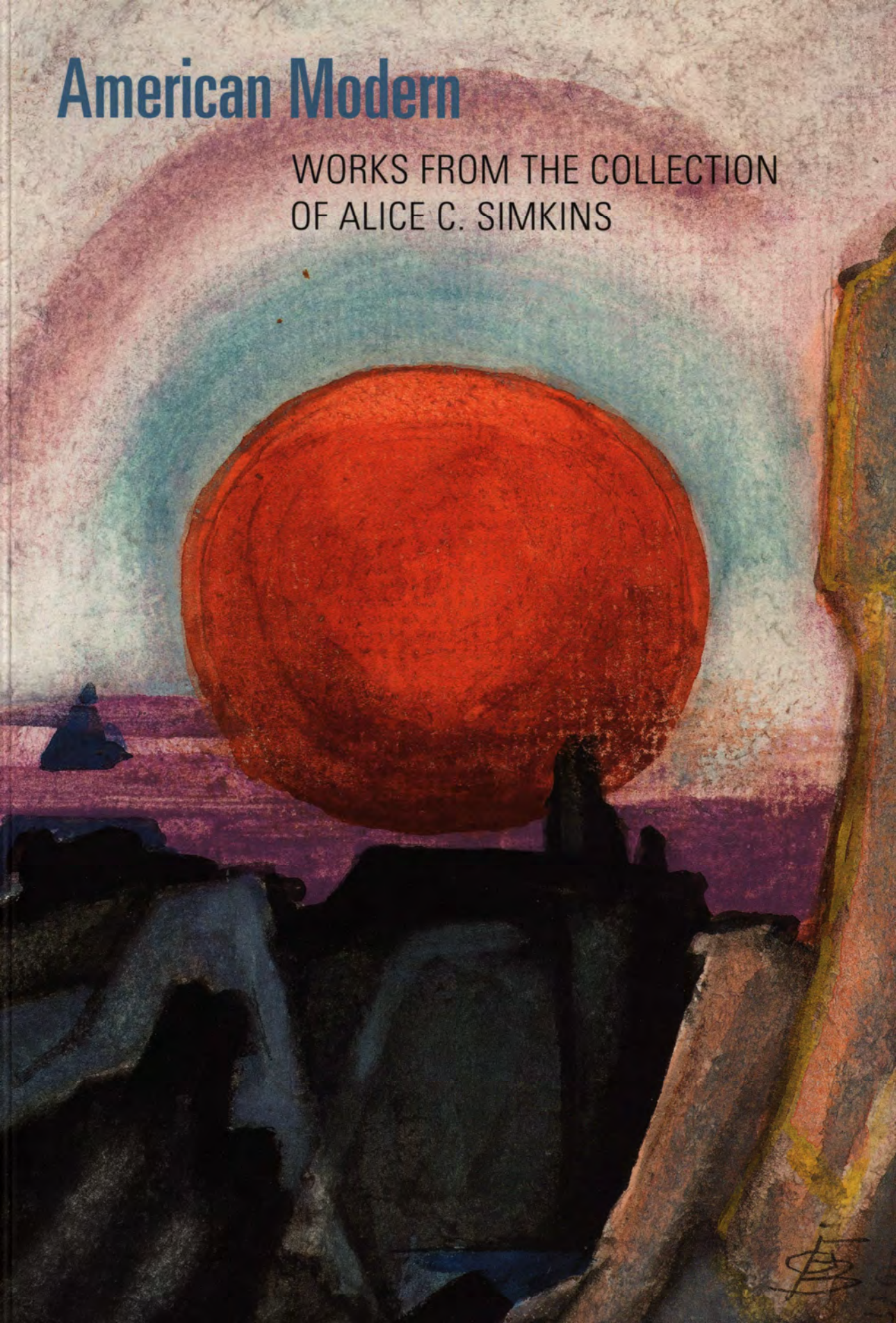


American Modern

WORKS FROM THE COLLECTION
OF ALICE C. SIMKINS





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OF ALICE C. SIMKINS

Alison de Lima Greene
with Lyle Williams, Jerika C. Jordan,
and Althea Ruoppo

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

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Cover: Oscar Bluemner, *Earth Sets on Moon*, 1922, watercolor on paper, 7 x 4 1/4 in. (17.7 x 12 cm), Collection of Alice C. Simkins.

Frontispiece: Abraham Walkowitz, *Isadora Duncan*, n.d., watercolor on paper, 8 1/4 x 5 1/4 in. (22.5 x 13 cm), Collection of Alice C. Simkins.

Foreword, pp. 6–7: Stuart Davis, *Jazz*, 1947, gouache and graphite on paper, 6 1/2 x 24 in. (15.9 x 60.9 cm), Collection of Alice C. Simkins.

© Estate of Stuart Davis / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Introduction, p. 8: Joseph Stella, *Cock (Himalayan Impeyan Pheasant)*, c. 1929, graphite and colored crayons on paper, 14 x 10 1/2 in. (35.5 x 26.6 cm), Collection of Alice C. Simkins.

Collection Highlights, pp. 14–15: Charles Burchfield, *Sunrise and Rain*, 1916, watercolor and pencil on paper, 14 x 19 3/8 in. (35.6 x 50.6 cm), Collection of Alice C. Simkins.

Collection Checklist, p. 44: Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Eggplant*, 1923, ink and wash on paper, 11 1/2 x 9 in. (29.8 x 22.8 cm), Collection of Alice C. Simkins.

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Back cover: William Zorach, *Rabbit*, n.d., bronze, 5 1/2 x 9 1/2 x 5 in. (14 x 24.1 x 12.7 cm), Collection of Alice C. Simkins.



FOREWORD

Alice C. Simkins's long and affectionate relationship with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the McNay Art Museum is one of mutual nurturing, beginning with her first years as a member of the curatorial staff at the McNay and continuing to her leadership role as trustee at both institutions. A generous supporter, she has given many fine works of art to Houston and San Antonio over the years, including important paintings and outstanding works on paper. She has also been a consistently strong advocate of collection care and conservation, with a thorough understanding of their importance to museum growth and scholarship at-large.

Simkins is equally serious about her own collecting, and she has assembled a particularly fine group of American sculpture and works on paper, a selection of which we are proud to bring forward to audiences in Houston and San Antonio. Her love of this field was fostered by John Palmer Leeper, founding director of the McNay, and Simkins has actively supported the McNay's commitment to American modernism, with a particular focus on the artists of the Stieglitz circle. She has also been



a consistent supporter of the prints and drawings department established at the McNay in 1992. Additionally, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, first under the direction of William C. Agee and then under the leadership of Peter C. Marzio, has benefitted hugely from Simkins's deep knowledge and enthusiasm. When the curatorial staff in Houston grew to support independent departments dedicated to prints and drawings in 1991 and American art in 1997, Simkins was among the first trustees to serve on the committees dedicated to these efforts. At the same time, she has also championed both contemporary art and Bayou Bend, Houston's house museum dedicated to Americana.

So it is especially fitting that when the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, undertook this special exhibition of the Collection of Alice C. Simkins, that the McNay became the second venue. We thank Alison de Lima Greene, MFAH Curator of Contemporary Art and Special Projects, who organized this exhibition and catalogue, and her colleagues Jerika C. Jordan and Althea Ruoppo, whose insightful research shed new light on many works in the

collection. Our appreciation also goes to Lyle Williams, the McNay's Curator of Prints and Drawings, for his contribution to the introductory essay and his commitment to bringing this project to San Antonio.

Finally, we acknowledge with gratitude Alice C. Simkins, who in her own collection has consistently sought out exceptional works that convey the essence of an artist's style. Her inspiring example is celebrated with this publication.

Gary Tinterow

Director

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Dr. William J. Chiego

Director

McNay Art Museum



Joseph Stella, *Cock (Himalayan Impeyan Pheasant)*, c. 1929, cat. 25

INTRODUCTION

Lyle Williams and Alison de Lima Greene



Fig. 1

Over the years her relationship with the McNay naturally evolved as she assumed the role of patron and trustee, while strong family ties took her frequently to Houston, where she joined the board of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH). Her profound and intelligent support of both institutions has shaped their histories, and in turn, the museums' complementary goals and programs have informed her choices as a collector.

A trip to London, Madrid, and Rome in 1969 organized by the McNay Art Museum looms large in the memories of those who accompanied founding director John Palmer Leeper on the journey. It was the first major collectors' trip undertaken by the museum, then only fifteen years old. As with many museum travel programs, the purpose of this tour was to build a sense of community, educating and encouraging both established and new collectors. Early and important supporters of the museum, including members of the prominent San Antonio Tobin and Oppenheimer families participated, as did Mrs. W.S. Simkins of Dallas and, fortuitously, her daughter Alice.¹ Alice Simkins had recently finished her coursework toward an MA in art history at the University of Texas at Austin and had been introduced to the museum by her aunt, Alice Nicholson Hanszen, a prominent Houston collector and early member of the McNay. The young art historian must have made quite an impression, and Leeper noted in his travel journal that Simkins looked at art with "greater thoroughness than anyone else."² Upon returning to San Antonio, he asked her to join the staff of the McNay, announcing in the museum's *Annual Report* of 1970 that "Miss Simkins" had been hired as "registrar and in a curatorial position."³

Alice C. Simkins is that rare breed of arts patron who has maintained a life-long commitment to two cities. Raised in Dallas, she made San Antonio her home in 1970 when she joined the staff of the Marion Koogler McNay Art Institute, known today as the McNay Art Museum.

Over the years her rela-

In 1970, the core of the museum's modern collection was still Mrs. McNay's founding bequest, and acquisition funds were nearly nonexistent. Moreover, there were few serious art collectors in San Antonio at that time. As a result, Leeper was actively cultivating collectors and prospective donors, and the 1969 trip was an extension of these efforts. As Simkins recalls, she and her fellow travelers learned a great deal from Leeper, who would expose his audience to the best that was available and answer the question "Should I buy this?" with a resounding "Yes," thus giving nervous, novice collectors the courage to buy art.⁴ He also emphasized the importance of good design in everyday life, following a personal philosophy that "melded art and life in a seamless fashion." Moreover, Leeper proclaimed that no art collection was a true connoisseur's collection without the support of relevant references and literature. Simkins took Leeper's teachings to heart; today her personal library is exceptional and includes many out-of-print and rare volumes, including an early edition of Arthur Wesley Dow's *Composition* and the *Art News Annual*, which first published Stuart Davis's *Jazz* (1947) (cat. 8).



Fig. 2

Leeper had a particular affinity for American modernism and had studied with Paul Sachs, a champion of modern prints and drawings at Harvard University's Fogg Art Museum. Following Sachs's lead and building upon Marion Koogler McNay's bequest, which included outstanding watercolors like Charles Demuth's *From the Kitchen Garden* (1925), Leeper played to this strength at the McNay (fig. 2). His enthusiasm encouraged others, including Simkins, to buy American modernism at a time when it was the province of only a handful of collectors and connoisseurs.

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One of Leeper's most powerful tools was the annual *Collectors Gallery*, a consignment exhibition which he launched in the late 1950s. Leeper would invite the museum's patrons to accompany him to New York to visit galleries and select works of art that would then be shipped to San Antonio. The art would be presented in the museum's galleries for purchase, with a percentage of the sales funding acquisitions for the McNay. Simkins helped coordinate all aspects of *Collectors Gallery* throughout her tenure on staff, from initial reconnaissance trips with Leeper in New York to the mammoth task of shipping hundreds of objects. She also remembers that Leeper managed to strike a balance between encouraging participation from the group in making selections for the McNay and ensuring that the final decision was his.



Fig. 3

Both Simkins and her aunt were very much involved in one of the McNay's most important acquisitions during these years, Charles Burchfield's *Nasturtiums and Barn*, presented at the 1974 *Collectors Gallery* (fig. 3).⁵ A hallmark work from 1917, Burchfield's self-identified "Golden Year," *Nasturtiums and Barn* captures that fleeting moment when the sun begins to set and the shadows suggest the mysterious night to come. Burchfield wrote on the back of the drawing: "Brilliant sunlight of late afternoon still shines on the barn, the flowers in the garden are in a shadow that already hints at night—and they lose their prosaic daytime character." Decades later, Simkins would acquire a Burchfield watercolor for her own collection, one that similarly captures a momentary and almost mystical natural effect. In *Sunrise and Rain* (1916), sunlight gleams through the raindrops, creating a glowing halo that suffuses the drawing with light (cat. 6).

Through *Collectors Gallery*, Leeper was also able to influence collections beyond the McNay's walls. A prime example was his championing of Helen Torr, the underappreciated and little-known artist and wife of Arthur Dove. A number of San Antonians bought Torr's work, including Leeper himself and Simkins, who acquired *White Feather* at *Collectors Gallery* in 1975 (cat. 26). Other works that Simkins purchased through *Collectors Gallery* in the 1970s include the Joseph Stella and Marguerite Zorach featured in this catalogue (cats. 25 and 29).

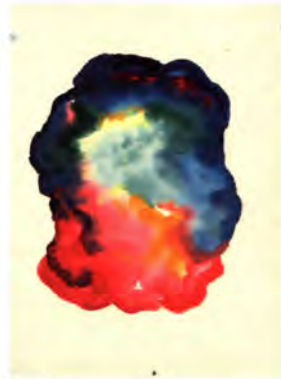


Fig. 4

Through the McNay, Simkins became well acquainted with the prominent art collectors of San Antonio. Mrs. Margaret Batts Tobin was a dear friend as was Mrs. Tobin's son Robert, who, in addition to being one of the most important theater arts collectors in the country, also actively pursued works by Dove, Charles Demuth, and Georgia O'Keeffe (fig. 4), among others. Another collection, however, would have an even greater influence on Simkins's career, namely that of prominent San Antonio attorney



Fig. 5

Sylvan Lang and his wife Mary. In 1973, Simkins completed a preliminary checklist of their collection, one that beautifully dovetailed with that of Mrs. McNay when it was given to the museum in 1975. While the Lang gift included a number of important School of Paris paintings, it was their American paintings that added a new dimension to the McNay galleries (fig. 5). Simkins got to know the collection extremely well, researching each object, its

provenance, exhibition history, and condition. She corresponded with the dealers who had sold art to the Langs as well as with all of the artists (or their heirs) who were represented in the Lang collection, including O'Keeffe and Ben Shahn's widow, Bernarda Bryson. So complete was Simkins's catalogue of the Lang paintings and drawings that it became the nucleus of her master's thesis in 1975, a document which remains to this day an invaluable tool for anyone researching the Lang pictures.⁶

Simkins stepped down from the museum's staff in 1976 in order to take care of family obligations in Houston, but she completed one last project during her final year at the McNay, *American Artists '76: A Celebration*. Conceived to mark America's bicentennial and the fruit of three years of research, *American Artists '76* emerged from Simkins's own strongly held feminist position. She sought out three generations of painters and sculptors from across the country, ranging from O'Keeffe and Alma Thomas, to Lee Krasner, Joan Mitchell, and Dorothy Hood, to Lynda Benglis, Lee Bontecou, and Judy Chicago. Each artist contributed a statement to the catalogue, and Joan Snyder's salute still resonates today: "Alice—Good luck on your show. Hope Texas will appreciate your effort and look at women's art seriously as they should in fact look at all women."⁷



Fig. 6

Well before the McNay gave Simkins an opportunity to take a place among museum professionals, her family background had begun to prepare her for a life in the arts. Her mother Elsie Nicholson Simkins had studied art history at Wellesley College, and she raised

Simkins with a keen appreciation for art. Another inspiring mentor was Simkins's aunt and namesake, Alice Nicholson Hanszen, who had married the prominent Houstonian Mike Hogg in 1929. While Mike Hogg was not as avid a collec-

tor as his celebrated sister Ima or his brother Will, he did acquire some important Americana. He could also be a convivial host to visiting artists, as evidenced by the warm dedications Charles Hawthorne inscribed on watercolors from his 1928 visit to Texas (cats. 13 and 14). Will Hogg, charmed by his new sister-in-law, made an exceptional gift to welcome her to the family, a collection of over 300 Art Deco perfume bottles, each exquisitely crafted by such manufacturers as Baccarat and Lalique, gathered from the major couturiers of Paris (fig. 6).⁸

After Mike Hogg's death in 1941, his widow chose to remain in Houston, and she married Harry C. Hanszen, a Houston oilman and chairman of the Rice Institute (now Rice University) in 1948. In the years that followed, Alice Hanszen became an important collector in her own right. Sitting side-by-side with Audrey Jones Beck, she bid competitively at major auctions for School of Paris paintings, and she joined the board of trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in 1963. In 1965 she



Fig. 7

made it possible for the museum to acquire a large collection of Pre-Columbian ceramics, and she continued to support the museum with such outstanding donations as Claude Monet's *Water Lilies*, 1907 (fig. 7).⁹

Simkins recalls with awe childhood visits to Ima Hogg and Bayou Bend, already in the process of being turned over to the museum, and she attended Bayou Bend's public opening in 1966 while still a student at Tulane University's Newcomb College. She was also present at the 1971 inauguration of the museum's Brown Pavilion, which completed Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's master plan for Houston. Coached by her aunt, as well as her cousin Harris Masterson, who then was serving as chairman, she joined the MFAH board in 1976.¹⁰

Simkins's tireless activities as a board member and patron earned her a life trusteeship at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in 2007. Her support of the museum's expanded conservation facilities has helped ensure a safe future for the collections, while the Alice Simkins Drawing Endowment and the Alice Simkins Endowment for Southern Art, established in 2012, have opened the door to new collection initiatives as well. However, Simkins does not hold back from the nuts and bolts responsibilities of trusteeship. As she recently recalled, her experience working with some of the great trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston—Nina Cullinan, Audrey Jones Beck, Caroline Wiess Law, and Isabel Brown Wilson—was an education in itself and gave her “a real love of museum administration and policy.”



Fig. 8

Today the MFAH collections hold numerous works that bear Simkins's name on their credit lines. Some were legacy gifts, such as Edward Hicks's *Penn's Treaty with the Indians*, c. 1830–40, and Édouard Vuillard's *Marcelle Aron (Madame Tristan*

Bernard), 1914 (fig. 8). Others reflect Simkins's sympathy for photography and contemporary art. Her generosity, family history, and her thorough knowledge of how a museum operates is perhaps best captured by Luis Mallo's *Open Secrets*, 2006, a photograph of the MFAH's object storage area with the art deco perfume bottles that had once belonged to Simkins's beloved aunt, newly inventoried and arrayed with care (fig. 9).



Fig. 9

Simkins did not abandon San Antonio for Houston, however, and she became a trustee at the McNay in 1992, by then under the directorship of Dr. William J. Chiego. Her Houston experiences served her well, as the McNay board was undertaking a major expansion plan and drafting new operating and accessions policies. In turn, the curatorial and executive skills she honed during her work for both institutions informed the decisions she would make as her own collection evolved. Over the years Simkins has selectively widened her representation of artists belonging to the Stieglitz Circle, as well as the subsequent generation of artists who flourished in Taos and Santa Fe. At times she has also judiciously pruned works that were no longer central to the story she has chosen to relate.

The seventeen works on paper and two sculptures selected for the present exhibition distill the buoyant spirit Simkins brings to her collecting practice, and the catalogue checklist represents the broader range of her modernist holdings. Like Abraham Walkowitz's *Isadora Duncan* (frontispiece and cat. 28), whose exuberance can barely be contained on the page, Alice C. Simkins ignites the imagination and commands the admiration of all who know her and are fortunate to be able to call her a friend.

Notes

- 1 The travelers included: Ms. Rosalie Berkowitz, Mr. John (Jack) Brooks, Ms. Patricia Dougherty, Mrs. Hudson (traveling with two young nieces), Mr. John Leeper, Ms. Elizabeth Oppenheimer, Ms. Alice C. Simkins, Mrs. W. S. Simkins, Mr. Robert Stitt, Ms. Ann Tobin, Mrs. Margaret Batts Tobin, and Mr. C. Thomas Wright. This was not Alice Simkins's first trip to Europe; she had visited several times with her aunt Alice Nicholson Hanszen and had attended school for a year in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1961–62.
- 2 John Palmer Leeper, unpublished diary of John Palmer Leeper, entries from June 10–June 30, 1969, private collection, San Antonio, 81.
- 3 McNay Art Institute, *1970 Annual Report of the McNay Art Institute* (San Antonio, TX: McNay Art Institute, 1970), 12.
- 4 Alice C. Simkins's quotes and recollections that reflect her experiences at the McNay are based on an email interview with Lyle Williams, August 24 and 25, 2014. Additional comments regarding her Houston experiences were shared with Alison de Lima Greene during interviews on September 28 and November 24, 2014.
- 5 Alice Nicholson Hanszen sponsored the McNay's acquisition of *Nasturtiums and Barn* in 1974.
- 6 The University of Texas did not have a graduate level museum studies program at the time, so Simkins had to invent her own under the guidance of Dr. Marian B. Davis, one of the founders of the art history program at UT.
- 7 Joan Snyder, quoted in Alice C. Simkins, *American Artists '76: A Celebration* (San Antonio, TX: McNay Art Institute, 1976), n.p.
- 8 In 2004 Alice Simkins donated this unparalleled collection to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
- 9 Hanszen's generosity extended to the McNay as well, and in addition to having underwritten the McNay's acquisition of Charles Burchfield's *Nasturtiums and Barn*, she donated major works by Paul Gauguin, Piet Mondrian, and Max Weber, as well as contemporary works by Gene Davis and Louise Nevelson to San Antonio in the 1970s.
- 10 After Hanszen's death in 1977, Simkins was charged with settling the complicated estate, and she has maintained a stewardship role in managing this family legacy.

Illustrations

- Fig. 1. Alice C. Simkins at the Bayou Bend 50th Anniversary Campaign Dinner, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2010.
- Fig. 2. Charles Demuth, *From the Kitchen Garden*, 1925, watercolor and graphite on paper, the McNay Art Museum, bequest of Marion Koogler McNay, 1950.33.
- Fig. 3. Charles Burchfield, *Nasturtiums and Barn*, 1917, watercolor, charcoal, gouache, crayon, ink, and graphite on paper, the McNay Art Museum, gift of Alice N. Hanszen, 1974.54.
- Fig. 4. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Red, Blue, and Green*, 1916, watercolor on paper, collection of The Tobin Theatre Arts Fund.
- Fig. 5. Arthur Dove, *Dawn III*, 1932, oil on canvas, the McNay Art Museum, Mary and Sylvan Lang Collection, 1975.27.
- Fig. 6. Forvil for René Lalique, *Le Corail Rouge*, designed c. 1925, made c. 1930, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Alice and Mike Hogg Collection, gift of Alice C. Simkins, 2004.1078.
- Fig. 7. Claude Monet, *Water Lilies (Nymphéas)*, 1907, oil on canvas, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of Mrs. Harry C. Hanszen, 68.31.
- Fig. 8. Edouard Vuillard, *Marcelle Aron (Madame Tristan Bernard)*, 1914, oil on canvas, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of Alice C. Simkins in memory of Alice N. Hanszen, 95.222.
- Fig. 9. Luis Mallo, *Open Secrets*, 2006, chromogenic print, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, museum purchase funded by Alice C. Simkins and Ann Tobin, 2007.452.



An abstract painting featuring a complex composition of layered colors and textures. The background consists of horizontal bands of purple, blue, orange, and yellow, with some areas appearing more saturated than others. Overlaid on these bands are dark, almost black, silhouettes of what appear to be palm fronds or similar tropical foliage, rendered with expressive, brush-like strokes. The overall effect is one of depth and movement, with the dark shapes contrasting sharply against the lighter, more vibrant background.

COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS

Alison de Lima Greene, Jerika C. Jordan,
and Althea Ruoppo

CHARLES BURCHFIELD

American, 1893–1967

Charles Burchfield came of age during a transitional moment in American art. Raised in the American Midwest, he did not have the opportunity to visit either the 1913 Armory Show or Alfred Stieglitz's landmark exhibitions at 291 in New York City. However, his emotive and symbolically charged landscapes unite the pantheistic romanticism of nineteenth-century landscape painting with the abstract mysticism that infused the works of such forward looking twentieth-century artists as Georgia O'Keeffe, Arthur Dove, and Oscar Bluemner.

A student at the Cleveland School of Art (now the Cleveland Institute of Art), Burchfield completed his academic training in 1916. He created more than two hundred watercolors that year, and as a consequence his technique and confidence mounted steadily. As he recalled:

My 1916 watercolors were meticulously done; everything was first carefully drawn and outlined in pencil, then the colors filled in. This manner was followed through most of the summer after my graduation.... My mind was teeming with ideas.... I gradually abandoned the pre-painting pencil work...and I virtually abandoned the pointed brush for the sable "bright" oil brush, which allowed a more robust, firm stroke, similar indeed to the oil on canvas technique. This led directly into what I call the "1917 manner" (although by November 1916 it was in full swing).¹

Created just as he was giving up the meticulous under-drawing of his early 1916 watercolors, *Sunrise and Rain* reveals Burchfield's observant eye and working process. Rain slashes across the composition's foreground, and the sun's red rays illuminate the fringes of the dark clouds above. The artist's pencil is clearly visible beneath the luminous washes of paint, and his color notes read: "RV / new YS / yellow / RV / YG." The vivid informality of this work would coalesce into the painterly flamboyance of his signature style in 1917, the year that Burchfield identified as his "Golden Year."

Burchfield's journals contain hundreds of descriptive entries, documenting everything from his experiences and observations of nature to more formal calculations regarding how to execute these in watercolor. Many of the 1916 watercolors are devoted to the effects of light and rain, and several other solar and lunar studies show the celestial haloing seen in *Sunrise and Rain*. Nature fascinated Burchfield, and he would continue to almost relentlessly tackle this subject throughout his career. Reflecting on this preoccupation in a 1959 interview, he explained:

I think that if this world lasts for a million years or two million years, or more, that never can you exhaust the subject matter of humanity or nature. It's simply inexhaustible. But I'd like to have at least another lifetime like I've had to say what I want to say about nature. I just don't think I can ever get it said. There just isn't time.²

JCJ

1 Joseph S. Trovato, *Charles Burchfield: Catalogue of Paintings in Public and Private Collections* (Utica, NY: Museum of Art, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, 1970), 37.

2 Charles Burchfield, interviewed by John D. Morse for the Archives of American Art, August 19, 1959, accessed November 2014, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-charles-burchfield-12702>.



Sunrise and Rain

1916

Watercolor and pencil on paper

14 x 19 ¹/₁₆ in. (35.6 x 50.6 cm)

Inscribed with color notes: RV / new YS / yellow / RV / YG

Dated on verso: 6-11-1916

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

American, 1887–1986

Between 1915 and 1916, Georgia O'Keeffe undertook her most radical experiments in abstraction. First working in charcoal and then watercolor, she laid down new principles of composition that were without precedent in American art. The summer of 1916 saw a series of important breakthroughs in particular. After confining herself to a monochromatic palette for much of the year, O'Keeffe gradually introduced a spectrum of new color harmonies, taking advantage of the unique properties of watercolor to achieve both vivid chromatic arrangements and a quality of transparency new to her work.

Untitled (Red, Blue, Yellow) reveals both O'Keeffe's aspirations and her sources at this critical juncture and is one of three variations on this theme.¹ Originally identified as a part of her 1917 *Light Coming on the Plains* series, it can now be securely placed a year earlier, most likely immediately after her summer tenure in Charlottesville, Virginia.² Fortunately, O'Keeffe's correspondence with her friend Anita Pollitzer, as well as with Alfred Stieglitz, provides a clear chronology for this period. At times O'Keeffe was wracked with doubts, writing to Pollitzer in July 1916: "A couple of weeks ago I made myself work one afternoon and Anita—the results were so awful that I made up my mind I wouldn't try again till I really wanted to—I've only had one idea since I've been here anyway."³ She could be confident as well, however, as she wrote to Stieglitz on August 6: "When I crawled out of my shell here and took the first step toward doing things—they kept coming and I kept doing them so that I have hardly had time to think."⁴ This onrush of work was prompted in part by O'Keeffe's desire to be represented by Stieglitz's 291 Gallery, and she dispatched a number of drawings to both Pollitzer and Stieglitz that August as she was leaving Charlottesville.

Untitled (Red, Blue, Yellow) was most probably painted shortly thereafter. On route to Knoxville, she stopped in Rockville, Virginia, to visit the awe-inspiring Natural Bridge that had attracted many artists, including Hudson River School painter Frederick Edwin Church.⁵ She sent two phototint postcards of the Natural Bridge, one to Pollitzer and the other to Stieglitz, writing to the latter, "Slept on the mountainside again last night—came by automobile from Charlottesville—Went under here early this morning it makes you dizzy looking up. Going on to Knoxville, Tenn., then to Asheville."⁶

Untitled (Red, Blue, Yellow), with its radiant halo, captures O'Keeffe's immediate response to this geological wonder. Additionally, the open, circular composition echoes the hollowed-out formation of the Natural Bridge, and the watercolor's color rhythms match the autumnal tones of the postcard as well. O'Keeffe may have also been drawn to the subject by her familiarity with Arthur Wesley Dow's celebrated textbook *Composition*, which reproduced Hiroshige's *Taki no gawa at Oji (Takino River, Oji)* woodcut (1857). Hiroshige depicts a similarly vast cavern, which for Dow represented color harmony.⁷

Despite her remarkable command of the medium, O'Keeffe rarely returned to watercolor after 1917. At the urging of Stieglitz, she abandoned the medium for oil in order to secure her place among her contemporaries. Yet, these early watercolors were fundamental to establishing the pictorial and chromatic language that continued to inform the entirety of her career.

ALG and JCJ

1 *Untitled (Red, Blue, and Green)* is probably the second variation on the theme, now preserved in the Collection of The Tobin Theatre Arts Fund, see fig. 4 on page 10.

2 Barbara Buhler Lynes, *Georgia O'Keeffe, Catalogue Raisonné*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 64.

3 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Lovingly, Georgia: The Complete Correspondence of Georgia O'Keeffe and Anita Pollitzer*, ed. Clive Giboire (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 163.

4 Georgia O'Keeffe, *My Faraway One: Selected Letters of Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz Volume 1, 1915–1933*, ed.

Sarah Greenough (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 18.

5 We are indebted to Alice C. Simkins for bringing the importance of Rockville's Natural Bridge to our attention and to Barbara Buhler Lynes, who cited the rock formation for its influence on O'Keeffe's work. Barbara Buhler Lynes, "Georgia O'Keeffe: Identity and Place," in *Georgia O'Keeffe: Circling Around Abstraction* (West Palm Beach, Florida: Norton Museum of Art, 2007), 43.

6 The postcard to Stieglitz, postmarked August 23, 1916, has been preserved in the Beinecke Library at Yale University, and can also be accessed at: http://brbl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3545722?image_id=1138543 and <http://brbl-zoom.library.yale.edu/viewer/1138543>.

7 Arthur Wesley Dow, *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers*, 7th edition (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, & Company, 1913), 13.



Untitled (Red, Blue, Yellow)

1916

Watercolor on paper

17 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 13 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (45.1 x 33.3 cm)

OSCAR BLUEMNER

American, 1867–1938

Trained as an architect, German-born Oscar Bluemner, who had immigrated to the United States in 1893, decided to abandon architecture in favor of painting in 1911. The following year a windfall from a long-pending lawsuit allowed him the freedom to travel, and in April 1912 he embarked on a seven-month sojourn across Europe. He visited England and France, and then went on to Germany where he attended the great *Sonderbund Exhibition of Modern Art* in Cologne. Additionally, Bluemner mounted two exhibitions of his own work, one at the Galerie Fritz Gurlitt in Berlin and the other at his hometown museum in Elberfeld, Germany. Fueled by his success abroad, Bluemner returned to America in time to be represented in the 1913 Armory Show, and two years later he accepted Alfred Stieglitz's invitation to mount a solo exhibition at 291 Gallery.

However, early acclaim brought little financial stability into Bluemner's life, and in 1916 he entered into a long period of personal depression, rarely producing finished works. In a 1920 letter to Stieglitz, Bluemner admitted that he put "writing...and preparing [ahead of] real painting." He went on to lament, "I have only arrived at inactivity. When the beast eats beef again in his own cage, the beast will paw the canvas up red again, you may believe."¹

Earth Sets on Moon was created in the midst of this tempestuous era, and the artist's financial need is attested by the fact that he painted it on the back of an announcement card promoting the "New American Art Galleries" hosted by the American Art Association in 1922. Unlike other motifs that Bluemner explored exhaustively in multiple sketches, no other study or painting of this lunar landscape survives; however, given the artist's annotations on the verso, it is tempting to identify *Earth Sets on Moon* as a preliminary sketch for an unrealized painting Bluemner intended to submit to the Salons of America.²

Bluemner tackled *Earth Sets on Moon* with an attention to telling details, an approach also evident in his urban studies. He described this wasteland on the postcard's verso: "...very cold. The pole flattened red earth. There is air only near moon surface, therefore cold white light, the violet horizon, and clouds. There is little water in deep hollows, deep fissures and strange rocks of craters."

There are a number of popular references that may have inspired or informed this disquieting view, including Camille Flammarion's *Astronomie Populaire*, published in Paris in 1890 and subsequently distributed across Europe and America in translation. *Astronomie Populaire* devotes several pages to describing how the earth would appear from the surface of the moon, and Bluemner may have taken one of the illustrations as a point of departure.³ Other sources may have included imagery from Georges Méliès's silent film *Le Voyage dans la Lune* from 1902, as well as Coney Island's Luna Park, which opened in 1903 and featured the popular ride "A Trip to the Moon."

Where Bluemner departs from these sources, however, is in his vibrant palette. Earth hovers as a threatening red planet, while the moon's rugged peaks are cast in the hues of the American desert. After the death of his wife in 1926, Bluemner returned to the theme of celestial orbs in an extended series of paintings of the sun and moon. Much admired by other artists, including Arthur Dove, these works remain haunting in their psychological urgency. As Barbara Haskell has observed, regardless of the ostensible subject of a specific work, Bluemner's art was deeply rooted in the self: "Unlike his contemporaries, who viewed art as a record of subjective impressions of external reality, Bluemner considered his art to be a portrait of his inner consciousness...He humanized its imagery in order to transform it into what he called a mirror of his soul."⁴

JCJ

1 Oscar Bluemner, letter to Alfred Stieglitz, August 11, 1920; quoted in Jeffery R. Hayes, "New Jersey: Something Has Given Mr. Bluemner Soul (1916–1926)," *Oscar Bluemner* (Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 104 and 105.

2 Bluemner inscribed on the verso of this drawing: "50" x 72" is maximum at Salons of America make 50" x 72"... in order to give more height of sky."

3 Camille Flammarion, Gabrielle C. Flammarion, and André Danjon, *Astronomie Populaire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1890), 201.

4 Barbara Haskell, "The Vermillionaire," *Artnews* 104, no. 9 (October 2005): 114.



Earth Sets on Moon

1922

Watercolor on paper

7 x 4 ¼ in. (17.7 x 12 cm)

Signed lower right with artist's monogram: OB / OB / '22

Inscribed on reverse: "Earth Sets on Moon"

HELEN TORR

American, 1886–1967

Helen Spangler Torr, affectionately known as “Reds,” was closely associated with Alfred Stieglitz’s 291 circle in New York, but, as was often the case with women artists of her generation, her work was eclipsed by that of her male counterparts—including that of her husband Arthur Dove. Receiving only marginal support from Stieglitz, Torr had only two opportunities to exhibit her work, and, during her lifetime, she never sold a painting.

Torr began her studies at Drexel Institute in 1902, where she worked alongside Charles Demuth and Charles Sheeler, and she enrolled at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in the fall of 1905, which gave her an opportunity to study life drawing with William Merritt Chase. While she did not pursue a professional career, marriage to Clive Reed, a former Drexel classmate, ultimately took her to Westport, Connecticut, where she struck up a friendship with Arthur Dove and his wife Florence. In 1921 Torr abandoned her marriage, embarking on a loving partnership with Dove, a union that also nurtured her return to the studio.

Over the course of their shared lives, Torr faithfully recorded their daily activities in her diaries, noting everything from chores and errands to houseguests and mail received. These diaries also document both artists’ creative output, tracing the progress of particular works from inception to completion. Torr’s records provide a comprehensive account of their respective oeuvres despite the fact that the entries are not always complete and that it is likely that the two volumes devoted to 1930 and 1931 have been transposed.¹

While she does not specifically mention *White Feather* by title at the time of its making, Torr’s entry of September 10, 1931, states: “I started a painting of stone, shells and feather.” The following day, she writes, “I finished stone, shells + feather but it has not much life.”² Torr was frequently very critical of her initial efforts, only to later reassess and change her mind about the quality of certain works. Indeed, if this 1931 entry is in fact a reference to *White Feather*, her tendency to eventually replace doubt with increased confidence is evidenced by the fact that she saw fit to include the work in her one and only exhibition at Stieglitz’s gallery where her paintings shared the stage with those of her husband.

Arthur G. Dove—New Paintings and New Watercolors. Also—Paintings by Helen Torr was held at Stieglitz’s An American Place from March 20 to April 15, 1933. Torr’s diaries and studio records specifically note that *White Feather* was included in the display, but no critical response has been preserved other than Stieglitz’s letter to Dove: “There is interest. No one has priced any of Reds’ but her things are admired.—It’s all very slow work.”³ However, the pairing of Torr’s paintings with those of her husband was an instance of sympathetic support on Stieglitz’s part rather than keen understanding. Torr’s distinctive and autographic style varied from Dove’s visionary approach to the landscape and was more closely allied with the clean aesthetics of Precisionism.

Torr would give up painting as Dove’s health failed in the late 1930s, and only in the 1970s would her work come back into the public eye. In 1972 Georgia O’Keeffe paid posthumous tribute to her work: “The things were small and colorful in a very reserved fashion, but I thought that they were very good. I think she is a person who would have flowered considerably if she had been given attention. It seems a pity when you look at what she did anyway.”⁴

JCJ

1 Torr’s diaries are preserved in the Archives of American Art. Given that the entry dated December 29, 1931, describes Torr beginning a still life with a “wire basket with fruit” and that the note from January 1, 1930, states that the same work has been completed, it is fair to assume that the years were transposed on these two volumes. See Arthur and Helen Torr Dove papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., box 2, folder 5, frame 149, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/diaries-196283>; and Arthur and Helen Torr Dove papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., box 2, folder 4, frame 3, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/diaries-196282>.

2 Arthur and Helen Torr Dove papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., box 2, folder 4, frame 129, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/diaries-196282>.

3 Alfred Stieglitz, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, ed. Ann Lee Morgan (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), 266.

4 Georgia O’Keeffe to Robert G. Pisano, October 12, 1972, quoted by Anne Cohen DePietro, *Arthur Dove & Helen Torr: The Huntington Years* (Huntington, NY: The Heckscher Museum of Art, 1989), 24.



White Feather
1931
Gouache on paper
13 1/2 x 11 in. (34.2 x 27.9 cm)
Signed lower right: Torr

ARTHUR DOVE

American, 1880–1946

Often credited with creating the first fully-realized abstract painting in the United States, Arthur Dove's contribution to the evolution of American modernism was matched only by Georgia O'Keeffe, with whom he shared a mutual admiration. Indeed, his work is frequently framed in critical discourse as the masculine counterpart to O'Keeffe's so-called "feminine" expressions of transcendentalism.

Dove entered the avant-garde circles of New York in 1910, when he was invited by Alfred Stieglitz to participate in *Younger American Painters* at 291, and two years later Stieglitz hosted Dove's first solo show. However, in order to support his growing family, Dove soon returned to his first career as an illustrator, and he would not begin painting in earnest again until 1921. It was also in 1921 that Dove abandoned his first marriage to initiate a lifelong partnership with fellow artist Helen "Reds" Torr.

In January 1933, Dove's mother died, and Dove and Torr moved to Geneva, in upstate New York, to settle her estate. Commonly referred to as the "Geneva Years" (1933–38), this was one of the most prolific periods of Dove's artistic career, particularly in watercolor. While undated, several attributes of *Green Sun* point to it having been created during this era: Geneva's rolling terrain is strongly suggested by Dove's sinuous horizon and the intimate scale of this work is typical of the 5 x 7 inch sheets Dove adopted only after 1931.¹

Further consideration of Dove's stylistic progression suggests that *Green Sun* was completed in the second half of his time in upstate New York, roughly 1936–38. As with *Sunrise*, 1937 (Hartford, Wadsworth Athenaeum), Dove employs olive and ochre tones to capture the compressed sunlight in a central glowing orb. And while Dove demonstrated an early interest in celestial imagery, his exploration of the subject reached its peak in the

mid-1930s, as he probed the optical qualities of light. A number of his compositions of these years use color inversions to suggest the after-image left on the retina after staring at intense light. Elizabeth Hutton Turner has noted:

Dove's interest in daylight was more akin to that of a modern physicist. Dove did not want to simply describe the light, he wanted to know the speed of it. Short of a conversation with Albert Einstein—an event that he often wished for—Dove believed dawn made him particularly sensible to matter and energy. As he said, "you get to the point where you can feel a certain sensation of light—a certain yellow-green-red—they have nothing to do with tubes of paint."²

The dramatic geometry of *Green Sun*, with its blunt rays and zigzag lines of energy, sets this watercolor apart from the organic abstraction of Dove's other solar compositions. Although he was not included in Alfred Barr's *Cubism and Abstract Art* survey mounted at the Museum of Modern Art in 1936, Dove did visit the exhibition, and *Green Sun* may have been painted in response to the work of the early Cubists and Futurists on display. However, it is just as likely that *Green Sun* captures a fleeting impression of the New York landscape, one that distills, in Dove's words: "the first flash [that] will give the truth of one's feelings."³

ALG and JCJ

1 Melanie Kirschner, "Watercolors: Technique and Style," *Arthur Dove: Watercolors and Pastels* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1998), 48.

2 Elizabeth Hutton Turner, "Going Home: Geneva, 1933–1938," *Arthur Dove: A Retrospective* (Andover, MA: Addison Gallery of American Art, 1997), 106.

3 Arthur Dove, quoted in Turner, 102.



Green Sun

c. 1936

Watercolor on paper

5 x 7 in. (12.7 x 17.8 cm)

Signed lower center: Dove

STUART DAVIS

American, 1892–1964

In the summer of 1947, *Artnews* invited Stuart Davis to provide drawings for Ring Lardner's 1926 short story "Rhythm" as part of a series of "American classics newly illustrated by American contemporary artists."¹ Davis created three gouaches for this commission: *Jazz* was the largest of the suite, which also included *Rhythm—George Wettling*, and *Composition with "Composers of Musical Comedies."*

Davis set to work immediately, and it is possible to trace the development of *Jazz* in his notebooks. On July 4, 1947, he sketched the spatial relationships of both the composition and the magazine layout he envisioned, with *Jazz* running across the top of two pages. Below this sketch, Davis wrote: "This solution of the problem transcends it, and in doing so, transcends all problems. This Art Object, composed of simple geometric Subject Elements is complete in relation to its function. The Function is [to establish] a basic dynamic variety in the Given conditions of a typographical lay-out on a page." Later that month he added a sketch of the top hat, noting: "This 'smear' (a new use of light) can be used effectively in any composition."²

It is clear that Davis was taking cues from Lardner as he developed this composition further; the words "Aida," "Symphony," and "I love you" are lifted from the short story. At the same time the flow of these elements across the page wittily captures the hero's transition from jazz musician to highbrow composer. The word "JUNE" next to the crescent moon is a nod to Lardner's other successes; *June Moon* is the title of a Broadway play based on Lardner's short story "Some Like Them Cold."

However, the published version of *Jazz* disappointed Davis. Not only were his suggestions for layout ignored, but his original pink tones were rendered in mustard yellow. *Artnews* editor and publisher Alfred Frankfurter offered a public apology:

[Mr. Davis] proved to be exactly the man eminently suited to carry out the spirit of Lardner's 1926 epic of jazz we had thought he was going to be. What he produced were, of course, not illustrations in the conventional sense, but rather embellishments, in his characteristic style, abstracting and combining the themes both in and behind *Rhythm*—which he was even kind enough to lay out. . . . This layout, however, finally turned out to be impractical for certain technical reasons, and we had to re-arrange it and change one of his colors (which could not be matched). . . . We are very sorry for any injustice Mr. Davis feels we have done a collaborator as efficient and understanding as he has been.³

Jazz is unique in this mature stage of Davis's career. The composition's legible format, overall simplicity, and prevalence of empty space can be contrasted with the calligraphic, allover technique that dominated his work in the 1940s. And unlike many of his later compositions, which were structurally rooted in his sketches and paintings from the 1920s and 1930s, *Jazz* stands out as a fully independent composition.

JCJ

1 *Artnews Annual* 46, no. 9 (November 1947): 107.

2 Stuart Davis Papers, July 4 and July 26, 1947, Harvard University Art Museums, Fogg Art Museum, accessed November 2014, <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/7983> and <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/7607>.

3 A.M.F. [Alfred M. Frankfurter], "Vernissage: With a Bow to Stuart Davis," *Artnews* 46, no. 11 (January 1948): 13.



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Jazz
1947
Gouache and graphite on illustration board
6 3/8 x 24 in. (15.9 x 60.9 cm)
Signed and dated upper right: SD 47;
signed and inscribed on verso: Stuart Davis 43-7

Illustrations for Ring Lardner's "Rhythm"
Artnews Annual 46, no. 9 (November 1947), 108–109

COLLECTION CHECKLIST

The Alice C. Simkins Collection

1. FRANK APPLEGATE

American, 1881–1931
Untitled (New Mexico Landscape)
n. d.
Watercolor on paper
8 1/2 x 5 in. (30 x 12.7 cm)



4. EMIL BISTRAM

American, 1895–1976
Lake Island
n. d.
Watercolor on paper
14 x 10 in. (35.5 x 25.4 cm)
Signed lower left: BISTRAM



7. ANDREW DASBURG

American, born France, 1887–1979
*Taos Landscape**
1933
Watercolor and graphite on paper
15 1/2 x 22 in. (38.7 x 55.8 cm)
Signed lower center: Dasburg '33



Verso: *Untitled*
Watercolor and graphite on paper



2. GEORGE AULT

American, 1891–1948
Oak Tree #3
1925
Graphite on paper
14 x 10 in. (35.5 x 25.4 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: G. C. Ault '25



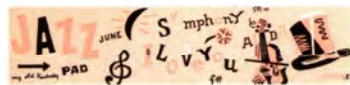
5. OSCAR BLUENNER

American, born Germany, 1867–1938
*Earth Sets on Moon**
1922
Watercolor on paper
7 x 4 1/4 in. (17.7 x 12 cm)
Signed lower right with artist's monogram:
OB / OB / '22



8. STUART DAVIS

American, 1892–1964
*Jazz**
1947
Gouache and graphite on paper
6 3/4 x 24 in. (15.9 x 60.9 cm)
Signed and dated upper right: SD 47;
signed and inscribed on verso: Stuart Davis 43-7
© Estate of Stuart Davis / Licensed by VAGA,
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3. DOROTHY AUSTIN

American, 1911–2011
*Handstand**
1942
Primavera wood
13 1/4 x 6 1/2 x 4 1/4 in. (35 x 16.5 x 12 cm)
Signed on the front top corner of the base
with artist's mark



6. CHARLES BURCHFIELD

American, 1893–1967
*Sunrise and Rain**
1916
Watercolor and pencil on paper
14 x 19 1/2 in. (35.6 x 50.6 cm)
Inscribed with color notes:
RV / new YS / yellow / RV / YG
Dated on verso: 6–11–1916



9. CHARLES DEMUTH

American, 1883–1935

*Tree Forms Bermuda**

1916

Watercolor and graphite on paper

9 7/8 x 13 in. (24.7 x 33 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: C. Demuth / 1916



Verso: *Landscape with Pink Pagoda*
(*Bermuda Landscape*)

Watercolor and graphite on paper



10. PRESTON DICKINSON

American, 1889–1930

*Still Life**

c. 1924

Pastel and pencil on paper

12 7/8 x 9 in. (32 x 22.8 cm)

Signed lower right: P. Dickinson



11. ARTHUR DOVE

American, 1880–1946

*Green Sun**

c. 1936

Watercolor on paper

5 x 7 in. (12.7 x 17.8 cm)

Signed lower center: Dove



12. MARSDEN HARTLEY

American, 1877–1943

*New Mexico**

1919

Pastel on paperboard

12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm)



13. CHARLES HAWTHORNE

American, 1872–1930

Mission Concepción, San Antonio

1928

Watercolor and graphite on paper

19 1/4 x 13 in. (48.8 x 33 cm)

Signed and inscribed: To Miss Ima Hogg / with appreciation / Charles Hawthorne



14. CHARLES HAWTHORNE

American, 1872–1930

Street in Zaragoza

1928

Watercolor and graphite on paper

13 3/4 x 19 in. (33.7 x 48.2 cm)

Signed and inscribed:

To Mike / Charles Hawthorne



15. STEFAN HIRSCH

American, 1899–1964

Tulips

1930

Graphite on paper

15 1/2 x 20 in. (39.3 x 50.8 cm)

Signed lower right: Stefan Hirsch



16. PETER HURD

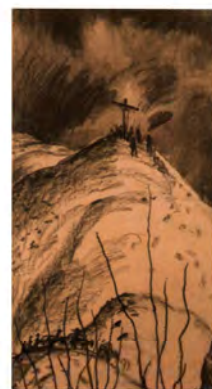
American, 1904–1984

Penitente Hill

1940

Charcoal and graphite on paper

56 x 31 in. (142.2 x 78.7 cm)



17. YASUO KUNIYOSHI

American, 1893–1953

*Eggplant**

1923

Ink and wash on paper

11 7/8 x 9 in. (29.8 x 22.8 cm)

Signed lower center: KUNIYOSHI

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New York, NY



18. BARBARA LATHAM

American, 1896–1989

Still Life

n.d.

Pastel on paper

8 7/8 x 11 in. (22.5 x 27.9 cm)

Signed lower right: LATHAM



19. WILLIAM LUMPKINS

American, 1909–2000

Abstract

1940

Watercolor on paper

13 1/4 x 18 in. (33.6 x 45.7 cm)

Signed lower right: Lumpkins



20. JOHN MARIN

American, 1870–1953

*Tunk Mountains, Maine**

1952

Watercolor and black crayon on paper

14 x 19 1/2 in. (35.5 x 49.5 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: Marin 52



21. B. J. O. NORDFELDT

American, 1878–1955

*Blooming Cactus**

1925

Watercolor on paper

15 x 21 1/2 in. (38.1 x 54.6 cm)

Signed lower right: Nordfeldt



22. GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

American, 1887–1986

*Untitled (Red, Blue, Yellow)**

1916

Watercolor on paper

17 1/4 x 13 1/4 in. (45.1 x 33.3 cm)



23. GUY PÈNE DU BOIS

American, 1884–1958

Tea Time

1938

Watercolor and ink on paper

16 1/2 x 12 1/2 in. (41.9 x 31.7 cm)

Signed and dated lower right:

Guy Pène du Bois '38



24. ARNOLD RÖNNEBECK

American, 1885–1947

Mountain Storm

1936

Black crayon on paper

11 x 15 in. (21.5 x 38.1 cm)

Signed lower right: Arnold Rønnebeck



25. JOSEPH STELLA

American, 1877–1946

*Cock (Himalayan Impeyan Pheasant)**

c. 1929

Graphite and colored crayons on paper

14 x 10 1/2 in. (35.5 x 26.6 cm)

Signed lower right: Joseph Stella



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39, 41 (top), 43, 44, 45, 46–49, back cover; Collection
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