humor; (5) a derivative or allusive attitude toward high styles and an accompanying reduction of formal (spatial, coloristic) complexity; (6) the actual training or experience of most American artists who came to maturity before 1940 as illustrators. This complex of attitudes and visual sources provided the matrix from which American printmaking of 1900-1950 took its inspiration.

Although one speaks of an "Etching Revival" in France during the 1860s, it was in fact predicated on the earlier accomplishments of the Barbizon printmakers: Charles Jacque, Jean François Millet, and Camille Corot.[8] In the 1850s the Revival was given an enormous boost by the extraordinary romantic-realist views of Paris etched by Charles Meryon (whose works were universally admired by later American printmakers). By 1862 James McNeill Whistler's French and Thames Sets had appeared and Albert Cadart had founded the Société des Aquafortistes in Paris. Cadart actually showed the publications of the Société in the U.S. in 1866, but not to any resounding acclaim. Whistler's etchings were exhibited in New York in 1868. Yet, it was not until 1877 that the first truly active American Society, the New York Etching Club, came into existence. Due to Whistler's pervasive influence, the handful of gifted American etchers—Otto Backer, Frank Duveneck, Stephen J. Ferris, R. Swain Gifford, Thomas, Peter & Mary Nemo Moran, Stephen Parrish, Charles A. Platt, John Henry Twachtman and J. Alden Weir—were committed to the aesthetic of the "fine print" and bound to a limited

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range of acceptable subjects. "The picture with a story was vulgar and old-fashioned."[9] But a few etchers did, albeit tentatively, break the Whistlerian mold. One was Winslow Homer, who was steeped in the traditions and subjects of American illustration.[10] Another was Joseph Pennell, an illustrator intensely committed to urban subjects. His early views of Philadelphia construction and one daring rendition of the *Coal Depot on the Schuylkill* (1879) might have immediately opened new paths in American printmaking had Pennell not spent the next twenty years (1884-1904) exclusively in Europe.[11] With few exceptions American printmaking remained tied to a rather conservative tradition of landscape etching right through the turn of the century. But the basis for a new tradition was slowly taking shape between 1900 and 1915, the year that marked the real emergence of twentieth-century American prints.

It comes as no surprise that we should insist on the importance of the illustrational tradition for American printmaking. Much has been written about the roots of "The Eight," their training both at the Pennsylvania Academy and in the art departments of Philadelphia's newspapers. But, so far as we know, it has not been pointed out how consistently the American printmaker of 1900-1950 was trained or earned his livelihood as an illustrator. If this was true for Homer and Pennell, it was doubly so for those who came to maturity in the years around 1900: George Luks, John Sloan, William Glackens, Everett Schinn, Jerome Myers, George Bellows, Albert Sterner, Stuart Davis, Glenn Coleman, Edward Hopper, Martin Lewis, and others. Many had worked in Philadelphia with Edward Davis, art editor of the Philadelphia *Press* and father of Stuart Davis. The Philadelphia connection is by no means fortuitous; rather, it is essential to our thesis. It was in that city that American art forged unusually close links between art and science. One thinks not only of Eakins' carefully constructed paintings, but of his and Eadweard Muybridge's pioneering photographic studies of the human figure in motion (1887). Thomas Anschutz carried on Eakins' teaching at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, emphasizing the precise, empirical study of Nature. A similar empiricism guided Philadelphia "Naturalistic Photography" and the first of the great photographic salons.[12] The emphasis placed on direct observation sanctioned an increasing recognition of the importance of the immediate urban, even industrial environment. Anschutz's *Ironworkers Noontime* of ca. 1881 was not only a remarkably original painting, but, as Ruth Bowman

has discovered, was based on the artist's photographs and may well have been inspired by a commercial, lithographic poster (itself a photographic montage).[13]

Out of this Philadelphia milieu emerged the painter Robert Henri (1865-1929). His role as teacher has been lionized by others, especially by his students, Sloan, Bellows and Davis.[14] Henri was the prophet of twentieth-century American genre painting. He preached the value of subjects taken from American lives rather than European traditions. For him, progress in art was synonymous with individual accomplishment, not technical or stylistic sophistication; beauty was inherent in the thing itself, in its living, factual value, not in being made so.[15] Henri, more than any other American, stood squarely opposed to Whistlerian aesthetics:

*But language can be of no value for its own sake*, it is so only as it expresses the infinite moods and growth of humanity. An artist must first of all respond to his subject, he must be filled with emotion toward that subject and then he must make his technique so sincere, so translucent that it may be forgotten, the value of the subject shining through it. To my mind a fanciful, eccentric technique only hides the matter to be presented, and for that reason is not only out of place, but dangerous, wrong.[16]

Henri exhorted his students to make pictures from life, to draw their content from their immediate response to the subject. As a means for sharpening their powers of observation, Henri forced them to practice the "quick sketch" and to cultivate the ability to draw a scene completely from memory.[17] This was the very antithesis of standard academic training, and it underscores the fact that Henri did not advocate any particular style. Although he did emphasize the techniques of the old masters, especially the Dutch, he appeared to hold that style was to be uncovered, not followed. In other words, style resulted from the encounter between the artist and his real-life subject. This attitude is amazingly close to that of contemporary illustrators whose "style" was invariably associated with specialized subjects and techniques.[18]

No matter how influential were Henri's teachings, the development of American printmaking cannot be ascribed to him; after all he was not a printmaker.[19] Another group of ideas about contemporary imagery, as already suggested, was implicit in the art and craft of the popular magazines of the period (1890-1910). These were the halcyon days of the artist-reporter and artist-illustrator whose drawings were reproduced as wood engravings, "direct process" photographic relief plates (after pen

sketches), and halftone reproductions (of watercolor or chalk sketches).[20]

Although a thorough analysis of "illustrational" styles is beyond the scope of our study, its most salient aspects must be defined.[21] The newspaper demanded immediate images of the fast-moving, dramatic, newsworthy life of the city. Pennell and Sloan have described how an event would be worked up into a sketch from memory (often by more than one reporter). Even if the event had taken place some time previously, the drawing had to provide the viewer with a sense of direct contact with the actual happening (much like a photograph); it had to be rendered in simple, immediately apprehendable forms, and it could not impose unconventional stylistic traits between the viewer and his perceptions. The very speed or informality of the execution of a newspaper sketch not only vouched for its fresh and authentic character but also conveyed a sense of the ever-increasing pace of modern life (including the rapid reporting of events by newspapers).

Magazine illustrations, on the other hand, usually possessed greater finish and autographic character. During the 1860-1890 period, the majority of illustrations were wood engravings of a fairly detailed and even painterly character. Many were totally transparent to the subject, that is they possessed little more than a reproductive function, especially those that were fabricated by a group of engravers working on a single image. But by the last decade of the century, detailed description was reserved more for historical fiction (e.g., Howard Pyle and Edwin A. Abbey) or delegated to the halftone reproduction of photographs. The rage of the day was the look of informality and linear brevity demanded by urban portrayal.

The haughty chic of the upper classes and the exaggerated reactions of the common pedestrian were both captured by the flashy pen-and-ink techniques of such renowned illustrators as Charles Dana Gibson, James Montgomery Flagg, Edwin Austin Abbey, Howard Chandler Christy and Frederick Dielman. The parallelisms of their pen lines evoked a world always on the move and a society enamoured of its own superficial image, one defined only by generalities of shape and gesture. The style of these 1890-1915 illustrators was admirably suited to social posturing and anecdote, but few of their images stood alone. Accompanied by captions or texts, they were meant to vivify words, to transport the imagination of the reader. This they did by use of gesture, facial expression, and the essentials of dress or setting—always alluding to

the specifics of a situation described by an author or observed by the artist-reporter himself. Understandably, the illustration could be stamped by the technique of the draughtsman, but in large measure it had to remain styleless, generalized and transparent to life. Years later Isabel Bishop described this essential aspect of American genre:

In this particular kind of artistic expression the subject must seem unmanipulated—as though a piece of life had been sneaked up on, seized, and somehow become art, without anything having been done to it.[22]

So pervasive was the thirst for images that illustration could hardly fail to respond to the growing realism of both ambitious literature and the popular press.[23] While the pen-and-ink illustrators worked magic on their transcriptions of a superficial society, their choice of subject only occasionally reflected the monumental wonders or ephemeral encounters of the city. Nonetheless, in altered form both the imagery and the techniques of these illustrators left a lasting mark on an entire group of painters and printmakers including John Sloan, George Bellows, Edward Hopper and Kenneth Hayes Miller. The art of these men was an amalgamation of many elements (as we have already indicated). It preferred the more psychologically incisive drawing of English pen-and-ink illustrators; it looked to a much broader spectrum of society for its subjects; it freed itself from the literal word although their images often seemed to illustrate some anecdote, event, or state of mind; and lastly, their art emphasized the interpretations of the individual artist far more than was permitted (or expected of) the contemporary illustrator.

An essential aspect of our thesis is that the subject matter of early twentieth-century American prints was often anticipated in late nineteenth-century newspaper and magazine illustrations, the vernacular images with which all of the people could identify. These were the wood engravings and the "process" reproduction prints that appeared by the tens of thousands in *Harper's Monthly* (1850-), *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (1855-), *Harper's Weekly* (1857-), *The Century Magazine* (1870-), *Life* (1883), *Cosmopolitan* (1886-), *Scribner's Magazine* (1887-), *McClure's Magazine* (1893-), and dozens of others.[24] How many of the images of the Brooklyn Bridge, of the life of the streets, of the waterfront, of factories, find their prototypes in the pages of these magazines! A few examples must suffice. There is the extraordinarily dramatic, and soaringly "modern" view of the Bridge by Horace Baker, Jr., in *Harper's Weekly*

of 18 February 1882;[25] a surprisingly picturesque contrast of old
and new in Henry McCarter's wood engravings for *Scribner's
Magazine* of October 1899;[26] an unexpected anticipation of the
photographs of Jacob Riis and the etchings of John Sloan in W. A.
Rogers' *A Sweltering Night, New York City, Tenement House Sufferers*
from *Harper's Weekly*, 30 June 1883;[27] a fine precedent for Hopper's
subway and Elevated interiors in Charles Dana Gibson's sketches for
*The Century Magazine* of February 1895;[28] and most astoundingly,
the kind of industrial drawings and illustrations done by Joseph
Pennell as early as 1881, such as *Bethlehem Steel Works* intended for
*The Century Magazine.*[29]

That the styles, subjects, techniques and public expectations of
newspaper and magazine illustration influenced painting and
drawing during the years around 1900 is hardly debatable. That
they also laid the foundations for and continued to influence
American printmaking over the next fifty years demands further
evidence. The problem is that we are attributing a formative
influence to works which very likely were not regarded as visually
innovative in a time dominated by Whistlerian aesthetics. Henri does
not appear to have referred to illustration. Curiously, the great
American disciple of Whistler, Joseph Pennell, always regarded
himself as an illustrator.[30] Still, Pennell did not find his construction
and industrial subjects suitable for etching until 1909, years after
they had appeared as illustrations.[31] Charles W. Mielatz worked in
similar circumstances, but he dared to utilize the subjects of his New
York illustrations in his etchings. Ironically, turnabout was fair play,
and several of his best etchings were reproduced as wood-engraved
illustrations in an article of 1892.[32] This freedom of iconographic
exchange is an important bit of evidence for the role we claim for
illustration. Not a great innovator, Mielatz nonetheless succeeded in
forging something new from the legacy of nineteenth-century
printmaking. He drew from (but never matched) the virtues of
Whistler's French, Thames, and Venice Sets–their sketchiness,
atmospheric tone, and salient details–as had Pennell in his London
work (e.g., *Rainy Night, Charing Cross Station*, 1886). But Mielatz also
informed his best New York images with the populist verisimilitude
and photographic point of view of the illustration.[33] By assuming
the vantage point of the pedestrian and even including him in his
realistic renderings of New York City, Mielatz established a genre
that would be reflected in the works of Sloan, Lewis, Bacon, Soyer,
and hundreds of others.

The work of John Sloan in particular lends enormous support

to our ideas about the genesis of American printmaking in this
century. In 1902 he was commissioned, with Glackens, Luks and
others, to supply several dozen illustrations for deluxe editions of
the novels of Charles Paul de Kock (1794-1871). Most of these were
executed as etchings, a significant decision because it led directly to
an amalgamation of the fine art of etching with the Philadelphia
realist drawing style that Sloan, Glackens, Luks and the others had
developed for newspaper and magazine illustration.[34] Many aspects
of Sloan's drawing style were quite eclectic. Figure types,
compositional principles, subjects, and even the very techniques of
drawing reveal his dependence on a wide spectrum of nineteenth-
century sources, from the lithographs of Honoré Daumier and
Théophile Steinlen to the pen-and-ink drawings of Charles Keene,
Charles Leech and other draughtsmen whose work appeared in the
English humor magazine, *Punch*.[35]

Although no one would claim that Sloan's drawing matches the
incisiveness and physical conviction of Daumier's, his scenes teem
with life, significant detail and telling gesture. Similarly, Sloan and
Glackens did not wholly adopt Leech's pen-and-ink technique,
although they were obviously inspired by the quickness of his touch
and the sureness of his characterizations. Together, the new realist
style and the everyday subject matter of the de Kock illustrations set
the stage for a major change in American printmaking.[36] This
developed in the etchings that Sloan derived from his own urban
experience, the series *New York City Life* (1905-1910).[37] Freed from
the strictures of a text, these works embody the personal feelings of
the artist and evoke those of the viewer as well. The text is
unwritten, open-ended, and left to our imagination. How different
are they in terms of execution and composition from Sloan's
de Kock illustrations? Perhaps they are a bit more abstract, that is,
technically more disciplined. Certainly Sloan has dampened the
gestures and facial expressions demanded by an anecdotal text.
Most significantly, however, is the fact that some of the burden of
meaning has been assumed by formal structures, especially Sloan's
growing mastery of chiaroscuro. The massing of lights and darks to
express mood separates Sloan's work from that of the illustrators he
admired. Nevertheless, he retained their directness, developed their
subjects, and never really departed from their communicative
conventions.

The etchings and illustrations of Pennell, Mielatz and Sloan
were crucial to the rise of all images of the city and contemporary
urban life. Aside from Hopper and Marsh, few were able to match

Sloan's blend of descriptive detail, significant gesture, and compositional originality. Sloan had absorbed the lessons of an extraordinary range of illustration and had synthesized it for a new generation and a new audience. For all the bravura of his fight scenes, George Bellows remained even more closely allied to the illustration than did Sloan. Bellows' types are less developed than Sloan's; they are drawn with only the broadest of strokes and are articulated, however powerfully, with only the most simplified of gestures and actions. In fact, many Bellows lithographs, like *The Street* of 1916, were derived from his own illustrations published years before in various magazines.[38] And Bellows is by no means an isolated example. Until the 1950s, most American printmakers were trained or worked as illustrators or draughtsmen; the list would include many of the abstract and formalist painters like Marin, Davis, Matulka, Lozowick and Pollock.[39] The mere fact that so many of our artists had intimate contact with illustration was important, but not only because it provided resources of technique and imagery. Edward Hopper best understood the significance of having been trained as an illustrator when, writing about Sloan in 1927, he said:

This hard early training has given Sloan a facility and a power of invention that the pure painter seldom achieves.[40]

It was this inventiveness, bequeathed to American printmakers by their illustrational heritage and practice, that set them apart from other twentieth-century artists. The separate essays that head each section of this exhibition will provide further elaboration of the connection between these two traditions. We have the feeling, however, that we have only scratched the surface.

Little has been made of the fact that the Armory Show of 1913 was also a fairly major print exhibition. Although originally conceived as a review of the state of American art, both the painting and print sections were largely European.[41] We doubt that such an assemblage of important, recent European prints could have failed to interest American artists who, as a rule, possessed neither the tradition nor the technical skills to make prints. There is no documentary evidence that the Armory Show directly inspired Americans to take up printmaking, but during the next three years a great many did. Ironically, most of these artists, with the exception of John Marin and Arthur B. Davies,[42] rejected the stylistic content of the Europeans. For the majority, printmaking was

perceived as a traditional, craft-bound means of expression, but there were those who believed that prints were inherently a means of communication and, in the tradition of Currier and Ives, that subject matter was of paramount importance.[43]

As a result of the impact of the Armory Show, forward-looking American artists were divided into two camps: those who favored a foreign dominated modernism (art for the initiated) and those who believed that art should be emphatically democratic (art for the people). To some degree this represented a split between the groups gathered around Alfred Stieglitz, the most unswerving champion of modern art in the United States, and Robert Henri, the most persuasive voice for an art drawn from American experience. The Stieglitz circle included Arthur G. Dove, John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Alfred H. Maurer, Max Weber, Abraham Walkowitz, and eventually Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler and Georgia O'Keeffe. Aside from Marin they all had abandoned or avoided illustration and printmaking.[44] The exact opposite was true for Henri's group. A number of Henri's followers had joined with John Sloan who, since 1912, had been art editor of the politically radical publication, *The Masses* (1911-1917),[45] The importance of *The Masses* is two-fold. First, it provided numerous artists the opportunity to combine illustration and art (Henri, Bellows, Sloan, Davis, Coleman, and others) in a way that exploited the styles, techniques and subjects they viewed as being particularly American. Second, *The Masses* generally reproduced large-scale crayon, wash or chalk drawings by means of highly perfected zinc process plates, a method of relief printing first practiced in France by F. Gillot in 1850.[46] The Gillotage produced images in broad masses and brought about a decisive break with the pen-and-ink technique of Charles Dana Gibson and his fellow illustrators. Such forms had long been ideal for artists like Daumier, Gavarni and Steinlen, who had sought to capture the emphatic meaning of a gesture, the burdens of the downtrodden, or the precise content of a petty incident. The same incisiveness may be detected in the language with which John Reed characterized the mission of *The Masses*:

Standing on the common sidewalk, we intend to lunge at spectres. . . . We intend to be arrogant, impertinent, in bad taste, but not vulgar.[47]

The events and ideas concentrated in the years around 1915 led to a quiet but definite American printmaking renaissance.[48] The stage had been set by Pennell's frequent trips to America after 1904 and his permanent return in 1917 after almost thirty years of

intermittent exile. He immediately set to work teaching at the Art Students League and, with his wife, authoring numerous books on the history of printmaking, illustration, and the development of the modern industrial landscape ("The Wonder of Work" series). With Albert Sterner (another artist trained as illustrator) Pennell attempted to pry the mysteries of lithography out of the secretive commercial shops so that artists could explore so quick and broad a means of printmaking.[49] Their ultimate success was Sterner's discovery, in 1914, of George C. Miller who, two years later, set up the first American workshop devoted solely to the production of artists' lithographs.[50] Thanks to the skills and patience of Miller, dozens of American artists, beginning with George Bellows in 1916, would be introduced to lithography over the next four decades.

Sloan's use of large, broad-mannered drawings as illustrations in *The Masses*, paralleled Pennell and Sterner's campaign to establish lithography as a respected printmaking medium in America. All three wished to utilize the more spontaneous and autographic qualities of lithography for the dissemination of ideas. Sterner was an illustrator who had learned lithography in the context of French Symbolism of the 1890s; Sloan had already executed five works on stone in 1908[51] and Pennell had published his 1912 drawings of the construction of the Panama Canal both as reproductive illustrations and as transfer lithographs. The connection between city life, social protest and lithography was reinforced by Théophile Steinlen's example. Sloan had long been familiar with the Frenchman's illustrations for *Le Rire* and had used them and the magazine to redesign *The Masses* in 1912. As a matter of fact, *The Masses* was illustrated with the exact same photo-relief processes employed by *Le Rire*, while the American illustrations owed much to the Frenchman's technique and subjects. Furthermore, Steinlen's lithograph of 1896, *Interior of a Street Car*, could be regarded as a prototype for the lithographic technique, figure style and subject of numerous works by Sloan, Reginald Marsh and Raphael Soyer.[52]

The year of the Armory Show also marked the founding and first exhibition of The Association of American Etchers, a very traditionalist group of printmakers. A second exhibition took place in 1914 and contained works by 28 artists.[53] As those associated with Henri and Sloan, many of these artists felt an increased interest in American subjects. In reviewing the second exhibition of the Association in 1914, Forbes Watson pointedly referred to this tendency:

The American subject is not healthy because it is American, but because it has been less 'seen,' and because, by the American, it can be realized with a depth of intimacy not possible, except in rare cases, to a stranger in a strange land.[54]

But it was during the following year, 1915, that one could claim American prints had arrived. On the 9th of January, Sterner invited to his studio a group of artists that included Childe Hassam, George Bellows, Boardman Robinson, Ernest Roth, George Brown and Leo Mielziner (?). Together they formed the Painter Gravers of America.[55] Their first exhibition was organized by Sterner and Bellows in an empty store on East 58th Street. One hundred and ninety-eight prints were hung, among which were those of Haskell, Eby, Higgins, Sterne, Sloan, Weir, Young, Arms, Goldthwaite, Hopper, Kinney, Auerbach-Levy and Myers. According to Ralph Flint, the exhibition toured this country and was followed by at least four more.

Whether it was the new society or simply the winds of change, 1915-1916 were years in which many of our finest printmakers first took up the litho crayon or the etching needle. In 1915, at the age of fifty-six, Childe Hassam began printmaking. George Bellows apparently made his only etching in 1915, as did Stuart Davis the following year. In 1916, Jan Matulka made the first of several etchings, Bellows initiated his incomparable lithographic work with the collaboration of Sterner and Miller, and William and Marguerite Zorach executed their first woodcuts. John Taylor Arms and quite probably a host of others did their first etchings at this time. But most significantly, 1915 marked the year in which two painter–illustrators began to etch, Martin Lewis and Edward Hopper. Their works set a standard for American etching that was in no way challenged until Jasper Johns took up the medium in 1967.

The fact that so many of our most important artists turned to printmaking en masse, as it were, was a signal that prints had achieved a new significance and popularity. The Panama Pacific Exposition, held in San Francisco in 1915, featured a large section devoted to American graphics. Ernest Roth and John Sloan both received prizes for etching. In 1916 the Brooklyn Society of Etchers held its first exhibition.[56] It is clear from these and other exhibitions that American printmaking meant American subject matter while modernist painting before 1920 signified its exclusion. Such a stance

was explicit in the selection of artists and in their statements for the Forum Exhibition of Modern American Art held in New York in 1916. The split in attitudes towards art was weakened, however, by the growing fear of involvement in the war being waged across the Atlantic. That fear drained some of the enthusiasm for imported styles and "isms" and favored recognizable indigenous subjects: cityscapes, urban society, and landscapes.[57]

As appeals to American independence and national identity acquired greater urgency, the image of the rugged individualist permeated even the ranks of the artist. Bellows, for example, had long been regarded as the paradigm of the American artist. Not only was he personally vigorous, but so were the subjects of his paintings. Their exclusion of European modernism was also ranked among Bellows' strengths. Other artists were lauded in a similar fashion, often for their recognition of and identification with the working classes. Everett Shinn's murals for the new City Hall in Trenton were praised, in part because Shinn had mingled with the workers and had "proven he was a man," and in part because they captured the spirit of the places and machines of the factories.[58] For the artist, "masculinity" signified a genuine commitment to life as the source of his inspiration. Each generation has redefined this attitude—one thinks of the statements of Benton, Pollock, Rauschenberg, Chris Burden and others. How distant is Pollock's talk about "being in my painting" from Sloan's involvement with the New York life around him? Even Henri's pupil, Rockwell Kent regarded his highly stylized designs as "by-products of life."[59]

The point of these and countless other statements is that they testify to the importance of the direct experience of life in American art. Stuart Davis wrote of his need for New York: "As an American I had need for the impersonal dynamics of New York City. . . ."[60] Because the American experience was so strong it has continually served as a root onto which European styles were grafted. Whether one was an American Scene painter or a modernist, the problem facing the American painter was how to be both modern *and* American, without surrendering either to provincialism or to a totally imported style.

Prints, with their underlying commitment to communication and readability, represented a closely connected series of statements of this American dilemma. The pressure to incorporate modernist styles is not absent from the works in this exhibition, but in almost all cases, those styles were grafted onto American subjects.

Whenever that occurs, especially in the prints of the late Twenties and Thirties, there results a particular American compromise. The elements of a given style are flattened, simplified, deprived of ambiguity, stylized, and sometimes caricatured. They are bent to the needs of the illustrator to tell something about life. What we formerly regarded as provincial efforts, may now be read, quite simply, as evidence of a very important American struggle for independence and identity. The American scene was and is the most central vehicle for the encoding of our self-understanding. To an astonishing degree this was appreciated by Robert Henri, his pupils and their critics from the very first:

Above all, Luks is an American. He believes sincerely, passionately in the future of America and American art. "Our young painters of promise should stay at home and work instead of going abroad," he says. "Let them go to Europe if they must to study the originals of great masters not otherwise accessible to them, but let them work here." After all, the commercial age is necessarily the great age of art. Under the urge of commercial activity those conditions are produced which should provide the inspiration for a great, virile, vital and abiding art. Here we have accentuated all the ambitions, struggles and passions which have inspired the world's history. Here we have wonderful romance, startling successes and failures, dizzy pinnacles of fortune and awful depths of doom. Here all the world meets in a single street, so to say; people of all the nations of earth meet and mingle in our crowds, compete in our market place. Here, too, the great vibrant passions which have burst with volcanic energies, making new nations and remaking others, the great revivifying forces of history, seethe between mansion and hovel. And here, as nowhere in the world beside, science performs splendid and stupendous miracles. . . . Where, if not here, can inspiration be found for poet, painter, orator, musician, sculptor or dramatist? . . . And here, too, is freedom from the dry rot of age and tradition, from the conservatism which kills the soul, from the dead past which like a mountain weighs upon the living brain.[61]

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After this catalogue had been set in type and proofread we discovered that Ralph Flint's and Harry Broadd's accounts of the formation of the Painter-Gravers of America was erroneous (F. Weitenkampf's mention of the group provided no details at all). A copy of the *First Annual Year Book of the Painter-Gravers of America*, at Harvard, clearly establishes that the founding date was 9 January 1917 (and not 1915). Obviously, our focus on 1915 must be modified. It would be more accurate, therefore, to claim that the renewed interest in printmaking began in 1913 and culminated in 1917. The charter members of the Painter-Gravers may now be

listed in full: G. Bellows, F. W. Benson, G. E. Brown, A. S. Covey, H. K. Eby, S. A. Guarino, E. Haskell, C. Hassam, E. Higgins, L. G. Hornby, E. Horter, A. Lewis (not M.), H. M. Luquiens, J. Marin, F. L. Mora, C. F. W. Mielatz, L. Mielziner, H. McCormick, B. J. O. Nordfeldt, H. Raleigh, B. Robinson, E. D. Roth, R. Ruzicka, M. Sterne, A. Sterner, J. Sloan, H. Townsend, J. A. Weir and M. Young. During their first year the society added J. T. Arms, G. Baumann, A. Goldthwaite, J. Held, W. A. Levy, E. Mars, J. Myers, J. A. Smith, D. Stevens and W. Simmons.

## NOTES

1. Jerome Myers, *An Artist in Manhattan*, New York, American Artists Group, 1940, p. 36.

2. Karen F. Beall, "Martin Lewis," *Print Review 14*, 1981, pp. 41-51, has recently suggested that the recognition bestowed on the work of Martin Lewis reflects a longing for more reassuring times. It must be admitted that the explanations for the growing appreciation of American art sound rather like the arguments invoked in the early Thirties in support of the Regionalists.

3. These include a most readable essay by Carey and Griffiths, *American Prints* (1980), Flint's brief synopsis, *The Print in the United States* (1981), Goldman's overview, *American Prints: Process & Proofs* (1982), and Fern's essay in Jacobowitz & Marcus, *American Graphics* (1982). Una Johnson's rambling and anecdotal text, *American Prints and Printmakers* (1980), is full of information.

4. It even reinforces the questionable practice of separating the painter-printmaker from the pure printmaker, a division the present writer has perhaps too rigorously insisted on for prints of the last twenty-five years (see my essay "Contemporary Trends," in

Michel Melot, Antony Griffiths, Richard S. Field, and André Béguin, *Prints, History of an Art*, Geneva and New York, Editions Albert Skira, 1981, pp. 188-233). My point is that such elitism is not productive when applied to the prints of 1900-1950 because it obscures concerns common to virtually all printmaking activity in the United States before 1960.

5. The study of technical lineages has rarely been undertaken. The exhibitions that have been mounted (e.g., Janet Flint's *Modern American Woodcuts* in 1974, or this writer's *Silkscreen: History of a Medium* in 1970) have not devoted their attention to this kind of detailed analysis. Some of this slack will be taken up, however, by the parallel investigations into the heritage of the printers. Clinton Adams' superb treatise, *American Lithographers: The Artists and the Printers*, will soon be published. In general, we need to unfold what might be called the sociology of printmaking. Who printed for whom? Who taught whom? Who were the dealers, when were the exhibitions, what were the reviews? To which treatises did artists turn for guidance? What were the important publishing ventures? (One thinks immediately of the documentation of group activity

detailed in Janet Flint's catalogue of 1981, *Art for All: American Print Publishing Between the Wars*.) Where is there a substantial bibliography devoted to the history of late 19th- and early 20th-century American printmaking? (Ludman and Mason's rather faulty bibliographies are a great help, of course.) Other needs are slowly being met: catalogue raisonnés are appearing in great quantity and with increasing quality in recent years (we trust that most may be found in our bibliography) and other studies are being devoted to the periodicals and reviews for which many artists worked. Only such an all-out assault will yield a coherent and comprehensive view of American printmaking. Anecdotalism must be replaced by historical research. The prime movers in this direction deserve mention, for our own work and thinking is based on their research and example. Without any doubt, the leading scholar is Janet Flint, Curator of Prints and Drawings at the National Museum of American Art. She follows in the footsteps of Una Johnson and the late Jo Miller, both of whom worked at the Brooklyn Museum. Sinclair Hitchings and Sylvan Cole have consistently published catalogues of lasting value, as have Peter Morse, William Dolan Fletcher, John Czestochowski, Jacob Kainen, Karen Beall, Alan Fern, Kneeland McNulty, David Kiel, June and Norman Kraeft, and Albert Reese. And no glance at the history of 20th-century American printmaking would be complete without mention of Frank Weitenkampf (1866-1962) and Carl Zigrosser (1891-1975).

6. Most of these have concentrated on the city, either architecturally or socially, or both. Among the most effective were Jane Farmer's *The Image of Urban Optimism* (which grew out of Joshua Taylor's study

of the same title–itself indebted to innumerable texts from those of Hugh Ferris down to Christopher Tunnard, Alan Trachtenberg, John Kouwenhoven and Dickran Tashjian) and James O'Gorman's *Skyscraperism: The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered*. Of a broader character were The Museum of Modern Art's *Manhattan Observed*, mounted in 1968 by William Lieberman, and Associated American Artists' *New York, New York*, of 1974. More specialized was *The Artist & The El* at the Mary Ryan Gallery in 1982, and the series of exhibitions devoted to Illustration at the Delaware Art Museum and the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, UCLA, in the 1970s. Even as this is being written, David Kiehl's exhibition of American Industrial Prints is opening at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

7. We have discussed some of the limitations of our selection in the Introduction to the Checklist of the Exhibition.

8. See Alan Shestack, "Some Thoughts on Meryon and French Printmaking in the Nineteenth Century," in James Burke, *Charles Meryon, Prints & Drawings*, ex. cat., New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, 1974, pp. 15-21; Eugenia P. Janis, "Setting the Tone–The Revival of Etching, The Importance of Ink," in Colta Ives, et al., *The Painterly Print, Monotypes from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980, pp. 9-28.

9. Lloyd Goodrich, *American Genre: The Social Scene in Paintings & Prints*, p. 8. Until very recently, these same words could have described our own attitudes toward most American prints from 1900-1950.
    There are no studies of the subjects of late 19th-century

American prints. The best general overviews may be obtained from Weitenkampf's rich, factual account published in 1912 as well as from Sylvester R. Koehler, *Etching*, New York and London, Cassell & Co., 1885. Three modest, recent exhibitions may also be noted: James E. Spears, *Etching as a Painter's Medium in the 1880s*, Washington, D.C., National Museum of History and Technology, 1974, essay by Elizabeth Harris; Francine Tyler, *The First American Painter-Etcher*, New York, Pratt Graphics Center, 1979; Glenn C. Peck, *America in Print 1796-1941*, ex. cat., New York, Hirschl & Adler Galleries, 1981.

10. See Lloyd Goodrich, *The Graphic Art of Winslow Homer*, New York, Museum of Graphic Art, 1968. Ironically, Homer's nine etchings (all but one from the 1880s) are still criticized for their journeyman-like approach to the medium—rather similar to James D. Smillie's bland technique of the same decade. But this very reproductive function may have permitted Homer's departure from the accepted repertoire of subjects for the illustrative and the fine print.

11. Pennell was completely aware of all the art around him, from Meryon and Whistler's etchings to what might well be the first American industrial painting, Bass Otis' *The Forge* (ca. 1815), at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (See Pennell, *Lithographs of War Work*, 1917). It is clear that Pennell has not yet received his due as artist, teacher, or writer. I am indebted to Marianne Doezema's imaginative and informed study of American industrial imagery, *American Realism and the Industrial Age*, ex. cat., Cleveland Museum of Art, 1980.

12. See Mary Panzer, *Philadelphia Naturalistic Photography*, ex. cat., New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, 1982.

13. See Ruth Bowman, "Nature, the Photograph and Thomas Anschutz," *Art Journal*, vol. 33 (Fall 1973), pp. 32-40.

14. See Davis' account in Diane Kelder, ed., *Stuart Davis*, New York, Praeger, 1971, p. 20.

15. See Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit*, New York, Lippincott, 1960 (originally published in 1923), p. 56. In this passage, Henri maintained that the inherent beauty of tools flows from their function rather than from the aesthetic intent of their designer.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

17. The influence of French non-academic practices— Delacroix's concept of rapid drawing, Lecoq de Boisbaudran's memory training, Manet's bravura brushwork, and the Impressionists' "slice of life" subjects—undoubtedly accounted for half of Henri's teachings; the other ingredient was his love of Dutch seventeenth-century painting. But his faith in American subjects and the imperative for each artist to seek his own expression through those subjects were very much Henri's unique contributions to American art. For one of Henri's earliest statements, made during his first year of teaching at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women, see *John Sloan/Robert Henri: Their Philadelphia Years (1886-1904)*, Philadelphia, Moore College of Art Gallery, 1976. Introduction by Dianne Perry Vanderlip.

18. I am exceedingly grateful to Lesley K. Baier who referred me to Will Jenkins' two articles on the

"Illustration of the Daily Press in America," *International Studio*, vol. 16 (June 1902), pp. 254-262, and vol. 17 (October 1902), pp. 281-291. Although Jenkins is not very informative, the terms in which he describes the styles of New York, Boston and Montreal illustrators are clearly those concerned with the choice and treatment of subject matter rather than form.

19. The one or two prints from his hand are not at all well-known and not mentioned by his biographers. One was exhibited in Baltimore in 1974; see Robert F. Johnson, *American Prints* (1974), no. 25, *Street Scene*, 1904 (70 × 108 mm.); another is owned by the Smithsonian Institution.

20. Summaries of these and other processes may be found in: Bullard, *John Sloan and the Philadelphia Realists as Illustrators 1890-1940* (1968); Carrington, "American Illustration and the Reproductive Arts," (1922); Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, vol. IV (1957), pp. 144-154; *The Golden Age of American Illustration, 1880-1914* (1972); *The American Personality; The Artist-Illustrator of Life in the United States, 1860-1939* (1976); *The American Magazine 1890-1940* (1979); and *City Life Illustrated 1890-1940* (1980). (For these and other references see the Bibliography.)

21. Virtually none of the studies of illustration grapple with stylistic problems. Some deal with the strictures imposed on the artist by the art editor, workshop practices, and technical processes. Others are concerned with individual reputations for special subjects and with the relationship between specific artists and publications. A few touch upon questions of historical antecedents. But, it appears, no one has sought to define the different "styles" used in various publications, to describe adequately the range of solutions developed by individual artists, or to correlate these relationships with categories of subject matter.

22. *American Artist*, vol. 17, no. 6 (June 1953), p. 46.

23. See Brown, *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1955, pp. 9 ff; also Wanda Corn, "The New New York," *Art in America*, vol. 61, no. 4 (July-August 1973), pp. 58-64.

24. See Clarence Hornung, *New York the Way it Was, 1850-1890*, New York, Schocken Books, 1977, and *The Way it Was in the U.S.A.*, New York, Abbeville Press, 1978 for two well-selected compendia of wood engravings from magazines of the period.

25. Hornung, *New York The Way It Was*, p. 94.

26. See Jesse Lynch Williams, "The Water-Front of New York," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 26, no. 4 (October 1899), pp. 384-399. I am most indebted to Sara Baughman for having pointed out this series of illustrations.

27. Linda Ferber and Robin Brown, *A Century of American Illustration* (1972), no. 8.

28. For M. G. Van Rensselaer's article, "People in New York," *The Century Magazine*, vol. 49, no. 4 (February 1895), pp. 534-548.

29. Reproduced in Joseph Pennell, *The Adventures of an Illustrator*, Boston, 1925, plate p. VII: "THE BETHLEHEM STEEL WORKS–WASH DRAWING 1881–DRAWN FOR THE ARTICLE ON THE MORAVIANS IN THE

CENTURY BUT NOT
USED–FIRST IMPORTANT
WONDER OF WORK
DRAWING."

30. See note 29. During the 1890s
Pennell wrote numerous articles
on illustration (Paul Sandys,
Aubrey Beardsley, Charles Keene,
etc.) and a book, *The Illustration of
Books*, London, 1896. Having
discussed the usual connections
between text and image, Pennell
added, "An illustration really is a
work of art, or rather it should be,
which is explanatory. . . . Today . . .
illustration is the most living and
vital of the Fine Arts, and among
its followers are found the most
able and eminent of contemporary
artists." (pp. 7-8).

31. We have already noted the
exceptions from the early Eighties,
namely Pennell's etchings of the
construction of Philadelphia's City
Hall and one of a coal depot. Only
in 1909 did he revert to this type of
subject in *In the Works, Homestead*
(Wuerth 512), executed during
Pennell's visit to Pittsburgh steel
mills.

32. Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer,
"Picturesque New York," *The
Century Magazine*, vol. 45
(December 1892), pp. 164-175.

33. As of now, there are no serious
studies of Mielatz's
accomplishments. Without
question his indebtedness to the
French etcher Félix Buhot
deserves study, but his influence
on American imagery deserves
even more. For example, Mielatz's
portfolio of New York lithographs
of 1898 preceded the more famous
set by Pennell in 1904. Mielatz was
very much identified with images
of New York City, as is amply
attested by the four commissions
given him by the Society of
Iconophiles. See I. N. Phelps
Stokes, *History of the Society of
Iconophiles of the City of New York,
MDCCCXCV–MCMXXX*, New
York, 1930.

It certainly seems possible that
Mielatz used photographs,
although there is no documentary
evidence to support such a
conclusion. That his work played
an important role in the formation
of the style and ambitions of
Alfred Stieglitz must be considered
a genuine possibility.

I cannot help but comment
here on the problematic article by
Matthew Baigell, "Notes on
Realistic Painting and
Photography, ca. 1900-1910," *Arts
Magazine*, vol. 54, no. 3
(November 1979), pp. 141-143.
The assertion that much of The
Eight's imagery is anticipated in
the photographs of Jacob Riis and
Lewis Hine is another of those
fasionable attempts to substantiate
the inventiveness of the
photograph. Closer to the truth is
the position taken here, namely,
that in the decades prior to 1900,
the popular press was filled with all
kinds of new imagery and
meanings that gradually made
their way into the "arts." What is
interesting, however, is what
Baigell has overlooked: that Riis'
photographs for *How the Other Half
Lives* were never seen in 1890 and
not for many years thereafter.
What were published were process
plate reproductions of drawings
*after* the photographs (and some of
these by the well-known etcher,
Otto Bacher!). Cleaned up as they
might have been, they certainly
were an interesting addition to the
growing volume of urban imagery
available to the public.

Unfortunately this short study
cannot hope to untangle the very
complex relationships that
undoubtedly existed among the
vernacular illustration, the
photograph, and the work of art
during the years between 1880 and
1905. To an already dense fabric
of urban imagery must be added

the influence of ideas, literary and social. The relationships between Dreiser's descriptions of urban life, for example, in *Sister Carrie* (published in 1900 but set in Chicago and New York in the years after 1889) and those painted by members of The Eight await more specific study. See, however, the two studies by Joseph J. Kwiat: "Dreiser and the Graphic Artist," *American Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Summer 1951), pp. 127-141 and "Dreiser's 'The Genius' and Everett Shinn, the Ash-Can Painter," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 67, no. 2 (March 1952), pp. 15-31. (Dreiser himself wrote on photography as early as 1899.)

34. Morse, in *John Sloan's Prints*, pp. 64-67 provides a detailed study of these etchings (53 by Sloan, 14 by Glackens, 2 by Luks, etc.) but does not specify the number of illustrations that were gravure reproductions of drawings.

35. See the unpublished dissertations by Merrill C. Rueppel (1956) and Edgar John Bullard III (1968). Sloan always acknowledged his debt to these masters, as in his "Autobiographical Notes on Etching," in Morse, *John Sloan's Etchings*, pp. 382-388; or the notes published by Helen Farr Sloan in *City Life Illustrated 1890-1940*, p. 13.

36. Naturally the de Kock etchings are not scenes of New York City life, but seriously researched fabrications of French life of the early nineteenth century.

37. More numbers 127-132, 134, 135, 137, 138, 150, 152 & 153.

38. A detailed inventory of these relationships is the subject of Charlene Engel's doctoral dissertation, *George W. Bellows' Illustrations for the Masses and Other Magazines and the Sources for His Lithographs of 1916-17* (1976).

39. Even Whistler did illustrations during two periods of his life; Arthur Dove, Arthur B. Davies, Edward Hopper, Joseph Stella, etc. were trained in or turned to illustration to support themselves.

40. Edward Hopper, "John Sloan & the Philadelphians," *The Arts*, vol. 11, no. 4 (April 1927), p. 172.

41. European prints by Bonnard, Cézanne, Condor, Denis, Gauguin, Jansem, Lehmbruck, Munch, Oppenheimer, Redon, Renoir, Lautrec and Vuillard were in abundance. The Americans were represented by Bolz, Pach, Sloan, Walkowitz (monotype), Weir and White. Information culled from Milton Brown, *The Story of The Armory Show*, Greenwich, Connecticut, New York Graphic Society, 1963.

42. For Davies' prints, see Price nos. 4, 24, 25, 57, 123, and 157 (the last, *Contemplation*, dates from 1914 and appears to be a genuine attempt to understand Picasso's Cubist "passage"). The most successful of these prints, *Figure in Glass* (Price 4, 1918) seems to anticipate Duchamp's *Large Glass* (and the fate that befell it).

43. Two of the most distinguished Curators of Prints at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, William M. Ivins, Jr. and A. Hyatt Mayor, were deeply committed to understanding and researching the communicative and functional roles of the print.

44. Walkowitz had made a number of prints in the early part of the first decade (these are so-far unstudied and uncatalogued), but these were quite provincial, and probably executed in France. It was only at the request of his dealer, Edith

Halpert, that he resumed printmaking, and that only because the Downtown Gallery had, in 1927, initiated a series of annual print exhibitions. I wish to acknowledge again my debt to my generous colleague, Janet Flint, for this and much other valuable information.

45. The best study of this "latitudinarian" publication, edited by Max Eastman after 1912, is Richard Fitzgerald's *Art and Politics—Cartoonists of The Masses and Liberator*, Westport, Connecticut, 1973. Unfortunately, Fitzgerald attempts to impose a rather Marxist view on what he sees as the "failure" of the artists who worked for *The Masses* to radicalize their art. By this yardstick, he finds Sloan's art disappointing. We would argue on the contrary, that the strength of this magazine was precisely in Sloan's adamantly held position that good art, rarely hooked to political texts, was the most effective means to move the reader. Fitzgerald fails to make the point that only a radical change in style (and not Art Young's pen-and-ink style of cartooning) could have radicalized the magazine artistically. The subversive aspect of art lies more in its formal inventions than in its portrayal of horror.

46. See André Béguin, *Dictionnaire technique de l'estampe*, 3 vols., Brussels, Published by the author, 1976-77, n.p. The first discovery utilized a transferred lithograph; the resulting prints were called "paniconographies." In 1872, Gillot found a way to produce relief plates photographically from any work of art, particularly drawings. This was the method, obviously further perfected, used for all of the large reproductions in *The Masses*.

47. Cited in Irving Howe's "Introduction" to William O'Neill,

*Echoes of Revolt: The Masses,* Chicago, Quadrangle, 1966, p. 6.

48. Printmaking was not particularly in vogue in America from 1895 until 1915. The reader should be reminded that the etching boom was a very real affair in the 1880s and even 1890s. In 1879, for example, 441 etchings were exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; in 1881, 769; in 1887, 338 works by women etchers.

49. So out of favor was lithography that few American artists of Sloan's generation had even attempted it. The single earlier American effort to generate enthusiasm for this popular European medium was made by Montague Marks, editor of *Art Amateur*. As reported by Pennell (in *Lithography and Lithographers*, p. 222), it was sometime around 1900 that Marks presented lithographic materials to J. C. Beckwith, J. Alden Weir, H. W. Ranger, F. Hopkinson Smith, J. Lauber, James G. Brown, Roger Donoho and Cleveland Coxe. It is to be hoped that Janet Flint will soon be able to reproduce some of these efforts; thanks to her, I have seen the very beautiful lithograph executed by Weir (Zimmerman no. 2).
   Pennell had learned lithography in Europe with Whistler's printer, Thomas Wey. Although an important apostle of the medium in the United States, it must be admitted that Pennell was not a particularly expert or sensitive lithographer. Most of his images are rapid illustrational drawings with little attention to style or to the qualities of the medium.
   Sterner's lithographic training had begun at Lemercier's in Paris in 1891 and continued during the first decade of this century at the firm of Klein & Volbert in Munich. See Ralph Flint, *Albert Sterner, His Life and His Art*, New York, 1927, *Catalogue of an Exhibition of*

*Lithographs by Albert Sterner*, New York, Berlin Photographic Company, 1915, and Harry A. Broadd, "Albert Sterner: Printmaker with Ideas," *Print Review 14*, 1981, pp. 27-40.

50. See Janet Flint's two studies: "The American Painter-Lithographer," in *Art & Commerce: American Prints of the Nineteenth Century*, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1978, pp. 126-142, and *George C. Miller and American Lithography*, ex. cat., Washington, National Collection of Fine Arts, 1976.

51. See Morse, *John Sloan's Prints*, nos. 142, 143, 144, 145 & 147. No. 143 is titled "Mother of the First King" and is one of the few allegorical figures in Sloan's printed oeuvre. It is much closer to Sterner's work in subject and execution than any of the other Sloan lithographs, but we imagine that is pure coincidence.

52. See Phillip Dennis Cate & Susan Gill, *Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen*, Salt Lake City, Utah, Gibbs M. Smith, 1982, p. 20; also the remarks on p. 132.

53. These included A. Goldthwaite, D. S. MacLaughlin, H. Winslow, E. Horter, L. G. Hornsby, G. Goetsch, E. Haskell, M. Young, J. W. Cotton, E. Higgins, A. Lewis, J. Marin (!), R. M. Pearson, G. Aid, and G. T. Plowman.

54. Forbes Watson, "The Association of American Etchers," *International Studio*, vol. 52, no. 207 (May 1914), pp. lxxix-lxxxvi.

55. The only record of this event known to me is contained in Ralph Flint's biography of Albert Sterner (see note 49 above), p. 28.

56. Included were Benson, Cassatt, Hassam, Haskell, Roth, Higgins, Mielatz, Webster, Goldthwaite, Sturgis, Smith, Partridge, Walkowitz, Kinney, Marin, Horter, Gallagher, Arms and Hornby–again, a rather conservative lot. Pennell was admitted to the second annual, while Hopper was not shown until the fifth, in 1920.

57. Just after the War, in 1919, Wehye Gallery published the first portfolio of fine prints to be issued in dozens of years, *Twelve Prints by Contemporary American Artists*. Of the twelve prints by Auerbach-Levy, Horter, Kent, Miller, Myers, Pach, Robinson, Ruzicka, Sloan, Sterne, Sterner and Young, eight were clearly inspired by American subjects.

58. "Everett Shinn's Paintings of Labor in the New City Hall at Trenton, New Jersey," *Craftsman*, vol. 21 (1912), pp. 378-385.

59. "I think of all the arts as by-products of life. Life has been and, God help me, always will be so exciting that I'll want to talk about it. My art, and that means pictures and books, will always be no more than an expression of my interest in living." Cited in William J. Spangler, "The Legacies of Rockwell Kent," *Print Review 14*, 1981, pp. 53-63.

60. Diane Kelder, ed., *Stuart Davis*, New York, Praeger, 1971, p. 27.

61. John Spargo, "George Luks, An American Painter of Great Originality and Force," *Craftsman*, vol. 12 (September 1907), pp. 599-607.
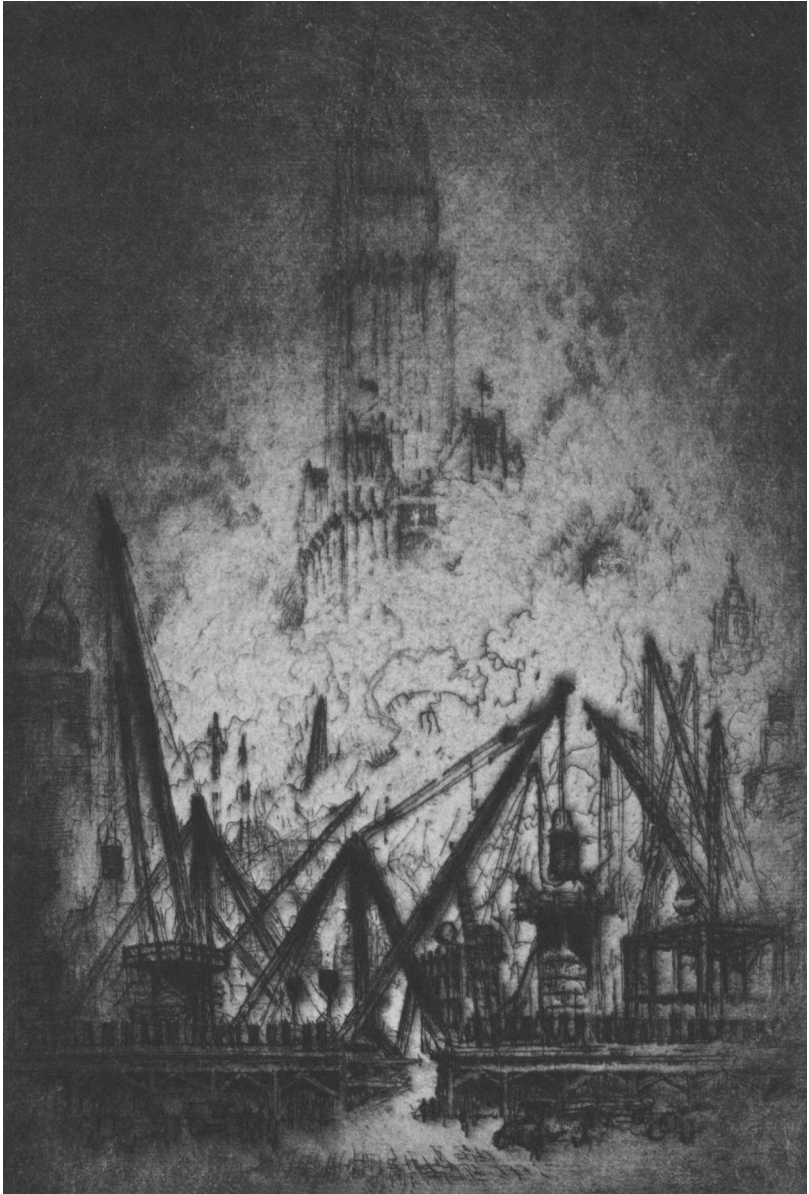
Joseph Pennell, *Caissons on Vesey Street*

# I Images of the Urban Complex: The City, Construction, Bridges, Transportation, and the Factory

Sara D. Baughman

Images of urban and industrial life largely remained the domain of the illustrator until the end of the nineteenth century. What would the new Vanderbilt mansion look like? Or the new Brooklyn Bridge? What was life like in a factory? How did Wall Street look during a panic? The wood engravers for such periodicals as *Harper's Weekly* or *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* sought to satisfy the public's curiosity about the appearance of the changing world. The late-nineteenth-century printmaker, on the other hand, preferred to render scenes removed from daily life: impressionistic landscapes, architectural monuments of the past, and an occasional sentimental peasant scene. The new buildings, bridges and machines displaced the older, nostalgic images as they took on significance as symbols of contemporary American life.

Around 1900, America's self-definition as a rural society gave way under the pressure of accumulated urban and industrial change. One in two Americans found themselves living in cities, whereas fewer than one in ten had done so in 1830.[1] The urban imagery initiated by America's journalists and illustrators found its way into the sensibilities of its writers and artists. Intellectuals like Henry Adams sensed a significant break with the past. Returning to New York from a European trip in 1904, Adams

. . . found the approach more striking than ever–wonderful–unlike anything man had ever seen–and like nothing he had ever much cared to see. The outline of the city became frantic in its effort to explain something that defied meaning.[2]

The New York skyline had become the universal symbol of the new era, but not without a measure of ambivalence. Adams' words captured the combination of fascination and repulsion inspired by the rapidly growing city at the turn of the century. Over the next four decades, the manner of representing the skyscraper and machine would reflect the changing attitudes towards the new age.

The work of Charles Mielatz in the 1890s provided a transition from old to new, combining nineteenth-century aesthetics with the new enthusiasm for urban subjects. At a time when most etchers went to Europe for inspiration, Mielatz devoted himself to the depiction of New York. Whereas the magazine illustrator of city life had cultivated a style tailored to convey the precise information necessary to his story, the printmaker sought to create a mood. In his print of *Cherry Street* (1904), Mielatz did not hesitate to allow shadow to obscure the figures and vehicles in order to create a unified atmospheric whole. The adaptation of the picturesque aesthetic to the depiction of modern forms was openly advocated by John Corbin in 1903:

Hideous it [the skyscraper] assuredly is to the rhythm-loving eyes of an architect. . . . Yet, the eye that delights in varieties of light and shadow, in the surprise of perspective and in the picturesque juxtapositions of masses, will find endless subjects of interest.[3]

Mielatz's high perspective exploits the dark shadow thrown across the foreground by the girders in order to enhance the viewer's sense of release into the sun-drenched street beyond. Like Corbin, he believes that such devices create a scene of interest, if not of beauty. Nevertheless, this print exhibits a new fascination with the stark lines of modern structures. Although Mielatz utilized typical nineteenth-century atmospheric terms, he boldly imposed the heavy iron work of the elevated roadway on the remnants of picturesque old New York. The contrast of the old and the new remained popular for decades, as in Samuel Chamberlain's *Manhattan–Old and New* (1929).

Corbin called the skyscraper "hideous" and that is how it was regarded by most of its early audience. Henry James, after his trip to New York in 1905, disdainfully described it as the " 'American beauty,' the rose of interminable stem,"[4] and peevishly remarked on "the new landmarks crushing the old quite as violent children stamp on snails and caterpillars."[5] Since the 1890s, office buildings using steel skeletons had reached heights that conspicuously contrasted with the surrounding mass of the city. Only gradually did a favorable response develop to the new urban structures. The enthusiasm of Europeans for American technology and the shock awaiting those who returned to modern America after several years' absence furthered the acceptance of both the skyscraper and the machine.

Herman Webster, a traditional architectural etcher specializing in quaint scenes of picturesque Europe, caught this new enthusiasm

on his return in 1910. He described the tall buildings as "the most marvelous things on the face of Mother Earth today." "It took me two months to begin to see them," he wrote, "but then they began to glow, to take shape, and to grow."[6] A number of drawings (for the *Century Magazine*) and etchings resulted, among which was *Cortlandt Street, New York*. This transitional work contained the elements of the most widespread approach to city imagery during the 1910s. While the critic Martin Hardie regretted the "uninspiring and unromantic" subject of Webster's print of Cortlandt Street, he praised the spirals of smoke that serve to "cast a veil over the sordid reality of the scene."[7] Turn-of-the-century artists (including photographers) began to emphasize the beauty of the modern city under a variety of atmospheric conditions–rain, fog, and snow–as had Mielatz in his rainy views of Madison Square and Broadway two decades earlier.[8]

In his essay on the modern city, John Corbin rhapsodizes on the way shadows gather at the foot of the tall buildings, and on the varying tones of mid-summer glare and mid-winter brilliancy. "At sunset the towering cornices take a radiance scarcely less beautiful in itself than the glow that suffuses a snow-capped Alp."[9] By alluding to Impressionist conventions, Corbin sought to "tame" the city, and to make it familiar. Joseph Pennell's *Sunset, from Williamsburg Bridge* (1915), reveals a similar intention. Just as earlier painters had depicted the radiance of a sunset on some unspoiled lake, so Pennell sought to capture the same delicacy of tonal range suffusing the city and the bustling river.

In Pennell's hands, Whistler's habit of etching directly onto the plate gained in spontaneity and became that much more capable of conveying the energy of the city under its mantle of diffused atmosphere. Even more dynamic and formally exciting were John Marin's etching and Rudolph Ruzicka's wood engraving of the Brooklyn Bridge, also of 1915. Resorting to an almost Neo-Impressionist vocabulary, Ruzicka's flecks of black and white evoke the brilliant sunlight and clear atmosphere for which New York once was renowned. The cropped sailboat and the depiction of the rippling water lend the immediacy of a snapshot.

As whole sections of the city were lifted up to match the heights of the lonely giants of the first decade, New York became known as the "Unbelievable City." It too was described in the terms of landscape. In 1916, Pennell referred to New York as the "mirage of the lower bay" formed by "mountains" in the morning and by mighty "cliffs" in the evening. For Pennell it was full of wonder, this

"Unbelievable city, the city that has been built since I grew up, the city beautiful, built by men I know, built for people I know."[10] John Taylor Arms also referred to New York as the "unbelievable city,"[11] while others used such terms as the "gigantic fairyland."[12]

Nothing could better represent this romantic image of New York than Martin Lewis' mezzotint *The Passing Storm* (1919). The emerging sun throws an unearthly light on the city, touching the pinnacles of skyscrapers but leaving their bases shrouded in shadow. The writer Walter Eaton sought to capture a similar effect in prose.

The Lower Island from the Bay and rivers is a perpetual revelation. Here the herded buildings are grouped like a titanic fist of mountains. . . . Again, on days of heavy atmosphere and lowering rain . . . I have seen the entire lower portions of the buildings obliterated, and only their summits reared on nothing into the gray air, a dream city, unbelievable, ethereal, immense.[13]

Writers and artists shared a vision which transferred the locus of the sublime from the "titanic fist of mountains" pictured by artists like Albert Bierstadt to the modern skyline. The future that Henry Adams feared had been transformed into a glorious vision.

Nourished by the prosperity of the 1920s, the enthusiasm for the skyscraper and the bridge steadily grew. The United States achieved the highest standard of living in history after World War I. Technological innovations and advances in time and motion studies fueled an incredible boom in manufacturing and construction between 1922 and 1929.

New construction transformed the very appearance of all urban America. Smaller cities such as Syracuse and Memphis built new skylines while the buildings in Manhattan and Chicago grew higher and higher. Extraordinary material prosperity combined with the exciting evolution of a new city form was bound to engender a certain optimism about the future and pride in the achievement. In addition, artists were encouraged to explore indigenous forms like the skyscraper as the question of "What is America?" became more pressing after the nation's emergence as a major world power after the war. Depictions of the urban panorama during the 1920s emphasized the clean, spare lines and sharply articulated volumes of the urban scene. Despite these forms, the emotional response to the city and machine retained a romantic nuance.

John Taylor Arms, an etcher deeply enamored of European architecture, responded to the vogue for city imagery in his aquatint, *West 42nd Street, Night* (1922). Always a superlative technician, Arms rendered an extraordinary range of tonal values

that enhance the volumes of his forms and voids. His choice of aquatint is particularly apt because of its ability to portray unusual atmospheric conditions while reducing mass and structure to continuous planes. The radiance which Pennell sought to achieve in his etching, *Sunset, from Williamsburg Bridge*, tended to dissolve form, whereas the incandescent lighting of Arms' night scene only enhances it. With Arms, there is a deeper acknowledgment of the forms of the urban world. Gradually, the prints of the 1920s were stamped by the Precisionist aesthetic, the simplification of detail, narrative and atmospheric incident through a radical reduction of formal means. As was pointed out in the Introduction, this represented a change from linear description filled with specific incident, to an emphasis on broader, more synthetic constructs that favored the planar aspects of printmaking.

Several techniques—wood engraving, aquatint and lithography—were given new life during the late Teens and Twenties. They provided alternatives to the Pennell and to Sloan's masses of scratchy etched line. For example, Gerald Geerlings executed his night scene, *Black Magic* (1928), in aquatint. In his hands, the darkish mass of the building retains a soft quality that transforms the skyscraper into a looming and mysterious presence. For Joshua Taylor, such images of the Twenties expressed an "urban optimism." They were utopian visions. Drained of society and its attendant problems, the technologically perfected skyscraper seemed to hold a promise of future rationality.[14]

Arms was careful to give the exact location of his subject in his title. While Geerlings did not, the site seems nonetheless identifiable, as is the case with the vast majority of prints devoted to the urban scene, including those of Sheeler and Lozowick. Only exceptionally—in a few early Lozowicks and Matulkas, in Walkowitz's 'Abstractions' of 1928, and in the later Marin—were prints used to explore abstract ideas and forms. While far less detailed and anecdotal than its nineteenth-century forebears, the modern American print of the city was reluctant to abandon the specific. Edward Hopper once remarked that etching seemed enslaved to its descriptive task.

A question that must puzzle anyone who has seen much of contemporary etching is why, when painting is in such a state of chaos and rebellion, so few etchers are concerned with technical innovation and experiment. But the practitioner struggling to bend the medium to serve his ends, realizes to the full the difficulty of plastic generalization in so meticulous a process as etching.[15]

Those artists who were schooled in European modernism were often the most stylistically experimental. John Marin began as an architectural etcher of European monuments but moved towards a more personal style with the encouragement of Alfred Stieglitz. Watercolor was his preferred medium, and in his 1913 etching, *The Woolworth Building*, he tried to capture its freedom of expression. In the oft-quoted statement provided for the exhibition of his watercolors at Stieglitz's "291" Gallery in 1913, Marin explained:

I see great forces at work; great movements; the large buildings and the small buildings; the warring of the great and the small; influences of one mass on another greater or smaller mass. Feelings are aroused which give me the desire to express the reaction of these "pull forces," those influences which play with one another; great masses pulling smaller masses, each subject in some degree to the other's power.[16]

In a new interpretation of the theme of the old and new city, Marin depicted the shorter buildings being stretched upward in response to the "pull" of the Woolworth Building. The air itself seems activated by the friction of encounter so specifically expressed in Marin's subtitle, *The Dance*.

In the *Woolworth Building*, Marin emphasized the all-over pattern of the print rather than the existence of volume in space. This tendency became more pronounced with time. In his *Brooklyn Bridge* (1915), the cityscape has become layered in order to fill the frame. By his late etching, *Skyscraper in Construction* (1930), he has eliminated almost all sense of volume. The disembodied black lines float on the white paper free of their usual descriptive or modelling roles.

Marin's explanation of his early expressionistic technique is couched in Futuristic rhetoric while his forms are not.[17] Movements like Futurism and Dada were most important for the printmakers in suggesting and justifying urban and industrial subject matter. It was not, however, an easy matter to make all the pieces fit together, to graft the words *and* the forms of Futurism (for example) onto American cityscapes. The divergence between the style of Marin's statement and the style of his work is a symptom of one of the major difficulties of American modernism, one that generally was avoided in the more traditional area of printmaking.

Jan Matulka's barely Cubist *Cityscape* of 1923 shares a similar interest in urban expressionism. Buildings are deliberately skewed in order to impart some spatial complexity to the pattern of their forms. Although he achieves an impression of some dynamism, the etching seems forced in comparison to the smooth overlapping of

planes in his oil compositions. In the face of the descriptive and popular American etching tradition, it would appear that Matulka found it difficult to abandon the individualized building forms and three-dimensional city space in favor of the impersonal conventions of abstraction.

A similar effort to adapt modernist conventions appears in Arnold Ronnebeck's *Brooklyn Bridge*, a lithograph of 1925. In his case, however, it was the decorative rather than the realist impulse that modified the Futurist-derived vocabulary. What had been intended as "lines of force" gave way to a fascination with pattern so pronounced that it imposed a flat grid on the waters of the East River. While the two-dimensional planes of Ronnebeck's bridge are bold and solid, the three-dimensional spaces are flattened and simplified. The artist avoids the kind of optical, coloristic and interpenetrating space that made Joseph Stella's painting of the Brooklyn Bridge so exciting. Ronnebeck's forms are far closer to the applied designs of Art Deco.

Because of the printmakers' interest in preserving the formal integrity of their subjects, they were willing to compromise with the rigors of high style. The adaptation of photographic vision to printmaking was particularly fruitful. While preserving the subject, the camera opened up new compositional possibilities. Charles Sheeler's view of the *Delmonico Building* (1927) demonstrates some of these unusual perspectives: the marshalling of successive flat planes by tilting the film plane away from the vertical, and the distortion that results from extreme foreshortening (as evidenced in the building on the right). Sheeler's choice of angle and lithographic execution effectively minimized the historicizing, Renaissance details of the facade and reduced contrasts between building materials. Although Sheeler always denied expressing anything other than a problem in form, the contrast he posed between the dark foreground building and the white, arrow-like surface of the Delmonico Building elicits the viewer's admiration of the new urban aesthetic. Much of Sheeler's imagery was generated by his collaboration with Paul Strand in 1921-22. Their movie, *Manhatta*, juxtaposed lines from Whitman's poem of the same title with images of the city taken from every conceivable angle. But insofar as Sheeler's vision was informed by his work as a commercial fashion photographer, his prints manifest a hint of the modern illustrator's (or advertiser's) fascination with smooth, slick surfaces–the very same kind of chic that informs Ellison Hoover's considerably later lithograph, *New French Hat (see Section II)*.[18]

The camera opened up an entirely new range of composition for the printmaker. For example, Earl Horter's *Chrysler Building* (1937) and William McNulty's *Gotham* (1928) both exploit and exaggerate the dramatic foreshortening of the photographic vision.

The Depression curtailed technological optimism; nevertheless, the lure of the skyline was not easily abandoned. Some, like Leo Meissner in *Future New York, #2* (1930s) continued (with tongue-in-cheek?) to place their hopes in technology. Most, like Armin Landeck in *Manhattan Vista* (1934) expressed their deflated mood in subtly greyed, somewhat bleak, rectilinear cityscapes. In the wood engravings of Howard Cook, the use of stark, foreshortened planes of black conveys an ambiguously menacing note in *Hotel New Yorker* and *Manhattan Bridge* (both 1930).

This transformation of the building from an optimistic to an oppressive symbol is clearest in the treatment of images of construction. Artists, illustrators and photographers were all captivated by the real drama of construction. The printmakers, encouraged by Pennell's words and graphics, were especially drawn to this subject, as if responding to some inherent correspondence between the structure of the print and the steel skeleton of a building. *Caissons on Vesey Street* (1924), Pennell's last print, transforms an everyday scene into a melodramatic encounter between the cranes of new construction and the disembodied symbol of an older order, the Woolworth Building. The same striking shapes of construction continued to intrigue printmakers and their audiences well into the 1940s, as is demonstrated by Martin Lewis' *Derricks at Night* (1927) and Armin Landeck's *East River Construction* (1941).

In the years immediately following the Crash of 1929, construction continued, and some prominent structures such as the Empire State Building and the Golden Gate Bridge were erected. Artists interested in depicting the worker found natural models at these sites. For them, the skyscraper most often took on its earlier literary significance as an emblem of the false values of the capitalist age. As the Depression deepened, satirical images of people worshipping skyscrapers were occasionally seen.[19] Like the art of *The Masses* and *The New Masses*, images of increasing political protest were couched in ever more conservative artistic forms.

The representation of the factory and the machine followed many of the same lines of development as the cityscape. Almost no printmakers were attracted to the machine; it seemed to be the domain of the photographer and the painter who seized upon its

structural and symbolic possiblities. Aside from Pennell and
Nordfeldt's chimney-and-smoke dominated Impressionist views, the
factory remained a fairly insignificant theme for printmakers until
the late 1920s.

The beauty of steam and smoke so attracted Pennell that he
bewailed the advent of electricity. In his drypoint of *Old Broad Street
Station* (1919), which he considered the "most pictorial train shed in
the world,"[20] his interest clearly lies in capturing the effect of the
rising smoke and steam. He wrote about a related print:

But over all the smoke curls and swirls and the sun in the late afternoon
streams in and turns the station to glory, transfigures even the
Commuters.[21]

Pennell enhanced the effect of sunlight on swirling steam through
his deft handling of the white of the paper and the wiping of the ink.
The great clouds of energy roll up into the drypoint lines of the
beams, dissolving and overpowering the great train shed.

Entranced by the urban-industrial scene since childhood,
Pennell wrote as well as drew. In an article for *Harper's Monthly
Magazine*, he described the mills, docks and bridges of America as
"the true temples of the present."[22]

The builders of these mills have unconsciously achieved a great and
romantic composition, and there is more grandeur in their mighty mass
against the evening glow than in all the romantic castles that were ever
painted or written about.[23]

Pennell's etching, *Under the Bridges, Chicago* of 1910, is a powerful
celebration of this type of industrial romanticism. By situating the
viewer underneath the bridge (an idea that may be indebted to
Mielatz's *Cherry Street*),. Pennell emphasizes the heroics and the
vitality of the great Chicago Edison Works. That Pennell might also
have glimpsed the ominous aspects of the industrialized city is only
speculation.

Pennell obviously had to ignore all social implications in order
to see this kind of beauty in the industrial scene. In his book *Pictures
of the Wonder of Work*, he digresses to discuss the living conditions
of the immigrant workers, but then notes:

But I only looked at the coal breakers as making, perfecting, carrying out a
composition in a glorious landscape, and for that reason I sat down and
drew it.[24]

Such blind aestheticism remained typical of the approach of the
majority of artists to industrialization and urbanization. Although

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writers and reformers would continue to rail against the evils
attendant to industrialism, printmakers embraced them as
transcendent symbols until the late 1920s.

How different are Louis Lozowick's lithographs of the *The
Crane* (1928) and *Corner of the Steel Plant* (1929)! If Pennell pursued
the evanescent effects of smoke and steam, Lozowick eschewed these
atmospheric effects altogether in order to concentrate on the
delineation of form. For this purpose, he turned to the medium of
lithography, as Sheeler had done before him. In an article printed in
1930, Lozowick wrote that lithography lent itself to "ornamental
abstraction on the one hand and photographic realism on the
other."[25] The artist had somehow to follow a median path between
them. Lithography had been revived as an artistic, rather than
reproductive, medium only in the late Teens, mostly for its gestural,
autographic potential. It became popular in the 1920s, however,
not for its autographic qualities, but for its broad range of even
tone. It facilitated composition by plane and shape rather than by
line, by gradation rather than abrupt contrast. As Lozowick points
out, these qualities could be exploited either for their
decorative/abstract or for their realistic/photographic potentials.

Lozowick began as a painter and acquired a broad knowledge of
modernist styles, including Purism, De Stijl and Constructivism,
during his stay in Europe from 1920-24. Yet, on his return to
America, he gradually moved towards greater realism and a greater
involvement in printmaking. In part, this shift resulted from his
socialist politics. Lozowick had emigrated from Russia as a boy and
always maintained an active interest in the Russian revolution.
Despite his modernism, he was unable to turn a deaf ear to the
Marxist dismissal of contemporary art as ornamental abstraction. In
his own art he strove for a balance between realism and reductivism.
The heroic scale and accentuated perspective of *The Crane* were
probably stimulated by Lozowick's visit to the Soviet Union in 1928.
But the even greater simplification of form, elimination of detail,
and attention to edges of *Corner of a Steel Plant* do not appear to
reflect strong Communist leanings. In fact, there seems to have been
a deep-seated conflict between Lozowick's politics and his art.
Although he was a frequent contributor to *The New Masses*, his
efforts to glorify the industrial environment could hardly have been
of much solace to the worker. The simplified and comprehensible
terms in which the factory and the machine were rendered,
however, might be regarded as a concession to his viewers, much the
same way the illustrator reduced his forms to essentials in order to

more easily reach his readers. In any case, it was only a partial withdrawal from the elitist languages of modern art. The period was still alive with enthusiasm for technology. In the paintings of Lozowick, Driggs, Dickinson, Spencer, Ault, Sheeler and others, a machine-like purity of form signified the high moral expectations of an industrial society.[26]

The New York "Machine Age Exposition" of May 1927 marked the apogee of American enthusiasm for art and technology. The exhibition displayed actual machines alongside works of art. For the catalogue, Lozowick wrote an essay which revealed the breadth of his optimism.

The dominant trend in America of today is towards an industrialization and standardization which require precise adjustment of structure to function . . . and thereby foster in man a spirit of objectivity excluding all emotional aberration. . . . The dominant trend in America of today, beneath all the apparent chaos and confusion is towards order and organization which find their outward sign and symbol in the rigid geometry of the American city: in the verticals of its smoke stacks, . . . the cubes of its factories. . . .[27]

This passage more than any other sums up the longing for objectivity and rationality that artists expressed after the "emotional aberration" of World War I. Nowhere is this better expressed than in the lithographs of Sheeler and Lozowick.

In the austere forms of Lozowick's steel plant, function is regarded as a source of beauty. Jane Heap, the organizer of the Machine-Age exhibition, wrote in the prospectus of 1925: "Utility does not exclude the presence of beauty . . . on the contrary a machine is not entirely efficient without the element of beauty."[28] Beauty and efficiency were considered to be two sides of the same coin. Charles Sheeler exhibited this same attitude in his comment about the Ford River Rouge complex: "in the successful fulfillment of their purpose it was inevitable that beauty should be attained."[29]

The Depression shattered expectations for order and many artists turned to social commentary. In his lithograph entitled *Traffic Control* (1937), Benton Spruance creates a marvellous hieroglyph of speed bordering on chaos. The checkerboard pattern of racing flags, the repeated hunched backs of drivers, and the overlapping of the streamlined forms of automobiles evoke a wry mixture of modernism and confusion. Although relying heavily on Lozowick's formal vocabulary, Spruance returns his shapes to the more caricatural forms of popular illustration. What had been refined,

spacious and serious in the 1920s has become patterned, compressed and tinged with humor in the 1930s.

The loss of heroic scale and symbolic significance could not be better observed than in a comparison between Hopper's *The Locomotive* of 1922-23 and Horter's *Autogyro* of ca. 1937. Separated by more than a decade, Hopper's engine is powerful while Horter's seems flimsy and slightly whimsical. Although a simple image, *The Locomotive* is fabricated of a dense web of black line that imparts structure to the machine and mystery to its relation to the men and the tunnel. On the other hand, the *Autogyro* is pieced together from lighter, irregular planes of aquatint that somehow change the triumph of flight into a slightly unsettling experience.

Not all images of the Thirties were political or humorous, however. Some continued the fairly dispassionate recording of life in the tradition of John Sloan. The railroad yards continued to provide subjects for American art throughout the Depression, including numerous prints by Reginald Marsh. Etchings like *Erie Railroad and Factories* (1930) perpetuate Sloan's neutral, uninflected etched line. Once again, the message resides completely in the subject. The strong diagonal pull of the train, stabilized by the cubes of the factories behind it, seems to express confidence in business as usual. Most artists, however, did not share Marsh's faith. Their interest was deflected from the factory and the construction site to the worker himself and to the daily routine of city and country life.

## NOTES

1. Figures by Daniel Boorstin, cited in Barbara Beth Zabel, *Louis Lozowick and the Technological Optimism of the 1920s*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1978, Ann Arbor, University Microfilms International, 1979, p. 52.

2. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918, p. 499.

3. John Corbin, "The Twentieth Century City," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 33, no. 3 (March 1903), p. 262.

4. Henry James, *The American Scene*, New York, Horizon Press, 1967, p. 77.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

6. Quoted by Martin Hardie in "Herman A. Webster," *Print Collector's Quarterly*, vol. 2 (1912), p. 58.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

8. I am indebted to Alan Trachtenberg's lectures on Alfred Stieglitz for this information.

9. John Corbin, "The Twentieth Century City," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 33, no. 3 (March 1903), p. 260. For a more detailed discussion of the role of landscape conventions in early views of the city, see Wanda M. Corn, "The New New

York," *Art in America,* vol. 61 (July-August 1973), pp. 60-61.

10. Joseph Pennell, *Pictures of the Wonder of Work,* Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott, 1916, p. 14.

11. John Taylor Arms, *American Etchers: John Taylor Arms,* New York, Crafton Collection, 1930, p. 6.

12. Herman Webster, quoted in Martin Hardie, "Herman A. Webster" (1912), p. 58.

13. Walter Prichard Eaton and Rudolph Ruzicka, *New York,* New York, Grolier Club, 1915, pp. 21-22.

14. Introduction to Jane M. Farmer, *The Image of Urban Optimism,* Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977, p. 4.

15. Edward Hopper, Review of Malcolm C. Salaman, *Fine Prints of the Year, 1925,* in *The Arts,* vol. 9 (March 1926), pp. 172-173.

16. "Notes on '291': Water-colors of John Marin," *Camera Work,* nos. 42-43 (April-July 1913), p. 18.

17. For the suggestion that Marin may have been familiar with Futurist literature, see Burr Wallen and Donna Stein, *The Cubist Print,* Santa Barbara, University of California, 1981, pp. 53-54.

18. Susan Yeh, "Charles Sheeler: Industry, Fashion and the Vanguard," *Arts Magazine,* vol. 54, no. 6 (February 1980), pp. 154-158.

19. See the reproduction of a woodcut-like drawing by Charles Silver, entitled *A.D. 1931,* in *The Survey,* vol. 67, no. 2 (October 15, 1931), p. 66.

20. Quoted by Louis A. Wuerth in *A Catalogue of the Etchings of Joseph Pennell,* Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1928, p. 244.

21. *Ibid.,* p. 244.

22. Joseph Pennell, "The Wonder of Work in the Northwest," *Harper's Monthly Magazine,* vol. 132 (March 1916), p. 591.

23. *Ibid.,* p. 592.

24. Pennell, *Pictures of the Wonder of Work* (1916), p. xvi. In his Introduction to *Joseph Pennell's Pictures of War Work in England,* London & Philadelphia, 1917, H. G. Wells wrote on the same themes:

    *He gives us the splendors and immensities of forge and gun-pit, furnace and mine-shaft. He shows you how great they are and how terrible. Among them go the little figures of men, robbed of all dominance, robbed of all individual quality. . . . He sees these forges, workshops, cranes, and the like as inhuman and as wonderful as cliffs, or great caves, or icebergs, or the stars. They are a new aspect of the same logic of physical necessity that made all these older things, and he seizes upon the majesty and beauty of their dimensions with an entire impartiality.*

25. Cited in Janet Flint, *Prints of Louis Lozowick,* New York, Hudson Hills Press, 1982, p. 25.

26. Aside from Sheeler (whose output was limited to five lithographs and one screenprint), none of the Precisionists made prints.

27. Cited in Flint, *Prints of Louis Lozowick* (1982), pp. 18-19.

28. Jane Heap, "Machine-Age Exposition," *The Little Review,* vol. 11 (Spring 1925), pp. 22-24.

29. Quoted in Karen Tsujimoto, *Images of America, Precision Painting and Modern Photography,* Seattle & London, University of Washington Press, 1982, p. 82.

# CHECKLIST

*Section I-A    The Urban Complex:*
*The City*

John Taylor Arms
Washington, D.C. 1887–New York
City 1953
*West Forty-Second Street, Night,* 1922
Etching and aquatint
272 x 171
Bassham 124, second state of two
Lent by Davison Art Center,
Wesleyan University; Gift of the
Artist

Samuel Chamberlain
Cresco, Iowa 1895–Marblehead,
Massachusetts 1975
*Manhattan–Old and New,* 1929
Drypoint
230 x 180
Chamberlain p. 203
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Howard N. Cook
Springfield, Massachusetts
1901–Ranchos de Taos, New
Mexico 1980
*Hotel New Yorker,* 1930
Wood engraving (?)
445 x 217
Checkerboard 93
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

Gerald K. Geerlings
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 1897–
*Black Magic, New York,* 1928
Etching and aquatint
298 x 167
Library of Congress 3
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Earl Horter
Philadelphia, 1881–Philadelphia,
1940
*Chrysler Building,* 1937
Etching and aquatint
252 x 202
Commissioned as Christmas card
by Walter P. Chrysler
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

Armin Landeck
Crandon, Wisconsin 1905–
*Manhattan Vista,* 1934
Drypoint
255 x 218
Kraeft 47
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

Martin Lewis
Victoria, Australia 1882–New York
City 1962
*Passing Storm,* 1919
Mezzotint
264 x 353
McCarron 29
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

Louis Lozowick
Ludvinovka near Kiev, Russia
1892–South Orange, New Jersey,
1973
*Hanover Square,* 1929
Lithograph
375 x 227
Flint 28
Printed by George C. Miller
Lent by Associated American
Artists, New York

44

John Marin
Rutherford, New Jersey 1870–
Cape Split, Maine 1953
*Woolworth Building, The Dance*, 1913
Etching with drypoint
327 x 266
Zigrosser 116, second state of two
Lent by the Philadelphia Museum
of Art: THE ALFRED STIEGLITZ
COLLECTION

Jan Matulka
Prague, Czechoslovakia, 1890–
Queens, New York 1972
*Cityscape*, 1923
Etching
258 x 197
Flint 30
The Walter R. Callender, B.A.
1894, Fund

William C. McNulty
Ogden, Utah 1889–Gloucester,
Massachusetts 1963
*Gotham*, ca. 1928
Drypoint
345 x 184
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Leo John Meissner
Detroit 1895–Monhegan, Maine
1977
*Future New York No. 2*, 1928
Linoleum cut
318 x 216
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art
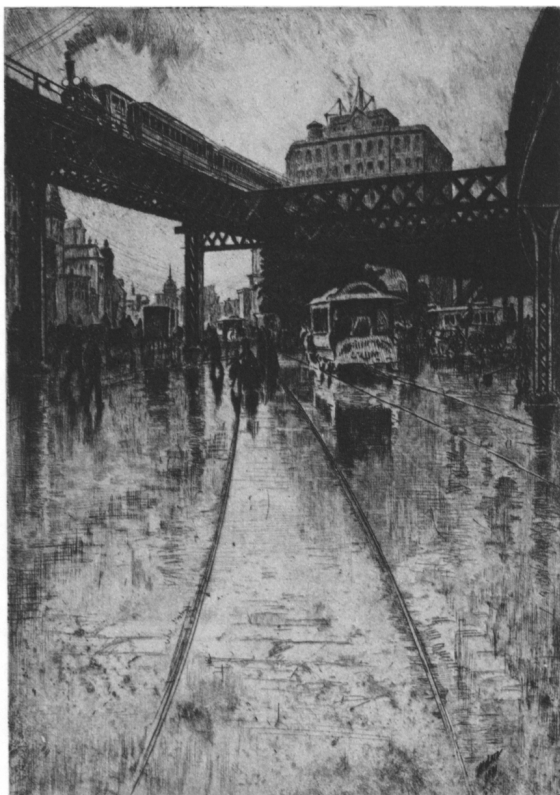


Charles F. W. Mielatz
*Rainy Day, Broadway*

Charles F. W. Mielatz
Breddin, Germany 1864–New
York City 1919
*Rainy Night, Madison Square,* 1890
Etching and plate tone
251 x 176
Lent by Davison Art Center,
Wesleyan University; Gift of
George W. Davison

Charles F. W. Mielatz
Breddin, Germany 1864–New
York City 1919
*Rainy Day, Broadway,* 1891
Etching
253 x 173
Lent by Davison Art Center,
Wesleyan University; Gift of
George W. Davison

Charles Sheeler
Philadelphia 1883–New York City
1965
*Delmonico Building,* 1926
Lithograph
248 x 171
The Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901,
Fund and Director's Purchase Fund

Herman Armour Webster
New York City 1878–1970
*Cortland Street, New York,* 1910
Etching
329 x 192
Flint 52
Gift of Walter S. Brewster, B.A.
1895

*Section I-B    The Urban Complex:*
*Construction*

Armin Landeck
Crandon, Wisconsin 1905–
*East River Construction,* 1941
Engraving
210 x 330
Kraeft 85
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Martin Lewis
Victoria, Australia 1882–New York
City 1962
*Derricks at Night,* 1927
Etching and drypoint
202 x 303
McCarron 58
Gift of J. Paul Oppenheim

John Marin
Rutherford, New Jersey 1870–
Cape Split, Maine 1953
*Skyscrapers in Construction, No. 1,*
1930
Etching
255 x 174
Zigrosser 147
Published by Alfred Stieglitz
Lent by the Philadelphia Museum
of Art: Gift of the J. Wolfe Golden
and Celeste Golden Collection of
Marin Etchings

Joseph Pennell
Philadelphia 1860–New York City
1926
*Caissons on Vesey Street,* 1924
Etching with plate tone
402 x 236
Wuerth 854
Lent by Davison Art Center,
Wesleyan University; Gift of
George W. Davison
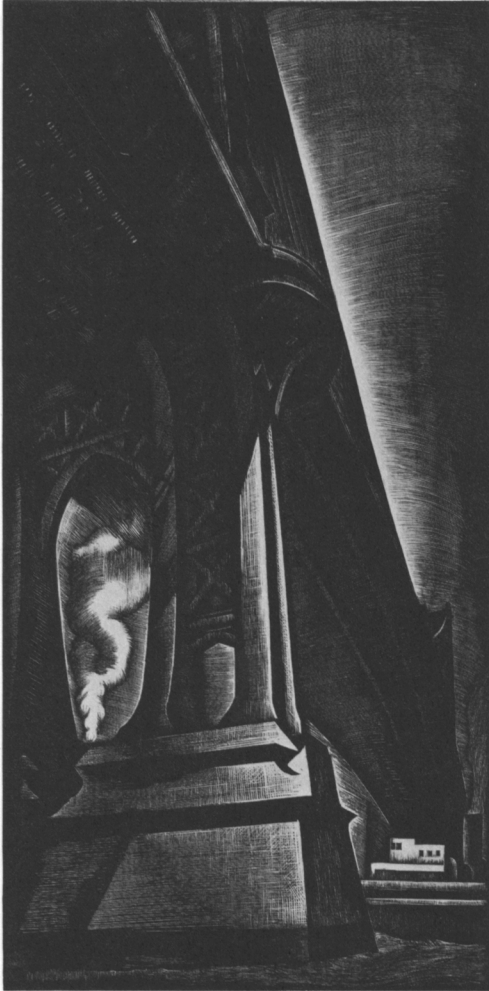
*Section I-C   The Urban Complex:*
*Bridges*

Howard N. Cook
Springfield, Massachusetts
1901–Ranchos de Taos, New
Mexico 1980
*Manhattan Bridge,* 1930
Wood engraving
445 x 217
Checkerboard 97
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

Kerr Eby
Tokyo, Japan 1890–Norwalk,
Connecticut, 1946
*Brooklyn Bridge,* ca. 1930
Drypoint
350 x 262
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

John Marin
Rutherford, New Jersey
1870–Cape Split, Maine 1953
*Brooklyn Bridge and Lower New York
(The Sun),* 1915
Etching
273 x 326
Zigrosser 122
Lent by the Philadelphia Museum
of Art: Purchased: Staunton B.
Peck Fund from the Carl and Laura
Zigrosser Collection

Charles F. W. Mielatz
Breddin, Germany 1864–New
York City 1919
*Cherry Street,* 1904
Etching
306 x 189
Lent by Davison Art Center,
Wesleyan University; Gift of
George W. Davison

Joseph Pennell
Philadelphia 1860–New York City
1926
*Sunset from Williamsburg Bridge,*
1915
Etching and drypoint
211 x 276
Wuerth 674
Lent by Davison Art Center,
Wesleyan University, Middletown,
Connecticut

Arnold Ronnebeck
Nassau, Germany 1885–USA 1947
*Brooklyn Bridge,* 1925
Lithograph
322 x 170
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Rudolph Ruzicka
Czechoslovakia 1883–Hanover,
New Hampshire 1978
*View of Brooklyn Bridge,* 1915
Wood engraving
190 x 179
Grollier Club 1948, no. 47; Library
of Congress 3
Lent by the Philadelphia Museum
of Art: Purchased: Lola Downin
Peck Fund from the Carl and Laura
Zigrosser Collection

*Section I-D   The Urban Complex:
Transportation*

Edward Hopper
Nyack, New York, 1882–New York
City 1967
*The Locomotive,* 1922–23
Etching
210 x 252
Zigrosser 17; Levin pl. 100
Gift of George Hopper Fitch, B.A.
1932

Earl Horter
Philadelphia 1881–Philadelphia
1940
*Autogyro,* ca. 1937
Aquatint
226 x 255
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

Earl Horter, *Autogyro*

Reginald Marsh
Paris 1898–Dorset, Vermont, 1954
*Erie Railroad and Factories,* 1930
Etching
203 x 304
Sasowsky 90; sixth state of six
Lent by the William Benton
Museum of Art, University of
Connecticut; Gift of Helen Benton
Boley

Joseph Pennell
Philadelphia 1860–Brooklyn, New
York 1926
*Trains That Come and Trains That Go
(Old Broad Street Station,
Philadelphia, Now Demolished),* 1919
Drypoint
253 x 299
Wuerth 712
Gift of G. Allen Smith

Benton M. Spruance
Philadelphia 1904–Philadelphia
1967
*Traffic Control*
Lithograph
225 x 363
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

49

Louis Lozowick
Ludvinovka near Kiev, Russia
1892–South Orange, New Jersey
1973
*Crane,* 1928
Lithograph
312 x 215
Flint 11
Lent by Davison Art Center,
Wesleyan University; Gift of
George W. Davison

Louis Lozowick
Ludvinovka near Kiev, Russia
1892–South Orange, New Jersey
1973
*Corner of Steel Plant,* 1929
Lithograph
288 x 198
Flint 21
Printed by George C. Miller
Lent by Associated American
Artists, New York



Louis Lozowick
*Crane*

Joseph Pennell
Philadelphia 1860–New York City
1926
*Under the Bridge, Chicago (Edison
Works)*, 1910
Etching with plate tone
232 x 305
Wuerth 593
Lent by Davison Art Center,
Wesleyan University; Gift of
George W. Davison

B. J. O. Nordfeldt
Sweden 1878–Texas 1955
*The Night Shift, Chicago,* 1911
Drypoint
197 x 300
Lent by the Metropolitan Museum
of Art; Gift of Mrs. B. J. O.
Nordfeldt

Martin Lewis, *Rainy Day, Queens*

# II City Life

Richard S. Field, Debra N. Mancoff and Lora S. Urbanelli

*II-A  On the Street*

Most traces of city life itself were noticeably absent from images of
the idealized cityscape. The greater the symbolic content of the city,
the less it could afford the distractions of the specific incident,
moment or fashion. Yet for some printmakers, the fascination of the
city was its people. In this Section, crowded streets, parks and places
of entertainment replace the empty and timeless Precisionist City.
These are records of life on the move, of the types, pleasures, and
surroundings that made New York the most intriguing and active
city of the world. But it was not merely the urban bustle or a
succession of vignettes and types that concerned these artists. Each
of them identified with urban life and sought its equivalent in the
individuation of his technical means.

     Under the leadership of The Eight, a new genre of urban
imagery was developed. All of life was deemed worthy of the artist's
attention: crowds in the street, strolling shopgirls on their lunch
breaks, patrons in cabarets, and idlers on street corners. The advice
that Robert Henri had given to his painting classes at the New York
School of Art to "Draw your material from the life around you, from
all of it," became the watchword of the new printmakers.[1] They
instilled in their works an honesty and a realism born of intense and
persistent observation.

     A similar devotion to recording the urban scene governed much
contemporary illustration. Even before the turn of the century, a
more realistic, reportorial style, whose essential motive was the
depiction of American life, had existed side by side with the
more genteel imagery of the fashionable illustrator. As important as
the new realism of this reportorial style was its choice of subjects.
By 1870, the news media focused increasingly on American cities.
The press accordingly devoted more of its attention to events that
directly concerned the growing ranks of its middle- and lower-
class urban readership. By the second decade of this century,

American printmakers would embrace the same subjects, treating them with the same fidelity but with an increased measure of compassion and individuality.

In the 1920s, John Sloan went so far as to give the following advice to aspiring artists at the Art Students League:

Do illustrations for a while. It won't hurt you. Get out of the art school and studio. Go out into the streets and look at life. Fill your notebooks with drawings of people in subways and at lunch counters. . . . Most important of all is to observe while you are drawing, so that you enrich your memory. Such training is essential to the illustrator and after all, there is an element of illustration in all great art.[2]

Sloan's colleagues and students in no way scorned such advice: most of the artists whose work is included in this Section were at one time active as illustrators. Yet his remarks should not be understood to suggest that the illustration and the print were considered one and the same. An illustration was imagined in the context of the written word it accompanied. Although it might have been sufficiently expressive to exist without that text, it was intended to amplify the author's work and was placed in the magazine to support, not compete with that text.[3] In contrast, the print was conceived as a distinct entity. Unhampered (and unaided) by a supporting verbal narrative, the printmaker strove to cast his observations in a succinct visual language, while still drawing inspiration from a variety of sources. As Helen Farr Sloan has observed, this visual language was not determined by a single style or point of view:

The diversity of graphic work . . . is an indication of the broad point of view which the whole generation had. It was not interested in establishing a fashion. It did not have a school. The creative diversity which is the strength of this kind of flexible tradition is the very thing that makes it difficult to put a label on its theme or style.[4]

Ultimately, though, the printmakers who were drawn to the human sideshow strove for a spontaneity of execution responsive to the pace of urban life.

When Sloan spoke to his students about the virtues of the illustrator, he was able to draw from his own experience. During the years 1892 to 1916 he had worked for newspapers and magazines such as the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Philadelphia Press*, the *New York Herald*, *Collier's Weekly*, *Good Housekeeping* and *Harper's Weekly*. As John Bullard has pointed out, Sloan worked in two manners during

his early years, one derived from the poster style of Grasset, the other from the observation of contemporary life as inspired by Hogarth, Goya, Daumier, Leech and Steinlen.[5] Sloan's best work, however, was not derivative, but proposed a serious and sympathetic view of the life he lived, not merely observed.

Sloan recorded his progress on *Night Windows* of 1910 in diary entries during the month of December.[6] His vantage point was his own window, from which he looked across the alley to the back of apartment buildings on 23rd Street. The idea of a distinct vignette was noted on December 12th:

The subject of the plate is one which I have had in mind—night, roofs back of us—a girl in deshabille at a window and a man on a roof smoking his pipe and taking in the charms while at a window below him his wife is busy hanging out his washed linen.

While Sloan's description emphasized the anecdotal, his etching found more meaning in the pictorial terms of the image. In a rather small space, he was able to convey the contrast between the somewhat shabby alley or courtyard, with its marvelous play of variously illuminated shadows and windows, and the towering, lit skyscrapers beyond. Sloan's minor drama is played out on the planes of the buildings, the man and his wife associated with the near, shaded wall, the desirable woman combing her hair with the lit window of the far wall. The subtleties of these oppositions remove the image from the realm of anecdote and narrative; there is no action, only the suggestion of the feelings of the observer. Sloan's etching pauses to record an intimate moment in the midst of the impersonal metropolis. His technique is similarly unassuming and straightforward; tone is largely achieved through linework rather than the wiping of the ink.[7] Subject and technique are in total harmony, the quick, direct method reflecting the immediate and honest glimpse of a life lived. How different is Childe Hassam's equally moving, but far less intimate view of New York public life, in which the figures are in harmony with, but dwarfed by, the massive buildings of Fifth Avenue. Hassam's modernism lies in his fascination with the movement, shapes and tones of the city, not with its minor incidents or individual inhabitants. His detached, quasi-abstract approach vivified the energies and pictorial joys of the city in a manner that no etcher after was able to duplicate.

George Wesley Bellows was equally committed to an art of the city. But the subjects he chose were unusually diverse, embracing a wide range of American experiences, from revivalist meetings,

prize fights and street life to literary allegory. Like Sloan, Luks, Glackens and Shinn, Bellows was from the first an illustrator; and beginning in 1904, he too studied with Henri. By the end of the decade he had executed some of his most important paintings and had contributed illustrations to *Harper's*, *The Century*, *Metropolitan* and the *American Magazine*. Bellows turned to lithography in 1916; the inherent flexibility of the process, its potential for drawing in large gestural masses, and its richness of tone were well suited to the vigorous subjects that fascinated him.

   *In the Street* of 1917 looks at lower-class life under the shadow of the El. Bellows' preparatory drawings for this print reveal that his earliest conceptions were full of anecdotal content.[8] One of these drawings found its way, appropriately, onto the pages of *Harper's Weekly* of 11 April 1914, with the caption, "I was Beatin' 'is Face."[9] These first drawings concentrated on the taunting street kids, restrained by a burly policeman. In the final, lithographic version, the youths were moved to one side, the melon-peddler replaced the police officer and two haughty women inserted on the left became the new focal point of the image. Just as Sloan had dampened the anecdotal element in his *Night Windows*, so did Bellows. The impression of a particular place at night rather than the ruckus caused by the street urchins is his main concern. In confirmation of this change, Bellows subtitled the lithograph in neutral, descriptive terms: "Under the Elevated, Lower East Side in Mid-Summer." It is significant that when Bellows used the image again as an illustration, this time for *The Masses* in July 1917, it was to the earlier drawn version that he turned rather than to the lithograph.

   One of Bellows' co-illustrators on the staff of *The Masses* was Glenn O. Coleman. Although his images possess none of the power of Bellows' lithographs, lacking the latter's focus, his deep black and white chiaroscuro, and his command of human gesture and expression, they do record some of the earliest, large-scale drawings of New York streets. While *Bonfire* dates from 1927, it is extremely likely that it derives from one of Coleman's drawings of ca. 1907. At that early date, these drawings were highly praised for their cleverness, that is for their exact portrayal of well-known city types in their appropriate city quarters.[10] The fact that such bland images were still acceptable in the 1930s testifies to the viability of the illustrational mode throughout the first half of our century.

   Reginald Marsh was also a chronicler of urban activities. His own experience as an illustrator began at Yale University where he worked for the *Yale Record*. After graduation in 1920, he became a

free-lance illustrator for newspapers and magazines. Norman Sasowsky recently observed:

In Marsh's panorama of New York, humanity was the center. He liked crowds, movement, the vitality and variety of popular life. Wherever the crowds were thickest, he found his subjects.[11]

Marsh turned the action of the city street into a burst of rhythmic pattern in the linoleum cut of 1921, *Mid-Town Impressions*. As in Bellows' print, two fashionably dressed women serve as the focal point of the composition. But unlike any printmakers of The Eight, Marsh introduced a totally modernist element. The women's surroundings–the double-decker bus, skyscrapers and bustling crowds–are expressed in angular, broken forms, which are strikingly parallel to Fernand Léger's Cubist-derived but object-oriented abstractions for Blaise Cendrars' *J'ai tué* (1918) and *La fin du monde* (1919).[12] The linocut appealed to Marsh, seeming to stimulate the most compositionally experimental prints in his oeuvre.[13] *Mid-Town Impressions* was published by *Vanity Fair* in May 1922. There Marsh's title was elaborated with the subtitle, "The Fifth Avenue Bus, a Very Modern Lady, in a Cubist Limosine, Views the Pageant of the Avenue," giving the print a stylish emphasis and a greater illustrational context.

Until 1925, Marsh continued to work as an illustrator, documenting city subjects and vaudeville shows for the *New York Daily News*. He then became a member of the *New Yorker* staff, and began contributing work to *Esquire, Fortune* and *Life*. Increasingly convinced of the value of observaton, Marsh advised:

Go out into the street, stare at the people. Go into the subway. Stare at the people. Stare, stare, keep on staring. Go to your studio, stare at your pictures, yourself, everything.[14]

The intensity of Marsh's advocacy of observation was, in part, derived from the teachings of Kenneth Hayes Miller (1876-1952), the motivating force behind the 14th Street group. Miller, himself a protégé of Henri and Sloan, already had many years of teaching experience, beginning in 1899 as an instructor at the Art Students League. Miller adopted a monumental figure style and an architectonic etching technique reminiscent of the stable, frontal forms favored by the early Renaissance masters of fresco. But the subjects for some of his paintings, and most of his prints, were taken from contemporary life. His art was yet another (not terribly successful) example of the American propensity to graft new materials onto a variety of established European models. *Leaving the*

*Shop*, an etching of 1929, is indicative of Miller's curious blend of humorous and formalist treatment of middle-class types. Marsh's *Schoolgirls in the Subway–Union Station*,[15] an etching of 1930, shows similar interest; but Marsh's invariable enthusiasm for the vigor and variety of city life gives his figures an energy and bravura that is totally absent from Miller's work.

Isabel Bishop was a contemporary of Marsh and another of Miller's pupils at the Art Students League. In 1926, she took a studio near her colleagues on 14th Street near Union Square,[16] and in 1931 the three went to Europe. Although American artists still felt compelled to travel abroad, they did so more to see the Old Masters and to reaffirm the importance of the artist to society, a concept always in doubt in the pragmatic America. In actuality, Bishop regarded Miller as a "symbol of staying and working in New York City," an exemplar of dedication to the portrayal of contemporary urban America.[17] Her etching, *Noon Hour* of 1935, reveals her own regard for the commonplace routine of the working woman. This theme occurred repeatedly in her work, but with a sensitivity to intimate gesture and psychological nuance that could only have been derived from a direct contact with Rembrandt's etchings.

The Australian-born printmaker, Martin Lewis (1882-1962), who like his colleagues supported himself with commercial work, was similarly dedicated to the observation of New York street life.[18] Although several of his artistic conventions reflect his training as an illustrator, he was not a journalist and did not concentrate on either the small anecdotes, little types or minor moments of urban life. His art was totally pictorial and finished. In his photographic realism, Lewis followed in the footsteps of Charles W. Mielatz and Joseph Pennell. But in his sensitivity to the changing light and textures of the city, he had no peer on either side of the Atlantic. So exquisite is *Rainy Day, Queens* (1931) that the viewer is hard-pressed to locate the exact source of his pleasure. Ultimately it is found in the extraordinary balance between the illusion of sensory impressions–the wet streets with the perfectly captured reflections, the textures of the sidewalk, buildings, and other objects–and the tangible tactility of the etched surface itself.[19] A similar perfection exists, as well, in the equilibrium obtained between the forces that pull us into the space and those that gently return the viewer to the surface.

Lewis' technique far outshone that of other American etchers of daily life; only John Taylor Arms could muster such control over texture and detail, but he never matched the magical lighting of

which Lewis was so fond. Even the relatively undramatic *Subway Steps* of 1930 is a marvel of precision that suggests the swirl of wind catching both dust and skirt, and evokes the pleasure of emerging from the oppressive underground into the soaring freedom of the midtown street. Again Lewis finds subtle ways to express his feelings: the mechanically repeated horizontals of the stairs and the smoothed verticals of the buildings act as a framing foil for the motion of the ascending and descending passengers, their swinging skirts, their shapely legs, and their graceful hips.

Yet, it is precisely here that Lewis fails in a way that Hopper, for example, does not. He is too descriptive and too attached to the graces and formal niceties of the moment. His best known prints lack the abstract poetry of Hopper's. His figures are too chic, and one begins to suspect an incipient tendency to pattern and repeat their forms (many of the figures in the three Lewis prints in this Section must be recognized as variations on a single theme). Ultimately, Lewis fails to infuse his spaces with the psychological, contemplative and out-of-time qualities that raise Hopper's etchings to the highest levels of symbolic thought. But, let it be said that Lewis' failures are probably the greatest triumphs of the illustrational mode in American printmaking.

Satire and humor formed another link between the work of the illustrator and the printmaker. The biting wit of Adolph Dehn was probably sharpened in his early work for *The Liberator* (1918-1924), successor to *The Masses* (1911-1917). Dehn's lithograph of 1933, *Easter Parade*, is a rather outlandish caricature of female vanity in which a haughty display of material finery not only envelops the women but literally defines them. Although numerous works of the Thirties have assumed a comfortable distance, there still remains something rather embarrassing about Dehn's simple-minded hyperbole. Still, this lithograph was one of six published by the Contemporary Print Group, a coalition of printmakers dedicated to meaningful commentary on contemporary life.[20]

In his wood engraving, *It's a Small World*, Leo Meissner seems more interested in simple humor than in social comment.[21] Meissner, yet another product of the Art Students League (under George Luks and Guy Pène du Bois), indulges in a bit of provincial New York humor. Composed of polished shoes on striding feet, this "dog's-eye view" of the world seems to await the author's title as one might expect a caption for a *Life* photograph or a *New Yorker* cartoon. Probably its humor is as much to be found in the unexpected combination of the inconsequence of the cartoon and

the perfection of the wood engraving. Such an image, however, is symptomatic of the occasional lack of probity in the prints of the Thirties. New York was in turmoil, the contrasts between rich and poor everywhere. One need only consider the distance that separates the style and subject of Ellison Hoover's fashion plate from Marsh's breadline (Section III). A strain of irrationality was often in the air.

*II-B  Entertainment*

As much as the city was a place of work and commerce, it also served the people's need for release from stress or boredom. As the entertainments offered by the city increased, so did their portrayal by the observers of the urban scene. Such images were often crammed with the frenzied actions of those in search of pleasure and escape; a few focused on the quieter aspects of leisure.

As one might suspect, John Sloan's work exerted a considerable influence on the development of this genre. *Hell Hole*, a nickname for the Golden Swan nightclub, transports the viewer into one of the regular haunts of the New York theatrical crowd. The specific date, 1 May 1917, suggests that Sloan intended to record a particular evening, as many printmakers of the period were prone to do. His notes reveal that "the character in the upper right hand corner of the plate is Eugene O'Neill"; with the playwright are friends Peggy O'Neill (no relation), author René Lacoste (right corner) and Charles Ellis (left foreground).[22] This is one of the few etchings to which Sloan added aquatint, obviously to better suggest the close, smoke-filled atmosphere of the room and to find an equivalent for the constantly distracting noises of the crowd.

The gleaming attractions of the night, the surge of humanity along the Great White Way (as Broadway was called in the Thirties), and the slightly lascivious mood that seized those who went there, is all set down in Fritz Eichenberg's small wood engraving, *City Lights* of 1934. What could not be acted out was suggested by lit posters and advertisements. It was all part of the unreal night world which lent itself so well to the mannerist conventions of the white-line wood engraving.

But not all entertainment was confined to the night. Masses of humanity packed off to the New York beaches during the sweltering summers. Aside from aerial photographs, Reginald Marsh's etching, *Coney Island Beach* (1934) is perhaps the most succinct image of the sea of bodies for which Coney Island was

famous. Marsh repeatedly returned to survey the seashore crowd in order to explore the incredible variety of physical types and activities in a singularly uninhibited atmosphere. Something of that wild release even invades the informality of the etched line, its classical cross hatching suddenly loosened. Marsh wrote of his fascination with the "crowds of people in all directions, in all positions, without clothing, moving–like the great compositions of Michelangelo and Rubens. I failed to find anything like it in Europe."[23] Ironically, Marsh's inspiration may have been strictly American, but much of his composition and many of his figures appear totally European. The writhing mass of bodies culminates in the teetering human pyramid much like a complex Baroque sculpture.

Similar in composition and in its exploitation of anatomy, now muscular and bulging, is Paul Cadmus' etching, *Shore Leave* (1935). Although it derived from a painting executed on the Spanish island of Mallorca, Cadmus regarded the print as one of his "American subjects." Cadmus has frequently been accused of vulgarity, but this etching, like Marsh's, must be acknowledged as a serious satirical image as well as an ambitious artistic undertaking.[24]

If the distractions of the night club, Broadway and Coney Island satisfied the excesses of those who sought relief from the treadmill of routine or the cramped confines of city apartments, the parks and the movies offered escapes into quieter, more private worlds. The parks, especially Central Park, offered an unmistakable refuge from the hectic pace of city streets. The park was green and soft, the air cleaner and the sun more plentiful. Above all, the rhythms were slower and a stroll could lead to rumination and relaxation for the mind as well as the body. For an artist like Bellows, the park provided a contrast between city and country. The bold contrasts of black and white, the repeated types, the massing of shapes, and the towering form of the Plaza Hotel impart a summary, almost wallpaper look to his early lithograph, *In the Park* (1916). For Matulka, the park occasioned a retreat into a rather French conception of nature as still-life. The highly stylized figures, their turned and flattened contours just hinting at Futurist sculpture, inhabit a landscape whose trees and lampposts assume the very same shapes. Matulka's *Boat Scene in Central Park* (1923) is devoid of incident, avoids the habitual American opposition between natural and urban forms, and has little of the sense of caricature, humor, directness of observation, or social commentary that has characterized most of the American prints in this exhibition. Matulka's later prints and his drawings for *The New Masses* slowly

wean away what one would have called the artificial veneer of European stylization. The contrast between Bellows and Matulka reveals these important distinctions, and demonstrates what we regard as the illustrational content of American prints.

Certainly these qualities are abundantly present in Mabel Dwight's exuberant lithograph, *Stick 'Em Up* of 1928. Although the image and its commanding title may occasion a smile, it is one that disguises the depth of communion between the individual moviegoer and the action on the screen. The direct confrontation with the viewer and the decidedly unsophisticated terms of the drawing not only parody the rather superficial subject of the movie, but cleverly couple the experience of the viewer with that of the audience. By so doing, the content of the movies (not the movie) becomes the meaning of the print. We are able to infer the escapism through identification that made the movies so important for an increasingly oppressed urban society.

Nothing could be further from Dwight's movie than Hopper's. Yet he, too, came from the ranks of the professional illustrator. As early as 1899, Hopper studied at the Correspondence School of Illustrating in New York. From 1900 to 1906, he studied with Henri and Miller. Until the late 1920s, Hopper earned his living through his illustrations, working for the C. C. Phillips Agency, and contributing to periodicals like *Everybody's*, *Scribner's*, *Express Messenger*, and *Hotel Management*.[25]

*The Balcony* is one of Hopper's earlier theater images. From a high vantage point at the top of the balcony, Hopper fixes on the backs of two isolated female patrons. The subject, but not its treatment, recalls the loge scenes of Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt and Auguste Renoir. It is not the bustle of life or the analysis of space and form that interests Hopper the most, but the meanings that may resonate from the contrast between the two individuals and the vast, empty space of the movie house. It is unclear whether the women are watching a movie, given the high level of light in the theater. What is clear is their look of total absorption, one that isolates each from the other. Reinforcing this sense of isolation is the alignment of architectural elements which seem to parallel and even encase the women's lines of sight. The play of light and dark serves to further develop the mystery of their states of being. For Dwight the movies were a kind of escape into extroversion, for Hopper a gentle and solitary path to inner contemplation.

Like the prints of an idealized urban environment or those of an idealized rural landscape, those of the life and distractions of the

city's people were important in presenting a vivid picture of Americans to Americans. Many of the prints tried to summon up worlds different from the relenting truths of the photographically illustrated magazines. They were full of social commentary, fantasy, humor and events too minor for the press. But the two streams of imagery worked in tandem, not at cross-purposes. Both reported on the nature of life in America.

## NOTES

1. Robert Henri, as quoted in *City Life Illustrated 1890-1940* (1980), p. 34.

2. John Sloan, *The Gist of Art*, New York, 1939, pp. 81 & 86.

3. See Elizabeth Hawkes' analysis of this relationship in her essay, "Magazines and Their Illustrators," in *The American Magazine* (1979), p. 27.

4. Helen Farr Sloan in *City Life Illustrated 1890-1940* (1980), p. 13.

5. See John Bullard, *John Sloan and the Philadelphia Realists as Illustrators* (1968).

6. See Morse, *John Sloan's Prints* (1969), p. 176, and Bruce St. John, ed., *John Sloan's New York Scene*, New York, 1965, pp. 484-486.

7. Lloyd Goodrich observed:

   *Etching offered to Sloan richer technical resources than any other graphic medium he had used. The refinement of the etched line, its differing weights and densities, and its actual physical substance due to the pressing of the paper into the ink-laden lines, made it a far more living medium. . . . His plates were 'honest' technically, not depending upon tricks in wiping or printing, the tones produced by straight line work. They had no Whistlerian ultra-refinements.*

   From *John Sloan*, ex. cat., New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1952, p. 29.

8. See Mason and Ludman, *The Lithographs of George Bellows* (1977), p. 90. The drawings are in the collection of the Boston Public Library.

9. See Charlene Engel, *George W. Bellows' Illustrations for The Masses* (1976), **. pp. 112-114.

10. See "Undercurrents of New York Life sympathetically depicted in the Drawings of Glenn Coleman," *The Craftsman*, vol. 17 (1909), pp. 142-149.

11. Norman Sasowsky, *The Prints of Reginald Marsh* (1976), pp. 9-10.

12. See Burr Wallen and Donna Stein, *The Cubist Print*, ex. cat., Santa Barbara, California, University Art Museum, 1982, nos. 76-78. Like many Frenchmen, Cendrars had been overwhelmed by New York on his visit in 1912. *La fin du monde* features an American businessman as God!

13. Sasowsky, *The Prints of Reginald Marsh* (1976), p. 52. Marsh printed his own blocks, most of which are now in the collection of the Yale University Art Gallery.

14. Reginald Marsh, as quoted in *City Life Illustrated, 1880-1940* (1980), p. 68.

15. Marsh executed an untitled painting of the same general design and subject. It is in the

collection of the artist's wife. Sasowsky, p. 154.

16. She still maintains a studio in the vicinity. Susan Teller, *Isabel Bishop, Etchings and Aquatints* (1981), p. 4.

17. Lawrence Alloway, "Isabel Bishop, The Grand Manner and the Working Girl," *Art in America*, 63 (September-October 1975), pp. 61-62.

18. Although Lewis drew illustrations for a weekly newspaper in Sydney, his contributions to American journals are unclear. Barbara Blackwell, *The Art of Martin Lewis: Emerging from the Shadows*, ex. cat. Ithaca, The Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, 16 March-24 April 1983, p. 7.

19. *Lewis achieved these effects solely through work in the plate, and he felt that any other means constituted deception: The essential qualities of a good print may be considered as brilliancy of impression, purity and definite intention of line and aesthetic unity. Many modern etchers attempt to get by manipulation of the printing, effects that should be obtained by work on the plate itself.*

   From Martin Lewis, "Etchings," *Picture and Gift Journal* (March 1928), p. 164. On Lewis' technique see also Thomas Bruhn's

illuminating essay in *The Graphic Work of Martin Lewis*, ex. cat., Storrs, Connecticut, The William Benton Museum of Art, 1978.

20. See the introduction to the following section and Janet Flint's remarks in *Art for All* (1981).

21. It is impossible to date Meissner's prints accurately since they were never signed by the artist. D. Roger Howlett of Childs Gallery, Boston, has undertaken a catalogue of the prints, but so far no documentary evidence has been retrieved to help establish a chronology.

22. Morse, *John Sloan's Prints* (1969), p. 212.

23. Sasowsky, *The Prints of Reginald Marsh* (1976), p. 10. Sasowsky notes (p. 189) that this print was given the specific date of 13 July 1934. A painting of the same year, title and design, at the Yale University Art Gallery, was made by projection of the printed image onto the canvas.

24. See *Paul Cadmus / Prints and Drawings 1922-1967*, New York, American Artists of the Twentieth Century, 1968, p. 8.

25. Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper, the Complete Prints* (1979), p. 15.

## CHECKLIST

*Section II-A    City Life: On the Street*

George Wesley Bellows
Columbus, Ohio 1882–New York City 1925
*The Street*, 1917
Lithograph
485 x 387
Beer 9; Mason 47
Printed by George C. Miller (?)
Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Fletcher Fund

Isabel Bishop
Cincinnati, Ohio 1902–
*Noon Hour*, 1935
Etching
176 x 124
Miller 13
Gift of Mrs. Laurent Oppenheim for the J. Paul Oppenheim Memorial Collection of Contemporary American Prints

Mortimer Borne
Rypin, Poland 1902–
*L' Fulton Street,* 1949
Etching
251 x 202
Lent by the Metropolitan Museum
of Art; Gift of the WPA–New York
Project

Glenn O. Coleman
Springfield, Ohio 1887–Long
Beach, New York 1932
*Bonfire,* 1927
Lithograph
339 x 468
Goodrich 1928, p. 262
Gift of Lydia Evans Tunnard

Adolph Dehn
Waterville, Minnesota 1895–New
York City 1968
*Easter Parade,* 1933
Lithograph
248 x 340
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Douglas Gorsline
Rochester, New York 1913–
*Idler,* 1940
Etching
203 x 108
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Childe Hassam
Dorchester, Massachusetts 1859–
Easthampton, Long Island 1935
*Fifth Avenue, Noon, April 1916*
Etching
253 x 183
Clayton 77
Lent by the Metropolitan Museum
of Art; Gift of Mrs. Childe Hassam

Ellison Hoover
Cleveland, Ohio 1888–1955
*New French Hat,* 1935–40
Lithograph
288 x 224
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Martin Lewis
Victoria, Australia 1882–New York
City 1962
*Rainy Day, Queens,* 1931
Drypoint
267 x 299
McCarron 100
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

Martin Lewis
Victoria, Australia 1882–New York
City 1962
*Subway Steps,* 1930
Drypoint
346 x 210
McCarron 96
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

Reginald Marsh
Paris 1898–Dorset, Vermont 1954
*Midtown Impressions–Cityscape,* 1921
Linoleum cut
260 x 184
Sasowsky EE
Bequest of Mabel van Alstyne
Marsh

Reginald Marsh
Paris 1898–Dorset, Vermont 1954
*Schoolgirls in Subway–Union Station,*
1930
Etching
247 x 203
Sasowsky 103, fifth state of five
Lent by the William Benton
Museum of Art; Gift of Helen
Benton Boley

Leo John Meissner
Detroit 1895–Monhegan, Maine
1977
*It's a Small World,* 1930
Wood engraving
150 x 210
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Kenneth Hayes Miller
Oneida Community, New York
1876–New York City 1952
*Leaving The Shop,* 1929
Etching
202 x 252
Tyler 84, fourth state of four
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

John Sloan
Loch Haven, Pennsylvania 1871–
Hanover, New Hampshire 1951
*Night Windows,* 1910
Etching
136 x 179
Morse 152, first state of five
Gift of Dr. Hollon W. Farr, B.A.
1939, in memory of Professor
Hollon A. Farr, B.A. 1896

*Section II-B   City Life: Entertainment*

George Wesley Bellows
Columbus, Ohio 1882–New York
City 1925
*In the Park,* 1916
Lithograph
406 x 535
Beer 48; Mason 31
Printed by George C. Miller
Bequest of Edith Malvina K.
Wetmore

Paul Cadmus
New York City 1904–
*Shore Leave,* 1935
Etching
164 x 292
Johnson & Miller 83
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

Mabel Dwight
Cincinnati, Ohio 1876–Sellersville,
Pennsylvania 1955
*Stick 'Em Up,* 1928
Lithograph
263 x 261
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Fritz Eichenberg
Cologne, Germany 1902–
*City Lights,* 1934
Wood engraving
158 x 123
Associated American Artists 1947,
no. 6, Eichenberg 1977, p. 21
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Edward Hopper
Nyack, New York 1882–New York
City 1967
*The Balcony (The Movies),* 1928
Drypoint on zinc
202 x 251
Zigrosser 33; Levin pl. 108
Lent by the Philadelphia Museum
of Art: Purchased: Thomas Skelton
Harrison Fund

66

John Sloan, *Hell Hole*

Reginald Marsh
Paris 1898–Dorset, Vermont 1954
*Coney Island Beach,* 1934
Etching
254 x 253
Sasowsky 153, fourth state of four
Lent by the William Benton
Museum of Art; Gift of Helen
Benton Boley

Jan Matulka
Prague, Czechoslovakia
1890–Queens, New York 1972
*Boat Scene in Central Park,* 1923
Etching and drypoint
273 x 354
Flint 20
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

John Sloan
Loch Haven, Pennsylvania
1871–Hanover, New Hampshire
1951
*Hell Hole,* 1917
Etching and aquatint
204 x 253
Morse 186, second state of two
Gift of Mrs. Laurent Oppenheim
and Laurent Oppenheim, Jr. for
the J. Paul Oppenheim Memorial
Collection of Contemporary Prints

Charles Turzak, *Man with Drill*

# III Social Statements:
# The Worker and Troubled Times

Lora S. Urbanelli

As has been demonstrated, the relationship between magazine illustration and the fine print in the first half of the twentieth century is many-faceted. One of the most obvious parallels between the two is their role as vehicles of mass communication. Always inherent in the print medium has been its multiplicity, an aspect not necessarily taken advantage of by artists. Fritz Eichenberg notes, for instance, that "since its origin the woodblock has been the most democratic medium of art. Whatever its social, political or religious significance may have been, it has always been the carrier of a message."[1] During the period covered by our exhibition, a renewal of interest in the more egalitarian offerings of printmaking occurred among many artists. This trend was supported by artistic, historic and sociological events over the years, and culminated in the movement toward "art for the masses" during the 1930s.

Even those printmakers who did not strive to disseminate a message could not help but be influenced by the introduction of narrative devices into American genre painting and graphics. In pursuit of an image easily and quickly understood (a concept which itself is derived from illustration) such devices as exaggeration and anecdotal detail were often employed. Douglas Gorsline's *Idler* and Adolph Dehn's *Easter Parade* are good examples of this. More important, however, was the underlying critique and humor, integral to the image which allowed society to laugh at itself. Mabel Dwight felt that the "artist-satirist" used "distortion and exaggeration" to make a point or bring "attention to a weak or absurd characteristic."[2] However, up until this time, satire like this was reserved for the cartoon. Indeed, modern society has often relied on the insights of caricature and cartooning to analyze and hopefully better understand itself. A good deal of the graphic work of 1900-1950 carried on this tradition of examining not just where people gathered and how they entertained themselves, but their political ideals, the consequences of their class and the value of their work.

Two magazines, *The Masses* and *The Liberator*,[3] had a profound influence in these decades, not only through what was often inflammatory prose but also through the style of their staff artists. Over the years, printmakers such as John Sloan, George Bellows, Stuart Davis and Glen O. Colemen worked for or contributed to the monthly. Before Max Eastman took over the job of managing editor in December of 1912, *The Masses* was a very serious journal dedicated to the propagation of Socialist dogma. But through the efforts of Eastman and Sloan, who joined the art staff at this time, a shift in policy was made to a more "popular" magazine of Socialism.

Our appeal will be to the masses, both Socialist and non-Socialist, with entertainment, education, and the livelier kinds of propaganda . . . we shall produce with the best technique, the best magazine pictures at command in New York.[4]

As promised, *The Masses* began to reproduce a good deal of artwork at this time, often giving a centerfold spread to an illustration of a strike or other event, and usually using the front and back covers to reproduce drawings of women workers, mothers and children, or other images, similarly unrelated to a story.[5]

While the styles of Sloan, Bellows and Coleman's illustrations remained fairly sophisticated, Art Young's pen and ink sketches, and the drawings of Maurice Becker and H. J. Turner were more cartoonlike, and carried far more specifically political meaning. Their exaggerated style was carried over into *The Liberator* where it was cultivated by a new generation of printmaker-illustrators like Adolph Dehn, Reginald Marsh, William Gropper and others. It was a style that even informed works of artists in the Thirties, such as Thomas Benton's *Mine Strike*, 1933 and Jacob Kainen's *Loading Up*, 1939. Their quick line and loosely defined anatomy had the ability to convey a powerful message-packed image.

Among the many young students to feel the stylistic influence of John Sloan at the Art Students League was Peggy Bacon. Sloan's often light-hearted treatment of his subject perhaps even helped to foster Bacon's more pointed wit. However, she never studied printmaking with Sloan or anyone else at the Art Students League and so, in 1917, Bacon began to experiment with drypoint on her own. It soon became her primary medium. Although Bacon shared a common interest in subject matter with Sloan and Bellows, her early drypoints, like *Socialist Meeting* of 1918, manifest a brief flirtation with modernism in their emphasis on basic shapes and flat body forms, more in the manner of the Zorachs, B. J. O. Nordfeldt and Max Weber.[6]

Reginald Marsh, who also studied with Sloan at the Art Students League (as well as with Kenneth Hayes Miller and George Luks) recalled more the generation of the Ash Can school of painters. Although he captured many scenes of poverty and unhappiness, and even contributed to *The Liberator*, Marsh's attitude remained apolitical. Like Henri and his followers, he felt "that contemporary art functioned best when it took as its source 'the characteristic life of the day'."[7] In the lithograph *The Bowery*, 1928, Marsh shows his affinity with George Bellows' action filled, densely populated compositions,[8] as his *In the Street*, 1917. Both men approach the stone in a similar manner using a combination of line and tone. Bellows, however, applies his line sparingly, especially when describing facial features and bodily form, creating more stylized characters. Marsh's line, on the other hand, winds its way around the forms and features of his individuals. The energy present in these two images is emphasized, therefore, in different ways, both through the actions of their figures, to which Marsh adds the frenetic quality of his line.

The value of work, indeed the whole issue of employment, was of great public concern and thus frequently represented in printmaking during these early decades. The worker was not simply envied at certain times, but he was also considered a hero of sorts as he helped forge new skyscrapers and highways. Even during the Depression, workers symbolized a shred of hope as they swarmed around the growing Empire State Building and other monuments.

Lewis Hine's photographic essay, *Men at Work*, 1932, helped to elevate the "American worker to the status of a hero," by showing that man was not subservient to the machine, but in control.[9] Even earlier, Joseph Pennell had been impressed by the beauty of this relationship on the site of the building of the Panama Canal:

"As I looked, a bell rang . . . . The engines whistled, the buckets paused, everything stopped instantly, save that from the depths a long chain came quickly up, and clinging to the end of it, as Cellini would have grouped them, were a dozen men–a living design–the most decorative motive I have ever seen in the Wonder of Work."[10]

Nevertheless, it was probably Hine's photographs, with their images of men on crane hooks, which inspired Louis Lozowick's lithograph *Mid-Air*, 1932. In this simple, yet powerful composition, Lozowick underscores the alliance of man and machine in his photo-realistic manner, unlike his homage to the power machinery in *Crane* of 1928.

Similarly, Samuel Margolies' *Builders of Babylon*, 1936, depicts two men on a girder, riding above the ground, this time with a distant view of the city below, an element of perspective often used by Hine in his images of the Empire State Building construction site. References to building Babylons and towers of Babel were not uncommon at this time.[11] The allusion to the Biblical city of Babel was most likely intended to refer both to the excitement, wealth and magnificence of the city, and to its corruption and instability. Moreover, the Tower of Babel has always symbolized a "structure impossibly lofty, a visionary scheme."[12]

As Sara Baughman suggests in her introduction to Section I, the subjects of the city and of industry were often grafted onto a modernist composition. Charles Turzak's *Man with Drill* is an excellent example of the pervasive, but attenuated influence of Futurism. His rough cut lines form repeated, high-contrast shock waves of black and white which surround the action of the drill, while the city seems to almost shift as if on a fault line. The dynamism created, however, only mimics the abstract energies of European Futurism, while actually serving a less ambitious and more humorous image.

Scenes of the ennobled worker were certainly not limited to prints, but had their counterpart in the larger-than-life mural paintings which were beginning to decorate public centers and private offices in the Thirties. Murals functioned to celebrate the history and growth of society usually through a series of images that either explained a story in the sequence of panels or were combined to form a didactic montage. The major element in common between mural painting and printmaking, however, was the number of people who could view them and feel their influence, murals by their location and prints through their ease of reproduction and multiplicity.

Both artists and the public turned to examining society after the fall of the market in 1929. As a result, the Thirties saw the height of the demand for familiar subject matter. More artists felt the need to question and emphasize what was truly American about their art and often did so by reflecting social issues.[13]

Breadlines became a familiar scene at this time as President Hoover refused, even during the worst unemployment, to provide emergency relief for the hungry who were everywhere. Suddenly, it was hard to escape the seeming breakdown of society. Bruce Bliven, a reporter for the *New Republic*, commented on a breadline at the Municipal Lodging House in New York City, 1930:

There is a line of men, three or sometimes four abreast, a block long, and wedged tightly together—so tightly that no passser-by can break through. For this compactness there is a reason: those at the head of this grey-black snake will eat tonight; those farther back probably won't.[14]

Clare Leighton and Reginald Marsh found two different pictorial solutions to the problem of depicting this endless line. Leighton in her wood engraving *New York Breadline*, 1931, exploits the dramatic contrast and fine detail of the medium. In a narrow one-point perspective just slightly off center, an elevated train platform serves as one diagonal plunge, met at the vanishing point by the tiniest head at the end of a long breadline, which forms the opposing orthogonal. The result is an endless, anonymous mass of men.

Marsh, on the other hand, presents his men at close range, in full figure, stretching in a tight, horizontal line from right to left. *Bread Line, No One Has Starved*,[15] an etching of 1932, is filled with studies of posture and expression. Matthew Baigell called Marsh an "artist-voyeur" like John Sloan and accused Marsh of having failed to portray the unemployed and down-trodden as convincing "victims of societal injustice."[16] However, Marsh displays compassion through the emphatic repetition of forms in the line of hunched over men that has no beginning and no end.

As Janet Flint noted, the Depression affected printmakers by introducing new subjects, new techniques, and new ideas for publication and pricing:

In prints . . . the new democratic spirit was extended beyond relevant, meaningful subject matter to include new concepts in the production and marketing of original works of art. It was equally, and strongly argued that prints should be dissociated from the wealthy and treated, as they once were, as a product for the many.[17]

The Contemporary Print Group formed in 1933 in order to supply good affordable art for a large public.[18] That year, they published two portfolios, *The American Scene No. 1* and *No. 2*, which included prints by: Reginald Marsh, Adolph Dehn, Charles Locke, Mabel Dwight, Jacob Burck, José Clement Orozco, George Biddle, Thomas Hart Benton, George Grosz and John Steuart Curry. Three prints in our exhibition are from Contemporary Print Group portfolios, Adolph Dehn's *Easter Parade*, Thomas Hart Benton's *Mine Strike* and Raphael Soyer's *Waterfront*.

Probably more than any other artist of the American Scene, Thomas Hart Benton sought to define a style and range of subjects that typified the American cultural experience.[19] Benton claimed that:

If subject matter determined form and the subject matter was distinctively American, then . . . an American form, no matter what the source of technical means, would eventually ensue.[20]

However, as evidenced by prints like *Mine Strike*, Benton worked hard to develop a specific relationship between technique and image. Baigell suggests that the "disjointed perspective" and "turbulent rhythms" so typical of all Benton's work connote the "disjunctive experiences, rapid growth rates . . . [and] energies" of our nation at that time.[21]

In order to alleviate some of the stress of unemployment, Franklin Roosevelt developed the Works Progress Administration (later the Works Projects Administration), to allow people to work using skills they had already refined. Holger Cahill, who headed the Federal Art Project division of the WPA from 1935-1943, perpetuated the already growing interest in 'art for the masses,' with Roosevelt's blessing. He wanted art to exist for more than just the educated and wealthy. Moreover, Cahill's efforts kept many artists alive and working in their field. Jacob Kainen, who produced *Loading Up* for the FAP in 1939, remembered that:

Aside from the relief at being able to survive economically, we were grateful to the government for recognizing that art was a public concern.[22]

Cahill believed that the Federal Art Project should be the "link between art and daily life."[23]

# NOTES

1. Fritz Eichenberg, "Eulogy on the Woodblock" in Francis V. O'Conner, ed., *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project*, Boston, New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1973, p. 148.

2. Mabel Dwight, "Satire in Art," in O'Connor, *Art for the Millions* (1973), p. 152.

3. *The Liberator* superseded *The Masses* on 15 April 1918.

4. "Editorial Notice," *The Masses*, vol. 4, no. 19 (December 1912), p. 3.

5. See vol. 4, no. 9 (June 1913), for a humorous color reproduction of a drawing by Stuart Davis of two women, impressed with their appearance on the frontcover of a magazine; also, vol. 6, no. 6 (March 1915), for a striking black and white reproduction of a George Bellows boxing match.

6. These observations and the following items of biographical information were made by Roberta Tarbell in: *Peggy Bacon: Personalities and Places*, (1976). Bishop studied painting privately with Nordfeldt during the summer of 1916. In her print, *Socialist Meeting*, Bishop records a speaking engagement of Irish-American poet/activist Padraic Colum. For more information see: Zack Bowen, *Padraic Colum: a Biographical Critical Introduction*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1970.

7. "A Half-Day in the Studio of Reginald Marsh," *American Artist*, vol. 5 (June 1941), p. 5; quoted in Matthew Baigell, *The American Scene: American Painting of the 1930s*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1974, p. 148.

8. Baigell, *The American Scene* (1974), p. 146.

9. As quoted from the introduction to: Lewis W. Hine, *Men at Work: Photographic Studies of Modern Men and Machines*, New York, Macmillan Company, 1932; reprint ed., New York, Dover Publications, 1977.

10. *Joseph Pennell's Pictures of the Panama Canal*, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1912, p. 8.

11. Martin Lewis, for example, published a drypoint entitled *Building a Babylon* in 1929, which was reproduced on the cover of *Harpers* that July and in the *New York Times* magazine, the *American Magazine of Art*, *Print Connoisseur*, *Pencil*, *Prints* and on the front cover of *Architecture* between 1930 and 1934.

12. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, Springfield: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1961. It is a humorous coincidence that the Tower of Babel was built in a confusion of languages as, no doubt, was the Empire State Building, built as it was with so much immigrant labor!

13. These observations are gathered from Janet Flint's essay in: *Art for All: American Print Publishing between the Wars*, Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980.

14. As quoted in: Ralph K. Andrist, editor in charge, *The American Heritage History of the 20s and 30s*, New York, American Heritage Publishing Co., 1970, pp. 193-196.

15. Marsh illustrated, with drawings and watercolors, an article in *Fortune* magazine entitled "No One Has Starved," in September 1932.

The story claimed to tell the truth about unemployment and relief, while making ironic reference to a statement by Herbert Hoover.

16. Baigell, *The American Scene* (1974), p. 146.

17. Flint, *Art for All* (1980), introduction.

18. The price was $15 for each portfolio of six prints. All lithographs were printed by George Miller.

19. This and other observations regarding Benton's interest in American form are culled from Matthew Baigell, *The American Scene* (1974), pp. 90+, which includes references to the following: "Thomas Hart Benton, "American Regionalism: A Personal History of the Movement," *The University of Kansas City Review*, vol. 18 (Autumn 1951), p. 47.

20. Thomas Hart Benton, "American Regionalism," p. 47.

21. Thomas Hart Benton, "American Regionalism," p. 47.

22. Milton Meltzer, *Violins and Shovels: The WPA Art Projects*, New York, Delacorte Press, 1976, p. 58.

23. Meltzer, *Violins and Shovels*, pp. 56-57.



Reginald Marsh, *Bread Line–No one has starved*

# CHECKLIST

*Section III-A    Social Statements:*
*The Worker*

Jolan Gross-Bettelheim
Nitra, Czechoslovakia 1902–
*Assembly Line,* 1944–
Lithograph
406 x 304
Lent by the Philadelphia Museum
of Art: Print Club Permanent
Collection

Fritz Eichenberg
Cologne, Germany 1901–
*Myers Cafeteria,* 1935
Wood engraving
268 x 199
Associated American Artists 1967,
no. 12
Published by the WPA–Federal Art
Project
Lent by the Philadelphia Museum
of Art: Purchased: Thomas Skelton
Harrison Fund

Helen West Heller
Rushville, Illinois 1885–1955
*Eyes and Ears,* ca. 1943
Linoleum cut
153 x 209
Gift of Eugene Healy

Jacob Kainen
Waterbury, Connecticut 1909–
*Loading Up,* 1939
Lithograph
368 x 280
Flint 33
Published by the WPA–New York
Project
Lent by the Artist

Clare V. H. Leighton
London 1901–
*Snow Shovellers, New York,* 1929
Wood engraving
207 x 154
Hardie 149; Boston Public Library
1977, no. 146
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Louis Lozowick
Ludvinovka near Kiev, Russia
1892–South Orange, New Jersey
1973
*Mid-Air,* 1932
Lithograph
290 x 165
Flint 84
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Samuel L. Margolies
New York City 1896–
*Builders of Babylon,* ca. 1936
Lithograph
277 x 362
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

Charles Turzak
Streator, Illinois 1899–
*Man with Drill*
Wood engraving
305 x 235
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

*Section III-B   Social Statements:*
*Troubled Times*

Peggy Bacon
Ridgefield, Connecticut 1895–
*Socialist Meeting*, 1918
Drypoint
153 x 204
Flint 14
Yale Club of New York Fund

Thomas Hart Benton
Neosho, Missouri 1889–Kansas
City, Missouri 1975
*Mine Strike*, 1933
From the American Scene No. 2
Portfolio, 1934
Lithograph
249 x 275
Fath 5
Lent by Davison Art Center,
Wesleyan University; Estate of
Russell T. Limbach

Clare V. H. Leighton
London 1901–
*New York Bread Line*, 1931
Wood engraving
303 x 203
Hardie 201; Boston Public Library
1977, no. 198
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Reginald Marsh
Paris 1898–Dorset, Vermont 1954
*The Bowery*, 1928
Lithograph
210 x 298
Sasowsky 16
Gift of the Artist

Reginald Marsh
Paris 1898–Dorset, Vermont 1954
*Bread Line–No One Has Starved*,
1932
Etching
166 x 305
Sasowsky 139, sixth state of six
Lent by the William Benton
Museum of Art; Gift of Helen
Benton Boley

Raphael Soyer
Tombov, Russia 1899–
*Waterfront*, 1934
Lithograph
228 x 340
Cole 34
Printed by George C. Miller
Lent by Davison Art Center,
Wesleyan University; Estate of
Russell T. Limbach

Alexander R. Stavenitz
Kiev, Russia 1901–Norwalk,
Connecticut 1960
*Bread Line*, 1933
Aqua-mezzotint
267 x 192
Lent by Davison Art Center,
Wesleyan University;
Gift of George W. Davison

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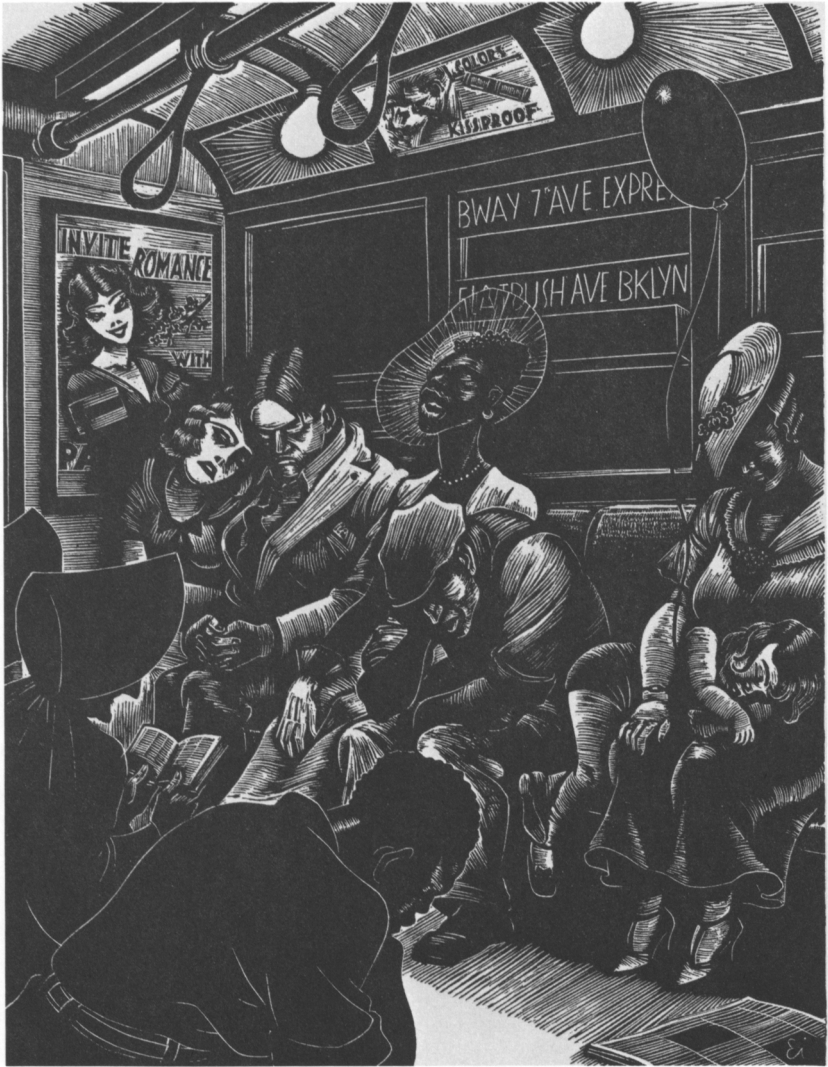
Fritz Eichenberg, *Subway*

# IV  The Isolation of the Individual – The Subway and the Window

Richard S. Field

The New York Elevated initiated service in 1877, followed by the
first underground line, the Subway, in 1904. Both systems provided
fast and cheap transit for thousands of New Yorkers. Although most
of Manhattan's Els were demolished during the Thirties and Forties,
in their time they served as potent symbols of changing attitudes
towards the machine age. At first, they were simply regarded as new
additions to the picturesque iconography of New York, as in the
etchings by Mielatz and Webster or in nineteenth-century
magazine illustration. But as the oppressiveness of urban life
became a matter of public concern, the subway came to be viewed as
an impersonal machine that carried the nameless masses to and
from work. Both subway and El became settings for bittersweet
images of routine life and the tragic loneliness of the individual in
the crowd. Nevertheless, the subway remained a symbol of power
and speed, while the El could also be thought of as an escape route.
It lifted its travellers into a cooler, less oppressive atmosphere,
where they could look out over the lower buildings of the city (the
tenements of the poor); and it could even take them to some of the
farther reaches of the five boroughs, like Coney Island. Although
the escapism of the subway did not find its way into many images,
the symbolic power of these trains was enhanced by the conflicting
ideas associated with them.
    Aside from the many images in which the El was featured as
part of the cityscape, few depicted its interiors. Despite John Sloan's
advice to go down into the subways and Everett Shinn's early studies,
printmakers were not quick to ride the subways to search riders'
faces for their inner thoughts.[1] The artists of Sloan's generation
were far more oriented to rendering action or recording anecdote.
Even as late as 1929, an etcher like Mortimer Borne approached the
subway interior with a cautious, indefinite, almost Impressionistic
touch, while Mabel Dwight drew her riders with characteristic
humor rather than open the floodgates of psychological content.
She and her contemporaries preferred the illustrator's mode of

exaggeration and graphic distortion to the serious business of probing inner thought through the invention of significant form. Thus Calapai's *8:30 Express* careens down the tracks, chains swinging and cars swaying, in a near caricature of the train's deafening rush through its tunnel.

In his four part lithograph of 1936, *The People Work*, Benton Spruance utilized conventions one would never encounter in serious easel painting, but which were widespread in the highly schematic murals of the Thirties. His heavy, automaton-like figures, with their obtunded shapes, blunt gestures, stooped shoulders and squat bodies move through the cycle of the work day like objects on an assembly line. Spruance's style is common to many images of the period, from those of the *Liberator* (1918-1924) that depict the exploited worker, to the less overtly political lithographs of the 1930s by Jacob Kainen, Elizabeth Olds, or even Jackson Pollock. Just as schematic is Spruance's view of the subway itself, cut away as if seen by x-ray. Through window-like openings, the people pass by in a series of movie (or comic-strip) frames. The viewer is drawn into the artificially lit depths of the city much as he would be if transported by the movies. Deftly combining a slightly abstracted series of simple shapes, gleaming lights, deep shadows, and briefly glimpsed episodes, the lithographs suggest the repeated, mechanical qualities of life in the subway. Spruance leaves aside the Cubist devices he had used in *Traffic Control* (Section I) and focuses on the cycle of the city-dweller's day from the crush of bodies going to work in the morning to the lonely stragglers who travel in the night.

Although solitude is but one of many vignettes in Spruance's chronicle, it had become a major theme for other artists of the Twenties and Thirties. Eichenberg's riders seem drugged by some mysterious underground force as they passively sit out their journey until arriving at their stations.[2] Yet where Eichenberg uses the romantic content of the subway ads as an ironic foil for the somnambulistic character of his riders, Edward Hopper avoids all such devices and commentary. Instead he seizes on the forms of his subject to wrest its content, the passage of life itself. Hopper's *House Tops* of 1921 might be described as the inverse of Spruance's subway. The daytime scene is set above the street in the El, looking out of rather than in through a window. Two isolated figures are quietly self-absorbed: one in his work, shadowed and inner directed; the other in gazing out the window, in full light but lost in some unknown thought. There is a parallel between the subway windows dividing the two travellers and the monotonous frieze of tenement

windows glimpsed outside. For Hopper the El is quiet, contemplative, conducive to rumination and fantasy, as unspecified as the intervals between the windows are unvarying.

The lines of the print are etched with a deliberate lack of articulation, deriving their looseness and tonality from John Sloan and their accented strokes from pen-and-ink illustrators like Charles Dana Gibson.[3] Although Hopper's ability to articulate his content in terms of space and light surpasses any American model, his deep concern for meaning, drawn from the ambiguity of encounters or the relation of a single figure to its environment, is also derived from the heritage of the illustrator. Gail Levin has already demonstrated how Elevated themes like *House Tops* had developed in Hopper's illustrations for *Farmer's Wife* and other magazines.[4] We have already pointed out the earlier "sources" in magazine illustrations, such as Charles Dana Gibson's for *The Century* in 1895.[5] Indeed, one could maintain (although Levin has not) that Hopper's art followed a course of slow abstraction from the anecdotal situations of illustration, through the attenuation imposed by the sparse technique of his etchings and watercolors, to their mature and most synthetic expression in the oil paintings. The gradual leaching away of narrative specificity in favor of psychological suggestiveness was effected, or at least accompanied, by a vastly sophisticated command of color and form. But still, as we can only suggest here, the roots of Hopper's work, certainly of the etchings, were nourished by the subjects, techniques, and even styles of the illustrator.

Hopper's genius lay in his ability to transform the scene of daily life into an interior, psychological event. He accomplished this, in part, through his uncanny ability to exploit the meanings of inside and outside. Robert Henri spoke of windows as "a look into time and space. . . . Windows are symbols. They are openings in. To draw a house is not to see and copy its lines and values, but to use them."[6] Sloan often gazed into the windows of his neighbors, capturing a vast range of life's minute and intimate details, as had Daumier and Degas before him. But Hopper managed to still the active life. In *East Side Interior* he again uses the device of a succession of stable verticals (lamp, figure, chair spindle, and column), again turns his sitter away from her expected posture (here, her work) in order to gaze out an open window into a relatively blank world. As great as is his debt to Degas' compositions, figure types and lighting, Hopper's works beg for a narrative interpretation one seldom desires from Degas' paintings or prints. The irony is that our interpretations may

be no more specific than the blank spaces into which Hopper's figures gaze.

As the early Sloan had profoundly influenced Hopper, the later Sloan may have been indebted to Hopper's thematic content. The former's *Nude and Arch* of 1933 relates to Hopper's *Evening Wind*. Sloan's female is nude, yet slightly sensual. The viewer is not so persuaded that the focus of meaning resides in her thoughts, but rather in his own. The contrast between the interior space and its accompanying erotic fantasies on the one hand, and the scene of Washington Square with its call to the vigorous, active life on the other, arouses but is not amenable to precise interpretation. By the 1930s the open window had become a potent theme for the American artist and, unlike the subway, one that was also widespread among painters. Sometimes, it is the view itself that symbolizes isolation from the world, as in Landeck's *Pop's Tavern*. A curiously empty cityscape levels the forms of architecture, cars, trash cans, and pedestrians, as if one had totally drained the bustle and vigor from a Martin Lewis etching. But the act of looking down into the almost empty street has an entirely new significance, since it concentrates on the act of looking as much as it does on the act of recording. It is as if the viewer were alone with his thoughts. Coleman's *Still Life* of ca. 1930 is an even further refinement of this theme. Here inside and outside spaces–the personal effects on the bureau top and the geometric forms of the city–are combined into one reality. The mirror forces the viewer to reflect on his own looking and his own fantasies, perhaps expressing a longing for the outside world and a release from imprisonment in the space of his room, his mind, his instincts, or even from his art.

Every single one of these prints is executed in non-modernist terms. They mean to tell a story, to allow the viewer to see and experience something in the world the artist inhabits. While many of the prints are technically accomplished, they are cast in almost elementary formal terms, like most illustrations. In her book on Hopper's illustrations, Gail Levin cites an article by J. M. Flagg, the most famous of Gibson's followers.[7] The article begs authors to sympathize with the plight of the illustrator who must invent imagery to accompany or even complete a given text. To make his point, Flagg supplied illustrations and asked the authors for a suitable story. Similarly, the prints in this section of our exhibition are without text, and they too seem to demand a reading from the viewer. But while Flagg was merely poking fun at pampered and often lazy authors, there is a serious core of meaning hidden in the

prints' conflicted messages. Because they allude to narratives deprived of texts, all interpretation is the invention of the isolated viewer. But because these interpretations so often allude to loneliness, the viewer's feelings of isolation are doubly reinforced. He becomes deeply identified with the barren existence and vague longings of those whose lives are confined to the city. Coleman's still life is a twentieth-century Vanitas, a symbol of urban emptiness.

## NOTES

1. See the introduction to Section II, note 2, for Sloan's remarks to his students. Shinn's pastel, *Sixth Avenue Elevated* of 1899 is reproduced in Levin, *Edward Hopper as Illustrator* (1979), p. 22.

2. Actually, Eichenberg's severely disciplined engraving technique, mannerist figure style, and brilliant chiaroscuro derive from Germanic traditions. Since he had not long before arrived in the U.S., it is not surprising to find echoes in his work of sixteenth-century chiaroscuro draughtsmen like Hans Baldung Grien and Niklaus Manuel Deutsch.

3. See Levin, *Edward Hopper as Illustrator* (1979). Although Hopper obviously preferred the broader media for his illustrations, his pen-and-ink work like that from *Everybody's* of March 1912 (Levin plates 4-6), shows his indebtedness to popular illustration. One still awaits a penetrating analysis of Hopper's prints, despite the widely-held opinion that they are certainly the most important American prints of the first half of this century. Beyond Hopper's American heritage, most of his etchings show a very deep understanding of Rembrandt's prints.

4. See Levin, *Edward Hopper as Illustrator* (1979), plate 161 from *Farmer's Wife*, December 1917. Levin's entire book supports the major thesis of this exhibition!

5. See our introductory essay, note 28.

6. Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit*, Philadelphia and New York, J. B. Lippincott, 1960, p. 46.

7. James Montgomery Flagg, "A Challenge to Authors," *Everybody's*, vol. 33 (October 1915), pp. 417-424.

# CHECKLIST

*Section IV-A   Isolation of the
Individual: The Subway*

Mortimer Borne
Rypin, Poland 1902–
*Subway Interior,* 1929
Etching
125 x 176
Lent by the Metropolitan Museum
of Art; Gift of Ian Stewart

Letterio Calapai
Boston 1904–
*8:30 Express,* ca. 1940
Wood engraving
132 x 217
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Mabel Dwight
Cincinnati, Ohio 1876–
Sellersville, Pennsylvania 1955
*Subway,* 1928
Lithograph
237 x 187
Lent by the Philadelphia Museum
of Art: Purchased: Lola Downin
Peck Fund from the Carl and Laura
Zigrosser Collection

Fritz Eichenberg
Cologne, Germany 1902–
*Subway,* 1934
Wood engraving
158 x 123
Associated American Artists 1967,
no. 8; Eichenberg 1977, p. 22
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Benton M. Spruance
Philadelphia 1904–Philadelphia
1967
*The People Work: Morning & Night,*
1937
Two lithographs from a suite of
four
Each 345 x 480
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

*Section IV-B   Isolation of the
Individual: The Window*

Glenn O. Coleman
Springfield, Ohio 1887–Long
Beach, New York 1932
*Still Life,* 1928–30
Lithograph
384 x 308
Lent by the Philadelphia Museum
of Art: Bequest of Margaretta S.
Hinchman

Edward Hopper
Nyack, New York 1882–New York
City 1967
*East Side Interior,* 1922
Etching
203 x 254
Zigrosser 8; Levin pl. 85
Gift of George Hopper Fitch, B.A.
1932

Edward Hopper
Nyack, New York 1882–New York
City 1967
*House Tops*, 1921
Etching
152 X 203
Zigrosser 15, fifth state of five;
Levin pl. 79
Lent by the Philadelphia Museum
of Art: Purchased: Thomas Skelton
Harrison Fund

Armin Landeck
Crandon, Wisconsin 1905–
*Pop's Tavern*, 1934
Drypoint and aquatint
159 X 259
Kraeft 45
Gift of Laurent Oppenheim, Jr. for
the J. Paul Oppenheim Memorial
Collection of Contemporary
American Prints

John Sloan
Loch Haven, Pennsylvania 1871–
Hanover, New Hampshire 1951
*Nude and Arch,* 1933
Etching and engraving
177 X 140
Morse 267, third state of three
Probably printed by Ernest W. Roth
Gift of Hollon W. Farr, B.A. 1939,
in memory of Professor Hollon A.
Farr, B.A. 1896



Edward Hopper, *East Side Interior*
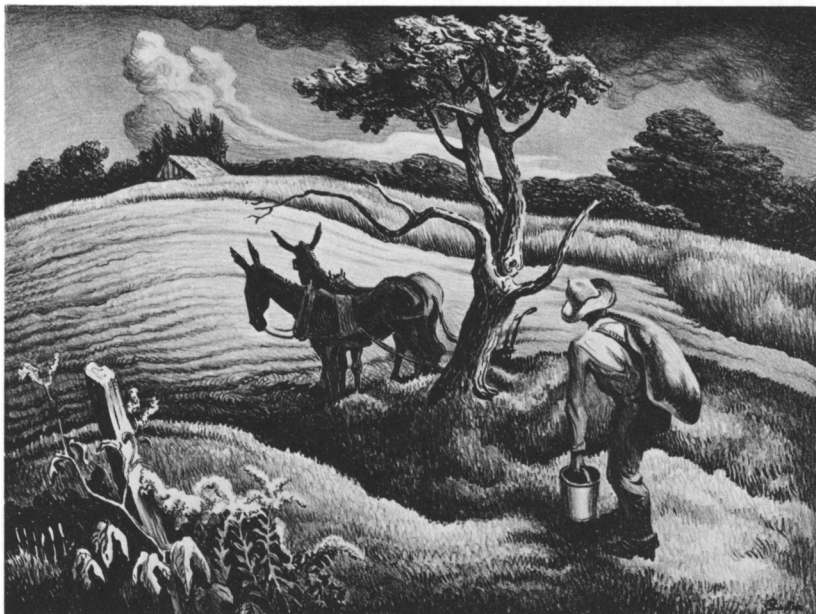
**Thomas Hart Benton**
*Approaching Storm*

# V Rural America–The Country

Richard S. Field

But the Federal Government has rendered inestimable service to the cause
of American art: it has recognized the existence of a native movement, and
by co-operating with regional boards, it has not only publicized the
importance of local themes and subjects but has also helped to restore the
artist to his former position as practitioner, or workman. . . . The honor
of putting the new tendency in motion–which amounts to the founding
of a distinctly American school–belongs to a small group of original artists
who, bravely and steadfastly for many years, and in defiance of great
opposition, have produced a body of work leading to our cultural
declaration of independence. The most prominent of these men–Benton,
Burchfield, Curry, Marsh, and Wood–by temperament and training, by
intimate knowledge of and sympathy with specific American environments,
by character and conviction, have become leaders of the new school. . . . Our
young artists no longer turn to Europe for inspiration; unhesitatingly they
equip themselves to understand and express the significance of the
American way of life.
*Thomas Craven*[1]

Associated American Artists (1934-), the Federal Art Project
(1935-1943), and other publishing ventures produced thousands of
bargain-priced prints during the Depression years. For many it was
simply a matter of work; for some, like Thomas Craven, it was an
intrinsic part of the coming-of-age of an American art whose
subjects, experiences and styles were rooted in American soil. The
slogan of the times was "art for all," and the hope of the idealists was
to provide images of America for a badly shaken society.[2]

   Perhaps no subject was as popular during the 1930s and 1940s
as the image of rural America. Until the late 1920s, most landscape
prints produced on this side of the Atlantic were highly skilled
recordings of the artist's Grand Tour of Europe. So great was the
hold of the romantic-realist tradition of Charles Meryon and James
A. McNeill Whistler, and so entrenched was the collector's insistence
upon technical bravura, that the great *Exhibition of Contemporary
American Prints* held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1929 was
completely dominated by conservative tastes. Of the 432 objects
hung, only a small handful represented the new trends.[3] Obviously,
America was not and had not been barren of printmakers who

depicted her own landscape. In the nineteenth century a few artists, beginning with Asher B. Durand and Thomas Cole, executed an occasional etching or lithograph of some small corner of this country, but most prints of America, down through the 1870s, were steel engravings or chromo-lithographs after large panoramic paintings.[4] Only in the 1880s, among the artists who had absorbed the lessons of nineteenth-century French landscape painting, did a talented group of American etchers begin to portray America. They included John H. Twachtman, J. Alden Weir, the Morans, R. Swain Gifford, Stephen Parrish, Charles S. Woodbury, and others. Their focus on America was carried into the present century by George Burr, Ernest Haskell, Lester G. Hornby and numerous other minor artists. But rarely did these artists celebrate the intimate, rural aspects of America which, later in the Twenties, became known as the American Scene. It was probably Childe Hassam's images of vernacular American architecture and small towns, like *Church Tower, Portsmouth* (1921), that turned attention from the American frontier and wilderness to its domesticated, inhabited rural settings. The complexities of the picturesque slowly gave way to the simpler and less spectacular rendering of man's own modest place in the world, his towns and his farms. The directness of Hassam's etchings is not only the result of his approach to his subjects, but should be attributed as well to the sparseness of his means. Together with Edward Hopper, Hassam reduced the American scene to its most symbolic entity, its wooden houses and trees.[5]

As Craven's words suggest, and as an enormously influential article on the "U.S. Scene" in *Time Magazine* of 24 December 1932 made explicit, American Scene painting and printmaking developed primarily as a conservative if not reactionary response to disastrous economic and political conditions throughout the world. Secondly, it represented a flight from the city and the dehumanizing technology that urban structures symbolized for many Americans. And third, the retreat into rural American subject matter entailed a rejection of European-dominated, East Coast aesthetics: European modernism, European attitudes, European subjects.

The images of the American Scene embodied a return to the myth of the simple agrarian life. While the art born of the city found numerous outlets for pessimism and protest, most images inspired by the country seemed positive and optimistic. Thus, the prints of Sections II and III are strikingly different in outlook from

those of this Section. The fact that the farmers were in desperate straits during the 1930s was rarely emphasized, except in occasional WPA prints.[6] The exaggerated, almost caricatural mode practiced by so many artists of the Thirties (especially in lithography) could easily carry political messages, but it was inadequate to portray the economic and natural hardships that had devastated so many farmers. Perhaps there is a deep validity to the claim that only the photographs of the Farm Security Administration convincingly documented this truth.[7]

Certainly the prints of rural America did not document so much as they idealized, often in the guise of factual rather than personal expressions. Because of the enormous increase in printmaking activity during the Thirties, there was an unusually wide divergence of technical and artistic quality. In general, prints sustained a loss of stylistic complexity in favor of a gain in communicative simplicity. Subject matter was often limited to a barn, a street, or a hillside; the artist's point-of-view gravitated toward the frontal, and his compositions sought closure (vs. Hopper's diagonally organized images). Drawing itself became less spatial and less volumetric, while men and women were gradually reduced to summary forms, their expressions revealing nothing of an internal existence. In all this, the artists reverted to their heritage as illustrators. Surely, the examples of Currier & Ives and of Louis Prang were not forgotten.

In addition to this return to traditional modes of imaging America, there were other stylistic shifts. Even though the printmakers of rural America did not attempt to portray the farmer or the town mechanic in the same terms that had been used by Sloan, Lewis, Marsh, et al., to vivify the movements and the press of humanity of city life, they did appropriate the machined surfaces and streamlined forms of the urban optimists like Lozowick, Matulka, Sheeler and the other Precisionists.[8] The fact that such important aspects of style and meaning were shared by Grant Wood and such urban artists as Earl Horter and Benton Spruance (see Sections I & IV) is particularly significant. It demonstrates again the deep structures that informed all of American printmaking during the first half of this century, those which we have provisionally associated with the principles of the illustrator. To say the least, rural and landscape prints of the Thirties eschewed any direct allusion to Cubism and Expressionism. For some critics, the work that resulted smacked only of provincialism; for others, it represented the birth of a new iconic art for America.[9]

Although Childe Hassam began as a wood engraver and illustrator, by the time he turned to prints at the age of fifty-six, his mastery of light, space and pictorial composition excluded all traces of his past. Hassam's intimate and generalized portrayals of specific towns, harbors and buildings initiated a break from the two main streams of city and country views. Although indebted to Whistler's mastery of atmospherics, they were far more laconic and far less precious, avoiding all traces of tonal pictorialism; the image and the meaning had to be contained in the etched line, not in the individual inking for each impression. An identical directness and honesty characterized and drew praise for Hopper's prints.[10] Hassam's prints also departed from the detailed, descriptive renderings of public monuments that had so impressed the legions of Meryon followers, including the early Marin, James M. Rosenberg, John Taylor Arms and Samuel Chamberlain, all of whom had been trained as architects. Unfortunately, Hassam's breadth and universality of treatment inspired few capable followers. By comparison, the poetry of Luigi Lucioni's etching of Vermont silos (1938) resides in its particularity rather than in its suggestiveness; it acts to transport the viewer to places s/he has known rather than to evoke the world of imaginative rumination. Somewhere between these two poles of expression stand William Stillson's modest evocation of summer sunlight and Andrew Butler's surprisingly powerful evocation of the patterns and the expansiveness of the Kansas prairie.

The dominant direction of American landscape prints, however, is captured by Nason's remarkably subtle and polished New England scenes. The wood engraving with its crisp, clean details and gleaming lights and shadows was best able to suggest the mythic purity of the land and best able to hint at those overtones of anthropomorphism that had appeared in Hopper and Burchfield's work of the Twenties. When such qualities were attempted in lithography, as in Grant Wood's image of *January* (1937), the result bordered on the quaint. Wood never did explain his meaning, writing only that ". . . the rabbit tracks, leading into the snug shelter of the shock in the foreground are a piece of symbolism with which I had some fun."[11] Nevertheless, we think the meaning is located in just this contrast between the mechanized natural forms (the cornshocks) and the inexplicable animal presence. In the simplest of terms, Wood contrasts the modern treatment of his surface against the anecdotal content of the rabbit tracks, the modern against the traditional, the urban against the agrarian. No matter how

quaint one finds Wood's lithograph, its symbolic forms are able to envelop greater significance than Doris Lee's *Helicopter*. Despite the more explicit narrative content of her lithograph, Lee's humor discharges the seriousness of the urban machine's subtle threat to the ordered garden.

It has always been problematic to evaluate these types of American rural prints. Do the direct and almost naive qualities of Dohanos' and Lee's prints stand comparison with the greater pictorial and stylistic sophistication of a Martin Lewis? Is it sufficient that they provided comfort and meaning to the lives of the many, as so many popular and illustrational prints always have? Perhaps these problems can be encapsulated (but not resolved) in a comparison of Walt Kuhn's drypoint, *Toms River* (1923) and Stow Wengenroth's lithograph, *Three Trees, Eastport, Maine* (1934). The first was clearly inspired by the earlier drypoints of the French Fauve, André Derain; it is a bravura performance whose charm is not so much in depicting an American place as it is in the handling of space and form, in the manipulation of the pictorial rather than the technical virtues of the drypoint medium. The Wengenroth, on the other hand, is a wonderfully deep, almost iridescent rendering of a corner of Old New England. Though technically exquisite, the pleasures of the image lie in associations with the world of nature rather than with the world of art. Wengenroth moves away from Kuhn's more formalist position (or from that of Marin's few successful landscape or seascape etchings). But it is not to judge his work inferior just because it is formally less ambitious. For many, its rich associative and emotional meanings provide a source of far deeper pleasure.

## NOTES

1. Thomas Craven, introduction to *A Treasury of American Prints*, New York, 1939, n.p.

2. See Janet Flint, *Art for All, American Print Publishing between the Wars* (1981), and Regina Lipsky, *WPA/FAP Graphics* (1976), and Francis V. O'Connor, ed., *Art for the Millions* (1973).

3. These were prints by Sloan (8), Lewis (7), Coleman (2), Gag (2), Hopper (2), Marsh (2), and Miller

(2). See also Robert Getscher, *The Stamp of Whistler*, ex. cat., Oberlin, Ohio, The Allen Memorial Art Museum, 1977.

4. There was a movement to portray the lesser scenes of America in the 1870s (especially among the Luminists). See William Cullen Bryant's *Picturesque America*, New York, 1874. Reprint edition, New York, American Heritage Publishing Co., 1974. Having acknowledged that the public was

well-acquainted with the America
of Niagara and Yosemite, Bryant
pleads for "the innumerable places
which lie out of the usual path of
our artists and tourists . . . [and
the] many strange picturesque,
and charming scenes, sought out in
these secluded spots. . . ." Yet, the
majority of Bryant's illustrations
are still panoramic steel
engravings.

5. It is conceivable that Hopper's
etching style of the early Twenties
was influenced by Hassam's.
Charles Burchfield, whose
paintings certainly helped change
the image of the American
landscape, experimented briefly
with etching in 1919, and a small
group of wood engravings with
J. J. Lankes during the Twenties.

6. Some of these were Jacob Kainen's
*Drought* (lithograph, ca. 1935, Flint
1), Mervin Jules' *Dust*, W. LeRoy
Flint's *Sun and Dust*, and George
Biddle's *Sand*, the latter three part
of the exhibition circulated by the
American Artists' Congress in
1936 entitled *America Today*.

7. This idea has been most
authoritatively advanced by Roy
Stryker and Nancy Wood in their
account of the FSA during the
1935-1943 period, *In This Proud
Land*, Boston, New York Graphic
Society, 1973. It should be noted,
however, that the more the war in
Europe threatened to engulf
America, the less the FSA wished
to emphasize the hardships of
America's rural population.

8. One of the best statements of this

grafting of urban, modernistic
forms onto the portrayal of the
farm is contained in James M.
Dennis, *Grant Wood–A Study in
American Art and Culture*, New
York, Viking, 1975, especially
Chapter 12, "Pastoral Farmscape
for a Technological Society."
Dennis' exploration of the evident
conflicts of meaning is extremely
valuable.

9. Benton and Wood's writings
demonstrated their belief that
American Scene art was not simply
jingoism, but a creative step
forward. Benton wrote: "We were
all in revolt against the unhappy
effects which the Armory show of
1913 had on American painting
. . . and we believed that only by
turning the formative process of
art back again to meaningful
subject matter, in our cases
specifically American subject
matter, could we expect to get . . .
an American art which was not
empty."–*An Artist in America*, New
York, U. of Kansas Press, 1951, p.
314.

10. See Virgil Barker, "The Etchings
of Edward Hopper," *The Arts*, vol.
5 (June 1924), pp. 323-327. We
regret that it has not been possible
to show the remarkably Fauve-like
lithographs executed in Kansas by
Swedish-born Birger Sandzèn in
those inspired years around 1915.
See "Birger Sandzèn: Painter and
Lithographer," *American Magazine
of Art*, vol. 8, no. 3 (January 1917),
pp. 148-153.

11. Quoted in Dennis, *Grant Wood*
(1975), p. 202.

# CHECKLIST

*Section V   Rural America:*
*The Country*

Thomas Hart Benton
Neosho, Missouri 1889–Kansas
City, Missouri 1975
*Approaching Storm,* 1938
Lithograph
246 x 325
Fath 25
Published by the Print Club of
Cleveland, Ohio
Gift of Mrs. Paul Moore

Andrew R. Butler
Yonkers, New York 1896–
*Kansas,* 1929
Etching
200 x 251
The J. Paul Oppenheim Memorial
Collection of Contemporary
American Prints

Asa Cheffetz
Buffalo, New York 1896–1965
*Ramshackle Barn,* 1940–45
Wood engraving
165 x 192
Gift of Lydia Evans Tunnard

Stephen Dohanos
Lorain, Ohio 1907–
*State Fair,* 1948
Wood engraving
321 x 227
Published by the Print Club of
Cleveland, Ohio
Gift of Mrs. Paul Moore

Childe Hassam
Dorchester, Massachusetts 1859–
Easthampton, New York 1935
*Church Tower, Portsmouth,* 1921
Etching
216 x 155
Clayton 161
The Mabel Brady Garvan
Collection, 1932

Walt Kuhn
Brooklyn, New York 1877–New
York City 1949
*Tom's River,* 1923
Drypoint
202 x 252
A. Conger Goodyear, B.A. 1894,
Fund

Doris E. Lee
Aledo, Illinois 1905–
*Helicopter,* ca. 1945
Lithograph
227 x 307
The J. Paul Oppenheim Memorial
Collection of Contemporary
American Prints

Luigi Lucioni
Malnate, Italy 1900–
*Pillars of Vermont,* 1938
Etching
182 x 277
Published by the Print Club of
Cleveland, Ohio
Gift of Mrs. Paul Moore

Thomas W. Nason
Dracut, Massachusetts 1889–1971
*Connecticut Pastoral,* 1936
Chiaroscuro wood engraving
83 x 118
Boston Public Library 1977,
no. 198
Gift of Mrs. Laurent Oppenheim
for the J. Paul Oppenheim
Collection of Contemporary
American Prints

Thomas W. Nason
Dracut, Massachusetts 1889–1971
*Early Snow,* 1934
Etching
65 x 122
Boston Public Library 1977,
no. 167
Gift of Mrs. Laurent Oppenheim
for the J. Paul Oppenheim
Collection of Contemporary
American Prints

William W. Stilson
New Milford, Connecticut 1874–
Shelton, Connecticut 1962
*A Cross Country Byway,* 1925–35
Etching
230 x 164
Gift of Edward A. Canfield

Stow Wengenroth
Brooklyn, New York 1906–
Rockport, Massachusetts 1978
*Three Trees, Eastport, Maine,* 1934
Lithograph
208 x 323
Stuckey 30
The J. Paul Oppenheim Memorial
Collection of Contemporary
American Prints

Grant Wood
Anamosa, Iowa 1892–Iowa City,
Iowa 1942
*January,* 1937
Lithograph
228 x 303
Bequest of Lydia Evans Tunnard

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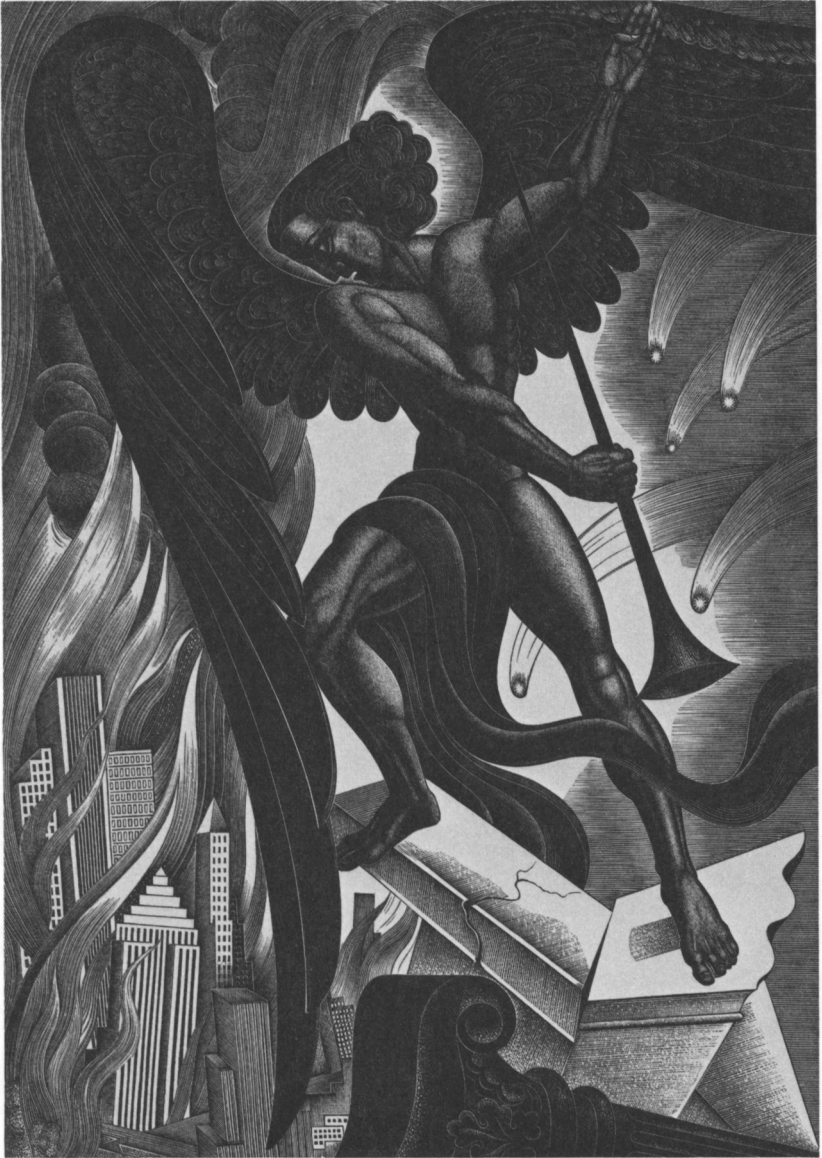
Boris Artzybasheff, *The Last Trumpet*

# VI  Symbolic Images

Richard S. Field

The idealistic and mythic tendencies that surfaced in urban and
rural images around 1930 were frequently cast into a symbolic form.
Although they appeared in prints of all techniques, the wood
engraving seemed to have a special affinity for more visionary
imagery while the lithograph lent itself well to the allegorical
argarian subjects. The Woodcut Society, founded in 1932, furthered
the revival of the intricate, white-line wood engraving which could
endow almost any image with other-worldly symbolic overtones.
Perhaps the roots of this style, as well as its association with wood
engraving, may be traced directly to their European forebears,
William Blake and Paul Gauguin. It was their mysterious blacks that
changed the daylight of reason into the suggestive and universal
realm of the night world, just as it was the mythical and
psychological content of their allegories that turned art away from
the objective world.

   Symbolic and allegorical prints about America were not that
uncommon in the nineteenth century; many were published by the
commercial lithographic houses.[1] But subjects at so great a remove
from reality were not easily countenanced by the Whistlerian
Impressionists or the Sloan Realists. Certainly such literary fare
could hardly have interested the modernist. Yet that is not quite the
case, for the modernist often felt that his art rose above the realities
of the moment. One has only to think of Marin's warring forces
(see the introduction to Section I) to comprehend the transcendent
spirit latent in American art.

   For Albert Sterner, the symbolic image provided a route
beyond the artistic restrictions of illustration. His lithograph, *The
Stranger*, though tame to our eyes, was a daring work for 1917 when
it was repeatedly reproduced. In what might pass for an illustration
of some bizarre story, a nude and a clothed woman (possibly a
fortune teller) receive a mysterious visit from a dark, cloaked male
stranger. The figures are not sufficiently inventive to yield a fully
convincing Symbolist work. Yet, Sterner's evocative image must have

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intrigued the skittish sensibilities of American print collectors more than Sloan's *Turning Out the Light*, which had been barred from the American Water Color Society exhibition of 1906. Sterner's broad lithographic washes provided an esthetic distance that Sloan's realistic portrayal of a scantily clad woman going to bed could not.

Aside from some of Bellows' masterfully monumental illustrations (e.g. *The Christ of the Wheel* of 1923 for H. G. Wells' *Men Like Gods*), blatant literary symbolism was not seen in American prints. It was even unusual to find emblematic figures such as those that appear in the linocuts of Marguerite and William Zorach. Both images relate far more to folk themes than to the sophisticated continental Symbolism that had inspired Sterner. Stylistically, Marguerite's 1917 *A New England Family (The Father)* reveals affinities with the woodcuts of Heinrich Campendonck and other artists of *Der Blaue Reiter*. The Munich group, led by Wassily Kandinsky, attempted to synthesize the primitive space, hieratic scaling and crude drawing of Russian and German folk art with the advanced modernist styles emanating from Paris. Zorach's towering father figure shows a remarkably similar blend, including the remnants of the repeated, overlapping round forms of French Orphism. The figure of the father remains clearly discernible, reduced to decorative rather than complex spatial elements.

William Zorach's *Father and Son* of 1916 is far more sculptural and considerably less modern, based as it is on the diluted neo-classicism that had been associated with allegory for more than a century. Although Zorach's handling of the broad forms of the linocut may relate to those found in the woodcuts of Munch or the German Expressionists, it was not sufficient to the figurative relief he hoped to simulate. Perhaps the relative lack of clarity was intentional, however, and like Sterner, Zorach was seeking to dampen the sentimentalism that all such obvious themes entail.[2]

In so small a section one cannot explore the entire range of symbolic American images. Most, however, are vaguely related in style even if totally disparate in subject. The modernized classical mode by itself acts to flag our expectations, preparing them for an heroic statement about life, death, family, education, freedom, frontier heroes, folk legends, agrarian myths, and even the conflict between the city and the country. Edward Hopper's *Bathers and Train* of 1920, may well be interpreted as a profound statement on this last theme, and yet how startlingly different from the allegorical mode of printmaking it is. Hopper, almost alone among American printmakers, was able to fuse symbolic content with realist

principles. His unaffected bathers only allude to the stasis of classical
art, to the bucolic innocence of the country, and the ideal life. Their
arcadian play is interrupted—not so much in fact as in
implication—by the train that rushes down upon them. But some
would take issue with any attempt to interpret these seemingly
artless etchings. In the opinion of Jerold Lanes, the non-specificity
of Hopper's images enables them to suggest anything; their content
is too general to support specific readings.[3] It was indeed a delicate
balance between form and meaning that Hopper achieved, but one
may speak, as has Susan Stein, of certain recurring motifs in
Hopper's work, themes to which Americans are particularly
sensitive.[4] Who could deny, for example, that the train does not
carry with it visions of escape into the country, of lonely journeys, of
separation, or of aggressive excitement? But in a work of art, the
image of a train may or may not evoke such varied associations. To
achieve such symbolism, Hopper learned to distill the realism of
his illustrations, to drain his objects of their specificity and to
heighten the space, light and shapes that contain and compose them.
Thus an etching like *Train and Bathers* opposes the apparent cavalier
manner of Hopper's open etching style, his seemingly casual
organization of shape and mass, and his mysteriously deep blacks
(that have resulted from several bitings in the acid bath) to the
handful of potentially symbolic objects: train, bathers and
countryside. The result is that in one simple image, as Stein points
out, Hopper manages to enfold an entire universe of feelings
concerning the invasion of the country by urban technology, the
feared loss of the natural world and the natural innocence that it
symbolizes, and the contrast between the aggressive rush of city life
and the more passive, contemplative life of the rural reaches of
America. These "themes of defeated escapism" haunt Hopper's
persona with forces just beyond their grasp or control.

   By comparison, the meaning of Artzybasheff's *The Last Trumpet*
(1937) is instantly manifest: the vengeful angel of the Apocalypse
sounding the trumpet of the Last Judgment over the towers of
Babel! The medium, wonderfully luminous and masterfully flowing,
is totally suited to this visionary subject. The angel triumphs over the
wickedness of the modern city and gives the lie to all the promises of
urban perfectibility proffered by the slick images of the Precisionist
city. Whereas Hopper extrapolated from the art of the illustrator,
Artzybasheff joined forces with him, revealing and articulating his
message in clearly fictional but seductive terms. It is the readability
of this and numerous other symbolic prints that link them with the

illustrative tradition. They provide the quick, often superficial gratifcation desired by a world on the move. How ironic it is that the same notions of ideal form, of simultaneity, transparency, speed and streamlining which had served to ennoble our visions of society were so easily turned against it. Or, how cynical it was that this same heroic vocabulary informed Rockwell Kent's *Home Port* which was commissioned as part of a series of national advertisements for the American Car and Foundry Company. Such a classicizing relief style and perfection of technique have long possessed the capacity for instant communication of national virtue.

No group of artists were more concerned with public myth making than the Midwest Regionalists, Grant Wood, John Steuart Curry, and Thomas Hart Benton.[5] In his essay, "Revolt Against the City," Wood relates what was probably the most widespread justification for the themes developed during the Thirties:

The Great Depression has taught us many things, and not the least of them is self-reliance. It has thrown down the Tower of Babel erected in the years of a false prosperity; it has caused us to rediscover some of the old frontier virtues.[6]

The pervasiveness of this idea of urban vice hardly needs emphasis, although its connection with many of the images in this exhibition is worth noticing again. Its opposite, frontier virtue, was at the heart of Wood's symbolism.[7] A most precious aspect of rural life was the will to conserve and regenerate. *Tree Planting Group (Arbor Day)* (1937) personifies conservation. Two boys are transfixed in the act of work, both a part of and separate from narrative time. At the left, the teacher-conservator approaches, offering the spring sapling and bringing two little girls whose role is confined to watching the boys at work. There is something off-balance, uncomfortable and unresolved in Wood's composition that gives the spectator pause for reflection, subtly displacing the expectation of narrative fluency. Filling the gap is a ceremonial quiet, in no small measure contributed by the absolutely dead-pan, Spartan manner of drawing. Wood's uncommitted crayon was not dissimilar to Hopper's informal needle, and both were wielded for identical, symbolic purposes. Their basically realist terms are very different from the European styles that inspired the Zorachs, Artzybasheff and Sterner. The Midwestern artists were searching for a new symbolic repertoire in the events and images native to America.

When it came to the importance of painting things American, no one was more outspoken than Thomas Hart Benton.

America offers more possibilities in the field of theme to her artists than any country in the world, and it is high time that native painters quit emulating our collectors by playing the weathercock to European breezes.[8]

Benton's many images of Blacks flirt with and often were attacked for what was perceived as a callous racism. Yet, he dared to set down one of the most emotionally meaningful aspects of America, the suffering, the earthiness, and above all, the warmth of the Negro. *Instruction* is charged with the fervor of the Bible teacher, the fascination of the acolyte, and the absorption of the two in the transmission of tradition. More than his allegorical paintings, Benton's lithographs unfold a series of chapters in American culture, the train and the horse, the farmer's pleasures and pains, the passions of love and jealousy, the folk heroes, the abandon of music, and always the farm and its work.

The energies that radiate from every corner of Benton's compositions have often been remarked upon: the nervous contours and flickering highlights, and the distortion of forms that Benton derived from past models like the paintings of El Greco and Albert Pinkham Ryder. But Benton's genius lies in his ability to articulate each composition in terms of its meaning: the distortion of an interior space by the excitement of music and dance; the confrontation of angular forms in the strike scene; the wind that seems to ripple the very furrows of the plowed field; the pull of the river, smoke and tree against the beached raft of Huck and Jim; the dance-like franticness of the parting couple measured against the fast-approaching train; or the tensions between agitation and stasis—between radiation and absorption of tradition—in our Bible teaching scene. This strength of conception together with his love of the deep blacks of the litho crayon endowed Benton's illustrations with such universal significance that they now represent the truth of an age.

With few exceptions, John Steuart Curry's prints are not well known. They possess neither the formal excitement nor the range of dramatic subjects that one finds in Benton's work. As did Grant Wood's painting, *American Gothic*, however, Curry's *John Brown* has become an American icon. He cries out in anger like the god that appeared to Job out of the whirlwind, a severe and unrelenting god who does not hesitate to extract his due from a country that has thwarted his law and enslaved his children. The power and even terror of Curry's lithograph derives immediately from the outsized Michelangelesque figure who expands and explodes against the

frame, much as the tornado and fire threaten to destroy the prairie land behind.

Whereas such scenes of release are common in the Thirties, they are not easily explained in the late Forties, in the aftermath of World War II. Harry Sternberg's *Enough*, an aquatint modulated with a crayon resist, conjoins the frustrations of the bound figure to the artist's technical struggle within the medium. The artist is now involved in an intensely personal way with some form of captivity—either that of labor or that of the Jews still captive in war-shattered Europe. (Israel came into being the following year, 1948.) Although the years after 1945 were dominated by the emergence of a totally American art, it had but the most glancing effect on American printmaking. The power, scale and gestural affectations of Abstract Expressionism could not be absorbed by the print as constituted. But neither were the traditional American genres of printmaking still viable. Ralph Fabri's somewhat humorous panorama of American subjects has little to recommend it save for its compendium of motifs. It brings to a close the circle of symbolic representations; what myths there were to be expressed in 1948 could only be encoded into the structures of painting. Recognizable symbols were once more regarded as naive, provincial and transparent.

# NOTES

1. See, for example, Janet Flint, *The Way of Good and Evil: Popular Religious Lithographs of Nineteenth Century America*, ex. cat., Washington, D.C., National Collection of Fine Arts, 1972; Anita Schorsch, *Mourning Becomes America: Mourning Art in the New Nation*, ex. cat., Pennsylvania, The William Penn Memorial Museum, 1976; and *American Allegorical Paintings, Drawings and Prints*, ex. cat., Saratoga Springs, New York, Skidmore College Hawthorne Gallery, 1968.

2. The Zorachs apparently studied woodcut with Bror J. O. Nordfeldt at Provincetown, Massachusetts during the summer of 1916. The Provincetown Printers included Ethel Mars, Maud Squire, Blanche Lazzell and others, many of whom practiced in the Japanese manner. By 1917 the group had been joined by the Zorachs, Karl Knaths and Max Weber. Weber, however, had been a student of the most original of all American woodcut artists, Arthur Wesley Dow. Dow's incredibly sensitive orientalizing woodcuts, dating from the last years of the 1890s and later, are unfortunately outside the scope of this exhibition.

3. Jerold Lanes, "Edward Hopper—French Formalist, Ash Can Realist—Neither or Both," *Artforum*, vol. 7 (October 1968), pp. 44-50. Unfortunately Lanes went on to ascribe almost all of Hopper's meanings to formal causes, totally disregarding Hopper's oft-insisted claims that it is the whole of man's thought that counts in art; for example: "The inner life of a human being is a vast and varied realm and does not concern itself alone with stimulating arrangements of color, form, and design." Quoted in Lloyd Goodrich, *Edward Hopper*, New York, Abrams, 1978, p. 164.

4. Susan Alyson Stein, "Edward Hopper: The Uncrossed Threshold," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 54, no. 7 (March 1980), pp. 156-160.

5. We wish we had been able to secure the loan of one of Jackson Pollock's lithographs from the 1930s. Not only do they clearly show the combined influenced of Benton and the more obtunded urban protest style, but they point to the source of the mythic sensibilities that informed the works of many Abstract Expressionist painters.

6. Published in 1935, and reprinted in Dennis, *Grant Wood* (1975), p. 231.

7. See Patricia Hills, *The American Frontier: Image & Myths*, ex. cat., New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1973.

8. "Form and the Subject," *Arts*, vol. 5 (June 1924), p. 308. During the spring of 1932 the Whitney Museum staged an on-going debate about the state of American art. One of the participants was William Zorach and it seems worth citing his words in the present context: "Let the American tell the thing that he loves in his own way, to fit a particular place, and it will be national in spirit, and, if fine enough, universal."—"Nationalism in Art—Is It an Advantage?" *Art Digest*, vol. 6, no. 12 (March 15, 1932), p. 15.

# CHECKLIST

*Section VI    Symbolic Images*

Boris Artzybasheff
Kharkov, Russia 1899–U.S.A. 1965
*The Last Trumpet,* 1937
Wood engraving
288 x 200
Published by the Woodcut Society,
Kansas City
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Thomas Hart Benton
Neosho, Missouri 1889–Kansas
City, Missouri 1975
*Instruction,* 1940
Lithograph
235 x 313
Fath 41
Bequest of Lydia Evans Tunnard

John Steuart Curry
Dunavant, Kansas 1897–Madison,
Wisconsin 1946
*John Brown,* 1939
Lithograph
376 x 277
Cole 34
Printed by George C. Miller (?)
The J. Paul Oppenheim Memorial
Collection of Contemporary
American Prints

Ralph Fabri
Budapest 1894–1975
*Americana,* 1948
Etching
201 x 246
Gift of Allen Evarts Foster, B.A.
1906

Edward Hopper
Nyack, New York 1882–New York
City 1967
*Train and Bathers,* 1920
Etching
214 x 252
Zigrosser 26, fifth state of five;
Levin pl. 74
Lent by the Philadelphia Museum
of Art: Purchased; Thomas Skelton
Harrison Fund

Rockwell Kent
Tarrytown Heights, New York
1882–Plattsburg, New York 1971
*Home Port,* 1931
Wood Engraving
166 x 187
Jones 62
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Harry Sternberg
New York City 1904–
*Enough (Bound Man),* 1947
Crayon aquatint
378 x 298
Moore 191
The J. Paul Oppenheim Memorial
Collection of Contemporary
American Prints

Albert E. Sterner
London 1863–New York City 1946
*The Stranger,* ca. 1917
Lithograph
335 x 235
Anonymous Gift in Memory of
Nancy Aston Furst, 1922

Grant Wood
Anamosa, Iowa 1891–Iowa City,
Iowa 1942
*Tree Planting Group,* 1937
Lithograph
213 x 276
Lent by Davison Art Center,
Wesleyan University; Gift of
George W. Davison

Margueritte Zorach
Santa Rosa, California 1887–Santa
Rosa, California 1968
*A New England Family (The Father),*
1917
Linoleum cut
331 x 223
Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund

William Zorach
Eurburg, Lithuania 1887–Bath,
Maine 1966
*Father and Son,* ca. 1916
Linoleum cut
136 x 247
Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund

Peggy Bacon, *Frenzied Effort (The Whitney Studio Cl ub)*

# VII Images of the Artist

Rebecca Zurier

For centuries artists have indulged themselves in depicting their special position in society. American printmakers were no exception. Whether as products of self-examination or as celebrations of their everyday life, their prints chronicle the changing conditions of art and artist over the decades. Generally, our artists focused on their own society, on their own day-to-day routines, but each, in the quiet of his studio would inevitably turn to a fellow artist or the image in the mirror to sound out the present state of the artistic psyche.

Childe Hassam's self-portrait belongs to the late nineteenth-century tradition that represents the artist at his press. Alone in his sun-splashed studio in the Connecticut countryside, Hassam implies his independence from the city, its subjects, its artists, and perhaps most revealingly, its technology. It is not known how and from whom Hassam learned lithography, but in his use of washes, he shows himself as a surprisingly innovative practitioner.[1] The freedom Hassam obtains from his medium is that of the painter who prefers to convey the effects of dappled lighting rather than to describe the details of the workshop.

The celebration of printmaking as a dialogue between the artist and the tools of his craft, and as a contemplative and intimate form of expression was the more usual impulse behind such studio images. In Armin Landeck's etching of 1933 the studio, the press, and the paraphernalia of printing become the ingredients of a still life. Its abstract qualities are underscored by the uninflected perfection of the etched lines of which it is composed. The result is another of those rare prints in which meaning is encoded as much in the image as in the process. As in Hassam's self-portrait, the terms of portraiture are as revealing as the likeness. Hopper's *The Conductor* and Sloan's *Portrait of Robert Henri* (neither in the exhibition, alas) are far more direct, unaffected portrayals of their subjects. Rarely do American portraits emulate the European habit

of including "attributes" of the sitter's role in society. But that is just the device used in Jules Pascin's seldom-seen portrait of the critic, Henry McBride, who is surrounded by what undoubtedly are meant to be his favorite paintings.[2] Although Pascin's portrait was probably a fairly private memento, it was used by Gertrude Stein (to whom McBride had presented an impression) on the cover of a pamphlet of her poems. The critic apparently had secured the first American publication of a Stein poem.[3]

Because the world of art was so well known to itself, these personal images would have been easily recognized. Thus McBride was caricatured in other prints by Peggy Bacon and he appears in the foreground of Mabel Dwight's *Greeting from the House of Weyhe* (other portraits are, left to right, the dealer Weyhe, his assistant, Carl Zigrosser, and the artist Wanda Gàg).[4] Another close member of this coterie during the Twenties and Thirties was Raphael Soyer. Describing one of his self-portraits (earlier than the one here exhibited), Soyer explained:

In those days [ca. 1925] everybody smoked. It was the fashion for an artist to draw or paint with a cigarette in his mouth. We were influenced, I think, by Pascin. They said that Pascin always painted with something in his mouth.[5]

Soyer's lithographed *Self-Portrait* of 1933 shows a taciturn and suspicious artist. The soft, fine strokes of the crayon tend to inhibit further scrutiny, leaving the larger forms to communicate an uncomplicated likeness. But the urge to probe more deeply soon took hold of artists during the Thirties, reflecting their growing acquaintance with German Expressionism (thanks to the opening of new galleries by J. R. Neumann and Curt Valentine). Milton Avery's portrait of his fellow artist, Louis Wiesenberg, and Jacob Kainen's utterly frank *Self-Portrait* pierce the surface of appearances through the total abruptness of the drypoint line.

Most often the printmaker portrayed the social activities that took place within his own community of artists, teachers, dealers and friends. The prints of John Sloan, Peggy Bacon and their contemporaries chronicle the rise of the New York art world in the early part of this century. Rather than try to fit into an existing cultural establishment or retreat into individual isolation, this group formed their own alternative society.[6] Judging from the numerous interconnections among the artists in this exhibition, it must have been a small world indeed. They studied and taught together in classes at a few art schools, exhibited together at a handful of print dealers uptown, frequented the same restaurants, and summered together at artist's colonies. With a lively group of writers,

performers and assorted personalities, they helped make Greenwich Village into America's artistic bohemia. Though the names have changed and the popular bars have moved farther downtown, lower Manhattan has remained a center for artists ever since.

The connections began in school, with a few influential and charismatic teachers like Henri, Sloan, Dow, Miller, Pennell, Wickey and others who imparted to their students not only ideas about art but attitudes toward life, and the life of the artist. Few of the artists were self-taught; most had studied at the National Academy of Design, the Art Students League, or had received private instruction. Thomas Eakins had taught at the Art Students League in the 1880s; his legacy of precise empiricism remained fiercely alive into the twentieth century. Sloan's print, *Anshutz Talking on Anatomy* (1912), records one of a series of lectures given by Eakins' successor, Thomas Anshutz, before Robert Henri's class at the New York School of Art in 1906. In the audience are Walter Pach, Rockwell Kent, William Glackens, Henri, Sloan, and Sloan's wife Dolly; caricatures by George Bellows and Glenn Coleman are faintly visible on the wall to the rear. The informality of the classroom atmosphere would persist as a hallmark of the entire group of artists who came to maturity during the first thirty years of the century.[7]

Henri, who had studied under Anshutz in Philadelphia, tried to communicate some of these same values to his classes in New York. But to Anshutz's ideas he added a new interest in everyday life and encouraged his pupils to go out and sketch "life in the raw." Henri's method in turn was carried on by his pupils, Bellows, Sloan and Miller, when they joined the teaching staff of the Art Students League in the 1910s. Etchings by Peggy Bacon, Raphael Soyer, Isabel Bishop and Reginald Marsh reveal their teachers' strong emphasis on anatomy and life drawing. On the other hand, almost all of these artists learned printing techniques independently; only after Joseph Pennell had established a formal program in graphic arts in 1921 would the Art Students League become the major training ground for several generations of American printmakers.[8]

At the time Bacon studied there (1915-16), the League was considered the most progressive art school in New York. Soyer later recalled:

Students talked about its radicalism and its modernism . . . the League was livelier, freer, noisier, less orderly than the National Academy. Fellows and girls worked in the same classrooms together, and the students had the privilege of choosing their own teachers and changing classes every month.[9]

The relaxed atmosphere, the feeling of camaraderie, and the idea, promulgated by Eakins, Anshutz and Henri, that art was a group effort extended outside the classroom. At dances, parties and meals in the League's cafeteria, students formed their own informal social networks. Peggy Bacon's drypoints depicting student life had their start in cartoons for *Bad News* a parody newspaper issued by Bacon, Edmund Duffy, Alexander Brook and others. In *The Supply Store* we can recognize a portrait of the artist herself (second from the left) buying materials for George Bellows' life class at the League.[10]

Bacon's *Frenzied Effort* records an informal session at the Whitney Studio Club, a popular gathering place founded by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1918.[11] Among the artists assembled are Mabel Dwight (in foreground, wearing glasses), Bacon (third from left, rear row) and George Overbury "Pop" Hart (in spectacles, to Bacon's left). The spider dangling at the center of the page replaces the artist's signature. In other etchings from the Twenties, Bacon depicted artists entertaining each other at home, and combining work and recreation at artists' colonies in Woodstock, Provincetown and Maine.

The informality and good humor of the Art Students League became increasingly buoyant after World War I as Greenwich Village developed its own subculture. Attracted by fellowship and low rents, artists had been renting studios in converted stables near Washington Square since the turn of the century. By 1915 the Village had become almost fashionable. In addition to the artists' favorite bars and restaurants (Mouquin's and Pettipas in the first decade, McSorley's through the depression years), there were a number of famous gathering places around Sixth Avenue. The "salons" at The Whitney Studio Club, the offices of various "little" magazines, as well as theatrical groups and a few political organizations, provided centers for artistic and intellectual discussion and diversion.[12]

Sloan's *Arch Conspirators* records one of the more notorious episodes of Bohemian hijinks that took place in 1917 when Gertrude Drick, a would-be poet, found the door to the Washington Square Arch left ajar. Recognizing an excuse for a party, Drick invited a group of friends to declare the secession of Greenwich Village from the United States at a midnight picnic atop the arch. Among the guests were actors, the avant-garde artist Marcel Duchamp, and Drick's embarrassed friend John Sloan who later described the event as "one of my Bohemian incidents, one of the very few."[13] This sort of activity seems to have subsided in the 1920s–perhaps

as part of the aftermath of World War I, perhaps because of Prohibition.

Prints proved an especially appropriate means for recording such congenial scenes because of the intimate, informal nature of the medium itself. Although there was a tradition of the "conversation piece" in painting, and many nineteenth-century prints by Daumier and others depict the artist in his studio or the public at the Salon, the idea of recording scenes that document the social and professional lives of the artists was novel. A good number of Sloan's etchings are dedicated to capturing such incidents, from evenings with other artists at home to those that depict the artist and his colleagues in a more public setting. Public or private, these etchings were serious undertakings; the personages and places were too much a part of the new spirit of American art to be considered mere characters in the storyteller's tale. Little notes of humor did assert themselves, of course, for they were in fact part of the scene. At the same time that Sloan's portrait of Anshutz's class alluded to paintings of great teachers at work (e.g. Eakins and Rembrandt), it was lightened by the cartoon-like portraits of fellow students and their caricatures pasted on the rear wall.

While Sloan's line was elaborate and tonal, Peggy Bacon's drypoint had the incisiveness of the caricaturist's pen. As had so many of her generation, she studied and then actively practised illustration. Recording the lives and foibles of her friends, her images function almost as snapshots in an album, as if the participants' names should be pencilled in underneath (which in fact was done on many of her proofs by Carl Zigrosser). Like Mabel Dwight's view of Weyhe's, many of the artists made prints as greeting cards. Run off in small editions and distributed among friends, the images provided souvenirs of good times and good company.

## NOTES

1. Although lithographic washes were known and used by the 1830s, most artists avoided them; they were simply too unpredictable. Hassam's few wash lithographs appear to follow the lead of Whistler's "lithotints" of the late-1870s and mid-1890s, but there is no evidence that Hassam was consciously doing so.

2. Unfortunately we have not really been able to identify these works. One may well be a Renoir. Of course, the portrait alludes to Edouard Manet's *Portrait of Emile Zola* (1868).

3. Gertrude Stein, "Have they Attacked Mary. He Giggled," Privately printed, ca. 1917. Thanks

to McBride's influence, the poem was published in *Vanity Fair*, vol. 8 (June 1917). See Daniel Catton Rich, ed., *The Flow of Art: Essays and Criticism of Henry McBride*, New York, 1975, pp. 20-21.

4. I am grateful to Gertrude Dennis of the Weyhe Gallery for identifying the figures in this print.

5. Frank Gettings, *Raphael Soyer: 65 Years of Printmaking*, ex. cat., Washington, D.C., Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 1982, p. 20.

6. On American attitudes toward artists at the turn of the century, see Joshua Taylor, *The Fine Arts in America*, Chicago, 1979, pp. 118-160, 179-185.

7. On the teaching methods of Anshutz and Eakins see *In This Academy*, ex. cat., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1976, pp. 162-189.

8. On the Art Students League see Marchal Landgren, *Years of Art, The Story of the Art Students' League*, New York, 1940 and *One Hundred Prints by 100 Artists of the Art Students' League of New York*, ex.

cat., Associated American Artists, 1975.

9. Raphael Soyer, *Self-Revealment, A Memoir*, New York, 1967, p. 60.

10. Bacon based her portraits on sketches she made during meals at the League's cafeteria: "I enjoyed crowding them in, and every one of the people was a portrait of a particular individual." See Roberta Tarbell, *Peggy Bacon: Personalities and Places*, ex. cat., Washington, D.C., National Collection of Fine Arts, 1975, p. 14.

11. Lloyd Goodrich, *The Whitney Studio Club and American Art*, ex. cat., New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1975.

12. On the Greenwich Village scene see Albert Parry, *Garrets and Pretenders: A History of Bohemianism in America*, New York, 1933. Parry devotes several pages to the event illustrated in Sloan's *Arch Conspirators*.

13. Quoted in Morse, *John Sloan's Etchings* (1969), p. 209. The figures in the print are (left to right): Charles Frederick Ellis, Marcel Duchamp, Gertrude Drick, Allen Russell Mann, Betty Turner and John Sloan.

## CHECKLIST

*Section VII    Images of the Artist*

Milton Avery
Altmar, New York 1893–New York City 1965
*Head of a Man–Portrait of Louis Wiesenberg, Artist*, 1935
Drypoint
230 x 117
Lunn 8; Miller 72b
Published in the Laurels Portfolio No. 4, 1948
Henry Sage Goodwin, B.A. 1926, Fund

Peggy Bacon
Ridgefield, Connecticut 1895–
*The Supply Store*, 1918
Drypoint
127 x 150
Flint 16
Yale Club of New York Fund

Peggy Bacon
Ridgefield, Connecticut 1895–
*Frenzied Effort (The Whitney Studio
Club)* 1925
Drypoint
151 x 229
Flint 57
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968
Collection of American Art

Mabel Dwight
Cincinnati, Ohio 1876–Sellersville,
Pennsylvania 1955
*Greetings from the House of Weyhe,*
1928
Lithograph
180 x 216
Gift of Lydia Evans Tunnard

Childe Hassam
Dorchester, Massachusetts
1859–Easthampton, Long Island
1935
*The Lithographer,* 1918
Lithograph
347 x 302
Griffith 9
Gift of Mrs. Childe Hassam

Jacob Kainen
Waterbury, Connecticut 1909–
*Self-Portrait with Drypoint Needle,*
1945
Drypoint
248 x 200
Flint 46
Lent by the Artist

Armin Landeck
Crandon, Wisconsin 1905–
*Studio Interior No. 1,* 1935
Etching and drypoint
203 x 268
Kraeft 57
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

Jules Pascin
Vidin, Bulgaria 1885–Paris 1930
*Portrait of Henry McBride,* 1917
Linoleum cut
150 x 131
Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund

John Sloan
Loch Haven, Pennsylvania 1871–
Hanover, New Hampshire 1951
*Anshutz Talking on Anatomy,* 1912
Etching
191 x 229
Morse 155, eighth state of eight
Printed by Peters Brothers, Inc.
Gift of Dr. Hollan W. Farr, B.A.
1939, in memory of Professor
Hollon A. Farr, B.A. 1896

John Sloan
Loch Haven, Pennsylvania 1871–
Hanover, New Hampshire 1951
*Arch Conspirators,* 1917
Etching
110 x 153
Morse 183, second state of two
Probably printed by Ernest D. Roth
Gift of Charles Nagel, Jr., B.A.
1923

Raphael Soyer
Tombov, Russia 1899–
*Self-Portrait,* 1933
Lithograph
336 x 249
Cole 26
Printed by George C. Miller
The J. Paul Oppenheim Memorial
Collection of Contemporary
American Prints
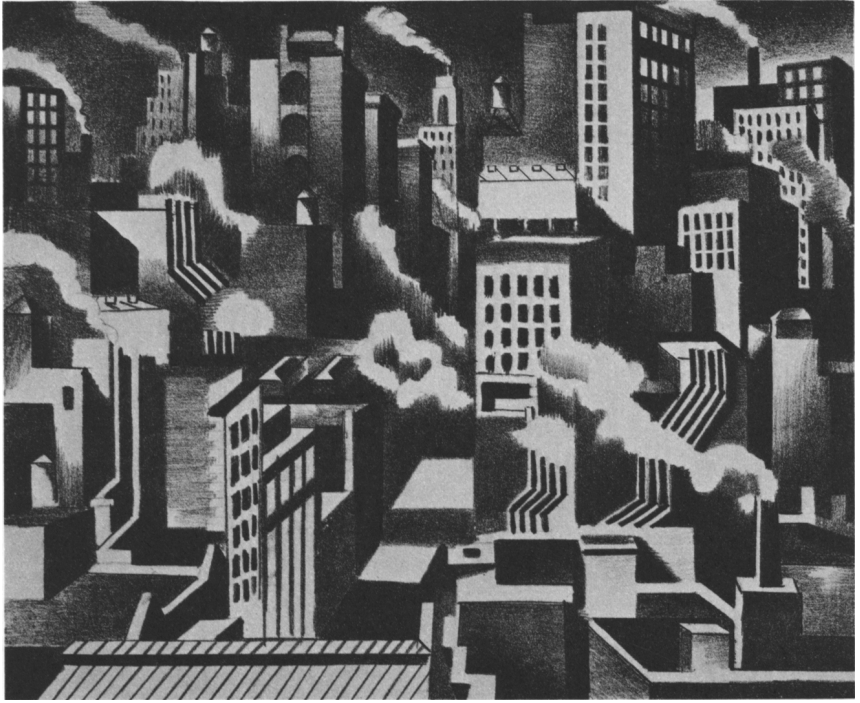
Jan Matulka , *Arrangement–New York*

# VIII Modernism

Richard S. Field

The purpose of this exhibition has been to isolate a set of attitudes that might characterize the vast majority of American prints dating from the first half of this century. We have offered the hypothesis that these prints share and even draw from the subjects, technical approaches, and expectations of the illustration. There remains, of course, the question of "exceptions." In this Section, we have included a handful of prints that might, under the rubric of "modernism," appear to be outside of the model advanced so far.[1] Nevertheless, these works provide a context in which some aspects of our thesis may be brought into sharper focus.

All of these prints avoid the site-specific qualities that were deemed an integral part of most urban images (including those of Charles Sheeler). Yet, several are without question inspired by the modernism attributed to the New York cityscape. Whereas Picasso and Braque worked out Cubism in the still life, the Americans characteristically found the new forms in the Cubist grid they perceived in the city. Walkowitz's *New York, Abstraction* (ca. 1928) is more a way of thinking about the city than it is a rigorous examination of formal language. Similarly, Stuart Davis' *Two Figures and El* (1931) is a highly integrated collage of disparate New York motifs rather than a study of a single style. In fact, its two figures also allude to different stylistic aspects of Léger and Picasso. What interests Davis is not so much the simultaneity of spatial perceptions (he once wrote that the Cubist *passage* was to be avoided because it depended on illusionism), but the simultaneity of ideas, of languages, signs, and objects. In his self-interview of 1931, Davis "replied" that the vitality of America could be found in its movies and radio "because they allow us to experience hundreds of diverse scenes, sounds and ideas in a juxtaposition that has never before been possible."[2] Certainly Davis' lithograph avoids what we have throughout this catalogue referred to as the narrative mode, but it does suggest something very akin to it. The picture space is still filled with signs, readable fragments that come from daily urban life.

And Davis treats these forms with an almost unique simplicity: flat, opaque blacks, reserved whites, and two or three kinds of obvious texture. For a printmaker to be so sparing of technique (by · comparison Sheeler and Hopper are immensely subtle) is unusual and significant. Davis eschews the complex exploitation of technique upon which depended so much of the meaning of the art of European printmaking, such as the Cubist prints of Albert Gleizes, Louis Marcousis, or Jacques Villon. We would claim that Davis is following in the mold that he had long practiced, that in their simplicity and concreteness, his prints still reflect the communicative values of the illustrator. Furthermore, there is an elusive awkwardness, a positive avoidance of facile draughtsmanship, and a retreat from artifice that informs every shape and object. It is fair to claim that in American printmaking, modernism was rarely allowed to displace the concept of readability, and further, that what was readable was most often the signs, fixtures, and common objects of one's daily environment.

The same argument may be extended to prints committed to a greater degree of abstraction. Matter-of-fact reality always competes with the urge to non-representation, and the abstract forms are themselves often treated as objects. Louis Schanker's woodcut, *Three Men on a Bench*, wavers between a constructive and an analytic point of view as if the artist wished to abandon the object but did not dare. On the other hand, Werner Drewes' *Red-in-Red* (1936) is at home with totally non-objective imagery. Comparison of his woodcuts with those of Wassily Kandinsky's *Kleine Welten* (1921), however, demonstrates Drewes' subtle shift away from identifying the entire print as an abstraction. Neither Drewes nor Schanker's image fills the plane of the paper so much as it occupies illusionistic space in the paper (or in the black surround of the printed block); that is to say, both images act like objects. American printmakers may have felt a pressure to simplify the identity of something, but they never quite relinquished its objecthood.[3] Even Max Weber did not maintain the identification between image and medium which was the strength of his woodcuts.[4] His lithograph, *Mother and Child* (ca. 1918), appears to be a view of a proto-Cubist sculpture rather than an integrated study of style and subject.

Another characteristic of many American printmakers is their apparent willingness to adapt their work to different contexts. Comparison among the three prints by Matulka in this exhibition discloses a fairly Marinesque realism, a European stylishness, and a more polished abstraction similar to Lozowick's. Artists inclined to

explore the purer aspects of modernism were reluctant to abandon the simpler, more communicative role expected of the print by our public. Many American collectors, knowledgeable about works of art, regarded the print as a reproduction, a second version of something else. In part, they were (and are) correct, but underlying that view is the deeper conviction that the print is merely a report of another event, an imitation and not an invention. We think that many of these attitudes exerted an inevitable pressure on the printmaker. Without doubt, that was the case during the nineteenth century and remained entirely so with regard to the illustrator.[5]

If the problems confronted by American painters between 1900 and 1950 could be summed up by the notion of grafting American subjects onto European styles–and this even included the Regionalists who looked to other traditions rather than modernism–the difficulties faced by the printmaker may be better appreciated. In addition to this style-subject dilemma, the very craft of printmaking was dominated by European precedent. In order to serve the American public, the printmaker could cater to those whose tastes were informed by the past, and many did. Or, he could ingest something of America's indigenous image-making industry, that of the illustrator. Unfortunately, this put him squarely in conflict with the styles that were appropriate to contemporary existence. Thus the printmaker had a doubly complex problem. Davis came close to significant new formulations in his brilliant lithographs of 1931, but there was absolutely no audience for his work. Sheeler and Lozowick made exquisite prints which were, nonetheless, rooted in what must be seen as a conservative modernism, what Milton Brown called "Cubist-Realism." Lewis was brilliant but traditional, while Hopper, probably the most penetrating humanist of them all, could not truly claim to be a modernist.

Even John Marin, who projected a mythic content into American subjects and had mastered the craft of etching, failed to find a total unity in his modernism. *River Movement* of 1925 is schematic rather than synthetic, the various shapes, planes and lines acting too independently, insisting too much on their separate identities. Nevertheless, this is a major American print, one that understands the formal givens of the medium–platemark, paper, atmospheric line of etching–and exploits them as an integral aspect of content rather than technique.

Marin's example and those of the group of Surrealists who gathered in Stanley William Hayter's New York printing

establishment, Atelier 17, inspired the sea change that took place during the early Forties. The locus of this metamorphosis was the work of Jackson Pollock, his prints and his drawings. During the Depression Pollock had been a social realist inspired by Benton's charged compositions. But in the early Forties, this gave way to an increasingly urgent demand for self-exploration. The impetus for this direction was supplied by Surrealist claims of access to the unconscious and by their several "automatic" processes of image making. In 1944-45 Pollock undertook to summarize his progress in a series of intaglios that fused Surrealism, process and an intuitive new insight into the very materials of art. In Pollock's engraving and drypoint of ca. 1944 the experience of the object world has been discarded. The energies begin to press out against the platemark in a manner only dimly hinted at in the prints by Walkowitz and Marin from the 1920s. Pollock's prints offered a new fusion of technique and content, one that at last found a way out of the old style-content (subject) duality. The experience of the print was about itself.

Although Pollock's Abstract-Expressionist ideas would have a profound influence on the history of art, printmaking remained moribund so long as it concentrated only on technical virtuosity (one lamentable outgrowth of Pollock's example). But suddenly, American artists were provided with a modernism that did not need to be made American. It was no longer an issue whether the print served some pragmatic purpose, whether it recapitulated an event external to itself. As was the case with Synchromists and the early Precisionists like Charles Demuth, the major practitioners of Abstract Expressionism had very little interest in printmaking. Neither the scale of the print nor the state of technology encouraged them to try to encapsulate their body gestures into a few square inches of copper, stone or wood. But in the 1960s, after a decade full of false starts, American printmaking embraced all of the loose strands of the past, its potential for technical invention, its ability to utilize and exploit commercial techniques and subjects, its penchant for reductive, often popular imagery and its tendency to quote other media and styles. Pop Art and the serious printmaking about the nature of the communicative image it inspired have many roots in the prints of this exhibition.

# NOTES

1. We do not claim that every artist utilizing the conventions of abstraction is represented; for example, we have not included Arshile Gorky's two or three Picasso-like works of the early Thirties, or Arthur B. Davies' half-dozen experiments in Cubism, Sloan's single Futurist image, Nathaniel Pousette-Dart's virtually unknown lithographs, or even Marsden Hartley's still lifes (they were conceived and executed in Germany).

2. Stuart Davis, "Self-Interview," *Creative Art*, vol. 9, no. 3 (September 1931), pp. 202-212.

3. Those who were particularly reductive in other media were rarely encouraged by an attraction to the purely formal aspects of printmaking. Even though Americans were among the most polished of technicians, at least in copperplate methods, it would seem that they scrupulously avoided the kind of formalism that characterized so much European printmaking.

4. It should be noted that Weber's most profoundly Cubist drawings and paintings, executed in the years just following the Armory Show of 1913, did not generate a single counterpart in Weber's prints. His earliest prints latched on to that other aspect of Picasso and Matisse, their sculptural primitivism.

5. Ironically, many of the artists who worked on the Federal Arts Project became so enmeshed in problems of craft, especially those who worked in silkscreen printing, that they became militant about the subject of originality. Not only did they turn their back on the ideals of the FAP (art for the millions), but they mistook their craft for their art. In 1941, the screenprinters, along with Carl Zigrosser, actually coined a new word to distinguish their efforts from the work of the commercial screenprinter. The restrictive notions with which the National Serigraph Society surrounded the word "Serigraph" were only abandoned in 1962, the year of Andy Warhol's and Robert Rauschenberg's first use of the medium!

# CHECKLIST

*Section VIII    Modernism*

Stuart Davis
Philadelphia 1894–New York City
1964
*Two Figures and El,* 1931
Lithograph
280 x 381
Cole 17
Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund

Werner Drewes
Canig, Germany 1899–
*Red-in-Red,* 1936
Woodcut
229 x 303
Collection of the Société Anonyme

John Marin
Rutherford, New Jersey 1870–
Cape Split, Maine 1953
*River Movement,* 1925
Etching
200 x 250
Zigrosser 145
Lent by the Philadelphia Museum
of Art: Purchased: Staunton B.
Peck Fund from the Carl and Laura
Zigrosser Collection

Jan Matulka
Prague, Czechoslovakia 1890–
Queens, New York 1972
*Arrangement–New York,* ca. 1925
Lithograph
335 x 407
Flint 32
Lent by John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968

Jackson Pollock
Cody, Wyoming 1912–
Southampton, New York 1956
*Untitled,* ca. 1944
Engraving and drypoint
304 x 250
O'Connor & Thaw 1074 (P14)
Printed by Emiliano Sorini in 1967
Gift of Lee Krasner Pollock

Louis Schanker
New York City 1903–Stamford,
Connecticut 1981
*Three Men on Bench,* 1939
Woodcut
230 x 320
Johnson & Miller 35
The John P. Axelrod, B.A. 1968,
Collection of American Art

Abraham Walkowitz
Tumen, Russia 1880–Brooklyn,
New York 1965
*New York, Abstraction,* ca. 1928
Lithograph
356 x 194
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Kainen,
Chevy Chase, Maryland

Max Weber
Bialystok, Russia 1881–Great Neck,
New York 1971
*Mother and Child,* ca. 1918 (dated
1920)
Colored lithograph
231 x 186
Rubenstein 54
Collection of the Société Anonyme

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