Stuart Davis

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Stuart Davis In Havana

"Stuart Davis in Havana" is on view at Kasmin Gallery on 297 Tenth Avenue through August 13.

JULY 15, 2021

Installation view of Stuart Davis, "Stuart Davis in Havana," 2021, at Kasmin, New York, photo by Diego Flores, courtesy to the artist and Kasmin Gallery.

Stuart Davis in Havana" is on view at Kasmin Gallery on 297 Tenth Avenue through August 13. It presents 10 early watercolors painted in 1920 that follow Stuart Davis' trip to Cuba where the artist recovered after contracting the Spanish flu.

Curated by Priscilla Vail Caldwell in collaboration with Earl Davis and the Estate of Stuart Davis, the exhibition features archival material documenting the artist's experience including postcards, lottery tickets, and the painter's passport. Works such as Dancers on Havana Street and Woman with Shawl utilize angular silhouettes rendered in purple, black, bright yellow, and deep red.

Melding reality and fiction, Davis layered depictions of Havana's natural landscape with detailed architectural elements pulled from recognizable structures such as the Church Santo Angel Custodio, La Fortaleza of San Carlos de la Cabaña, or the fortifications of the old city. With his collection of transformative works, he became one of the preeminent figures of the American Modernist movement through the post-war era.

Installation view of Stuart Davis, "Stuart Davis in Havana," 2021, at Kasmin, New York, photo by Diego Flores, courtesy to the artist and Kasmin Gallery.

Stuart Davis, "Three Women with Terrace," 1920, watercolor on paper, 16 ¾ x 23 ¼ inches, courted to the artist and Kasmin Gallery.

Stuart Davis, “Dancers on Havana Street,” 1920, watercolor on paper,
22 7/8 x 15 5/8 inches, courtesy to the artist and Kasmin Gallery.

Artforum
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ARTFORUM

Stuart Davis

Rahel Aima

Stuart Davis, *Rhythm—George Wettling*, 1947, gouache and pencil on board, 13 x 16".

KASMIN GALLERY | 293 TENTH AVENUE
293 Tenth Avenue
September 13 - December 22

Blue jeans, jazz, 1930s America; sailors and signage in New York's Times Square, the stench of fish rolling off the river, and the plaintive sound of a trumpet snaking through the air. Stuart Davis, of course, was at the center of it all. But the artist's pictures here aren't the exuberant, hot canvases of his retrospective that took place at the Whitney Museum in 2016. This exhibition of spare, mostly black-and-white drawings and paintings, hung against smoky blue walls, features almost no color at all. Bebop drummer Art Blakey comes to mind—he said that "jazz washes away the dust of everyday life." I think of legendary saxophonist John Coltrane, too, who once said, "I start in the middle of a sentence and move both directions at once."

Maybe that thin, high trumpet is coming from Eddie Condon's jazz club, which used to be located on West Third Street in Greenwich Village. Its address can also be found in Rhythm—George Wettling, 1947, Davis's tribute to the titular Dixieland drummer. The show's title, "Lines Thicken," refers to a kind of sonic texture found in jazz, where a melody is shadowed in close harmony. Formally, this exhibition is full of such moments. Davis's lines come together and branch out like urban streets, taking swooping, angular detours. Images such as musical staves, clefs, and notes mingle with cityscapes, boats, buildings, chimneys, fish, flowers, and even an armchair in a sort of interior-exterior cartography. His strokes are so rewardingly bold and sure, but on occasion we can see the faintest of hesitant, whispery pencil traces—they feel like a benediction.

SAGHARBOR
EXPRESS.COM

On Art: Davis and Krasner Together

Helen A. Harrison

Stuart Davis, (Study for "Men Without Women"), 1932, ink and pencil on paper, 11 1/2 x 17 1/2 in. © Estate of Stuart Davis/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Courtesy of Kasmin Gallery.

Apart from resting peacefully near each other in Green River Cemetery in Springs, what do the painters Stuart Davis and Lee Krasner have in common? Judging by their best known works — his geometric, hers gestural — not much. Yet there was a time when they were both aiming toward similar artistic goals. Their point of confluence was during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when they were employed by the WPA Federal Art Project and designed murals for WNYC, New York's municipal radio station, and other public buildings. Both were then strong adherents of Cubism, Davis having absorbed it first-hand in Paris and Krasner having come to it as transplanted to New York by her teacher, Hans Hofmann. But while Davis stuck with it, adapting it to his own, singularly American, point of view, Krasner veered off in a more subjective direction, becoming one of the foremost abstract expressionist painters of her generation.

Their brief period of agreement is illustrated in a pair of complementary shows at Kasmin Gallery's

two showcases in Chelsea, which represents both artists' estates — a coincidental commonality that allows the gallery to present them in tandem. "Lee Krasner Mural Studies" is at the 297 Tenth Avenue space, while across 27thStreet is "Lines Thicken: Stuart Davis in Black and White," at 293 Tenth Avenue. The Davis show is on through December 22. The Krasner show closes on October 27, the 110thanniversary of her birth.

Last year, Kasmin's show of Krasner's so-called Umber series concentrated on the late 1950s and early 1960s, when she delved into deep emotional territory in large canvases that fairly boiled with painterly energy. They were highly personal statements, whereas 20 years earlier, her ambition, which she shared with Davis, had been to paint wall-filling works for a mass audience, and to do it in a flat, neo-Cubist style. As a WPA muralist, she was assigned to decorate buildings, first as an assistant to more experienced artists and finally, in 1940, on her own. Kasmin is showing eight gouache studies she made that year for a specific, though unknown, location — probably a school, library or hospital — identified only by blank areas indicating the architectural elements she had to work around.

Krasner's approach to this assignment ranges from exuberant to restrained. The influence of predecessors like Matisse, Arp and Miróis evident, but, like Davis, she has internalized and adapted their lessons. In some examples, brightly colored biomorphic shapes cavort across the wall, jostling one another playfully, as if inviting spectators to join in the dance. In one, however, the mood is cool and formal. Carefully balanced rectangles structure the space, but a kidney-shaped loop relieves the design's geometric purity. Sadly, none of these concepts made it to the wall for which they were intended. Nor did her 1941 proposal for the WNYC Studio A mural, though many sketches and studies survive.

Davis, on the other hand, did complete various mural projects in the 1930s, including two for the WPA: "Swing Landscape," intended for a housing project but later acquired by the Indiana University Art Museum; and one for WNYC's Studio B, which was removed and donated to the Met. A study for his first mural is a highlight of the Kasmin show. "Men Without Women," a pre-WPA commission, was painted in 1932 for the Radio City Music Hall's men's lounge. The linear ink and pencil version lacks several of the male attributes in the finished work, which now lives at MoMA, but three dominant motifs — a tobacco pipe, sailboats and a horse — are present in skeletal form. The drawing shows how meticulously Davis planned his compositions, shifting and adjusting elements until he achieved the ideal balance. He was a brilliant colorist, and when that chromatic richness is stripped away his mastery of structure becomes all the more evident.

From the show's largest works on canvas to the smallest drawings, Davis was endlessly inventive, even as he played variations on themes and reprised many of his subjects. Nautical scenes and maritime paraphernalia, observed in New York harbor or in the seaside port of Gloucester where he summered, gave him plenty of raw material, as seen in several of the works on view. And a charming drawing that pays homage to the jazz drummer George Wettling represents another of his long-term inspirations. That's another thing Davis and Krasner had in common — they both loved jazz.

Colorful Monochrome

IN MAY, PAUL Kasmin Gallery of New York announced that it would begin representing the estate of Stuart Davis worldwide. This month, some 25 large-scale black and white works by the artist go on view at the gallery's Chelsea space. "Lines Thicken: Stuart Davis in Black & White," which opens on September 13, marks the first collaboration between the international dealer and Davis' estate, which is run by his only child, Earl Davis.

Stuart Davis is known for loud, hotly colored compositions that pulse with the rhythms of jazz and the sensory aspects of street life. Often at play with the objects of the everyday—an eggbeater, a ladder, a matchbox—and the language of advertising, Davis became a hulking influence on the modernism and abstraction of his own day and on the Pop Art movement that emerged several decades later.

Though his black and white works are less well known, they are a vital and longstanding aspect of his oeuvre. Davis's first departures from color emerged in the '20s. In the '50s, he recycled motifs he had used earlier, working them through in black and white. *Untitled (Black and White Variation on "Pochade")*, a 1956–68 casein on canvas work, is a sort of reconfiguration of *Pochade*, a large-scale canvas from the same period. Though *Pochade* is colored with blocks of red, green, and black, it places its emphasis on drawing (the title means "outline" or "quick sketch" in French). In *Untitled*, Davis seems to zoom in and reorder *Pochade*'s structure, mixing Cubist fragmentation and his signature lettering to create a work that is more disorienting and immediate.

ARTNEWS

Stuart Davis Estate Heads to Paul Kasmin Gallery

Andrew Russeth

May 25, 2018

Stuart Davis, The Paris Bit, 1959. ©ESTATE OF STUART DAVIS/LICENSED BY VAGA, NEW YORK/WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART; PURCHASE, WITH FUNDS FROM THE FRIENDS OF THE WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Rarely a week goes by these days when a high-profile dealer does not announce the representation of the estate of a major artist. The latest entry in the category is Chelsea's Paul Kasmin Gallery, who is now working with the estate of the great American modernist Stuart Davis, which is handled by his son, Earl Davis.

At the start of the fall season, on September 13, Kasmin will offer up "Lines Thicken: Stuart Davis in Black & White," an exhibition focusing on the artist's works in those two hues, in which the artist pared down his vibrantly colored scenes to just lines and shapes. A catalogue of archival material, compiled and edited by Earl Davis, will be published in conjunction with the show.

As Hilarie M. Sheets notes in the New York Times, the Davis estate previously worked with Salander

O'Reilly gallery in New York. In 2010, its proprietor, Lawrence Salander, pleaded guilty to a wide-ranging program of fraud totaling $120 million that included selling 90 paintings by the artist without telling Davis fils.

In 2016, Davis was the subject of a superb retrospective, organized by the Whitney Museum's Barbara Haskell and the National Gallery of Art's Harry Cooper, that began at the Whitney before traveling to the NGA, the de Young Museum in San Francisco, and the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, where it ended its run on New Year's Day of this year.

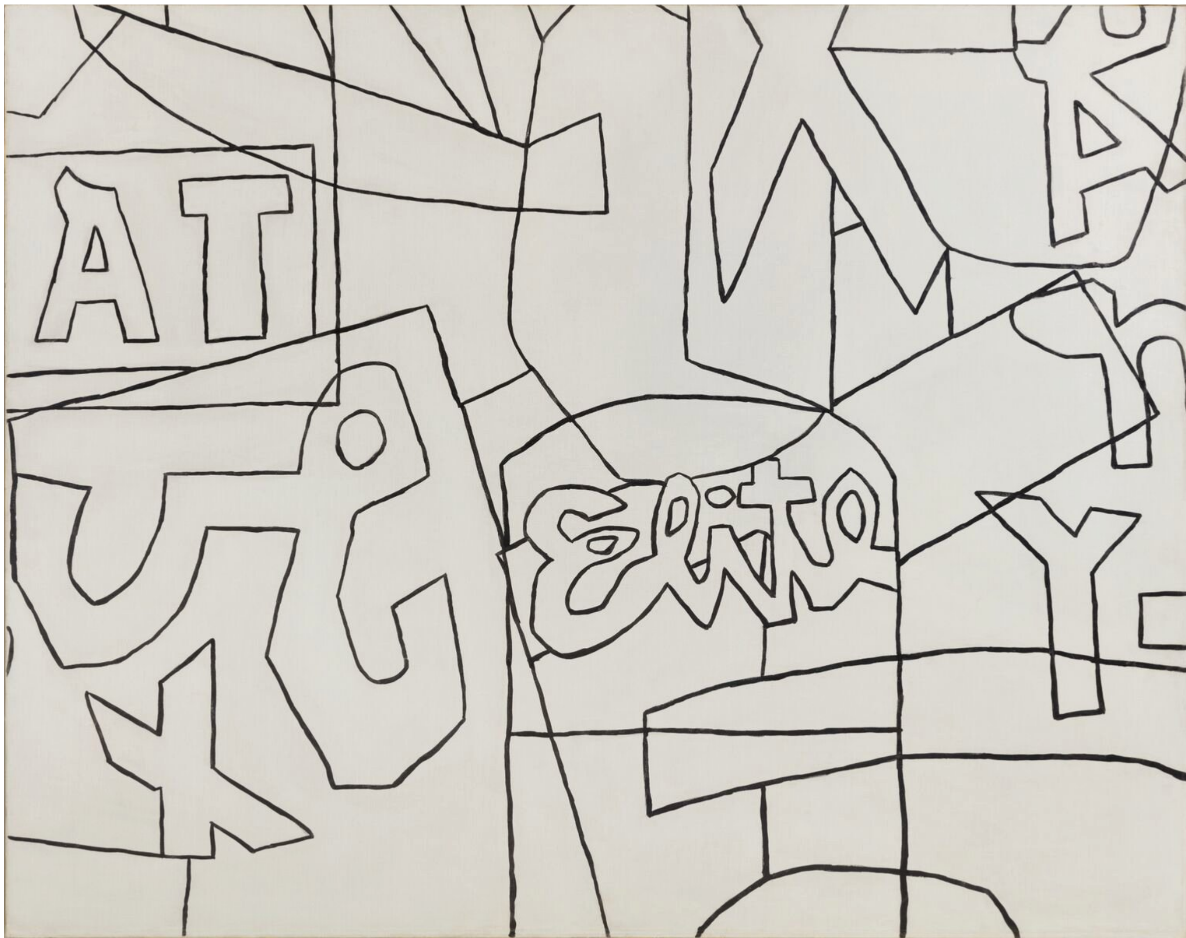
At a moment when figurative art is ascendent in some parts of the contemporary scene, Davis's work is looking quite fresh and being mined in disparate ways by artists including Nina Chanel Abney and Hank Willis Thomas.

The New York Times

Another Side of Stuart Davis, the Black and White, to Go on Display

Hilarie M. Sheets

May 24, 2018



"Untitled" (Black and White Variation on "Pochade"), 1956-58, by Stuart Davis.
Credit All rights reserved Estate of Stuart Davis/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY; Paul Kasmin Gallery

Stuart Davis, a leading American modernist who died in 1964, is best known for his boldly colorful paintings. They reduced consumer products and billboards into hard-edge shapes and dynamic rhythms inspired by street life and jazz. But his art theories were rooted in drawing, not color, according to Earl Davis, the artist's only child, who oversees his father's estate.

"At various points he decided to focus just on the integrity of the drawing as a finished painting and considered black and white colors unto themselves," Mr. Davis said.

The first exhibition in more than three decades devoted to these large-scale black-and-white works on canvas and paper will go on view in September at the Paul Kasmin Gallery in Chelsea, which is now representing the Stuart Davis estate worldwide. Some 25 of these works, which first appeared in the early 1920s and accelerated in the 1950s when the artist was paring down and recycling earlier motifs that he called "beat-up subject matter," will be shown. One, a black-and-white variation on "Quinciette" from 1964, has never before been exhibited.

The estate was previously represented by the Salander O'Reilly gallery, in a longtime relationship that ended traumatically after it was discovered that Lawrence B. Salander had sold some 90 Davis works secretively. (He pleaded guilty in March 2010 to a $120 million fraud scheme, admitting he sold those paintings, among many others.)

The new relationship with Paul Kasmin includes the gallery's publication of a scrapbook compilation of archival materials very few people have ever seen, including family photographs and excerpts from the more than 10,000 pages of Davis's studio journals on art theory.

"These really reductive black-and-white compositions about form and shape were important precursors to many things, including Minimalism," said the Paul Kasmin gallery director Laura Lester, noting in particular that Donald Judd, in a 1962 review in Arts Magazine, discussed his admiration for Davis and his influence on Pop art. "One of the most important things we can do for Davis's legacy, bringing him to a Chelsea gallery with our roster of contemporary artists, is to show the work in the context of what was to come."

FINANCIAL TIMES

Stuart Davis: In Full Swing, New York

'Soul-warming'

Too often overlooked, the spiritual father of Pop Art at last gets his due at the Whitney Museum

Ariella Budick

JUNE 28, 2016

'Swing Landscape' (1938)

Stuart Davis has always enjoyed a seat at the high table of American art; now, the Whitney Museum's buzzing new retrospective demands that he take pride of place. Most surveys of early modernism dutifully recognise Davis as a critical figure in the rise of abstraction, representing him with one or two paintings. The Whitney's tribute, on the other hand, unrolls his career like a brilliant scroll, surprise following cheery surprise. Curators Barbara Haskell and Harry Cooper have staged a generous show, replete with soul-warming paintings.

Unlike so many of his peers, Davis didn't fall for Picasso. Sure, he quaffed Cubism's concepts, guzzled Fauve colours, and soaked up Mondrian's spare geometries. But he also swirled these European advances together into an optimistic New York style, tinged with his own ebullience. He thrilled to the brash graphics of advertising, and magnified humdrum products — Lucky Strike packs, Edison Mazda lightbulbs, and Odol Mouthwash ("It Purifies!") — to monumental scale. His creative improvisations on the theme of mass culture anticipate Pop Art by almost 40 years. Davis likened his project to euphoric poetry: "I too feel what Whitman felt and I too will express it in pictures — America — the wonderful place we live in."

Davis was born in Philadelphia in 1892. His father belonged to a group of newspaper illustrators who formed the core of the so-called Ashcan School. Under the leadership of Robert Henri, they revered

the common man and shunned refinement, wallowing in the foulest corners of the city. “The sketch hunter has delightful days of drifting among people,” Henri wrote. “He is looking for what he loves, and tries to capture it. It’s found anywhere, everywhere. Those who are not hunters do not see these things.”

Inspired by such effusions, Davis dropped out of high school at 16 and went to study with Henri in New York. And even as he edged away from Ashcan realism, he never abandoned either the school’s politics or its rituals of passionate observation. However abstract his art became, he always injected it with meticulous love of the city.

The 1913 Armory show exploded the American art scene at a formative moment in Davis’s life. Matisse, Gauguin and Van Gogh leapt off the walls and lodged in his creative brain. In Chicago, art students felt so threatened by the European avant-garde that they burnt Brancusi and Matisse in effigy. Davis, though, understood right away how to use colour in perversely pleasurable ways, boasting about how quickly he “could paint a green tree red without batting an eye”.

He found loveliness in grim times, but not through blithe escapism. In the 1930s, he plunged into activist politics, writing articles, leading an assortment of leftwing organisations, and editing the radical journal Art Front. As squabbles erupted between modernists and traditionalists over the correct approach to politically engaged painting, Davis argued for the power of formal innovation. Viewers, he believed, could restructure their minds simply by grappling with contrapuntal arrangements of shapes and colours. His was a subliminal revolution.

Not quite trusting his theory to deliver on its promise, he often reinforced his message with clues. The “New York Mural”, made for a 1932 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, applies the punchy flatness of commercial billboards to agitprop. Against a backdrop of the Empire State Building and other rising skyscrapers, Davis inserted a collection of avatars to represent Al Smith, the progressive four-term New York governor who ran for president in 1928 and again in 1932. We see his ever-present derby hat and bow tie; a pair of giant bananas evokes his campaign theme song, “Yes! We Have No Bananas”; and an upended champagne glass nods to Smith’s fight against Prohibition. (That cause resonated with Davis.) Most people missed these coded suggestions, and by now they have grown as indecipherable as antique political cartoons. Yet his passion and humour endure, and the picture still packs a wallop.

Socialist realism was the common idiom of the Works Progress Administration, but Davis kept veering happily into abstract subversiveness. “Swing Landscape”, a nearly 15ft mural that he created in 1938 on assignment for the WPA, never made it to the Brooklyn housing project for which it was intended. That’s a shame for the residents, since its kaleidoscopic patterns and hectic energy would brighten anyone’s life, but at least it didn’t suffer the neglect that beset every other aspect of public housing. Instead, it wound up in the Indiana University Art Museum, and now casts its brilliant glow at the Whitney.

Secure in his individuality, Davis candidly acknowledged his influences, especially Fernand Léger and Piet Mondrian. They assimilated urban intensity into sublime abstractions — exactly what Davis aspired to. With its vibrant colours, clangorous silhouettes and jazzy dissonances, “Swing Landscape” pays homage to Léger’s “The City” of 1919. Davis also memorialises Mondrian in “For Internal Use Only” (1945), where he cordons off cartoony colours within a black-striped grid. Davis saw Léger and

Mondrian as soldiers of exuberance. Léger wrote that "The beautiful is everywhere"; Mondrian, on the run from Fascism, found succour in jazz syncopations and Broadway lights. All three perceived animated patterns in the city's grids, pulsing neon and jostling cars.

In the postwar period, Davis drastically pared down his manner and reduced his palette. He regenerated old motifs by magnifying and simplifying them. The results are shocking in their clarity. "Première" (1957), a babble of block-cap monosyllables ("bag", "large", "cat", "new", "cow"), conjures a battle for the customer's attention in the supermarket. It's too bad that Davis's career wound down just as Pop Art sprang to life. He was the movement's spiritual father, though his work lacked the next generation's irony and preening self-consciousness. He was that rare bird among great 20th-century artists: an unembarrassed painter of joy.

THE NEW YORKER

This Is America

A Stuart Davis retrospective.

Peter Schjeldahl

June 20, 2016

Davis's "Egg Beater No. 4" (1928): a concerted effort to transcend Cubism.Courtesy The Phillips Collection

The ebullient paintings of Stuart Davis, surveyed in a retrospective aptly titled "In Full Swing," at the Whitney Museum, rank either at the peak of American modern art or a bit to the side of it, depending on how you construe "American" and "modern." (And perhaps throw in "abstract," a touch-and-go qualifier for an artist who insisted on the essential realism of even his most abstruse forms.) Davis, who died in 1964, at the age of seventy-one, laid heavy stress on both terms. The beginning of his career overlapped with the first generation of American modernists—Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth, Georgia O'Keeffe—and the end of it with Abstract Expressionism and Pop art. He was a polemicist and a happy warrior for modernity as the heart's blood of what he called, invoking the nation's definitive poet, "the thing Whitman felt—and I too will express it in pictures—America—the wonderful place we live in." In the Whitney catalogue, the art historian Harry Cooper, the show's co-curator, quotes a previously unpublished list of self-exhortations that Davis wrote down in 1938. The first item: "Be liked by French artists." The second: "Be distinctly American."

Seeing no contradiction between patriotism and radical politics, throughout the nineteen-thirties Davis all but set aside studio work, dismissing leftist demands for proletarian themes in art, to engage in labor-organizing activism. The one overtly political work in the show, "Artists Against War and Fascism" (1936), a gouache of uniformed officers beating a protester, is formally ingenious and rather pretty. Newness in art held precedence for Davis in all weather, and, like other leftist painters of the time, he adopted the belief that artistic progress is somehow inherently revolutionary.

Davis is best known, and rightly esteemed, for his later, tightly composed, hyperactive, flag-bright pictures, with crisp planes and emphatic lines, loops, and curlicues, often featuring gnomic words ("champion," "pad," "else") and almost always incorporating his signature as a dashing pictorial element. Their musical rhythms and buttery textures appeal at a glance. If the works had a smell, it would be like that of a factory-fresh car—an echt American aura, from the country's post-Second World War epoch of dazzling manufacture and soaring optimism. But, in this beautifully paced show, hung by the Whitney curator Barbara Haskell, Davis's earlier phases prove most absorbing. They detail stages of a personal ambition in step with large ideals.

Beginning in 1921, collage-like paintings of tobacco packages, light bulbs, and a mouthwash bottle wrestle with Cubism in what amounts to proto-Pop art. Four "Egg Beater" paintings, from 1927 and 1928, memorialize a concerted effort to transcend Cubism, and even to challenge Picasso, with rigorous variations on a tabletop array of household objects. The thirteen months that Davis spent in Paris, starting in 1928, yielded flattened, potently charming cityscapes in toothsome colors. Back home, he fed his semi-abstracting campaign with motifs from summer sojourns in Gloucester, Massachusetts: signs, boat riggings, gas pumps. His sporadic output in the thirties ran to murals. The rioting shapes and hues of the more than fourteen-foot-long "Swing Landscape" (1938), made for a government-funded housing project in Brooklyn, leap beyond the compositional order—contained and balanced—of French predecessors, chiefly Fernand Léger. They jostle outward, anticipating the "all-over" principle that Jackson Pollock realized, with his drip paintings, a decade later.

Davis was born in 1892 in Philadelphia, the first child of artists who had studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. His father, Ed, working as a newspaper illustrator, became involved with the budding Ashcan-school illustrators-turned-painters, led by the charismatic Robert Henri. (A star of that cohort, John Sloan, became an early mentor and lifelong friend of Stuart's.) The family moved to East Orange, New Jersey, in 1901, as Ed bounced between jobs. Stuart, at sixteen, persuaded his parents to let him quit high school and enroll in Henri's art school, in Manhattan. He also began frequenting bars in Newark and Hoboken, where he commenced his habits as a prodigious drinker and a passionate jazz buff. As he later recalled, "You could hear the blues, or Tin Pan Alley tunes turned into real music, for the cost of a five-cent beer." In 1910, after less than half a year of formal study, he showed realist work, with other members of the Henri circle. Two years later, he was illustrating for the socialist magazine The Masses. He had five watercolors in the 1913 Armory Show, which was, he later told a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, "the greatest single influence I have experienced."

Around that time, New York's modernizing art world, small as it was, developed factions. The most sophisticated was that of the group that formed around Alfred Stieglitz's 291 gallery, founded in 1905, which showed the European new masters and emphasized photography. More eclectic was the Whitney Studio Club, established in Greenwich Village in 1918 by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney.

Davis gravitated to the latter, which took on painters from the disbanded Henri school and whose most talented member was Edward Hopper. A stipend from Whitney and her director, Juliana Force, rescued Davis from poverty in the nineteen-twenties, and Whitney's purchase of two of his paintings funded his trip to Paris. This history lends special resonance to the new show, at the museum that bears Gertrude Whitney's name. It rhymes with a peculiarly geographical quality—national, even municipal—of Davis's cosmopolitan enterprise.

Willem de Kooning called Davis one of the Three Musketeers of the New York art scene in the thirties, along with the Ukrainian émigré John Graham and the mercurial Armenian Arshile Gorky—men who glamorized the lives of a tiny, impecunious avant-garde that was besieged by philistinism and reaction. A rare figurative painting in the Whitney show, "American Painting," begun in 1932 and not completed until 1954, reflects the jape, working cartooned images of Davis, Graham, Gorky, and de Kooning into a hectic abstraction inscribed with the Duke Ellington line "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing."

But Davis's strenuous Americanness incurred limits. One of them registers in the pedantic positivism of his theoretical writings, which impose a strained opposition of the "objective" (good) against the "subjective" (bad), as art's proper orientation. He was fond, to a fault, of the phenomenological idea of "the percept"—the flash point in the mind where perceptions take form, an instant short of full consciousness. The somewhat wearying effect is a forced sunniness, as against the emotional currents in the paintings of Hartley and, certainly, of Hopper. There's no trace of Davis's lived vicissitudes in his work. He was devastated when, in 1932, his first wife, Bessie Chosak, died after a botched abortion. But, within weeks, he was at work on a chipper mural for the men's lounge at Radio City Music Hall: orchestrated virilities of smoking, card playing, motoring, horse racing, sailing, and a barber pole. His anguish may explain his dislike of the title that an adman gave it: "Men Without Women."

In the forties, Davis's drinking reached a crisis level, which sharply reduced his productivity but still had no evident effect on his style. A painting that was key to the evolution of his late period, "The Mellow Pad," begun in 1945, remained upbeat even though it took him six years to complete. Sobriety, following a collapse of his health in 1949, launched him on his prolific last phase, which accounts for more than half of the work in the Whitney show. His joyous art finally became authentic to a life of worldly success and domestic contentment with his second wife, Roselle Springer, and a son, whom they named George Earl, after the jazz musicians George Wettling and Earl Hines. The show concludes with a work left unfinished, festooned with masking-taped guidelines, on the day of Davis's death. The night before, after watching a French film on television, he lettered "fin" on the canvas, and went to bed. ♦

The New York Times

Stuart Davis: A Little Matisse, a Lot of Jazz, All American

HOLLAND COTTER

JUNE 9, 2016

“The Mellow Pad” (1945-51) in the exhibition “Stuart Davis: In Full Swing,” at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Credit Michael Nagle for The New York Times; All Rights Reserved, Estate of Stuart Davis /Licensed by VAGA, New York

In 1908, Henri Matisse tried some damage control. Alarmed that his new work was being dismissed as a provoking joke, he responded no, no, no, the critics had him all wrong: His aim was to create the opposite, a soothing, antidepressant art, the visual equivalent of a well-padded armchair. A few decades later, Stuart Davis, who admired Matisse enough to crib from him, was pitching his own radical art as an embodiment of optimism and pleasure of a particularly American kind.

He didn’t venture a furniture analogy, though an apt one might have been to a La-Z-Boy recliner, one with cigarette burns and beer bottle rings on the armrests and a jazz beat thumping up through the seat. A chair good for a quick studio snooze, but easy to jump out of when you felt impelled to add one more crucial stroke to a painting in progress.

This is the artist we find in “Stuart Davis: In Full Swing” at the Whitney Museum of American Art, a restless, zestful exhibition that’s both broad enough to be a survey and sufficiently focused to qualify

as a thematic study. It isn't, however, a full-blown retrospective and isn't meant to be. Davis's very early art is missing and that's quite a bit of work for an artist who got going very young.

Stuart Davis's "Swing Landscape," from 1938. Credit All Rights Reserved, Estate of Stuart Davis /Licensed by VAGA, New York; Indiana University Art Museum

He was born in 1892 in Philadelphia, where his father, a newspaper illustrator, was one of a group of young painters, including William Glackens and John Sloan, who took cues from a magnetic, slightly older figure, Robert Henri. Henri was promoting a new kind of American art, fundamentally urban and based on the observed realities of everyday life. When he moved to New York City in 1900, his followers went too. Eventually, Davis, dropping out of high school, joined them, determined to make art his career.

Manhattan delivered an array of heady stimulants, most of them habituating: alcohol, cigarettes, leftist politics, African-American music and, in 1913, European modernism in the Armory Show. What Davis saw in that exhibition had him sitting bolt upright in astonishment: Gauguin and Matisse using colors that had no connection to nature; Cubism shattering forms, flattening space, turning words — newspaper headlines, product labels — into objects. Davis, though hooked on the new Modernism, didn't know what to do with it and for a while longer stuck with New York scenes and landscapes painted in Gloucester, Mass.

This is the work, high-polish journeyman stuff, that the present show, organized by Barbara Haskell of the Whitney (assisted by Sarah Humphreville) and Harry Cooper of the National Gallery in Washington, leaves out. It starts instead with Davis the fresh-minted Modernist, painting meticulous, trompe-l'oeil versions of Cubist collages that have local materials — Lucky Strike tobacco packaging, comic strips — as content. In these tiny pictures from the early 1920s, he defines the lasting tension in his art between American-derived realism and European-derived abstraction, between populism and classicism.

Now he's off the street and in the studio doing still lifes: a bottle of Odol mouthwash — "It Purifies" reads the label — looks as cool as an archaic Greek goddess; a tabletop jumble of rubber gloves and an eggbeater becomes a vision of balanced but teetery architecture. By now, he's pretty much dropped Henri's version of realism. On a visit to Paris in 1928 Davis tirelessly roamed the city, but his paintings of it suggest stage sets, as do his subsequent views of Gloucester and New York. Yet in each case,

something — a shop sign, a type of building, the color of the air — tells you, in shorthand-fashion, where you are. (He wasn't the son of a news illustrator for nothing.)

Stuart Davis's "American Painting" (1932/1942-54). Credit Michael Nagle for The New York Times; All Rights Reserved, Estate of Stuart Davis/Licensed by VAGA, New York

Place was important to him, but the modern world was increasingly about movement and he wanted to picture that. A 1931 painting, "New York-Paris No. 2," put us in both cities simultaneously, with a Hotel de France set against the Third Avenue El. In the exuberant "Swing Landscape" of 1938, a mural commissioned by the Works Progress Administration for a Brooklyn housing project but never installed, we see bits and pieces of Gloucester — ships, buoys, lobster traps — but basically we're in a whole new universe of jazzy patterns and blazing colors, a landscape defined not by signs but by sensations: sound, rhythm, friction.

As you move through the show, you're moving through time. And change, over time, becomes one of the exhibition's main themes. You get a vivid sense of the time, measured in labor, that Davis put into making individual pieces from a display of 14 annotated ballpoint-pen studies that represent the mere beginnings of a 1956 painting called "Package Deal." You see the look of his art, though not its upbeat spirit, change over years. After finishing his dense, cacophonous "The Mellow Pad," a grueling six-year project, in 1951, his compositions start to untangle. His palette simplifies. His use of words, or scriptlike arabesques, grows. And more and more you see him moving back and forth in time, to revisit and reuse themes from his past.

A 1927 Cubist still life, "Percolator," done almost entirely in beiges and grays, resurfaces, intact but high-colored and festooned with words, in the 1951 "Owh! In San Pao." And on one wall, four ingenious variations on a single design — Davis likened them to jazz improvisations — done between 1932 and 1956 hang side by side. Individual Davises have been changed, and changed again. One called "American Painting" is multiply dated "1932/1942-54," indicating that it is the product of several revisionist campaigns, of which there is poignant internal evidence.

The original 1932 composition of "American Painting" incorporates both Davis's first use of an extended written text — the phrase "it don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing," from a Duke Ellington hit of the day — and an image of four small male figures posed together as if for a photograph. They represent the artists Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, John Graham and Davis himself, who were, at the time, close friends. Davis and Gorky parted ways, possibly over political differences, and by 1954, Gorky was dead, which could explain why Davis marked his figure with a kind of canceling-out black X.

"Fin" (1962-64), Stuart Davis's last painting, unfinished, with tape still attached to its surface. Credit All Rights Reserved, Estate of Stuart Davis /Licensed by VAGA, New York; Private collection

Davis's biography, shaped by struggles with poverty, alcoholism and critical neglect, all reversed in late career, is the subject of a remarkable chronicle composed by Ms. Haskell for the catalog, but is only lightly touched on in the exhibition. The artist, scornful of Abstract Expressionism's bleeding-heart tendencies, would have preferred it that way, though in places a personal story comes through in the show, one being at the very end. His final painting, unfinished, with tape still attached to its surface, prominently features the French word "fin" — "end" — on the upper left side. He added it the night before he died of a stroke in 1964, at the age of 71.

The last New York museum survey of Davis's career was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1991 and caused only a moderate stir. A general revival of interest in painting since then, particularly abstraction, gives his art a sense of freshness and pertinence that it didn't project then. Some of his thinking about art, however, seems locked in the past.

I'm thinking about the way he identified his art as American, a product of, and a homage to, "the wonderful place we live in," a place of entrepreneurial appetites and Walt Whitman-esque

enthusiasms. I'm thinking of his insistence that art's primary moral role is, or should be, to add pleasure to the world, to give an illusion of ordering chaos, as opposed to facing it and staring it down.

Whitman is a much darker poet than is usually thought. The moral chaos of the Civil War haunted him and complicated him, and continues to make him feel contemporary. As for America's entrepreneurial appetite, suffice to say it doesn't always look so positive now. When it comes to a critical evaluation, it's Andy Warhol, cynical soul and sometimes (wrongly) taken as Davis's heir, who got it right.

What Davis got right was belief: the belief that he was doing the one sure, positive thing he could do, and that he would keep doing it, no matter what, in failure or success, sickness or health. That's the lesson young artists can take away from his show, along with an experience of painting that's conceptually razor-sharp and completely worked through, with all fat trimmed off, all air squeezed out: an art of truly honest weight.

AN AMERICAN CUBIST

Rediscovering Stuart Davis.

By Hilton Kramer

The more closely we examine the development of American art in the early decades of the twentieth century, the more convinced we become of the need for an entirely new history of the period–now reaching back nearly 100 years–that begins with the emergence of the modern movement in the United States. Hardly a season now passes that does not bring us an exhibition or a publication that vividly illuminates the inadequacy of the existing histories of twentieth-century American art. The 1980s have brought some especially important contributions to our knowledge of early American modernism, and there is every reason to believe that the 1990s will bring many more. By the year 2000, our whole understanding of the achievements of American art in the first half of the twentieth century is likely to be very different from what it was only a few years ago. Already the books commonly used to chart the course of those achievements are woefully out of date.

Sometimes this new look at the American past entails the rediscovery of artists whose work has been unjustly overlooked–artists condemned by either ignorance or prejudice to an obscurity or marginality now judged to be entirely wrongheaded. And sometimes this new understanding obliges us to perform a very different sort of task: to lower our assessments of well-known figures whose work, upon serious reexamination, no longer supports the high esteem that established opinion has accorded it. But in some respects the most interesting and problematic cases concern those artists who are already well known and widely admired but whose work as a whole nonetheless turns out to harbor a larger accomplishment than was formerly suspected.

The latest candidate for this kind of upward reevaluation would appear to be Stuart Davis (1892-1964). Davis is surely one of the most familiar figures in twentieth-century American painting. There can hardly be a museum in the country–among those, anyway, that take a serious interest in modern art–that is not the proud owner of one or more examples of his painting. Generally these belong to the last thirty years of the artist's career–the period we associate with those immaculately executed, more or less abstract cubist paintings in bright, jazzy colors that have long been regarded as American classics. Can there really be anything new to be learned about such a firmly established presence in American art?

Well, yes–there is, as a matter of fact, quite a lot. Like many of our painters who are represented in museum collections and in the history books by pictures of a certain type, Davis is a more various and more complex artist than we have quite understood, and we are only just beginning to get some sense of his oeuvre as a whole. More and more of his earlier work is coming to light, and as we get to know more of these "unknown" pictures, our respect and admiration for Davis is bound to grow. We always knew he was good, but it turns out we literally didn't know the half of it.

This is certainly my own impression from seeing the paintings from the Teens and the Twenties that have been turning up in one or another exhibition in the last couple of years. Davis was one of the stars in the show called "The Advent of Modernism" organized by the High Art Museum in Atlanta a few years ago. And he surprised us again in the exhibition

Hilton Kramer is editor of *The New Criterion*. His *Abstract Art: A Cultural History* will be forthcoming from the Free Press.

of early paintings mounted at the Grace Borgenicht Gallery in New York around the same time. These gave us our first real glimpse of Davis's precubist paintings—paintings in which the paramount inspiration was Van Gogh and certain other postimpressionist masters.

It was no secret, of course, that Davis had been a dedicated modernist since his encounter with the Armory Show of 1913 in New York. But now we are beginning to see exactly what it meant for a young American artist of Davis's talent and ambition to work his way through the formidable array of ideas that was disclosed to him for the first time in the achievement of the European avant-garde. From the outset Davis's response to this challenge was at once so intelligent and so passionate that he immediately left behind the kind of provincial pieties and timidities that haunted and often disabled so many other members of his American generation. He had found his artistic tradition, and quickly set out on the task of making an art worthy of it.

For modernists of Davis's generation, the greatest of the many challenges to be met lay in the phenomenon of cubism—still so new, so radical, and so difficult for an artist who had begun his career as a disciple of Robert Henri. The problem was not only to acquire mastery over a new pictorial idiom, but to do so in a way that allows the artist to remain faithful to the spirit and substance of his own experience—the problem, in other words, of assimilating cubism to a vision that remained quintessentially American.

Precisely how Davis accomplished this feat has never, until now, been entirely clear, but with the exhibition that William C. Agee organized earlier this season at the Salander-O'Reilly Galleries under the title of "Stuart Davis: The Breakthrough Years, 1922-1924," a significant advance has been made in illuminating this crucial phase in the artist's development. Mr. Agee has been at work for some time on the catalogue raisonné of Davis's oeuvre and his research has led him to focus on this particular three-year period as the major turning point in the artist's career. He has, moreover, come up with the pictures that persuasively support his claim. They represent an episode in Davis's development that has heretofore remained unknown to the present generation.

Foremost among these pictures are three monumental works painted in 1922—*Still Life with* Dial, *Still Life (Red)*, and *Still Life (Brown)*. These are paintings that fully justify Mr. Agee's high opinion of them. "These paintings," he writes, "have a weight and authority, a gravity and reach distinctly new in [Davis's] art. By any standard, they are among the greatest monuments of American cubism and, indeed, more than hold their own in the order of post-1918 international cubism." Clearly these paintings owe much to the precedents of Picasso and Braque, but there is nonetheless something thrilling and revelatory in the freedom and independence and confident ambition they display in undertaking a large pictorial challenge and bringing it to a triumphant realization.

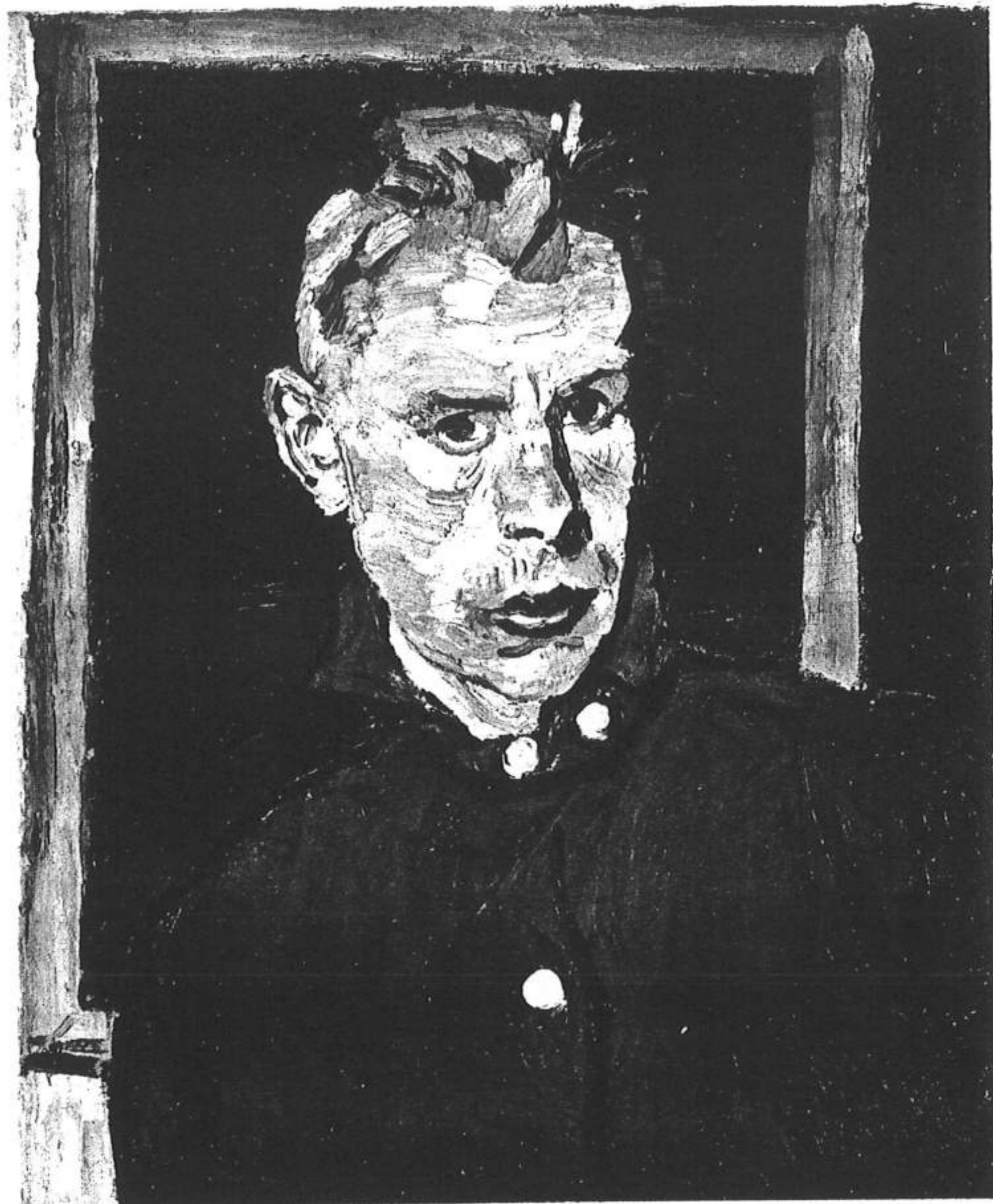
Davis was thirty when he painted these marvelous pictures, and from that year onward he followed a remarkably steady course. There were other fine pictures in this exhibition, especially those devoted to common objects—*The Saw* (1923), *Egg Beater* (1923), and *Electric Bulb* (1924)—which are in some respects even more original than the big still lifes of 1922. But it is in the big still lifes of 1922 that a new level of ambition is definitively announced and firmly achieved for the first time.

It is interesting to learn from Mr. Agee's catalogue that these pictures were exhibited as a group in the Whitney Studio Club in 1926—and then, apparently, promptly forgotten. So it was with a great many things that American artists achieved in the Twenties. For future historians of American art in the twentieth century, there is thus much to be recovered. We were given still another reminder of this in yet another Davis show this season—"An American in Paris," focusing on the years (1928-29) Davis spent in France, a show that Lewis Kachur organized at the Whitney Museum branch in the Philip Morris building in New York. Who knows? with a little luck—the Met is said to be planning a full retrospective—we might yet get to see this remarkable artist in the full scale of his achievement. And in the next century we might get a history of American art that fully accounts for an achievement of this sort. □

Art in America

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1976/$3.00

Cover: Stuart Davis' "Swing Landscape" (detail)
Special 30-page section on 1930s art: Bolotowsky on the A.A.A./Hélion
Stuart Davis/James Brooks's LaGuardia Mural/plus: Prendergast/Constable
Demuth/William King/Suzanne Harris/Chicago Photography/Books



Stuart Davis; *Self Portrait*, 1919, oil on canvas, 22¼ by 18¼ inches. Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth.

Stuart Davis, Picture-Builder

Davis' tough and jazzy late near-abstractions, for all their sense of improvisatory ease, are results of a course of steady growth and experiment that spanned half a century, from the heyday of early modernism to Abstract Expressionism—a career unmatched in U.S. art.

BY ROBERTA SMITH

If anyone was in a position to become America's first great abstract painter, it was certainly Stuart Davis. The child of two artists, Davis was born in 1894, just early enough to have the revelations of the Armory Show form a crucial but natural part of his already precocious artistic development, and just late enough to realize, after one short trip, that it was no longer necessary to be in Paris to be a modern artist. Davis was the first American artist to combine a response to his country's environment with a clear, systematic understanding of the rudiments of abstract picture-making and to evolve a method of working that sustained him a lifetime. His artistic career, which began when he was only 15, spanned almost 55 years. Stylistically his art began in the 19th century, received its greatest im-

Author: Roberta Smith writes for various art journals; her sequel to this article will appear in a forthcoming issue.

petus from Synthetic Cubism and continued well past the middle of the 20th century with a highly original form of impure geometric painting, a debauched but austere classicism. These paintings, monumental conglomerations of irresistibly deviant geometric shapes, stray lettering and symbols, thick linear structures and cursive scrawls, vibrant colors ballasted by black and white, and physical, compact surfaces, continue to look fresh and vital today, 12 years after Davis' death. The span of both time and styles, the sustained quality throughout and the final culminating great works make Davis' career unique in the history of 20th-century American art. His is an example not so common even in Europe, where one thinks mainly of Mondrian and Matisse.

Davis is best known for his last great paintings; his "maturity" begins anywhere from the late '20s to the late '40s, depending upon which book you read. Although it took him 25 years from his unusually early start in 1910 to develop a consistent style, this development is both fascinating in itself and essential to a study of the later work. The story of Davis' early development is not completely known, but there don't seem to be many flukes or dead ends; Davis occasionally seems to retrace his steps, but everything ultimately fits together and is used; little is discarded. During the '20s and '30s, he was carefully laying the groundwork, developing the subjects, color, scale and drawing, and in some cases the exact compositional motives that he would use during the last two-and-a-half decades of his life. It's also interesting to examine the early work because Davis was always mature in the particular sense that his paintings from early on were almost invariably complete and fulfilled in ambition. Even when the ambition was not completely his own, the execution and the spirit were. He was a born painter, confident, eager to learn, and his alert, blunt personality comes across in his surfaces and shapes.

In the beginning, Davis was surrounded by older artists who recognized his talent, helped him and soon accepted him as an equal. He grew up knowing Everett Shinn, George Luks, William Glackens and John Sloan—all future members of the Eight who worked for his father, Edward Davis, when he was art editor of the *Philadelphia Press*. Davis was 15 when in 1909 he asked for and received his parents' permission to quit high school in East Orange, N.J., and cross the river to attend Robert Henri's art school in New York. Henri encouraged independence and self-confidence in his students. His approach, methodless and non-academic, was to send them out into the streets with sketchbooks. According to Henri, art should be full of "life" (a favorite word) and to him this meant vitality of subject matter and of surface. Although Davis would later criticize the over-emphasis on the vitality of subject matter to the detriment of "an objective appraisal of the dynamics of the actual color-space relations on the canvas" (Sweeney, p. 10),[1] Davis developed a skeptical awareness of his surroundings and a belief in the communicative, social function of art that, even as people disappeared from his images, he never lost.

Davis and his friends explored and drew what the city and its environs had to offer. "Enthusiasm for running around and drawing things in the raw ran high," he later wrote in his often-quoted autobiographical essay. "Raw" is accurate; the watercolors and paintings from this period, like the newspaper illustrations (wasting no time, Davis started working for *The Masses* in 1912), depict scenes in dance halls, bars, bedrooms, with bluntness and wit.

In 1910, just barely into classes with Henri, Davis exhibited in the huge Eight-organized "Exhibition of Independent Artists," and that year he also received his first, mostly favorable review, from Guy Pène du Bois. By 1913 he was finished with his formal education and doing illustrations for both *The Masses* and *Harper's*. From then on he exhibited frequently (his first one-man show was in 1917, his first retrospective in 1926 at the Whitney Studio Club) and was more or less always in the news. (When he moved his studio from Hoboken to Manhattan in 1913, two newspapers noted that he would be missed by local artists and a few years later another described him as "rapidly becoming one of the foremost artists of this country.")

Reading about Davis' life, the decade from 1910 to '20 seems to have been a whirlwind of new experience in both the "art" and "life" categories. After 1913, the nascent New York art scene scrambled to absorb the shock of the Armory Show and flourished until about 1920—it would not be so receptive to new ideas again until the late '40s, as Davis, a vigilant defender of abstraction during the '30s, would discover. Davis himself had five watercolors in the Armory Show—a fact that didn't impress him as much as did the art from Europe.

As early as 1910, American artists, most of them affiliated with Alfred Stieglitz's gallery "291," had started drifting back from Europe with new ideas and new paintings to show. Among them was Charles Demuth, who, in Provincetown with Davis in the summers of 1913 and 1914, would help him sort out his reactions to the Armory Show. And then, because of the war or perhaps because of the sense of excitement here, European artists started coming to New York; between 1915 and 1917, Davis' studio was near those of Duchamp, Villon, Gleizes and Picabia.

Running around New York, Davis acquired a special sensitivity to the American scene that would, in increasingly fragmented form, be the source of his imagery and, more generally, of the energy of his work. He discovered ragtime

5 more pages

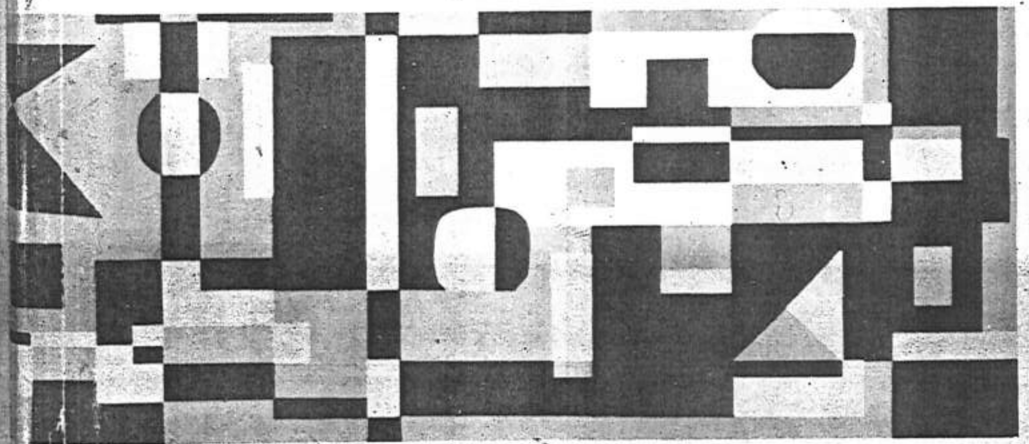
The Back Room, 1913, 30¼ by 37 ½ inches. Whitney Museum.

New Mexican Landscape, 1923, 32 by 40¼ inches. Carter Museum.

Stuart Davis

by RUDI BLESH

12 COLOR PLATES 36 BLACK AND WHITE ILLUSTRATIONS



Mural: *Allee*. Drake University

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MODERN FRENCH PAINTINGS

Stuart Davis

(Continued from page 25)

a rubber glove, and an egg-beater to a table and used them as my exclusive subject matter for a year. . . . This egg-beater series was very important to me because in this period I got away from naturalistic form" (see color reproduction on cover of this issue).

In 1928 he went to Paris taking a packing case of the egg-beater paintings with him. He did not work on them. Instead he turned to Paris street scenes, *Place Pasdeloup* and *Rue de l'Echaudé* (1928) *Café, Place des Vosges* (1929). These have a more lyrical charm than the egg-beater series, but there is here the same structural logic and inventiveness. *Egg-Beater #5*, painted a few months after his return from Europe in 1929, shows a return to the severe geometry of the earlier series with something of the sensuous charm of the Paris street scenes. This is true also of such paintings as *Summer Landscape* (1930) and *New York-Paris #1* (1931). Davis' understanding of the problems he had set himself under the impact of the Armory Show matured while he was painting the egg-beater series, his feeling for the real space of the canvas, formal simplification, arbitrary use of color and emphasis on contrasted areas of color and texture, and a very idiomatic use of line, not only line as contour and limit, but also as color-space coördinate and constructive and moving force.

Davis entered on his period of maturity as an artist in Paris. Oddly enough, Paris recalled him to his earlier interest in subject. In the pictures painted since his return, during his years of teaching (he now has a very successful class at the New School for Social Research), his work for the Federal Art Project between 1935 and 1939, and his recent work, it is evident that his research has been devoted to harmonizing his interest in the severe logic of color-space composition, and in what he calls "the particularities of composition," the objects that carry his "story." These are always recognizable and refer directly to his immediate environment, the skyscrapers of New York, its bridges, streets, factories, lights, fast moving vehicles, jive, gadgets, tobacco labels, electric signs. This subject matter is handled with an inventiveness that is often playful and always filled with humor—(*Swing Landscape*, 1938, *New York Under Gaslight*, 1941, *Arboretum by Flashbulb*, 1942, *For Internal Use Only*, 1945.) In these later pictures, as James Johnson Sweeney says in his excellent introduction to the catalogue, Davis has shown a steadily developing interest in bringing the representational source elements "to the same level of amplification as the major lines of the composition. Consequently they . . . fuse into a more comprehensive unity."

The exhibition, handsomely installed in the first floor galleries of the Museum, admirably charts the development of a painter, primarily interested, as he himself says, in "color-space compositions celebrating the resolution in art of stresses set up by some aspects of the American scene," and for whom painting is "not a duplication of experience, but the extension of experience on the plane of formal invention."

Armory Show: High Sales, Attendance

THE Arts and Antiques Show ended its seven-day run at the Armory on September 30, with attendance of around 76,000 and sales estimated at a million and a half dollars. One small group of New Yorkers, however, openly dissented from the popular acclaim accorded the featured "Critics' Art Show" of contemporary painting and sculpture. Ten students from the Art Students League picketed the show because they objected to the fact that the critics' choice was confined to recognized or popular painters.

The combination of the Critics' Art Show and a cross-section of the antique field proved so successful that Seymour Halpern Associates, Inc., the sponsors, may incorporate it in plans for their National Antiques Show at the Garden.

Art for Veterans at the Modern Museum

AFTER one year of operation the Museum of Modern Art's War Veterans' Art Center is ready to show what it has accomplished. The current exhibition shows both objects produced and documentary photographs which trace step by step the the exhibit is of definite social importance. The training in the Art Center is free, covers a period of three months, and offers eleven classes which add crafts to the usual fine arts program besides lettering, layout, and typography. The group of

The Post Office Goes Abstract

By J. Carter Brown
Assistant Director, National Gallery of Art

ON DEC. 2, some 120 million pieces of abstract art will go on sale all over the United States for 5 cents each. The sponsor of this precedent-shattering project will be the United States Government.

The brightly colored, sassy little design comes from the studio of Stuart Davis, one of the major, and one of the most American, artists of our century. It will bear the inscription, "To the Fine Arts," as well, of course, as the more familiar words, "U. S. Postage."

Among the prophets that have been without honor in this country, our visual prophets have somehow managed to carve themselves a particularly inaccessible niche. Although the Post Office Department has already received a good deal of mail in favor of the new stamp (and few people have been able to see it in color), there have been the inevitable letters from those for whom the dictum "I-know-what I-like" might perhaps better read, "I like what I know."

It is a particular irony that so much of the criticism is put on patriotic grounds. "To what depth of depravity can a nation sink?" one correspondent queries. "Now if we put out a stamp for the world to see, this to be such a mass of squiggles and hodgepodge of odd shapes and this to come from a Nation that is supposedly civilized and intelligent, we certainly have scraped the bottom of the ash can." A third writes in about the stamp: "Why use the Post Office Department to further lower our standing around the world?"

Just how has that standing been doing recently on the basis of serious American artists like Stuart Davis? It is not hard to find somebody to give you the count on the number of gold medals our athletes won in Tokyo. How many, though, know the score on the international prizes our artists have won in Tokyo, and in South America and in Europe?

THE OLYMPICS of art are the two major world-wide biennial exhibitions in Sao Paolo and Venice. In the last two, the grand prize for each exhibition was carried off by an American artist.

Before World War I, few American paintings were bought by European museums. In the last 15 years, American paintings have been bought by museums throughout Europe — Paris, London, Rome, Stockholm, Basel, Amsterdam — and the museums have been hard put to meet the prices on American pictures bid up by European collectors.

Last spring and summer, the major European exhibitions of international contemporary art, the Dokumenta in Kassel, the Tate exhibition in London, the New Realism show in The Hague and the Venice Biennale, were dominated by American art.

"Everyone recognizes today that the center of the art world has moved from Paris to New York," read the Biennale catalogue. Pointing to just this trend in a circular letter that shocked Paris this spring, Daniel Cordier, one of the leading art dealers in Paris, closed down.

Turning the knife, Roger Hilton asked the French critic Michel Ragon in London in April, "How can you be an art critic in Paris when there are no more painters in France?"

A matchbook cover inspired Stuart Davis's "Visa," shown at the National Gallery last winter.

One of the healthiest indications of America's new standing internationally is the reversal of flow among the younger painters. For centuries the ambitious young painter studied in Rome. Then for the last century and more it was Paris. Now, wondrously, it seems to be the United States.

Alan Solomon, who organized America's winning representation in Venice last summer, told us that everywhere he went, young European artists asked him, "How do I get to America?" . . . "What is Bob Rauschenberg like?" . . . "Tell us some anecdotes about the artists in New York."

The rising young English artist David Hockney is currently in this country on just such a pilgrimage. In an interview a couple weeks ago, he said, "In fact, everything fresh-looking and vital in England these days has been coming from the U. S."

For a salute to the fine arts at this moment of American ascendancy, no more suitable artist could have been chosen than Stuart Davis. He spans the whole range of what has been strongest in American painting. His roots were in American realism, in the keen-eyed reportage of the American cityscape that Robert Henri taught early in this century. Like so many of Henri's pupils, Davis began by learning the trade of commercial illustration for magazines.

But like Marin, like Feininger, like, if you will, Gorky, Davis could learn from the new kinds of seeing that were being developed in Paris. As Davis matured, his pictures concentrated more and more on the elements of design, at times completely abstract, at times enriched with actual words, as in his famous "Champion" picture that seems, now, so proudly appropriate.

THROUGHOUT HIS development, the world around him was his continual starting place.

"I have enjoyed the dynamic American scene for many years," Davis said, "and all my pictures . . . are referential to it."

One of the letters that the Postmaster General has received observes, "The stamp you O.K.'d for issue is atrocious. It is to real art what Rock and Roll is to go[od] music."

Davis did not consider hi[m]self above rock-and-roll. H[is] great love was jazz, and e[v]erything about American li[fe] that has the caual individ[u]ality, the energy, the impa[ct] of jazz. It is this spirit th[at] informs the bright, free, pu[l]ing shapes and colors in h[is] stamp design.

Stuart Davis died not lo[ng] after approving the final ve[r]sion of this stamp. He di[d] a prophet, having years a[go] prefigured that reapprais[al] of the American visual envi[r]onment which is vitalizin[g] American art, and the world art, now. That he also be n[ot] entirely without honor in h[is] own country, nor with hi[s] the profession he served, [is] a hope this tiny postag[e] stamp holds out.

Washington Post, Dec. 15, 1964

63

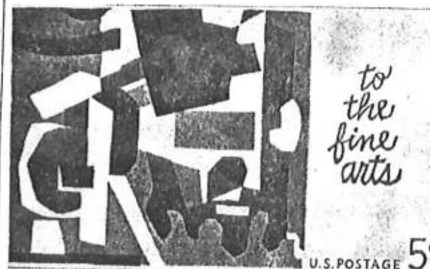
Feelings Run High Around Nation About That Abstract Art Stamp

By Susanna McBee
Staff Reporter

One thing about the Nation's first abstract art stamp: you cannot feel neutral about it.

Just two weeks ago Postmaster General John A. Gronouski gave the five-cent commemorative, based on a design by the late artist Stuart Davis, a grand send-off in a ceremony at the National Gallery of Art.

Since then he has been getting comments from around the country that, with few exceptions, have not been remarkable for their restraint, equanimity or indifference.



Colors of the abstract stamp are red, white, blue and black.

Indeed, he has been praised for his courage in introducing an "absolutely beautiful" stamp as well as castigated for "putting out a monstrosity." One man wrote that his wife, in a moment of rapture, bought $15 worth of the Davis stamps.

A Post Office Department spokesman said first day sales of the stamp are estimated at about 500,000. "a little below average, but not much, for commemoratives." He gave the following summary of reactions in several cities:

New York — Not much comment with the exception of a few unkind comparisons of the stamp to a jigsaw puzzle.

Dallas — Comments "very derogatory." There seems to be more dissatisfaction with this than any other commemorative.

St. Louis—Many requests. More, in fact, than for two other recent commemoratives. The Washington University crowd is very much in favor.

Chicago — Women like it; men don't. The public generally does not, "but there's an art colony near the Ft. Dearborn station here, and they love it."

Boston—Sales running only 75 per cent of "average" commemoratives. "Those who appreciate abstract art are in the minority."

San Francisco — No complaints.

From Washington stations came these reports:

Georgetown — "We've sold all we ordered. Those who appreciate art ask for it, but some say it's far out."

Friendship — "You hear only extreme opinions—no in-betweens. It's doing as well as other commemoratives."

Cleveland Park — "Most people are for it."

Chevy Chase—"All we're getting is criticism. One man said, 'It ain't worth a damn.'"

Fri. June 26 1964

 New York Herald Tribune

Stuart Davis, 69, Leading Painter

Artist Stuart Davis, 69, considered the dean of American abstraction, died Wednesday of a heart attack en route to Roosevelt Hospital.

His work was as experimental and fresh as that of the youngest painters on the art scene, yet he was old enough to have been part of history. Five paintings of his were among those exhibited at the Armory Show of 1913.

Mr. Davis, who lived at 15 W. 67th St. won many awards, including the 1958 and 1960 Guggenheim International Awards, the 1962 American Institute of Architects Fine Arts Gold Medal and the Chicago Art Institute's 1964 Logan Prize.

His paintings—from early, representational city scenes and landscapes painted with wit and a very personal style, to later non-objective works hang in the permanent collections of major museums.

Born in Philadelphia in 1894, the son of Edward W. Davis, cartoonist and art editor of the old Philadelphia Press, he became interested in art early. His father was a close friend of John Sloan, Robert Henri, William Glackens and other artists of the group known as "The Eight" or "The Revolutionary Black Gang." These artists dared tradition by painting everyday subject matter instead of romantic myths.

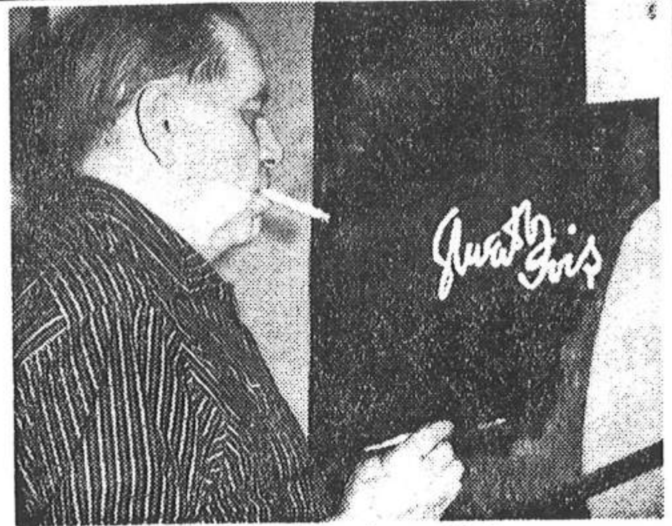
Mr. Davis also painted many murals, among them murals for Radio City Music Hall, the WNYC radio station, the 1939 World's Fair Communications Building, the H. J. Heinz Research Center in Pittsburgh and, most recently, for a Drake University building designed by the late Eero Saarinen.

He found his source material in the familiar objects and sights of contemporary life, and once did a series of five paintings entitled "Egg-beater I, II, III," etc. Long a jazz buff, he found inspiration in its rhythms, although he once commented that "jazz has helped ruin much of it (modern painting)."

His pictures of the 1920s and '30s portrayed the American scene in a new way, utilizing the simplifications and stylizations of the modern movement. His later abstractions seemed to project the fast pace and dynamism of our times.

He was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1952 and a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1956 he was one of five Americans selected for the International Awards Exhibition. He also won the 1957 Brandeis University Fine Arts Award for Painting and the 1694 Pennsylvania Academy Temple Gold Medal.

Surviving are his wife, Mrs. Roselle Springer Davis; a son, Earl Davis; his mother, Mrs. Helen Davis, of Gloucester, Mass., and a brother, Wyatt Davis, of New Mexico.



Stuart Davis at work on painting.

Hallmark of His Work: Perennial Youthfulness

With the death of Stuart Davis, American art has lost its most youthful painter. That magical sense of sustained contemporaneousness, which for more than 40 years has been the hallmark of his work, will continue to inspire painters whether avant-garde popsters or artists concerned solely with the purely formal aspects of a picture.

To the art student, Davis came like a breath of fresh air in a period when American painting (the 20s and early 30s) was still too much in the grip of European influences.

The jazzy razzmatazz of his later abstractions, with their unmistakably American rhythms, would invariably make an apathetic student sit up and take notice. Suddenly, the student would relate to the topsy-turvy, zigzaggy movements, brilliant color, and immediacy of the composition, and all at once miraculously understand the workings of abstract art, with its fragmented objects, and odd juxtaposition of shape and form.

That students come to mind in speaking of Davis is merely one indication of his continuing appeal to youth. But Stuart Davis' particular freshness stems from his own inventiveness and originality. He used actual words and letters in his paintings long before the idea was taken up with a vengeance by our poster-inspired pop-art generation. As for the concern of these young painters with flatness of design and color, Davis beat them at their own game years before, and with far greater subtlety.

The body of his work will stimulate future artists. They will owe something to the clarity and esthetic effectiveness that Davis brought to his own art.

JOHN GRUEN

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on Wednesday, June 24, ...oselle Springer Davis. Private service at Frank ...Madison av. at 81st st. ...wers.

FAMOUS ARTISTS MAG
Sum. 1962

close-up of the artist Stuart Davis

BY MARY ANNE GUITAR

Courtesy *Look Magazine*

> **Editor's note:** If uniqueness is the measure of the fine artist, then Stuart Davis fully deserves his high place in modern art. Someone described his remarkable achievements quite accurately in these words: "You can't miss recognizing a painting by Stuart Davis. He is always himself." Or as Davis himself has put it: "I paint paintings like mine."
>
> In his New York City studio, surrounded by the jazz records he loves, Davis talked with us about originality, art study, and the influences on his own work. Resolutely experimental, Davis remains a pioneer of modern art. He has much to say and he says it in his own pungent fashion.

I know that your mother and father were both artists. Is this why you became one? Some people are born with an impulse to be artists—people who have had no contact with art through their families or otherwise. The same thing is true in music, where somebody learns to play an instrument although the family tries to discourage him. He has the continuing drive to do it, so he plays. In my case, I had the continuing drive to be an artist, as well as the background. You have to want to do it all the time.

The important word is "continuing," isn't it? Art is very hard work and it takes a lot of effort to master it. Playing a musical instrument is hard, too, but there's only one way to do it and that is to practice continuously. The same thing applies to art. There's no getting around it, Art is the product of the desire of the person to paint. Picasso is a striking example. He just makes pictures all the time, day and night, seven days a week. Why does he do it? He can't help himself.

What are you trying to communicate to those who look at your work? No verbal communication, but a visual statement of my interests and enthusiasms from day to day and year to year. The visual structure of the picture, the design of the picture, the color of the picture, all have a quality

or stupid, so that the place of drawing in art is primary at all times. Drawing is objectively necessary in order to communicate the subjective content of your experience. Drawing is, essentially, the constructing of an object. You are building something, giving your subjective experience a physical identity. Knowing this, you realize that you have to learn the rules of effective construction, which is drawing.

What is your first response to a subject? Emotional? Intellectual? Analytical? It's a spontaneous, unpredictable response to something—a non-analytical, personal reaction of excitement and interest. Of course, something else has entered the situation already which causes you to formulate this subjective feeling in an objective visual vocabulary.

Can you visualize the finished painting immediately? In a sense yes, and yet the more you know the more you don't know. Painting itself can open up ways to say things you couldn't say before. I always have the need to express moods and deeper feelings. If you ever learned how to do this completely, all you would be doing would be repeating clichés and terms that are already familar.

Students often wonder how they can tell if a subject is

monplace today and widely accepted that people recognize its excitement. Let me say that the purpose of so-called "abstract" art is basically the same as all other art and that it always has a subject matter. Mondrian's purpose, for example, is to make a statement of his spiritual experience. Common experience with form, color and space in Nature is the subject matter of his art, made explicit in the terms of a logical visual system.

What, then, is realistic art? In general it's art in which the images identify easily with familiar ones.

What do you look for in a picture? I look for a complete and balanced object. By this I mean the picture itself in its totality, not something outside the picture. The balance means completeness and completeness means balance. This is the primary consideration. This is not something I look for consciously—it's an automatic response. And since, at one time or another, I've looked at all the kinds of pictures there are, I know if the picture is in the tradition of first-class work or not. If it is, it holds your attention. It's a new comment, a new statement in the modern tradition of good art and you believe it. That's all I respond to. Certainly not to subject matter or medium or size.

Premiere courtesy The Los Angeles County Museum

The Terminal courtesy The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Collection

worthwhile and important enough to paint. What would you advise the student to seek in his own environment as subject matter for pictures? The answer to that is, of course, that any subject is a worthwhile subject, just as all incidents in life are real and worthwhile and demand your response. If you look at the history of painting, any subject which you are likely to run into has been regarded as important enough to use in art at some time or other. Any subject is important. I have used as subjects the most insignificant things at one time or another—a book of pocket matches or a tin can or a package of cigarettes. While I don't limit myself to insignificant objects, I realize that the response is what is important and not the subject which inspires it. Every day you have the capacity to respond and it's the strength of your response which gives importance to a subject, not the subject itself.

How would you define abstract art? All these words are open to a thousand interpretations. Abstract art is so com-

What actually makes a picture? Except that it's impossible to state these things categorically, I would say balance and completeness. This can happen in a hundred thousand different ways. You can put a line down the middle of a page and you are making a picture, but it's a bloody bore because it's so elementary. It doesn't give you anything new. Your sense of completeness and balance comes out of your body. You have to coordinate in order to exist, so you demand this of a picture. If it doesn't correspond to a complexity of feelings that are a necessity to you, you don't care about it. The thing you look at will be of continuing interest to you if it makes a demand on you to respond. So it doesn't make any difference if the figures of the painting are geometric or human or vegetable. It's the totality of the picture, the figures and their environment in the picture, to which you respond.

What use is a picture anyway? It's just one of a multiplicity of things that people want and in order to get them they

make them. People want to make them and look at them and own them. It's one of the many things they do to express their enthusiasm for life.

How has the camera influenced art? It's an extension of the sense of sight and gives it permanence and angles of vision that were not possible before. It hasn't changed the purpose of art in any sense, but it's made certain kinds of painting unnecessary. In the past there were a lot of realistic paintings done of scenes and people. Now you can take a camera on your vacation instead of having a painting made. It's affected painting in this sense. But it hasn't changed art and it hasn't changed people.

What is the value of experimental art? A person doesn't experiment in art only. As he matures, his abilities demand that he understand more in every field. Why home cooking? You could survive on a woodchuck cooked over an open fire. Fortunately your curiosity will make you try different things with food. Curiosity is innate in man.

How can an artist develop originality? He can develop his own potential. Everybody has originality. It's developed through work. The person has to be himself. The development of himself is the achievement of originality. Some people don't seem to want to be themselves.

White Walls courtesy The Downtown Gallery

International Surface #1 courtesy The Downtown Gallery

Tournos courtesy The Downtown Gallery

Have you ever wanted to be somebody else? I'm sure I must have, but I forget who. If you live long enough you find out you can't, so you resume being yourself.

What artists influenced you in your development? In the beginning Robert Henri and his group. I had the advantage of my family's association with these artists. I just took their attitude toward things for granted and felt this was the way to be. But when I saw the Europeans I reacted very strongly. A Van Gogh reproduction is in every hotel room today but at that time he was a complete surprise. Later I was influenced by Seurat, Picasso and Leger, among others.

Would you like to collect any artists who are working now? I don't collect anything. I have no interest in owning works of art. I don't have any of my own paintings around. I'm working on my ideas all the time and the one I'm working on represents all of them. If I have the others around they distract me. Now if you asked what artists interest me, that would be different. I think there is more art going on right now than in any other period of the human race, including the Renaissance. Every newspaper, magazine, radio program has some reference to art. The amount of art being sought, produced, talked about is unprecedented. Because of the vast amount there's a lot of bad art, but then there always was. There's a lot of good art, too. I have preferences, but I don't want to advertise my competition.

Do you think an artist must have talent to succeed? I think he's in a hell of a fix if he hasn't.

What other factors are important to success? Endlesss energy, and some people have that. It's a talent in itself and the more you have the better. Hard work, including self-criticism.

What principal advice would you give the student of art? I would advise him to like good art, to look at it and try to organize his own feelings in the spirit of the best work. Instead of looking at bad work, look at good work.

You have always been ahead of your time and often must have felt frustrated because it took so long for public taste to catch up with yours. Could you have painted in the style of the day if you had wanted to? I couldn't have painted any other way than I did. It simply didn't interest me. I couldn't have devoted myself to that kind of thing. I bought a book of Toulouse-Lautrec reproductions in 1912. In those days not many people knew who he was. Now everybody does. Only in the last ten to fifteen years has the balance swung the other way, toward modern art. The dealers have promoted it, but it wouldn't work unless the public accepted it as corresponding to life. The tempo of life is not in academic work. Modern art has a contemporary feeling. I, along with some other people, was ahead of the time in recognizing it.

And now your taste has been justified. You're on the side of the angels at last. How does it feel? To me it feels quite natural.

Stuart Davis, Abstract Painter, Dead at 69

Forerunner of Pop Art Depicted Jazzy, Billboard America

Stuart Davis, a leading American abstract painter, died of a heart attack Wednesday as he was being taken to Roosevelt Hospital. His age was 69, and he lived at 15 West 67th Street. Word of his death was given out yesterday.

Mr. Davis's bright, jazzy interpretations of the American scene led to his recent recognition as a precursor of Pop art.

His paintings incorporated elements of signs, calligraphy numbers and billboards. David Sylvester, the British critic, recently said, "His work reflects a professional artist's involvement with the apparatus of Coke culture."

His titles displayed pungency and wit sometimes more obviously than the works to which they were affixed. Among them were "Max No. 1," "For Internal Use Only," "Egg Beater No. 2," "Owh! In San Pao" and "Detail Study for Cliché."

Mr. Davis himself said, "I have enjoyed the dynamic American scene for many years, and all my pictures (including the ones I painted in Paris) are referential to it."

'Store Fronts and Taxicabs'

"Some of the things that have made me want to paint, outside of other paintings, are: Civil War and skyscraper architecture; the brilliant colors on gasoline stations, chain-store fronts and taxicabs; synthetic chemistry; fast travel by train, auto and airplane, which has brought new and multiple perspective; electric signs; the landscape and boats of Gloucester, Mass.; 5 and 10 cent store kitchen utensils; movies and radio; Earl Hines's hot piano and Negro jazz music in general," he wrote.

He is represented in museums and private collections throughout the country. The Museum of Modern Art owns eight of his oils, among other work, and is currently exhibiting two of them — "Lucky Strike" and "Visa."

His "Combination Concrete No. 2" is on display at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Mr. Davis was a stocky, roly-poly man with a jowly face and a manner that was deceptively gruff. He had as friends many jazz musicians and enjoyed discussing their art, his art and art in general. He loved city life, too. Mrs. Edith Halpert, his dealer since 1926 and director of the Downtown Gallery, said, "He hated trees and the country."

Born in Philadelphia

Although he disdained rusticity, Mr. Davis spoke strongly about his role as an American artist:

"I am an American, born in Philadelphia of American stock," he said. "I studied art in America. I paint what I see in America, in other words, I paint the American scene. But I use, as a great many others do, some of the methods of modern French painting which I consider to have universal validity."

Mr. Davis was born on Dec. 7, 1894. His father, Edward Wyatt Davis, was art editor of The Philadelphia Press and employed as illustrators such prominent artists as John Sloan, George Luks, William Glackens and Everett Shinn.

When Mr. Davis was 7, his father was appointed art editor and cartoonist on The Newark Evening News, and the family moved to East Orange, N. J.

In 1909 he quit East Orange High School in his first year to study with Robert Henri, a members of the Ashcan school of painters, who chose their themes from the world of saloons, alleys and gutters.

In February, 1913, the International Exhibition of Modern Art—later to become famous as the Amory Show—opened. It introduced American artists to works by avant-garde European painters and sculptors. There was a large American section, and although Mr. Davis was only 19, he contributed five water-colors. He later described the show as "a great shock—the greatest single influence I have experienced in my work. I resolved that I would quite definitely have to become a modern artist."

Conway Studio

Stuart Davis

During the closing months of World War I, Mr. Davis served in a branch of Army Intelligence, drafting maps and graphs. He was stricken in the Spanish influenza epidemic in 1918 and went to Havana to recuperate. On his return, his orbit swung from New York to Gloucester.

Mr. Davis admired Gloucester for its "brilliant light, topographical severity and the architectural beauties of the Gloucester schooner." Wandering over the rocks with a sketching easel, canvases and a pack on his back, he came closer to his abandonment of literalism in painting.

After a while, he noted, he began to drop the heavy physical paraphernalia of the painter for a small sketchbook and fountain pen and to cast aside conventional representation. In one of the most unusual disciplines of modern art, he put an egg beater on his studio table and painted innumerable variations of it for a year.

"My aim was to strip a subject down to the real physical source of its stimulus. Everything that I have done since has been based on that egg-beater idea."

When the Federal Art Project under Edward Bruce was set up in 1934, Mr. Davis was one of the first artists to enlist. Later he was an instructor in the Works Progress Administration Art Project, which held classes for adults and children throughout the city.

In 1944, the Museum of Modern Art gave Mr. Davis a retrospective show of 53 canvases. Many prizes followed — an honorable mention from the Carnegie Institute in 1944, a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1952 and Guggenheim International Awards in 1958 and 1960. Last January, he won a gold medal for the best picture in oil at the annual exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

Lloyd Goodrich, director of the Whitney Museum, said yesterday that "he was one of the most natively American and at the same time most universal of artists. His art came, directly and powerfully, out of American life. As a painter, and as a person, he was very much his own man."

Survivors include his widow, the former Roselle Springer, a son, Earl; his mother, Mrs. Helen S. Davis of Gloucester, and a brother, Wyatt.

The funeral will be private.

"Standard Brand," an oil done by Stuart Davis in 1961

Major American Artist

Davis's Work Was Never Out of Date —He Anticipated Movements in Art

By BRIAN O'DOHERTY

Stuart Davis was never what people nearly always thought he was. He was a loner, but he had a name for being a mixer. He looked like an indigenous All-American, but he was aman of great sophistication and charm —if you knew him. He had no time for fools.

His death removes one of the limited company of major painters America has produced. Although he had been in and out of hospitals, his death was unexpected. He was improving, he felt he had a new future, he had begun working again. Not being able to work had made him miserable. "I can't get the release that work gives you," he said when he was ill. But in the past year he had done some major painting. He had completed a picture Wednesday.

Spare, Balanced Prose

"Art isn't a commodity. It must mean something to the human race," he said not long ago. He tried to make it mean something every way he knew how. He was argumentative, a letter writer, a controversialist, a fighter. He saw sides and took them. He was downright tough, and tender. He wrote a spare, balanced prose, tightly logical. He talked hip. His intellect was precise, his emotions numbered.

He was never out of date. Whatever happened in the world of art already seemed to have a precedent in his painting. His hard, dissonant color, his rigorous intellectual integrity, his use of words and letters in some abrupt aphasic alphabet of his own, all found confirmation in subsequent developments—as if the present had undertaken to prove his past.

His colors were snapping and staccato long before the new optical art hit the galleries. And the word obsessions that occur in Pop art had a natural ancestor in him.

He was an urban animal. He united the febrile vitality of the city with an abstraction so firmly founded on principal that his art is classical in spirit if not in narrow definition. Art and life collided and fused in his best work through the medium of a mind passionate for order.

The famous egg-beater series was an expression of that cool passion for order, for syntax, for discipline. He understood the vocabulary of form and color, and their creation of space, as few modern artists have.

When he talked about art, he talked with concentrated gnomic clarity, capable of shading meaning precisely. The violence and pungency of his work often depended on the most oblique and subtle shading of his means. This gave his art a firmness and durability that made it a standard of honesty on the artistic scene, a point of stable reference every new artist felt he had to consider in taking his own bearings.

Did Not Profit in Victory

A pioneer, he never profited greatly from the revolution he helped win—the cause of abstract art in America. He didn't believe greatly in revolution, he simply wanted recognition for the new ideas, not total triumph. "I'm in favor of ideas and their execution, but I don't think everyone has to be," he said.

He had no sympathy with artistic anarchy. "You don't add to tradition by destroying it," he said once. "I'm not interested in overthrow. I believe in permanent values. Isn't anything permanent for the future, in the future?"

This is the final paradox for those who saw him as some sort of hipster ancestor living at his nerve endings. The deceptively matter - of - fact exterior (he looked like someone who was going to go and shoot craps any minute) concealed a classic spirit, a spirit of the sort that could find some principal of eternal order in the neon wilderness of Times Square. He searched disorder for its unifying principle. Not long before his death, he told me: "The value of impermanence is to call attention to the permanent."

It becomes his epitaph.

of the family . . . You can't have Whitman's [dad] run through the par[...]out changing the look [...]s."

* * *

MAY 1 1962

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Art: Paintings of the Honk and Jiggle

Stuart Davis Catches Mood of the City

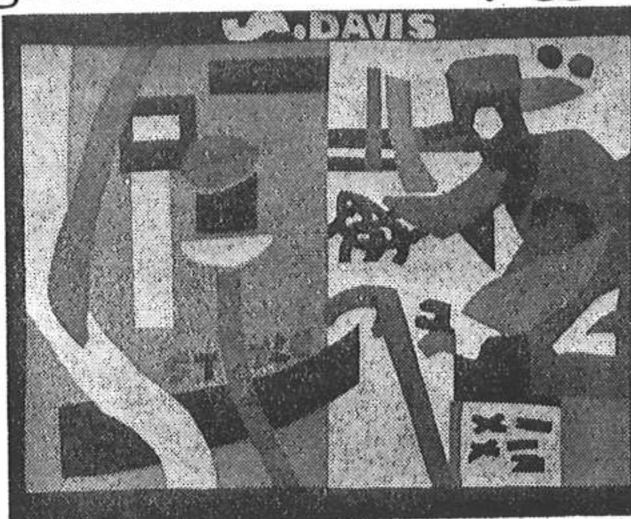
By BRIAN O'DOHERTY

IT'S real wild, man, Brief, terse, and straight, that's the way it is, man. You'll dig it. It's got class.

Stuart Davis' first one-man exhibition of new work in six years, at the Downtown Gallery, 32 East Fifty-first Street, gives spirits wilted by the relentless bombardment of bad art a real lift. The most American of American abstractionists invokes with all his old skill the visual twitch and jiggle of the American city in canvases that blare, burp, and hop with bright, shallow color. They also give broad hints of a new lease of life and lyricism in some smaller pieces that, while they could never be called still, don't fight their way out of the frame so agressively as some of his earlier work.

He is still honking his neon-like yellows and greens and reds, still slicing precisely his poster-placard shapes, still signing his large squiggly signature that looks as if it were squeezed out of toothpaste tube. And he is still putting them all together to create from very simple means a hot and electric visual tension that makes the delirium of Times Square and Forty-second Street more bearable. Out-of-towners suffering from the assaults of Manhattan on the ear and eye should spend a few bracing moments with these pictures and emerge to take on the city, not refreshed, but with their threshold of irritation braced to a higher level.

For Mr. Davis' art, in its frank collision with the raw kaleidoscope of the city, is hip. It swings. And it reminds one that he is one of the fathers of the Beats.



"Night Life 1962," by Stuart Davis, is in his exhibition at the Downtown Gallery, 32 East Fifty-first Street.

While holding Mr. Davis' pictures off, there are a few things one can quickly notice. Sometimes the paint swells to a juicy fatness, and here and there he takes care to frame his pictures with a red or black ribbon to hold them more firmly down. His off-key dissonances of color are not so loud, but they are more sustained. He is better in more solid pictures than in more linear ones. He is one of the few men who can force linear and curvilinear elements to stay together in the same picture.

Mr. Davis, like the early Cubists, favors words and letters. But while the Cubists broke words in half and turned them into visual furniture, Mr. Davis' pictures suck whole words into them, and leave them there like neon-signs that have flashed briefly and then stayed on. One looks at them in a slightly stunned way, as if entering a familiar city after a wearying drive. The words he favors are hip. Taking all of them in random sequence from the present exhibition and stringing them together without punctuation they go like this:

"Complet lines thicken Belle France pad news cat style Hotel eau eite any OXO no." The French influence is from a picture called "The Paris Bit."

To compound the persecution of the conventional and the square, Mr. Davis signs his signature inside out, upside down, sideways, at times confining himself to his first name, as if signing a letter. Obviously he has been enjoying himself, using the spectator as a punchbag, or if you can stand up to him, as a sparring partner. For Mr. Davis' pictures either invigorate or destroy his opponent.

Stuart Davis, *Unfinished Business;* courtesy Downtown Gallery.

In the Galleries

Review by Donald Judd

Stuart Davis: There should be applause. Davis, at sixty-seven, is still a hot shot. Persistent painters are scarce; painters with only a decade or less of good work are numerous. There is a Cubist painting of two apples and a jug, done in 1923, which is easily attributable to Davis; there are good Fauvish landscapes going back to 1916. The present exhibit of paintings done between 1958 and 1962 is first-rate. That makes forty-six years. The "amazing continuity" of Davis' work does not seem to have been kept with blinders, in fact, could not have been. Neither has Davis been startled into compromises with newer developments. Some older artists abandoned developed styles for one of the various ideas included under "Abstract Expressionism," spoiling both. Davis must also have faced the fact of increased power and different meanings. Instead of compromising, he kept all that he had learned and invented and, taking the new power into account, benefited. His painting, certainly not by coincidence, gained in scale, clarity and power after 1945, and gained further after 1950. *Tournos, Visa, Memo, Cliché, Owh! In San Paò* are all instances. It takes a lot not to be smashed by new developments and a lot to face power and learn from it. The present paintings are comparable to the ones of the last ten years. Perhaps Davis should again increase the scale and add wilder notes. Matisse's collages, Léger's paintings, the work of some of the younger artists are challenges. Someone at the show thought Davis should just write his name across a canvas billboard size. A change is that some of the paintings are hotter and therefore more dense. *Unfinished Business* is a rectangle of yellow deep within a red border. The yellow deep presses forward against black, green and red printing, writing, circles, an X and a large Harlequin shape. It is a somber painting. *Standard Brand*, one of the largest works, sixty by forty-six inches, is similarly hot. The paintings are full of such "color-space" devices, which are decreasingly spatial and additionally interlocked, as the bulky, white, indecipherable word written equally across the adjoining black and yellow deep. The black shows through the loop of an "l" over it and also through the loop of a "p" over the yellow. An apparent "e" and a "c" contain both colors, the division as it is. The white seems negative, which makes the black and the yellow positive, but is obviously positive, which replaces everything and so on; it is all subtle and complex. *Pochade*, another big one and a good one, contrasts several two-color schemes. One half has black lines "on" red; the other half has red lines "on" white around a black with green lines labeled "CAT."

The Artist's Voice

Josef Albers
Ivan Albright
Alexander Calder
Stuart Davis
Edwin Dickinson
Marcel Duchamp
Naum Gabo
Morris Graves
Hans Hofmann
Edward Hopper
Franz Kline
Jacques Lipchitz
Isamu Noguchi
Georgia O'Keeffe
Ben Shahn
David Smith
Mark Tobey

Talks with seventeen artists by

Katharine Kuh

K. Kuh

STUART DAVIS

Question: Why do you use words so often in your paintings?
Davis: I paint my pictures spontaneously, but not in a technical sense. In a technical sense I work on them for months. It's spontaneous content I'm interested in, and by this I mean the direct reaction of the spectator to the finished painting and the continuous reaction of the artist himself as he's working on it. There's the consciousness of a considered design and its re-formation over and over, but there's also the continued immediate response of the artist as he works and changes the painting. Then a delightful thing happens at the time an artist finds his painting satisfactory, and also finds thousands of other people responding to the same satisfaction. I paint for myself, but I'm pleased to know that my own interests correspond to those of many other people.

But to return to this idea of words. The artist sees and feels not only shapes but words as well. We see words everywhere in modern life; we're bombarded by them. But physically words are also shapes. You don't want banal boring words any more than you want banal boring shapes or a banal boring life. You've always got to make a choice. In choosing words I find that the smallest idea is equal to the greatest. I've used insignificant words and drawn insignificant objects because at times these were all that were at hand. By giving them value as experiences and by equating great with little, I discovered that the act of believing was what gave meaning to the smallest idea. For instance, take my paintings that grew out of cigarette packages, or the canvas called Champion [*Plate 20*]. The idea for that picture came from a package of matches—an insignificant inspiration, but what made it work was a great belief in the possibilities of any inspiration.

For years I went out of doors and painted landscapes. The kind of paintings I'm making now (I think of them as structural continuities) are not particularly different; they just take less walking around on my part. I conceive the structural continuities as not confined by time limits. I have no sense of guilt when today I use a design I made forty years ago or last year. The past for me is equal to the present because thoughts I had long ago and those I have now remain equally valid—at least the ones that were really valid, remain valid.
Question: What are the most important forces behind your work?
Davis: I wrote about this almost twenty years ago in *Art News*, and what I said then still holds. "Some of the things which have made me want to paint, outside of other paintings, are: American wood and iron work of the past; Civil War and skyscraper architecture; the brilliant colors on gasoline stations, chain-store fronts and taxicabs; the music of Bach; synthetic chemistry; the poetry of Rimbaud; fast travel by train, auto and airplane which brought new and multiple perspectives; electric signs; the landscape and boats of Gloucester, Mass.; five-and-ten-cent-store kitchen utensils; movies and radio; Earl Hines' hot piano and Negro jazz music in general. In one way or another the quality of these things plays a role in determining the character of my paintings."
Question: How has jazz influenced your work?
Davis: You just saw my young son, Earl. I named him after Earl Hines. For a number of years jazz had a tremendous influence on my thoughts about art and life. For me at that time jazz was the only thing that corresponded to an authentic art in America. Mondrian also felt its impact; I talked to him about this several times. He responded to the basic rhythms of jazz in a direct physical way; they even made him want to dance. For me—I had jazz all my life—I almost breathed it like the air. I knew a lot of anonymous giants of jazz—I found them in Newark on Arlington Street. I think all my paintings, at least in part, come from this influence, though of course I never tried to paint a jazz scene. As a child my parents took me to Negro revues and shows; my sense of musical rightness probably stems from that education. But you could take some other child and he might just as well have hated it—I loved it and followed it up. It was the *tradition* of jazz music that affected me.
Question: Do you feel your work is basically American?

Davis: I've never lived anywhere else for an extended length of time—only once in Cuba for a few months and in Paris for a year and a half. Otherwise I've always lived here. Of course my work is American—it couldn't be anything else, but America is increasingly part of the world. It's the big cities here, I suppose, that have impressed me the most. I've accepted the noise, the cacophony (to use a big word) of present-day life as subject matter. I'm a thorough urbanite—one hundred per cent. New York City and my warm affection for Philadelphia have played a strong part in my paintings. One reason I liked Paris was because it reminded me of Philadelphia in the 1890's. You know I was born in Philadelphia. But all this isn't too conscious. You're born with a genetic tape that has a coded prescription for your behavior throughout your entire life—and never forget that it's in code.

Question: Do you name your pictures before or after you paint them?

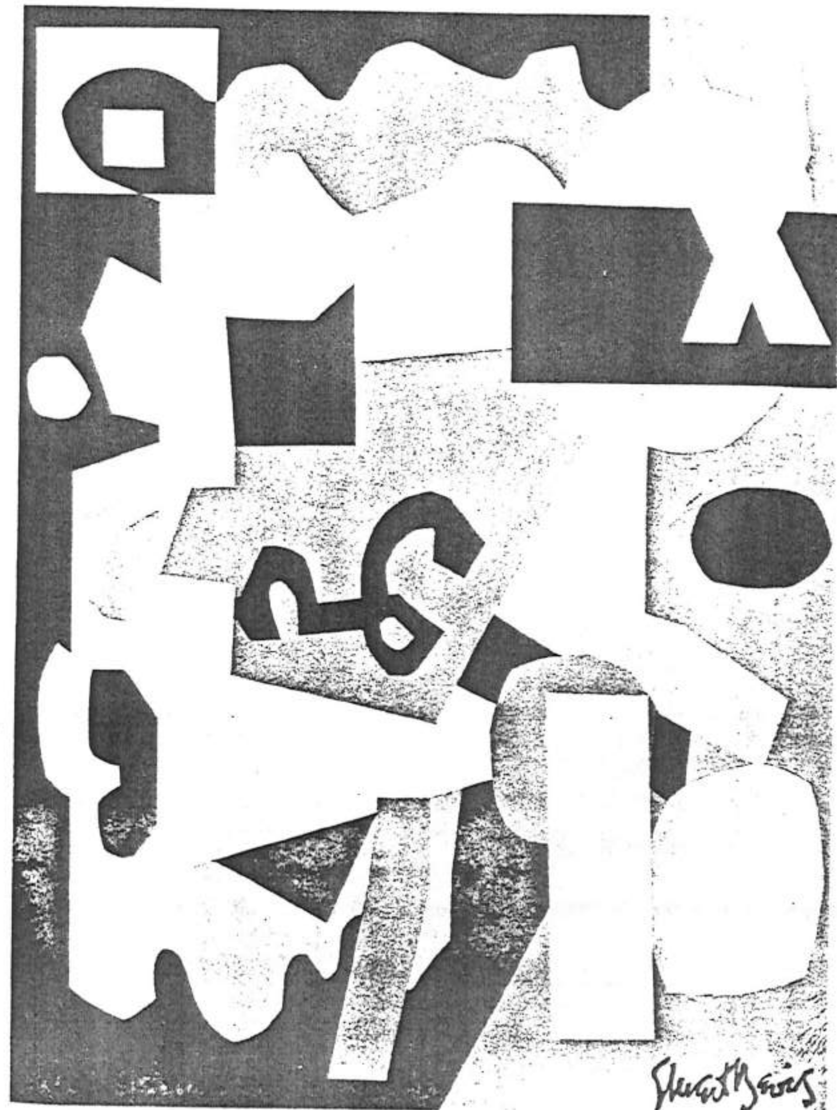
Davis: I name a picture both before and after I paint it—in the same way I use letters and words in a canvas. I consider part of the spontaneous subject matter I use as the basis for a painting. Now take Ready-to-Wear—that had to do with newsreels and radio programs. I consider shapes and words with all their multiple meanings as the normal content from which the intuitional premise of a painting originates. The picture called Visa [*Plate 21*], as you know, was the second version of Champion. Though the idea for the original painting came from a matchbox cover, I made another version because I had the possibility of using the same idea in, what I felt, was a better form. Why did I call it Visa? Oh—that's a secret. Because I believe in magic.

Question: Do you make preliminary sketches?

Davis: Yes, I make a lot of preliminary sketches, but the process of arriving at a satisfactory one takes weeks, even months. Mostly I use black and white drawings as sketches. The next step is to put the black and white drawing on the canvas. Then I define the larger areas in color.

Question: I notice that you use your name as part of the design.

Davis: Yes, because in the past it was customary for artists to sign their



22 *Ready-to-Wear, 1955* *The Art Institute of Chicago*

names on the front of paintings. I got the idea it ought to be integral, or else on the back of the canvas. People sometimes say—"that egotistical bastard," but after all if you're going to sign your work, why not make it a part of the composition? Refrigerator and automobile companies are not modest—why should the artist be?

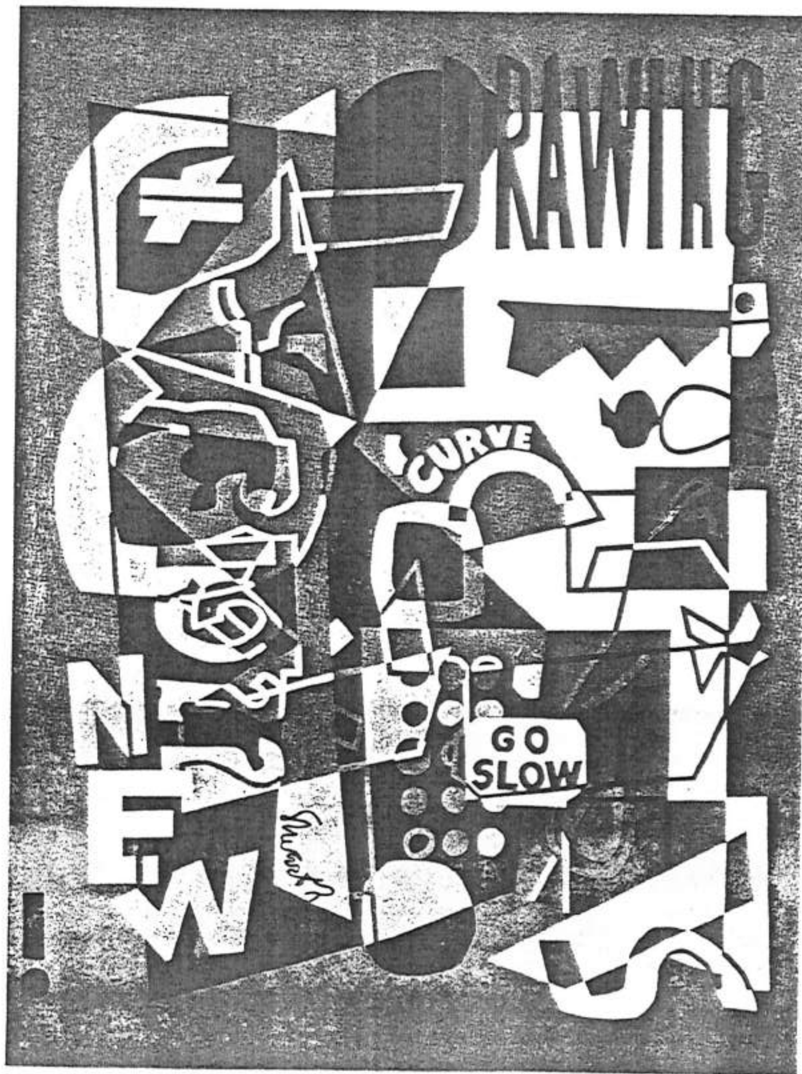
Question: What part does color play in your work?

Davis: It doesn't play any part in and by itself; my color is not decorative. But I consider that visual images exist only through color and the artist always has the choice of two or more colors. Even just two colors can define a front and back space, though which is front and which is back is irrelevant. What is important is that the two colors are not in the same place. When I taught, my students used to ask, "Is the red tablecloth in Matisse's painting in the front or back?" I'd always answer, "It's neither; it can be miles away or on top of you—like ordinary tiles in a bathroom floor. They're either in front or in back but they change as you look at them." It's a common optical experience to differentiate between front and back. In daily living it's practical and necessary to do this; but in a painting, space doesn't involve practical hazards. You can't break your neck in a painting. Even though you use the same sense of space in a picture that you use in crossing a street, you don't have the same obligations. With a painting you're completely *free* to *appreciate* your optical faculties.

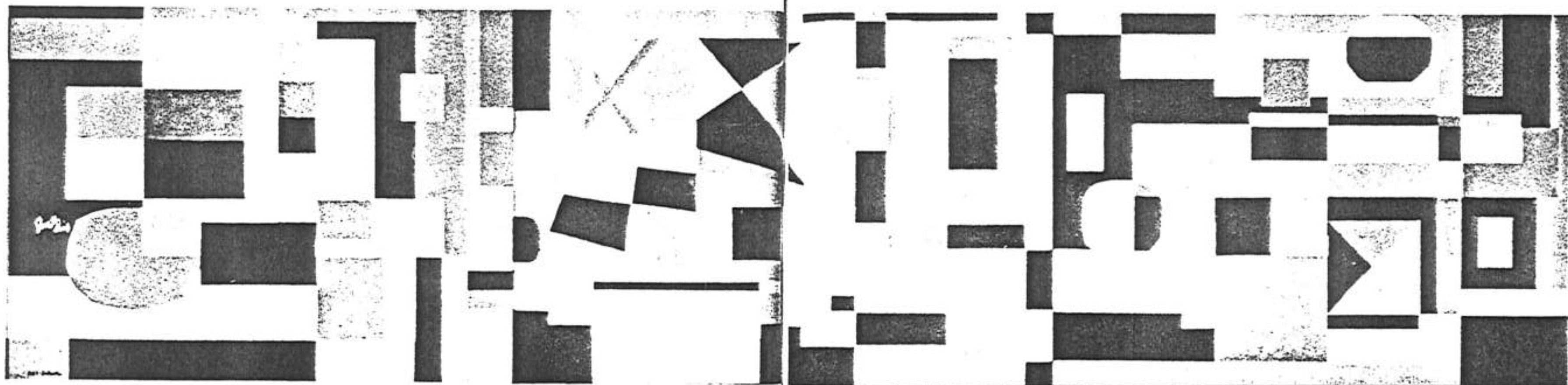
An artist can make a phenomenon with only two colors. The reason it's meaningful is because the two colors are not in the same place. I'm referring here only to the physical fact that to make a visual image exist, you must use at least two colors. They have significance for us because we can identify them with daily optical experiences. We interpret everything in terms of daily experiences, don't we? When you're talking about the space in a painting, you're hung up because it's not real space, but our life experience gives us clues that help us to see. The painting is never practical—it's a painting of space.

Question: But what are you really doing with color—not just as a physical tool?

Davis: The point is that different temperaments respond to the outside world in different ways. Some like prize fights; some don't. Some



23 *Combination Concrete No. 2, 1958* Collection Mr. and Mrs. Earl Wade Hubbard



27 *Allée, 1955* *Drake University, Des Moines*

like football games; some don't. Those who incline toward simple physical things respond to experiences in that same simple direct spirit, and consequently their image of the world will tend toward structural simplicity. What I'm trying to point out is that the colors I choose from the spectrum are appropriate to the purpose of my paintings, appropriate to the attitude in which the work was designed. Certain artists love to crawl in texture—this is a psychological thing. On the other hand, certain artists like myself choose simplicity and directness in color. Anybody can buy the colors I use in a store; it's how they're used that makes the difference. To me they are always integral to the purpose and the meaning of each painting. I prefer vigorous materials. By materials I mean canvas and paint. It is the interrelationship of these two that finally makes the structure of a picture.

Question: How do you feel about texture?

Davis: Years ago I decided that texture was a refuge for people who couldn't draw. If you pressed me, I'd say that any painter has a right to be a sculptor if he wants. I'm a refugee from sculpture. As a student I once went to a school of sculpture and stayed for a couple of weeks. When finally the teacher came around and looked at my work he said, "A monkey could do better." From that day to this I've been an enemy of any kind of statuary.

Question: If you had to choose a few of your most pivotal works, which would they be?

Davis: The Tobacco pictures [*Plate 24*] I painted around 1921–22, the Egg Beater series [*Plate 25*] of 1927–28 and the Paris paintings [*Plate 26*], as far as my earlier work is concerned. For me, though, my entire work is all part of the same interest. People are born in a certain way; they have certain ability. All one can do is objectify it. If you live long enough you learn something. Now here's a watercolor I did in 1912, almost fifty years ago. It has the same kind of structure and composition I still use, but I've learned something since then. I've learned how to make my work a public object—a universal communicative currency.

The Tobacco paintings came out of the Armory Show, though they were done nearly ten years later. The Armory Show had great

impact on me. The Egg Beater series was important because at that time I began to think of a painting as an object in itself. I'd always felt this way, but with the Egg Beaters it became clearer to me just how to go about it. As to the Paris paintings—I didn't go over there to paint scenes of Paris but that's exactly what I did when I got there. Personally I find these paintings do not differ in purpose from any of the other works I've done.

Question: Do your murals (I'm thinking especially of the one at Drake University) [*Plate 27*] present different problems than the easel paintings?

Davis: Yes, because I must take architecture into consideration. I was out in Des Moines twice looking at the interior of the building at Drake, at its color, shape and even at the color of the sky through adjacent windows. I painted that mural right here in my studio in three eleven-foot parts. I made careful preliminary designs but there were endless physical problems connected with it. There was the problem of finding large enough canvas of the right quality; there was the problem of temporary stretchers for use in the studio; the problem of permanent stretchers for final installation. Those have a built-in weather device to keep the canvas taut.

Question: What artists do you especially admire?

Davis: To my mind Seurat is the grand artist of all times. Here's the rest of my list: van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse (Cézanne is too intellectual for me), Picasso—I think he's a genius—and Léger. I guess that runs the gamut.

Question: What do you most want to get across?

Davis: You're asking Socrates to answer the riddle of the Sphinx in three minutes. I'll try to answer it in less. What I'm trying to do is resolve my daily intuitive questions into a practical visual logic that will last through the night. And if it lasts through the night it will last forever.

DAVIS

1894 *Born, Philadelphia.*
1901 *Moved to East Orange, New Jersey.*

1910–13 *Studied with Robert Henri.*
1913 *Made covers and drawings for "The Masses." Exhibited watercolors in Armory Show. Made cartoons for "Harper's Weekly."*
1915–34 *Summers in Gloucester.*
1918 *Made maps for Army Intelligence.*
1928–29 *Paris. Egg Beater series.*
1931–32 *Taught, Art Students League, New York.*
1933 *With Federal Art Project.*
1940–50 *Taught, New School for Social Research, New York.*
1941 *Retrospective exhibition, Cincinnati Modern Art Society and University of Indiana.*
1945 *Retrospective exhibition originating at Museum of Modern Art, New York.*
1952 *One-man show, Biennale, Venice.*
1952 *Guggenheim Fellowship.*
1956 *Elected member National Institute of Arts and Letters.*
1957 *Retrospective exhibition, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Whitney Museum, New York, etc.*
1958, 60 *Guggenheim International Award.*

Lives in New York City.

1965

Proceedings SECOND SERIES · NUMBER FIFTEEN

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LETTERS

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ARTS AND LETTERS

ACADEM

Stuart Davis
1892-1964

BY JULIAN LEVI

IT IS STARTLING to realize that before Stuart Davis there was no American painting which was, in subject motivation at least, indigenous. All of our previous painting had sprung from sources in our colonial past – specifically from Europe. Unencumbered by nostalgia (which he loathed) Davis perceived with stunning clarity the visual phenomenon of twentieth-century America, and in so doing, revealed it to all of us in a metaphor which seemed especially invented for the purpose. He nailed down in colors of the wildest intensity the clanging vulgarity, the energy, the mechanized, the dehumanized statement of our civilization's shrill heartbeat, all in the hard rhythms of jazz which he loved obsessively.

Stuart died on June twenty-fourth in an ambulance en route to Roosevelt Hospital. I cannot help speculating on how this curiously apt circumstance would have appealed to his sense of irony – this fast-moving vehicle, siren blaring, dashing through crowded streets festooned with neon lights – and not making it. Being a rationalist with a particularly skeptical attitude towards the medical profession, he would have understood failures in the improvisations characteristic of our life, without questioning their authenticity.

The biographical facts of Stuart Davis's life will never lend themselves to fictional treatment. They have a strangely astringent matter-of-factness which was so characteristic of the man

hich his ultimate aesthetic vocabulary evolved. A trip to France 1928 offered a congenial working climate for a year. He left ith regret, for France in the twenties was the undisputed Nirına of the artist. However, expatriation for Davis was out of ıe question. He is quoted as saying, "As an American I had need ır the impersonal dynamics of New York City." He never again ft the city except for summer visits to Gloucester, Massachu-tts, and the last of these was in 1934. This certainly was not ıltural jingoism – it was a man's declaration of faith in the soil hich nourished the roots of his creativity.

To gain further insight into what kind of a man Stuart Davis as, I have been studying what I knew of his culture-heroes, :arching for a pattern into which they might all fit. Here is a st of some of them: Earl (Father) Hines, pianist; Dan Parker, ›orts reporter; Loren Eiseley, anthropologist; Sammy Baugh, ›otball player; Alfred North Whitehead, mathematician; Louis .rmstrong, trumpeter – all notably fine performers, and perhaps ıe only thing they have in common is excellence in fields that 'ere relevant to Davis's fastidious and complex exploration of ıe American soil.

I never learned whether or not there were any painters in tuart Davis's personal pantheon. In writing about the Armory how, he mentioned that he respected particularly Gauguin, 'an Gogh and Matisse. In his old studio on Seventh Avenue, remember a single photograph clipped from an art magazine anging among his own paintings on wall space where there was .ttle to spare. This was a photograph of Seurat working in his 'aris studio. Perhaps it was the superb quality of the photograph :hich he found compelling enough to claim a place on those rowded walls – or maybe it was admiration of Seurat, who, like)avis, was a master of clarity and order.

By Stuart Davis

ART NEWS v. 56, n. 4
Summer (June-July-August) 1957
PP: 29-30

The place of painting in contemporary culture

The easel is a cool spot at an arena of hot events

The scope of Subject Matter indicated by the title of this essay could be taken as formidable and even alarming, but as a Scholar without Scholarship, I find it more convenient to take a Do-It-Yourself attitude and simply follow the Instructions on the package of my own experience.

In line with that decision, I feel able to make the categorical statement that The Place of Painting in Contemporary Culture consists entirely of what each artist emergently makes it. In my understanding the word Culture means a Subject Matter for art, as opposed to the notion of it as an Historical Imperative which makes the Rules, and then Scoops the Artist before the Algebra of his Dream has become a real Event. The Predictions of Cultural Determinism might allow the Artist to read his own Obituary in the Morning Paper, so to speak, but at the same time it would rob the Artist of his Birthright of the Enjoyment of it. But when culture is understood to be simply a splendid Environment of Events with no questions asked, the role of Painting seems much less Macabre, and can even be considered quite attractive. By the foregoing I think I have succeeded in changing the title of this occasion to one more suited to my ability in dealing with it. It now reads, "The Place of Culture in Contemporary Painting."

Contemporary Culture as a Subject includes the Past in the form of the Past and Present Individual Formulations of it. These exist on the same plane of our Awareness with what is Uniquely Immediate to the Twentieth Century. The latter includes New Lights, Speeds, Sounds, Communications and Jazz in general, as the Ornaments of daily Experience. Their continuous presentation to the Front Page of our Common Sense constitutes a Montage Perspective—a Short-Cut to the necessary Implementation for Knowing you are Alive. It holds the promise of an Automation Psychology suited to the Know-How for a Pre-Fabricated Humanism. It suggests

a Button for the Correct determination of Obligatory Moral Categories.

And then of course there is Modern Art with its Natural Giants of Painting in the last fifty years. That too is a laminated Fact in the Cultural Subject Matter for Today's Artist with a normal Appetite for the Air-Conditioned Now. The Continuity of Culture exists as a Sequence of Unconsidered and Unlicensed Choices and Identifications by Artists. They reserve their Faculty of Consideration and Comparison for the Mathematics of Tangibility which gives to Choice its forms as Public Currency. The Painting itself is the Responsible Social Act of the Artist, and is one of the surest, most direct forms of Communication known to man.

At one time or another, including the present, this question of Communication has been Viewed-with-Alarm by Scholars, Critics and others occupying a position Tangent to the Main Point. They are fond of saying that the Content of much of Modern Art is Perversely Cryptic, disassociated from the interests and observations of the Citizens, and that its Visual Idiom is impossible to Translate. In effect they demand of Art an Audit and Notarized Itemization of its Contents. I regard this as the Wrong Approach. It is not the Property Assets of the Painting's Subject which are the Measure of its Civic function, but rather the Unsolicited Blueprint of the picture's Shape-Identity—a Photostat of the Individual's Deed of Ownership to the Enjoyment of his own Senses.

The Artist Contemplates His Work: woodcut by Hokusai from the book of Chinese poems of the T'ang dynasty, titled *Yehon Toshisen*, 1833.

There is nothing more Universal in Experience than Enjoyment, but Art is simply *one* of the Techniques for its Social Communication and Use. To propose that the worth of Art stands in Direct Ratio to the Universality of its Appeal is a fairly meaningless Proposition. It represents basically an un-Democratic impulse to coerce not only the Artist but the Audience as well. In effect it would deprive the Individual of his Right to Free Choice of Technique in Creative Social Communication. It is necessary that the Right to Hate Art as well as to love it be preserved and that the current Popularity of the Aptitute Test be respected. In brief, since Modern Art is very well understood by Millions who are impelled to concern themselves with it—why quibble?

My personal guess as to the Meaning and Enormous Popularity of Modern Painting goes somewhat as follows:—I see the Artist as a Cool Spectator-Reporter at an Arena of Hot Events. Its continuing appeal to me since the Armory Show of 1913 is due, I believe, to its American Dynamics, even though the best Reporters then were Europeans operating in terms of European Identifications. Fortunately, we have our own share of Aces today. In his Professional Capacity the Modern Artist regards the subject of Subjective Feelings as a Casualty and never confuses them with the Splendor of the Continuity of Process, the Event itself. I see the Paintings as being made by Competent Workmen outside the self—not as a Signed Convulsion communicating an Enormous Capacity for Frustration with the Outside. I am aware that a number of excellent Artists today might seem to fall into the latter category and would regard my remark as offensive. But Offense is no part of my intention which is entirely one of Notation. I believe that there is a vast Audience which, like myself, is more interested in the Scenery than the Familiar Furnished Room of their own Short-Circuited Emotional Wiring.

I think that if the Contemporary Artist, with a reasonable amount of Taste for the Excitement and Impact of contemporary Culture in the sense I have indicated, will make his Report to the very Hip People—then both Art and Culture will do all right.

outline. Reacting to the stimulus of the old Gloucester sketch, Davis had gone directly to the drawing on canvas, with no other sketches made, "using the white surface as a blackboard." The tapes were used "for the purpose of temporarily isolating certain parts of the composition so that they can be treated separately for a time." They serve somewhat the same purpose "as coordinates between sea, earth and sky" as the masts of schooners in Davis' earlier pictures. "These divisions," he stressed, "have nothing to do with good design, dynamic symmetry or any kind of ideal proportion like the golden section."

In the upper left were two crosses set diagonally "to show that something is happening. In some places the action of these happenings is slow; in others, like the zig-zig shape [at the lower right], it is happening fast." At the edges, where one plane overlapped another, a slight recession was sometimes indicated by a discontinuous sequence—a place where a line continued from one plane to another with a slight change in direction.

Several weeks later the changes in the drawing were in the nature of consolidation rather than revision.

The precise adjustments of linear direction, the gradual materializing of shapes out of lines, were evidence of a severe discipline. Davis had been working six or seven hours each day "sitting or standing in front of the easel, with everything else excluded." Once or twice there were interruptions—"I had to go uptown, then the day's work was ruined."

A free, rectangular pattern, which now appeared in the center right, had been elaborated to make a texture. Davis explained that this area could be thought of "as having the vibrancy of water or light breaking over grass." "It corresponds," he added, "to the textures that French artists often get through mixing several different grades of sand with paint."

The word "ANY" appeared at the left, cut off by a wedge-like shape. "'Any' is a good word because it could be anything or any other shape," Davis said seriously. "The same kind of action could have been produced by using another pattern in that spot, but I like to use words as a variation in my subject matter, as long as they don't obtrude any meaning that would distract from the character of the rest of the picture." In a later picture dealing with some [illegible] position occupied here by "any."

Almost two months after the picture had been started, it was still in the stage of a black-and-white drawing or "drawing with two intervals," as Davis called it. A diagonally placed cross, two irregular, intersecting shapes and a pattern of circles now animated the plane at the upper right—a space adjoining the circle and triple bars, which, being at the top, would probably be interpreted by most people as a sun and clouds. "I might have thought of it as sky at some time," Davis said, "but on the canvas now, it simply represents a different kind of activity." He added, "I have now established three different scales in the different intervals of the circular pattern, the rectangular pattern and the checkerboard square below."

A solid cross and a nest of rectangles had replaced the earlier diagonal lines, conforming, Davis pointed out, in their new right-angular position to the direction imposed by the taped divisions. The interval of width set up in this top part of the picture was consistently carried out in the new motifs at the bottom: a figure 8 in lower left, irregular rectangles adjoining it, and a variation on the cross motif just above the legend.

The total effect of all these changes was to create actions, about equalized in pull, in every part of the canvas. Davis speaks of actions rather than of space. Apparently a space is, to him, what happens in it (a point of view that seems characteristic of American extroverted sensibility).

Before colors were applied to the picture, the tapes were removed as "their force in the operation had now been absorbed into the shapes and positions of the motifs themselves." The final charcoal lines were brushed over with turpentine to fix them and chalk was rubbed over the revised outlines. The lettering was given thickness.

Davis referred to the next stage as "working with six color intervals instead of two." The word "intervals" is crucial to understanding here, since Davis does not use color either to stand for local colors of real things or to indicate recession. He uses colors as positions in relation to fixed extremes, much as a musician uses a progression of tones from high to low, in notes varied on the basis of set intervals. The particular color extremes that are set up—red to green, or blue to orange—are less important than the amount and kinds of steps between them. That is why colors did not have to be determined in advance, but were decided from day to day once the drawing was complete.

Green was thought of as the color of the over-all canvas in *Rapt at Rappaport's*. Whether it was suggested initially by the green traffic light or by a certain mood is irrelevant to the work itself. At any rate, the green that Davis mixed—white with a bluish Rembrandt green of the phthalocyanine type—could be called a stop-light color. Using a sable brush about a half-inch wide, Davis applied this green, liberally diluted with turpentine, to the largest, generally outside shape. He usually mixes all the colors needed for one [illegible] utility table on wheels. A second, auxiliary palette, also on a wheeled cart, is needed only when more than one picture is in progress at a time. Having mixed his initial piles of color—he never uses colors right out of the tube—he does not modify them further, but uses the same mixture throughout the picture.

"The first spot of color you put down determines the logic of the possible sequences," he observed. With Davis the choice is bound to be an opposition rather than an immediate harmony. Thus red-orange was the next color used because "it was approximately, not exactly, the complement of the green." For this he mixed a little white with a cadmium red-orange (made by Roberson, an English firm). Again thinning the paint for the first coat, he brushed the color in the next largest plane, working carefully up to the edges of interior shapes. Occasionally he changed to a pointed sable brush for smaller shapes.

The next decision, faced a day or so later, involved a complex of three planes top and right, which Davis considered related and "dominated by the idea of blue." Although the uppermost area was the sky-associated one, Davis said he chose blue (Winsor and Newton's Permanent) simply because of its complementary relationship to the red-orange. The cooler crimson red (Rembrandt rose), which he later used in the background of the circular pattern, restored the other half of the complement, split in relation to the blue. The last large plane to be filled in, the ground for the rectangular pattern, became black. It was painted with a mixture of ultramarine and burnt umber, a blend which dries faster than prepared blacks.

With main dispositions of color established, it remained only to combine them in varying degrees of vibration in the smaller shapes, from the quiet effect of blues and greens in the checkered square to the sharp contrast of the alternately green and white rectangles above. Tapes painted with the colors were occasionally used to try out a certain shape and amount of contrast.

The final step was to go over with a thicker coat of paint—unmixed with any medium—each separate color shape. The use of the same wide sable brushes left these areas with the crisp and smooth textured surface Davis prefers, since his textures are not in the paint, but in the shapes.

As soon as the picture was finished it was sent off to the Whitney Museum's 1952 annual exhibition of American painting, and Davis shortly afterward began a new picture with many of the same motifs as *Rapt at Rappaport's*. "It's the same thing as when a musician takes a sequence of notes and makes many variations on them."

At the Whitney, spectators, as usual, read many different meanings into the picture with its enigmatic legend; and some of them reached the artist. "People always make analogies and they always differ," he commented. "You only get analogies, though, when there is something very real in the painting."

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ARTS

STUART DAVIS' JIVE
By John Lucas

THE FINE ART OF JIVE STUART DAVIS

It's the same thing as when a musician takes a sequence of notes and makes variations upon them . . . You only get analogies, though, when there is something very real in the painting.
—Stuart Davis

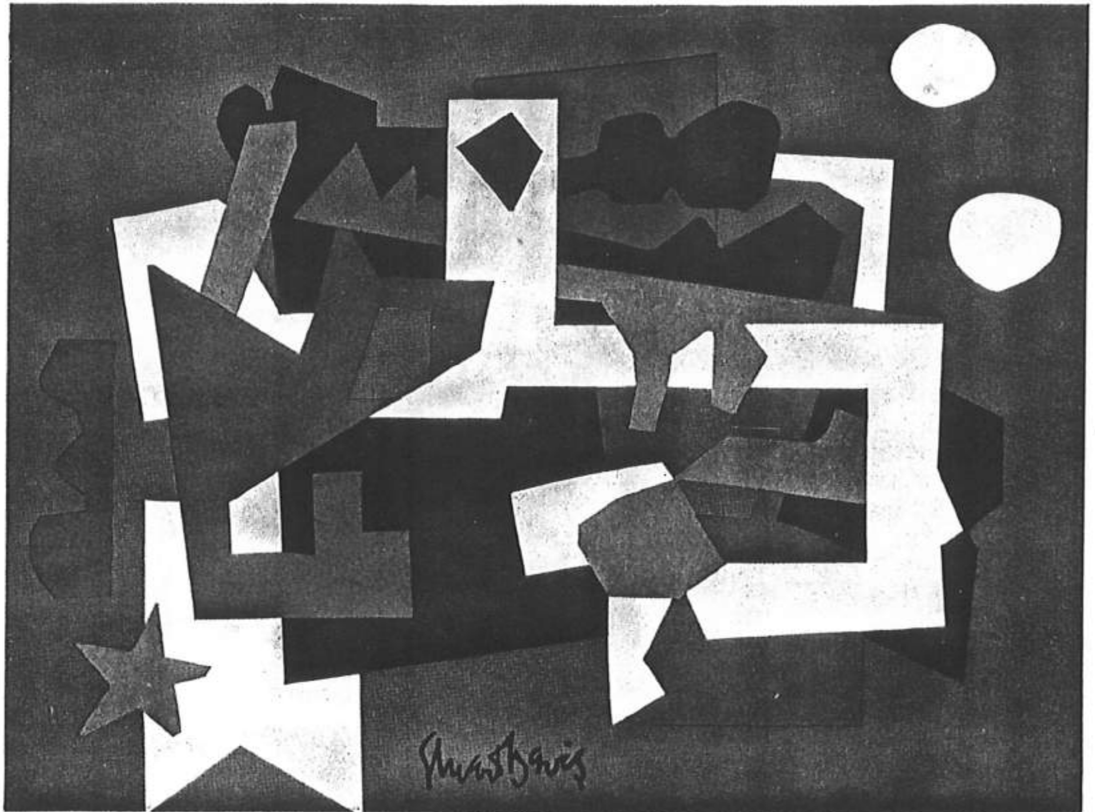
BY JOHN LUCAS

"MAN is an analogy-drawing animal; that is his good fortune. His danger is of treating analogies as identities," cautioned W. H. Auden in his first address at Oxford last year. "The more one loves another art, the less likely it is that one will wish to trespass upon its domain." His friend Stephen Spender apparently agrees, for reviewing a recent book on Gertrude Stein in *The New York Times* he asked rhetorically: "Is it possible that her conception of herself was based on a false analogy between her own work and music, painting and science?" He echoed Lessing again in concluding: "It might even justify Gertrude Stein's experiments, should they teach us to give up talking about one art as though it were another."

Yet in our time this tendency to correlate the arts has proved both pervasive and productive. An artist like Klee detected Bach in Delaunay, and a critic like Grohmann saw Schoenberg in Klee. Moreover, whereas Kandinsky was content to treat art in terms of music, Schoenberg actually tried his hand at painting, and Klee on occasion turned musician or poet. Their associate Feininger, an American raised in the Bauhaus, quite naturally incorporated musical characteristics into his work. Stuart Davis has done the same, with this difference: the music with which he has consorted is not that of Bach or Schoenberg, but of Armstrong and Calloway, Waller and Hines.

With the mounting at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis of his most important show* since the 1945 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Stuart Davis has again been confirmed as a painter who engages the liveliest interest of his contemporaries. This interest bears on, among other things, the connection between Davis and jazz. The painter himself when speaking of his art has frequently directed attention to this relationship, most recently perhaps in

* After its initial showing at Minneapolis in May, the exhibition went to the Des Moines Art Center and then to the San Francisco Museum of Art. It is now featured at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York (September 25-November 17).



Colonial Cubism (1954); collection of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

an unpublished interview with Sidney Simon in the course of which he maintained:

> Jazz has been a continuous source of inspiration in my work from the very beginning for the simple reason that I regard it as the one American art which seemed to me to have the same quality of art that I found in the best modern European painting.

He has also brought notice to it by giving his canvases such titles as *Swing Landscape* and placing within them such tags as "Dig This Fine Art Jive." The question is whether such assertions and maneuvers remain mere whimsy or assume validity and significance when considered in conjunction with the works.

THERE would seem to be three potential links between painting and music. The most obvious for an artist to exploit is that of the subject itself. Dubuffet, for instance, has an oil entitled *Jazz* in which the only visible justification is the fact that it purports to depict a jazz pianist, guitarist, cornetist, drummer, clarinetist, saxophonist and bassist all standing stiffly in a row. Not even Claude Luther ever looked or sounded like this, but it nonetheless makes good material for a typical Dubuffet. A second possibility involves a painter's examining jazz techniques in the hope of implementing or augmenting his own. How this can be done is demonstrated by the late collage series which Matisse called *Jazz*, wherein not the theme but the treatment reflects an effort to absorb and express the music's meaning. What constitutes the most exacting of all, however, is an artist's attempt to catch the very spirit without resorting to jazz as a subject and without employing techniques deriving by analogy from jazz. Toward this end Léger, whom Davis considers the backbone of modern art, made a start in his lithograph *Jazz*. It remained for Davis, though, to capture its spirit with no recourse to jazz for a theme.

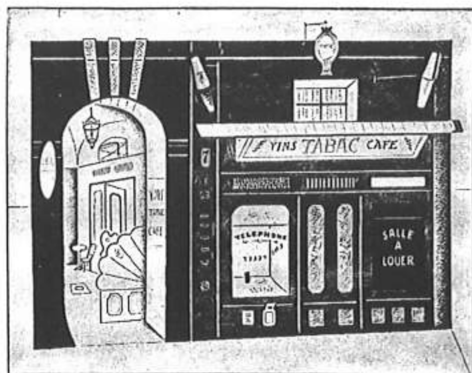
To oversimplify the process by which he reached this achievement, to impose order on a development which may have known none, it can be said that Davis began by taking jazz as a subject, sought next to appropriate its devices, and came last to approximate its spirit. Often, of course, he was doing more than one at once. For a long time, on the other hand, he was not aware of what was taking place. When he learned from Rudi Blesh that I was interested in this issue, Davis remarked:

> Tell your friend that I have always liked hot music. There's something wrong with any American who doesn't. But I never realized that it was influencing my work until one day I put on a favorite record and listened to it while I was looking at a painting I had just finished. Then I got a funny feeling. If I looked, or if I listened, there was no shifting of attention. It seemed to amount to the same thing—like twins, a kinship. After that, for a long time, I played records while I painted.

It is certain that Davis adopted the practice of painting to jazz well after he had abandoned jazz subjects. As he later explained to Sidney Simon, it was much like painting while watching a television bout. Though he might be much affected by the fight, he would scarcely imitate the action that was going on. In other words, though at least twice he has called them the same thing, Davis never truly confuses music with painting. He does not make the mistake Auden warns against,

THE FINE ART JIVE

OF STUART DAVIS



Café, Place de Vosges (1929); collection Mrs. Edith Halpert, New York.

of converting analogies into identities: and rarely does he violate Spender's proscription, to speak of his art as though it were another.

DAVIS has always and avowedly been a spokesman for Modernity and America—sometimes synonymous, sometimes not. His dominant desire to celebrate the former by representing the simultaneity of objects and events is wedded to his prevailing addiction to gas stations, chain stores, neon signs, cars and cabs, trains and planes, dime-store kitchen utensils, hot piano and jazz in general. James Johnson Sweeney quotes him as saying:

> In one way or another, the quality of these things plays a role in determining the character of my painting; not in the sense of describing them as graphic images, but by pre-determining an analogous dynamics in the design which becomes a new part of the American environment.

Clearly a modern American can sing America without singing Modernity. Think of Curry, Benton and Wood. And clearly he can do just the reverse—as with Feininger, Weber and Gorky. Davis is not our only painter to unite the two. Marin, Demuth and Sheeler have all contrived to do so too. Yet with the exception of Jimmy Ernst, whose *Blues in Chicago* comes straight from Louis Armstrong and whose *Indiana Avenue Stomp* comes straight from Montana Taylor, Davis is our only painter to combine America and Modernity through regular reference to jazz.

"An analogous dynamics in the design": until he arrived at this the impact of jazz on his work was bound to be negligible. His interest in jazz as material was strongest at the outset and diminished as his assurance grew. Indirect as it appears, there is much more of it in the 1912 watercolor *Negro Saloon* than in his oils *Blue Café* and *Rue des Rats* of 1928. It was in Paris during the latter year that his style began really to submit to the joint influence of modern painting and American jazz, of Fernand Léger and Earl Hines. In both *Place Pasdeloup* of 1928 and *Café Place des Vosges* we find him exploring the possibilities of combining a distant prospect with a close-up, in one the buildings at opposite ends of the same street, in the other the exterior and interior of the same establishment. Much more radical—more like those, say, of Picasso and Armstrong—are his American representations through separate treatment of various aspects of the same phenomenon found in the *House and Street* of 1931 or the *Sail Loft* of 1933.

This period had actually started with the *Eggbeaters*, painted the year before he left for France, when he nailed to a table an electric fan, a rubber glove and an eggbeater to produce a series of variations anything but banal upon a theme as prosaic as any Cab Calloway has ever subjected to multiple punishment. It was climaxed, to my mind, by the *Salt Shaker* of 1931. Here is material similar to that in his *Lucky Strike* or *Cigarette Papers* of a decade before, but the handling is significantly different, involving the innovations illustrated separately by the four works from 1928 to 1931 and manifesting tentatively the initial strong impact of jazz. In its reduction to essences, its very telling simplification and its visual synecdoche or metonymy, the *Salt Shaker* suggests Armstrong's habit of abstracting and representing a melody by its dominant notes or phrases. And in its arbitrary repetition, alteration and superposition of forms, it offers something comparable to Armstrong's variations on a theme as well as his interpolation of fragments from other tunes—the latter analogy later to be greatly extended and developed by Davis.

EVERY phase is one of transition for a painter like Davis, but between 1931 and 1941 the change in his art was especially important. Gradually but irrevocably he moved from the *Summer Landscape* of 1930 to the *Swing Landscape* of 1938, from an intense but incidental interest in jazz to a creative response to its promptings. Toward the end of this period, from *Swing Landscape* to *New York under Gaslight* in 1941, his application of the principles of jazz and swing became less and less casual if more and more subtle; he would take some relatively simple formal pattern for his structural basis and then, still retaining it, depart from it and elaborate upon it with conjugations and syncopations of every variety.

Swing Landscape presents a complex of such variations, part objective (a house) and part non-objective (circles and stripes), the whole suggesting the ornamental yet functional series of loosely related solo flights traced by different hot instrumentalists upon the solid background of this era's big swing bands. And if the *Mural for Studio B* of 1939 seems more symphonic than jazzlike in the quality of its harmonious abstractions—"the tonal intervals of music have their counterpart in painting in intervals of tone, color, contrast, size and direction"—such is not the case with *Hot Still-Scape for Six Colors* of the following year. Here, by analogy, is the jazz band or jam band translated into another medium with no allusion at all to music. Davis explained it thus at the time in *Parnassus:*

> It is composed from shape and color elements which I have used in painting landscapes and still-lifes from nature. Invented elements are added. Hence the term "Still-scape." It is called "Hot" because of its dynamic mood, as opposed to a serene or pastoral mood. Six colors, white, yellow, blue, orange, red, and black, were used as the materials of expression. They are used as the instruments in a musical composition might be, where the tone-color variety results from the simultaneous juxtaposition of different instrument groups. . . . The subject-matter of this picture is well within the everyday experience of any modern city dweller. . . . The painting is abstract in the sense that it is highly selective, and it is synthetic in that it recombines these selections of color and shape into a new unity, which never existed in Nature but is a new part of Nature.

New York under Gaslight followed in 1941, with the painter proclaiming the connection between his free arrangements of form or color and the improvisations of Hines or Armstrong with the words "Dig This Fine Art Jive."

The culmination of this phase came, I think, with a canvas less directly related to jazz—his *Report from Rockport* of 1940. In subject vaguely reminiscent of the 1916 *Rockport Beach*, this painting contains in its treatment elements lacking in the early work. Again it combines near with far and separates into sections. This time, however, the procedure is extended to project the artist's image in multiple facets. Much

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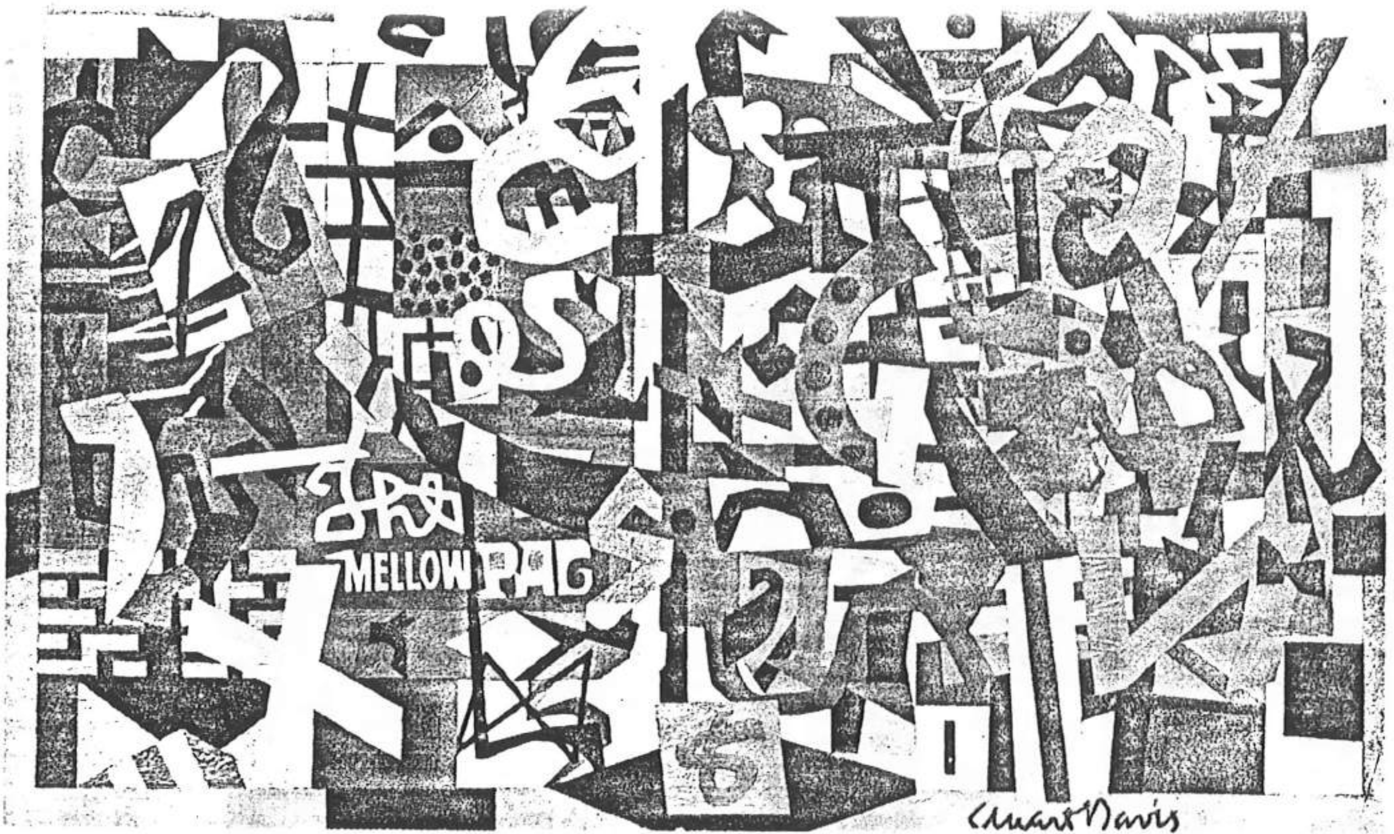
as *New York under Gaslight* discloses the city's secret through a juxtaposition of different eras. Rockport is revealed both by night and by day. It is even seen in close conjunction with Paris, as New York had been as early as 1931. To find an A & P on the banks of the Seine or a Parisian poster column on the sidewalks of Rockport is no less startling than to encounter *Rigoletto* in Armstrong's *Dinah* or *National Emblem* in *Tiger Rag*. Yet in Davis, as in Armstrong, it strikes us at once as right. What we have is a highly subjective Report—worth any number of earnestly realistic delineations if our purpose be to respond emotionally rather than bomb a bridge or rob a bank. And if such interpolations here reach their fullest development, the rhythmic and tonal distortions are more extreme too than ever before, so that what is not Armstrong seems to be Hines even in something professing no jazz affinity.

THE thirties were, as I say, especially transitional for Davis. While he was passing from a quasi-Cubist representation to a wholly abstract distillation of his vision, such things as *Swing Landscape* and *Hot Still-Scape* partook almost equally of each. But by 1942, in *Ursine Park* and *Arboretum by Flashlight*, the accent was distinctly non-objective; and by 1945, in *For Internal Use Only*, his new commitment was all but complete. Here is a painting analogous to jazz not so much in approach as in spirit. Time and again Davis has cited as special favorites Armstrong and Calloway, Waller and Hines, all of whom have one characteristic in common: more than almost any others they convey the gay, free quality of jazz—that sense of excitement and love of life which once gave an age its name. About them there is little intellection or introspection, rarely anything brooding or somber. To note the difference all one need do is

Rapt at Rappaport's (1952); collection Mr. Joseph Hirshhorn.



The Mellow Pad (1945-51); collection Mr. and Mrs. Milton Lowenthal.

compare a piano solo of Hines or Waller with Bix Beiderbecke's *In a Mist*, a vocal version by Armstrong or Calloway with Bessie Smith's *Saint Louis Blues*. *For Internal Use Only* has a happy aspect more akin to the jazz Davis prefers than any painting I know. It could hardly, for instance, be further from Feininger. In his *Broadway Boogie Woogie* two years earlier Mondrian had prepared the way, and two years before that Hines had burst out with *Boogie Woogie on St. Louis Blues*.

The space between *For Internal Use Only* and the 1952 *Rapt at Rappaport's* was spanned by *Pad*, a series of free developments taking their title from a word often heard in hot circles and ending with *The Mellow Pad* of 1945-51, in which the whole phrase has jazz connotations. In his *Visa* of 1951 Davis sang "The Amazing Continuity," suggesting again certain connections among the arts; but it is in *Rapt at Rappaport's* from the following year that the beat grows most insistent—that propulsive and regular basic rhythm overlaid by manifold syncopations which so attracted Davis to Earl Hines and George Wettling that he named his son after them. The effect is attained in part through his unusual use of six color intervals disposed in relation to fixed extremes, much—Dorothy Gees Seckler rightly observes—as a musician employs a tone progression from high to low notes varied according to established intervals. It derives its force scarcely less, however, from its contrast and conjugation of shapes—so that, with only a moderate effort of the imagination, when we look at it long we can nearly hear the rapt confrontation of conflicting accents between a drummer like Wettling and a pianist like Hines. Here at last improvisation is almost as much an end as a means —just as it is in the drumming of Wettling, whom Davis has taught to paint; just as it is in the reedwork of Probert, who also paints in his spare time. And in the title itself, embodied as it is in the work, can be found an analogy with the jazzman's riffs—those repeated figures that engender such intensity in prearranged swing and spontaneous jam alike.

THE rest is largely recapitulation, but not altogether. The year 1954 saw the completion of *Tournos*, and 1955, the addition of *The Lyre Bird* and *Cliché*. Then in 1956 came *Memo*, which I take to be the current summary of all that Davis has done. It joins ideally his early two-part treatment, to which he had returned in *Deuce* two years before, with his very latest techniques—the spatial, abstract, variegated handling of *Tournos* and *Midi* with the linear, representational, monochromatic approach of *Lyre Bird* and *Cliché;* the first having a word (Any), a letter (X) and a number (8) as well as several fragmentary geometrical patterns (rectangles, triangles, circles and squares), the second having a skeletal dwelling in white set against a black backdrop (roof, door and window being reasonably apparent). The total effect is to emphasize the dual character of the painting—perhaps of modern life too—by bisecting the canvas diagonally from upper left to lower right, transfiguring the nocturnal quality of the top area into the diurnal state of the bottom by adding red and green to the black and white as well as by compounding the shapes to imply diversified activity.

Here the playing of one thing against the other reminds me of Waller's two-fisted pianistic attack in which, however different they seem, the right hand always knows what the left hand is doing. Moreover, the probably unconscious combination of old and new—the segmentation goes back not only to the Davis of the late twenties but at least as far as Bosch—bears a resemblance to Armstrong's present work in which, though by no means deliberately, Louis incorporates both the small-band elements of his younger days and the big-band qualities of the subsequent years. In each the early improvising freedom is now enhanced by an access of technical mastery. And just as Armstrong has certain phrases of which he is especially fond that at once identify his performances, so Davis repeats with increasing frequency shapes and colors that serve to stamp his work. With much wit he sometimes so combines them that, as in his series of covers for Columbia's "Modern American Composers" project, he even manages to initial his signature as an integral and prominent part of the design. Davis is in paint a modern American composer himself.

Jelly Roll Morton once applied the term "transformation" to the process by which he converted relatively ordinary material into brilliant jazz. It seems too the best word to describe what Davis does with a subject. I therefore dig his speaking of fine art in connection with jazz. It is surely not all jive.

ART

The All-American

In both his life and his art, Stuart Davis is as American as bourbon on the rocks. A dumpy, bejowled man who talks with down-to-earth honesty in a good-natured nasal growl, Davis likes television, football, prizefighting, hot jazz and Manhattan skyscrapers. The bold and violent abstractions he paints echo the clash and clatter of 20th century American life, and they have earned him the acclaim of a satisfying number of fellow Americans. Last week, within four days after a new exhibition of his paintings went on view in Manhattan's Downtown Gallery, four had been sold at prices ranging from $3,500 to $6,500.

One top-priced canvas was an eye-straining mélange of stridently colored geometrical shapes called *Something on the 8 Ball,* bought by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Another jazzy abstraction, *Tournos,* was sold to Utica's Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute. One reason for the high cost of Davis' paintings is the sparseness of his output. Says he: "I work murderously slow." He averages about three major paintings a year, has taken as long as six years to complete a large canvas.

Davis has been working murderously slow on abstractions ever since 1928. Now, at 59, he feels that his work is more concentrated in design and color than ever before. "I've learned to eliminate irrelevancies," he says. The most concentrated painting in Davis' current show is *Midi.* The brilliant fuchsia background contrasts so sharply with the blue, orange, white and green of the geometric patterns that the spectator can look at the picture for only a few seconds without getting eye jitters. Davis smilingly admits: "It does kinda jump."

Midi, like all of Davis' titles, is an arbitrary one, although the luminous colors of the painting do suggest something of the brightness of the sunny southern part of France. Most of his titles, such as *Rapt at Rappaport's,* are as abstract as the paintings, in most of which the only recognizable objects are a few scattered words. Davis puts in words because he feels they are part of the U.S. landscape. "Everywhere you look," he says, "you see words." Two that reoccur in his paintings are "any" and "it." Davis favors such words because they are "usable without any specific meaning."

Artist Davis lives and works in a Manhattan studio, where he puts in long hours at his easel. He likes to paint with the television set turned on, but with the sound off. "I don't have to look at it. It's like having a window onto the street in your room." Davis, who used to play a hot piano himself ("I discovered I could paint better"), admits that his feeling for sharp rhythms and raucous tones is carried over into his clean-cut, hotly colored abstractions. Unlike some of his contemporaries, he finds the atmosphere of 20th century America a stimulant rather than a strain. Says he: "I am an American, born in Philadelphia of American stock. I studied art in America. I paint what I see in America."

Tommy Weber

PAINTER DAVIS & "SOMETHING ON THE 8 BALL"
It does kinda jump.

Davis at work in his Seventh Avenue studio, New York. An ardent jazz and television fan, he can watch a program of a U. N. debate while preparing his neat palette to begin *Rapt at Rappaport's* on the large canvas [right].

Stuart Davis
PAINTS A PICTURE

By Dorothy Gees Seckler

Photographs by Bernard Cole

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Stuart Davis cannot recall ever having any specific place association with the title of the painting discussed here. "The phrase 'rapt at Rappaport's' was in my mind long before I made this picture," he said. "In fact I had been saving it to use on such a painting as this."

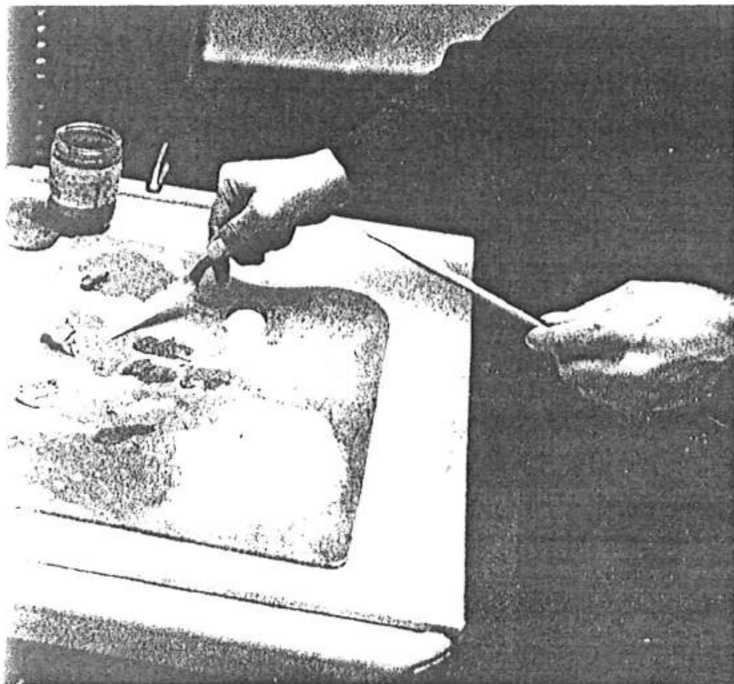
The incongruities of the title, however, are not accidental but typical. Insistence on the vigorous, vernacular elements in American, and especially New York life have been central to Davis' painting since his early study with Robert Henri and association with artists of the Ashcan School. Being "rapt," on the other hand, is a cultural state of mind. With him it is the rare sensibility to real environment that makes intolerable any kind of "hot-house" aesthetics. "I'm about as rapt as anybody could be," he said in his terse, dead-pan manner that often conceals a dry humor. But he is not joking. Being rapt—or better, a forthright, assertive and concrete rapport (to further compound the contraction)—has been the constant in Davis' work over four decades. Through it he has detected a taut lyricism in places where its presence in our life was never suspected.

Late in the spring of '52, Stuart Davis found a quick sketch he had made over thirty years ago on the coast near Gloucester, and it suggested a new compositional idea. He had no impulse to duplicate or even re-create its images of sky and water, but there was something about its plot of line, plane and interval that set off a chain reaction in the artist. As these initial shapes and diversions were set down on canvas, new associations, both conscious and unconscious, came into play. "Remembered shapes and colors, having nothing to do with the original point of departure, influenced what I put down, and even associations from sounds and imagined movements contributed a part in the day-to-day changes on the canvas. New shapes, arrived at in this way, in turn called forth a different range of responses." This continued until every element had been arrested in an absolute relation with every other part of the picture—a matter of months.

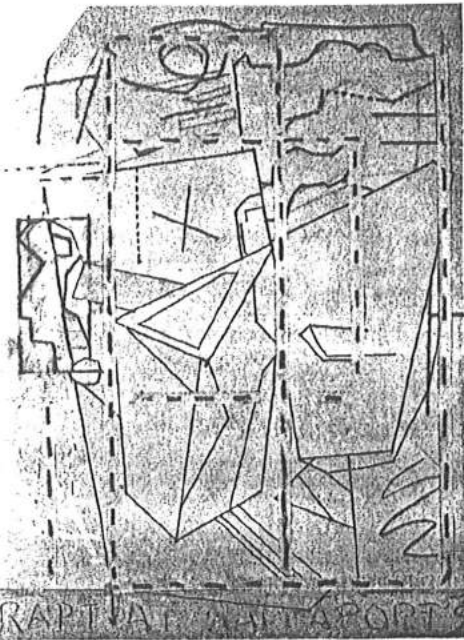
It was almost the end of the third month before the painting, which had remained in a stage of black outlines on white, became "a green picture" for reasons that "had nothing to do with the initial starting point of the sketch." Davis, usually terse in his interpretations of his paintings, is doggedly insistent about this. "There might have been a dozen reasons why green took precedence in my mind at that time," he said. "It could have been somebody else's picture, a mood of depression or elation, or a green traffic light."

Stockily built and square of stance, Davis gives an impression of fiercely contained energy. His eyes snap and his jaw takes on a more stubborn set when he talks about the often misunderstood subject matter of his paintings. He feels more at home in the language of jazz. "Dig this fine art jive," he lettered on a 1941 picture, in the jargon of the musicians who are his closest friends (his infant son is named after Earl Hines and George Wettling). A beat like that of the hot piano music "that makes me want to paint" comes through in the vibrancy of his pictures —not only in the sharpness of patterns and tautness of his shapes, but also in the motifs that have occupied him. An egg-beater and an electric fan, both things that function through vibration, were the objects of his first exhaustive experimentation with abstraction (in 1928), and since then vibrancy has been the constant element in things which attracted him as subjects—from salt shakers to electric signs and gas pumps. Always there is the insistent rhythm of sharply contrasted alternates: the motif and interval; the line, the break and the line resumed; the color and the dissonance of its complement.

The credo of "art out of life" instead of "art out of aesthetics" was one that Davis grew up with. Artists of the famous "Eight" were among his father's friends, both in his boyhood in Philadelphia and later in Newark, where the elder Davis worked as editor and cartoonist. Moreover, when Stuart left high school to enroll in Henri's New York school in 1910 he landed in the bailiwick of the most energetic and articulate philosopher of the Ashcan School. The life of streets and alleys, canal boats, Hoboken music halls and Bowery burlesque filled his sketchbooks, and in the next few years he carried the same robust satirical realism into drawings for *The Masses* and *Harper's Weekly*. The particulars of this Hogarthian panorama have disap-


Never using pure tube colors, Davis mixes enough paint to last him for the entire process before starting a canvas.

Brushes and paints stand in orderly array beside a phonograph on which Davis plays jazz records while he works.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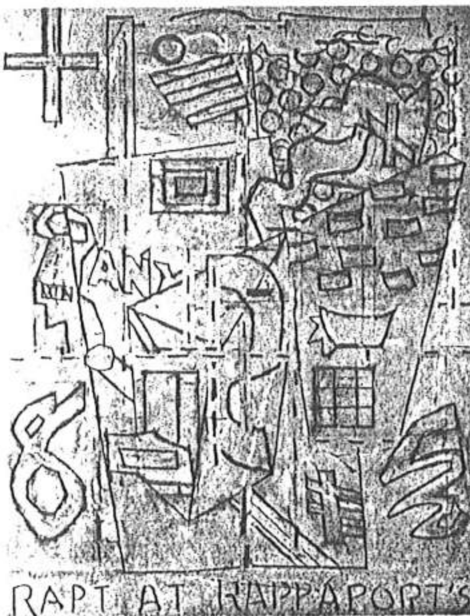
Davis paints a picture continued

With his hand steadied by a ruler, Davis adds a final coat of paint.

peared from his work, but a sense of the drive and physical aliveness of this environment survives in the earthiness of his fragmentary motifs and perhaps also in the forthrightness and vigor of his brashly opposed lines and colors.

For the past nineteen years Davis has lived and had his studio in a rambling third-floor apartment on Seventh Avenue, only a block from that mecca of New York realists of all shades, Fourteenth Street. This is a neighborhood where crumbling brownstones submit to the indignities of petty commerce. Inside the studio, too, the gaslight and neon eras confront each other in the neat, high-ceilinged room. Light, filtered through ancient curtains from tall, arched windows which are sealed against the rumble of the traffic outside, falls on trim shelves of materials and orderly paraphernalia. Not brilliantly, but adequately, it lights the massive, two-story easel on the opposite side. At right angles to the easel is a table television set which Davis likes to have on when he works, "especially if there is a baseball game or a prizefight." "I don't rely on television for culture," he adds, "but I like its liveliness and action. It's a stimulus, like the world outside—but I can turn it off."

In the first stage of *Rapt at Rappaport's*, the large white canvas—it is 52 by 40 inches—was divided by tapes marked with charcoal dashes, stretched vertically and horizontally across a number of angular shapes drawn in [Continued on page 73]



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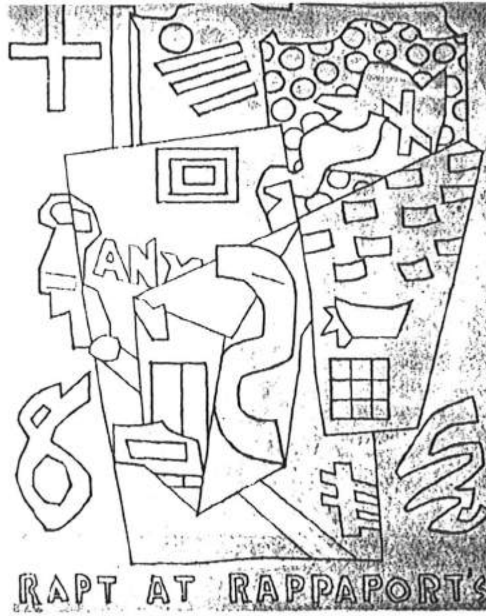

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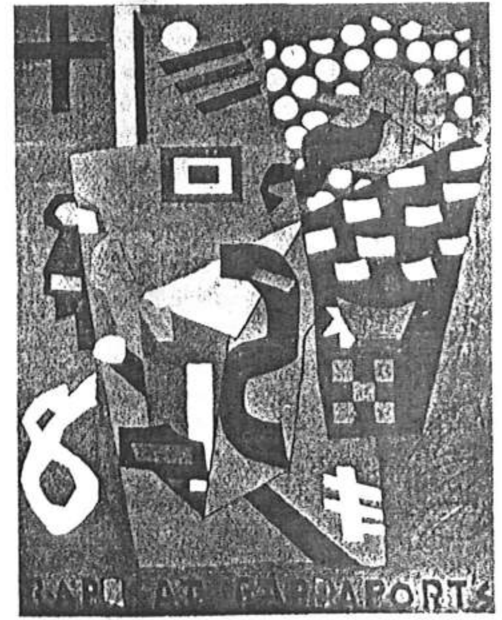

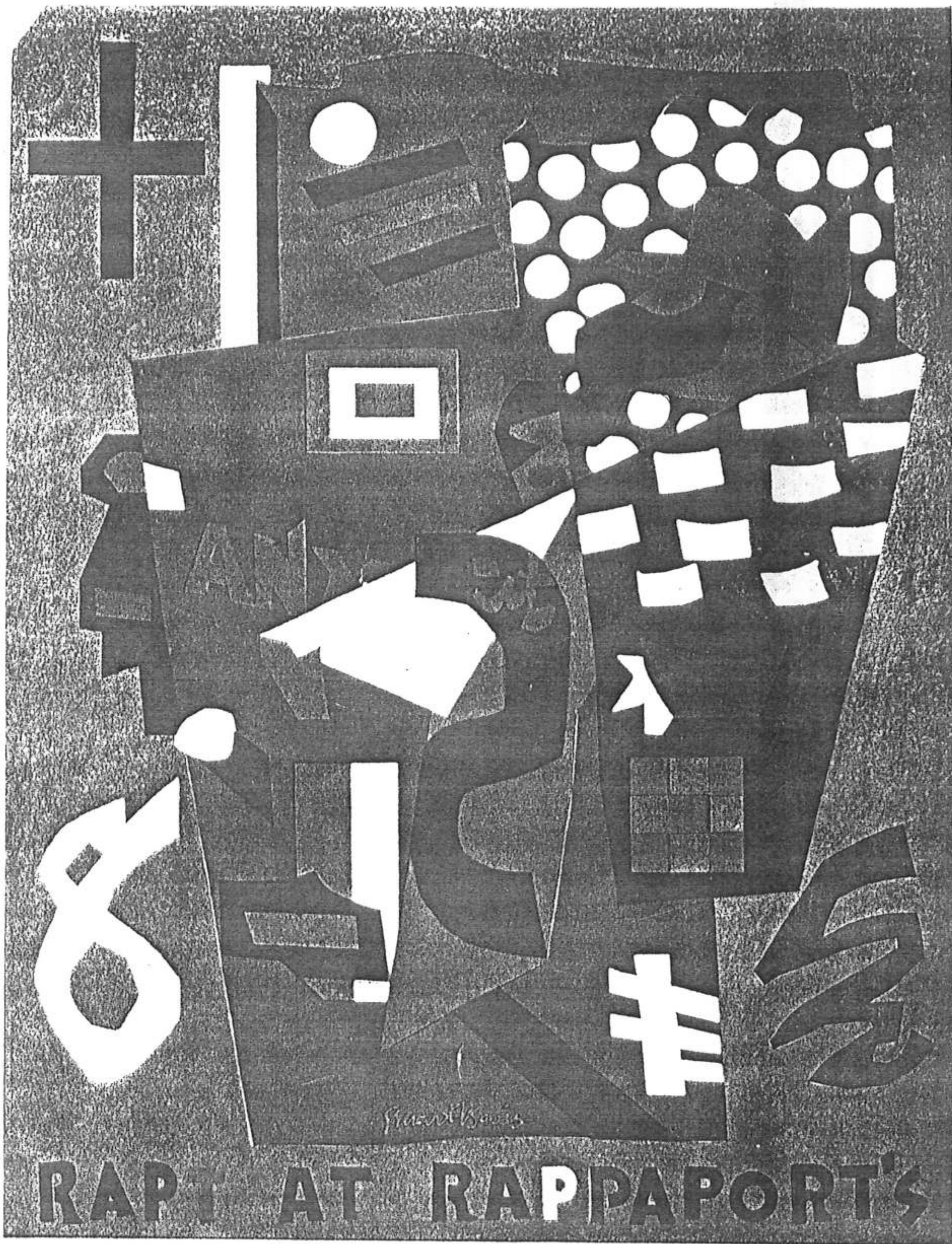

Stuart Davis:

Rapt at Rappaport's, 1953

Davis' point of departure for the composition was a quick sketch done long ago in Gloucester. Beginning to rework the motif on canvas (52 by 40 inches) he introduced sequences of crosses, zigzags and overlapping planes [1] and divided the surface into sections with tapes. In 2, rectangular patterns were added. Looking for a theme of letters which would have no literal meaning, for the center of the picture, he chose the word "any." New "actions" were tried out in 3. Finally, he cleaned up the canvas, chalked out rejected ideas and removed the tapes [4], before laying on the paint. It was first applied thinly [5], later in thick coats (Downtown Gallery).

ART DIGEST 5/5/53 | *profile*

Stuart Davis

by Frederick S. Wight

It is astonishing how much American art history crowds into Stuart Davis' life. The Ash Can School was a family business in his experience. His father, art editor of the Philadelphia Press, was employing Sloan, Glackens and Luks over half a century ago. With the general hegira of the Philadelphia realists at the turn of the century, the elder Davis became art editor and cartoonist for the Newark Evening News, and in 1900 he moved his family to East Orange. Stuart Davis was six. The painters he knew enjoyed a cub reporter bohemia, and he was out nights with Glenn Coleman when he might better have been in bed.

At this propitious moment Davis saw the Armory show. He had five water-colors in the show and one actually sold. But the show was the thing, the last of the old order for him, or rather the last of the old disorder. From that experience he emerged a modern painter. "It was a real shiftover. Seeing all those paintings from the modern movement in Europe—which had just started over there. It opened up thoughts about the possibility of using colors, shapes, which one hadn't regarded as legitimate before." The rest of Davis' life is his colors and shapes, and the difficulty of living off them, however well known they became.

Stuart Davis and George Earl Davis, December, 1952

Stuart Davis: *Semé*

Later when he came to know Paris he was reminded of Philadelphia, so art-drenched were his early recollections.

Stuart Davis took to the arts as a thing expected of him. He chose Henri's art school in place of high school, and was sending to the Independents at 16. Three years later he was illustrating for the Masses and Harper's Weekly. His black-and-white work owed a debt to Aubrey Beardsley and Toulouse-Lautrec. He was one of the last to follow the illustrator's road to painting. In that day printer's ink and paint were happily mixed. There was nothing private or mysterious about art, nothing that publication wouldn't improve.

"Some people around Stieglitz were more directly involved," Davis recalls. "Demuth, Hartley—but I never got in that group." He never got into any group. An individualist, he has a level humorous glance; in speech and manner he is a mixture of the courteous, the pungent, the pugnacious. His talk is lucid and tends to follow his thoughts, not getting ahead of them in the modern free-associative vein. One is vaguely reminded of the first Roosevelt, but perhaps it is only the epoch—the pattern was set young. Davis is short and solid, with a prognathous jaw of serious proportions. He has a nocturnal pallor and his hair has been knocked down hard with a brush as though he had been got ready for Sunday School. For physical or moral reasons he drinks glasses of water in slow and steady progression, at a man's pace, as though they were whiskey. Responses is a favorite word.

"I'm not one of those who hold painting comes out of nothing. It may be subjects I'm interested in at any time. Light, objects, buildings, people, sounds, the context of a phrase of writing, and always jazz music. I used formerly to go outdoors after nature, landscapes, but I don't need that any more. Haven't excluded them, but I've found a better way to record my responses.

"Up to now I've been working on painting my enthusiastic responses. But you come to realize that experiences which are *not* enthusiastic are the

[*Continued on page* 23]

Stuart Davis

[*Continued from page* 13]

easiest to come by and should not be wasted. For several years I've been thinking of *not* making enthusiasm a condition for uninterrupted continuity of interest. The act of perception is itself a good reason for enthusiasm. Ability to perceive is common to *both* elating and depressing experiences. Sometimes I get my most satisfying results on a day I have no real stimulus to paint at all."

We are in Davis' studio, a second floor front on lower Seventh Avenue. The scene is curiously like a Davis painting in monochrome. A tremendous number of things lies in sight, yet there is no clutter. The impression of neatness is unaccountable yet distinct. For the moment, a fluorescent light overhead recreates an uneasy 20th-century day. Davis turns the easel. The large painting is resplendent and new—a major work. Its title is *Semé*—"Strewn," says Davis, "lots of *things*." It is in fact a complex organization, predominantly yellow set off with a wine red. Davis has an extraordinary way of making white areas a color.

Words, either in titles or in Davis' paintings themselves have a major part to play. Here the word ANY stands out. The word EYDEAS at the bottom of the canvas is less obvious because it is in script. What do these words mean—or rather, *do* they mean? Yes, they have a context, and over and above that a sort of hypnotic import, such as words have for that other painter, E. E. Cummings. They are like words in a headline. Davis grew up with the press. "In this painting ANY means any subject matter is equal in art, from the most insignificant to one of relative importance. What is significant in subject matter is what is spontaneously given." And as for EYDEAS—the EY is for eye? Visual ideas? "Yes, probably," Davis admits.

Titles Sometimes Meaningless

Titles don't have to mean anything in particular. The recent *Rapt at Rappaport's* has no communicable meaning. For a while Davis was afraid it was too close to the earlier *Report from Rockport*. When he was teaching at Yale he was accused of taking *Rappaport's* from the name of a liquor store in New Haven which uses the subtitle or slogan: "Let Mort wrap a quart." But there was nothing to this. Davis never saw the store.

A painting like this *Semé* is first planned in black and white—"a two-color painting." "I make a black and white drawing as a starter, like the one for *Rapt at Rappaport's* on the north wall. Then I decide on the number of colors to be used in the final execution and mix their exact intervals before starting work." The colors for both these paintings have been kept on a small canvas over by the door "for the record."

"The structure of the finished painting is not held together by the black-and-white definitions of the original drawing," Davis insists. "In no case is the color held together by lines and edges as Léger often uses black lines to support major shapes; take out the black lines and the color wouldn't hold up by itself as structural color intervals." For Davis, "shapes are defined by their own color intervals, and are on their own. No discussion, you understand, of the merits of the two ideas."

Question: Is one color in front of another? "It's reversible, like a box drawn so that you can see the same planes as either advancing or receding in front or in back. What is basic is that there are different planes. I never think of coming forward or going back, that old idea that certain colors are advancing and others are retiring. They're *not*—except in the context of an analogy to some subject matter in the mind of the spectator.

"What is required is that all areas be simultaneously perceived by the spectator. You see things as a unit at the same time. What there is, *all* at the same time." Davis' paintings are headines, billboards, their immediacy is their Americanness. This is not to deny the paintings' gradual growth upon the observer. One aspect does not exclude the other. There is a process of observing and seeing each day new relationships—a process of *doing* which takes a matter of months. But no thinking of *this* color seen after *that* color."

He Works Slowly

A matter of months: Davis works slowly. He sells everything he paints and yet he is hard up. He has taught 10 years at the New School for Social Research, and he has taught at Yale, but he is sure that the men who go out to universities, artists in residence, paint the worse for it.

The sacrifices of men who have jilted money are always of interest. In Davis' case the lack of money has kept his life at once difficult and simple, and hard times have set their austere value on his work. When he was 19, Harper's Weekly gave him enough money for his summer at Provincetown. And later during the first World War he had a job with a branch of the Intelligence Department; he worked for Walter Lippman drawing maps, ethnographic, economic, which were stored for a peace conference. Then he did occasional cartoons, jokes, and sold them. And he painted a sign for Polly Holiday's Greenwich Village Inn. "I remember walking in from East Orange to Polly Holiday's on New Year's Eve. Demuth was there. He loaned me the money to go home. I don't know, I really don't know, how I lived. Occasionally I had to go back to my parents. After Provincetown I was able to go to my father's house in Gloucester. I was unable to live any place else. Eventually my father lost the house.

"When I painted those eggbeater pictures around 1926 I worked in a small room, 9' x 11', which made it obligatory to have a still-life of a simple nature in one place. I had never done any thing like those paintings before. I guess I had just got to a point where I could think of areas themselves having more significance than I had previously given them. What I suppose is an abstract attitude, although I distrust the word.

"I went to Paris in 1928. Mrs. Force [Juliana Force, then director of the Whitney Museum] gave me $900 for three paintings. I took one suitcase and got on the boat. I liked Paris the minute I got there. Everything was human-sized. The pressure of American anti-art was removed. You could starve to death quicker there but you had the illusion an artist was a human being and not just a bum. I had a studio in the rue Vercingetorix—I got married over there. I came back with no money and took a place on 14th Street. I'm wondering how I paid the rent. I don't think I got it from my father; he was short of money at the time. I guess I sold a painting—yes, I had a show with the Downtown Gallery. *She* had already given me one the year before I went to Paris for that matter and she *sold* paintings. I taught at the Art Student's League. I had pupils who came up to the studio. But there has always been the economic terror up to this very day. It is a complete mystery; there's no rationality to it at all."

He Views the Abstract Scene

How does the contemporary abstract scene look to Davis? "Kootz' boys and the others?" Davis blows hot and cold. "The fact that they made large paintings is a good thing in itself. Some of them have real talent. DeKooning has; Motherwell has. I don't care for the terminology of their propaganda, but I see them apart from the baloney, and can look at them with pleasure. I admire this uneasy cohesion they've got up.

"I liked the exhibition at that gallery called The Stable. The character reminded me of the first Independent Show in 1910. There was some affirmation about art in the exhibition itself apart from the individual items that composed it.

"Yes, I am all for them. A lot of energy and integrity. But it's the expressionist attitude I don't see any need for—the dripping ritual given overimportance. Gorky [Davis was a close friend of Gorky] saw a Picasso where the paint had run, and it *meant* something to him.

"An American art?—various schools have been called that. But America is part of the world now. Still, art ought to have the character of the place the man makes it lives in. I see what goes on in Europe, and I don't see any new challenging idea other than we've had already and are familiar with.

"You have to consult yourself. I don't know anyone else to ask."

Coast-to-Coast Notes

[*Continued from page* 12]

Barbara's Museum of Art (June 9-28); the San Fransisco Museum of Art (July 17-Aug. 6); the Portland Art Museum (Sept. 3-27), and the Seattle Museum of Art (Nov. 11-Dec. 6). The show introduces a group of engraved glass pieces designed by the American sculptor, Bruce Moore, and also pieces by five British artists: Robin Darwin, Jacob Epstein, Graham Sutherland, Frank Dobson and Matthew Smith. All the glass in the show was made in the Steuben factory at the Corning Glass Center, Corning, N. Y.

ESQUIRE JAZZ Yearbook 1947

Friends, It's Here to Stay

A HIP ARTIST EXPLAINS HIS CREDO

by Stuart Davis

STUART DAVIS, like the late Piet Mondrian, is an important contemporary painter with an intense interest in hot music. Several of Stuart's paintings include references to jazz, and although his writings to date have been rare, all of them contain mention of the inspiration provided him by jazz music and jazz musicians.

Here, for example, is a paragraph from the autobiographical sketch published by the American Artists Group last year, titled "Stuart Davis — An Illustrated Monograph":

> ***"It is only necessary to lean slightly to the right and turn the radio dial at the right time and place. Or, if it isn't the right time, you lean slightly to the left and turn the phonograph on.***
>
> ***I am forced to admit, however, that there are still occasions when it is necessary to leave the premises to satisfy the desire to hear creative music.***
>
> ***My wife, Roselle, and I merely go out the front door and bear to the left. After a healthy hike of two blocks, we dive into a joint where the great Earl Hines is sadistically murdering a helpless piano. On other occasions the sorties call for sterner resolve, running up to distances as high as six blocks. But the Spartan effort is always well repaid by the musicianship of such men as James P. Johnson, Pete Johnson, Vic Dickenson, Max Kaminsky, Frankie Newton. At one time or another, in darker mood, I have questioned the possibility of cultural advance in the United States, but on the evidence here presented, I guess I must have been wrong."***

While Stuart Davis readily concedes to an avid interest in hot musicians it must be conversely reported that hot musicians are also interested in him. George Wettling, drummer of the Paul Whiteman orchestra, for example, is already painting with a regular criticism from his friend Stuart Davis. Right now Stuart is arranging the details of George's first one-man show.

> "If I get there first I'll make blue lines, —
> if you get there first you rub 'em out."
>
> MORAN AND MACK

Since the time I began to study painting at the Henri School of Art I have been addicted to hot music. They didn't teach it there, it was strictly my own idea. I implemented this side line with an Edison Cylinder Record that had come into my possession. It was titled, *Dust Explosion in a Dehydrated Silo,* by Glenn Coleman and his Cirrhosis Six. This unique hot Americana started me off in a good groove where music was concerned. I have followed its solid advices with little deviation since that time.

Recently I had occasion to inquire of a little boy what he wanted to be when he grew up. Without breaking the Chicago style popping beat of his bubble gum, he replied, "Eddie Condon." Conference had been fogging my vision a bit of late. It was clear that the little boy had his hip boots well clasped up to his navel. This was the jolt I needed. I played an old Punch Miller record with a George Wettling backing I had recently dubbed in, added a configuration to my current painting, "The Mellow Pad," and forgot all about Sir Alexander Cadogan and Gromyko. For a brief moment I thought I was Eddie Condon too, but that passed.

The incident is important because it demonstrates the necessity of never underestimating the right contacts. At the time I left art school I had the immediate need to get straight. My objective was to make paintings that could be looked at, while listening to the "Silo" record at

the same time, without incongruity of mood. I looked in vain for substantiation of this desire in the work of the contemporary American painters of the period. When I did finally find a school of painting that was really jumping, I had to dig it by remote control. It was located in Paris and was known under the generic term of "Modernism." Various considerations made it impossible for me to go there and get direct inspiration from these International cats who were giving out in art. I continued to get my kicks locally from jazz. Fortunately, this modern musical art became increasingly available in various forms. I leaned on it heavily since it was the only thing I could find where creative ideas were somehow being expressed. American painters in general were messing around with the Old Masters. It was like living in some screwy community where the service station attendant filled your tank wearing a sixteenth-century court costume. After wiping your windshield, he would hand you a tract on the philosophy of Leonardo Da Vinci, plus the technique of under-painting and glazing. Nothing intrinsically unsound in the jive, but too anachronistically square.

Finally, I did get to Paris in a fairly hip stage of development where painting was concerned. In the artistic climate engendered by the righteous cats who were giving out there, I got some new ideas. In fact, I am still using some of them because they wear well. I came back to America with the throttle wide open. Radio had been invented and passed out to the people. The Wisconsin Chair Co., among others, was making authentic jazz available on records. But when I took time out to dig what American painters were up to, a rude awakening took place, as the saying goes. The "American Scene School" was carrying the ball and bringing the Old Masters up to Rural Standard Time. The only difference was that the characters in these pictures wore overalls, and were variously menaced by the elements of nature, Indians and the D. A. R. True, a change had taken place, but somehow it all came out even. In spite of the European hot stuff, the painters here had just gone on chewing their cud, while holding assorted treatises on the Old Masters in one hand, and a Sears-Roebuck catalogue in the other. The outhouse was two hundred feet away, to the right.

From the left, the "social content" artists began to chisel into this isolationist racket. They used different slogans but the same pictorial ideas. They substituted the Daily Worker for the Sears-Roebuck catalogue. Both of these cults, in their purest expression, have since gone down the drain, where they faintly gurgle. But their confused offspring still potter around with painting ideas that had ceased to be novel at the time the Indians were liquidating their Manhattan real estate. Since novelty and idea are synonymous terms, nobody is getting no place fast.

Art in Europe is inert and has been for some time, except for the innovators of forty years ago who are still living. The joint has been closed up. Post-surrealistic things crawl around the darkened interior and beget other things with different names. Out in the streets the "Social Content" boys are busy chiseling away all over again. No contemporary art ideas have come from young painters in Paris, however great the traffic in obsolete ones. Nor do we get any music from there. On the contrary, they import it from us. They import jazz. Their youth is learning to play it themselves.

Since we have this authentic art in America, it proves that any suspicion that the place itself is poisonous to creative expression is unfounded. I say this in full knowledge that jazz is constantly being chiselled at by cosmetic arrangers, larcenous adapters, and gigantic disemboweling promotions. But we still have it. There will always be an audience for classical corn. Popularity polls will always show a "trend" toward "sweet" music. Future Lombardos will own a fleet of rocket ships. But that is no reason why we can't have art too. In the field of painting we will always have the Academy, in one form or other. There will always be artists who are "well-groomed in drawing," and who will stay grounded. They like it there. There will always be a vast hierarchy of scholarship in art, the rest room of culture, to preserve the art of second guessing. Collectors will continue to acquire "important" paintings by living artists which simulate the mood of some cat who was jumping in the seventeenth century. But what I say is — is that necessarily all that we will always have? I don't think so. History proves different. The only condition for being an artist is to be interested in it exclusively. An essential concomitant is a perfect defense against interference from relatives, friends, civic organizations and governments. If, on the other hand, conditions are set up which prescribe that you have to make a living, use a specified subject matter, simulate a style, or lay a commercial or political message on the people, then you might as well forget about the whole thing.

Currently there are a number of talented artists around whose work approaches the inspirational. But they all have an obstructive guilt complex which falls into one or more of the inhibiting categories noted above. To whatever degree they can progressively eliminate this confusion their work will advance toward the category of the "killer." If any were to ask my advice I would tell them to give heed to the Hip Kid quoted at the beginning of these remarks. In effect, go dig Dr. Condon's Clinic.

Madman's Glossary

by Slim Gaillard

In which the Gertrude Stein of the shellack offers a handy guide to the Cement Mixer school of modern cacophony. Some of Mr. Gaillard's most provocative odes have not been released. Rather they have escaped under the Majestic label which now breathes easier.

All Reet .... Everything is in order and you may proceed
Avocado Seed Soup .... Orange soda
Orange Soda .... Avocado Seed Soup
Vousaroonie .... A sideman suffering from hey-hey fever
Vootaroonie .... His brother-in-law
McAroonie .... A pastry
Little Annie Roonie .... My sweetheart
Zdazz .... Band boy formerly Lt. Col. in Air Corps
Jack McVoutie .... String bass in arrears on income tax
Reetie-Vouties .... Chili-con-carne with a sprig of mint
Drazoo .... Recording date on a ferryboat
Riff .... Musical phrase
Riff-riff .... Do it right the next time
Riff-raff .... A song-plugger's relatives
Take Five .... A half-hour out for Gin Rummy

ART NEWS

FOUNDED 1902

OCTOBER 15-31, 1945

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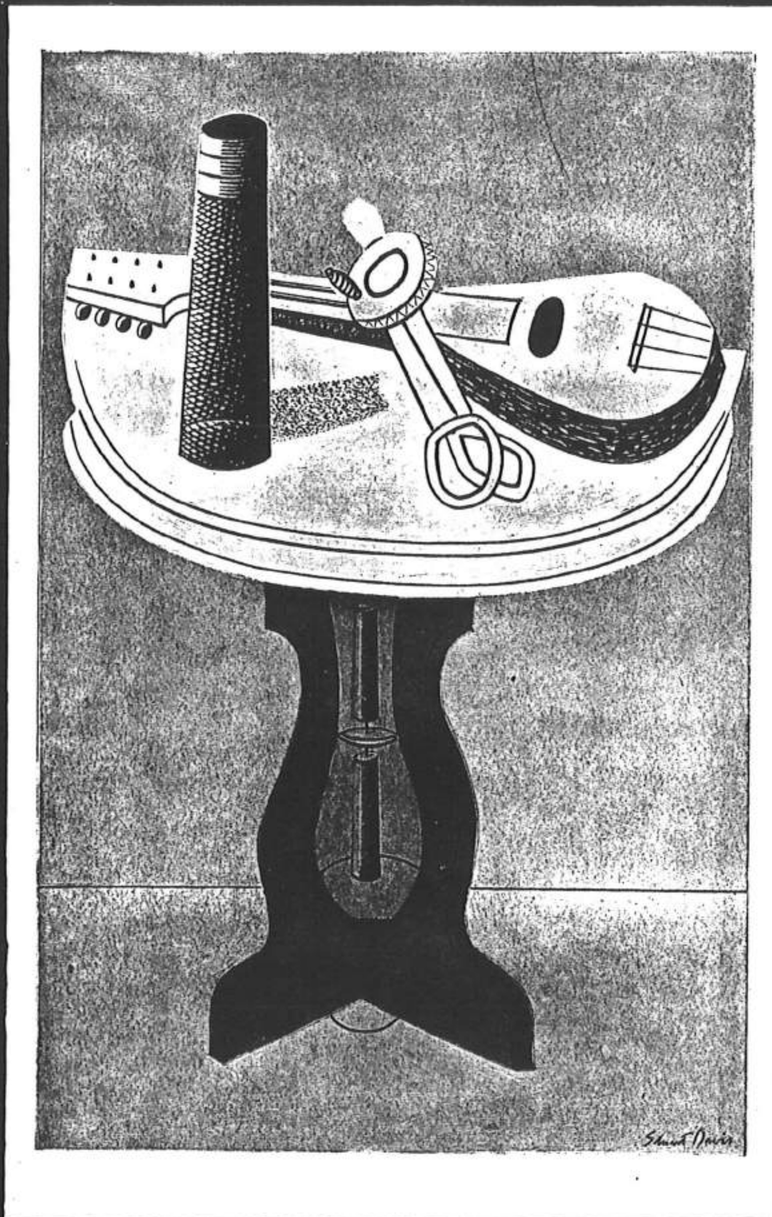
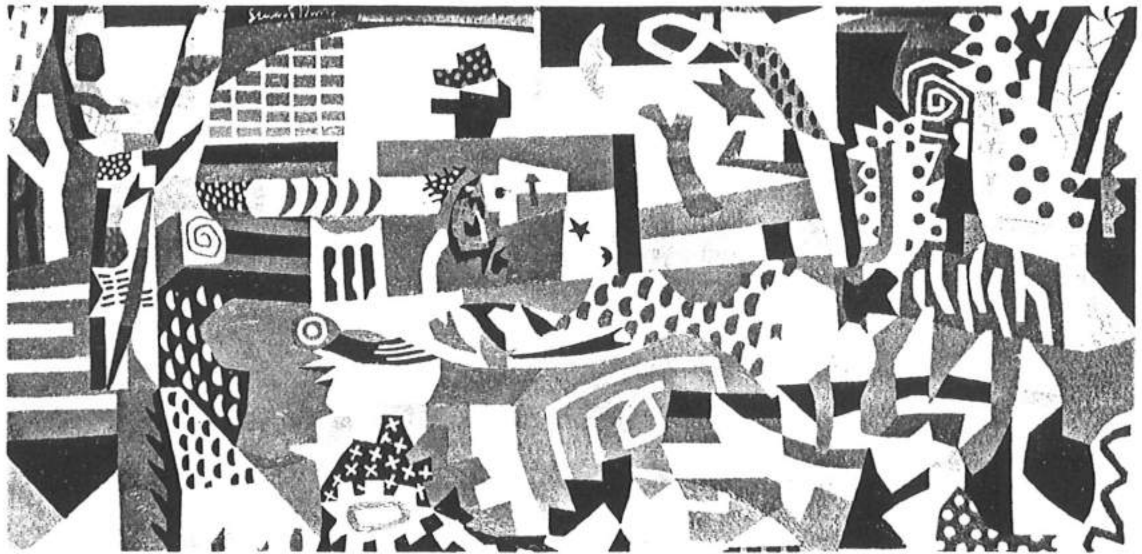




PLAYFUL INVENTIVENESS characterizes Stuart Davis' mature productions such as "Arboretum by Flashbulb" of 1942, lent by Mr. and Mrs. Milton Lowenthal to coming retrospective at Museum of Modern Art. Artist's current interest is "the severe logic of color-space."

STUART DAVIS

IN RETROSPECT 1945-1910

by Holger Cahill

THE coming Stuart Davis exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art is more than a long backward glance at the work of a leading contemporary artist. In a very real sense it is the biography of an era, one of the most vital and revolutionary in the history of American art. Davis, now at the half-century mark, has lived this era fully. His report on it, expressed in a racy personal idiom in a group of some fifty paintings and drawings, reveals the character of the man, the things he has found interesting in his environment, and the nature of the problems which have concerned creative artists in our time. It is vigorous, exciting as a jam session, filled with keen observation and humor.

Hints of direction are given in the earliest pictures. *Negro Saloon*, painted in 1912, reveals not only the kind of subject matter that interested Davis but also his severe selection of detail based on the intuitive realization that nature, for the purposes of art, is not something given but is always a choice and a projection. From this point, Davis' road to maturity was a long one, but it was always consistent and clearly related to the dominant contemporary creative trends.

Davis, like Picasso, was born to art. Both his parents were artists. Both had felt the influence of Eakins through his pupil Thomas Anschütz, with whom they studied at the Pennsylvania Academy. When Stuart Davis was born, his father, a painter and cartoonist who had given up art for a business career, was art director of the old Philadelphia *Press*, famous in history as the employer of such distinguished painter-reporters as John Sloan, George Luks, William J. Glackens, and Everett Shinn (whose achievements in this field are currently being celebrated at the Philadelphia Museum). These men, under the leadership of Robert Henri, were the nucleus of *The Eight*, the giant killers who challenged the American academic world in the early 1900s.

Davis took his first steps in art under the aegis of the Henri group. His family had moved from Philadelphia to the New York Metropolitan area in 1901. John Sloan, George Luks, and Robert Henri, who also had moved to New York, were frequent visitors at the Davis home. From earliest childhood young Davis had been making drawings and hearing the art talk of this group. His formal training as an artist began in 1910 at the recently opened Henri School in New York. From the first the young artist interested the older members and he began exhibiting with them almost at once, at the Independent Show in 1910, the Newark Museum in 1911, and the New York Water Color Club in 1912. In 1910 he also began contributing drawings to *The Masses*, a lively radical monthly of those days, of which John Sloan was art editor.

Rebellion was stirring in New York in 1910. The massive frontal attack of the Armory Show was still three years away but the Henri group had opened its powerful skirmish. These artists were in revolt against the saccharine Fifth Avenue vulgarity of the Academy and its genteel tradition of "seeing beautifully" which was a way of saying that art must confine itself to ladylike studio arrangements. The point of departure for the Henri group which formed Davis' early ideas about art was the realism of Manet. What interested them was not only Manet's technical idea, but also his flouting of French bourgeois taste. The center of the group's position was the thesis that art is "not a matter of rules and techniques, or the search for ideal beauty. . . . It is an expression of ideas and emotions about the life of our time." This thesis led the group to a loving observation of the life of mean streets which earned them the nickname of "The Ashcan School."

Even more than the older members of the group Davis was interested in this subject matter. He had the greatest "enthusiasm for running around and drawing things in the raw. . . . Chinatown,

THE HENRI PERIOD of Davis' first experiment: "Negro Saloon," painted 1912.

ARMORY SHOW influence is evident in the freer "Gloucester Terrace," dating from 1916.

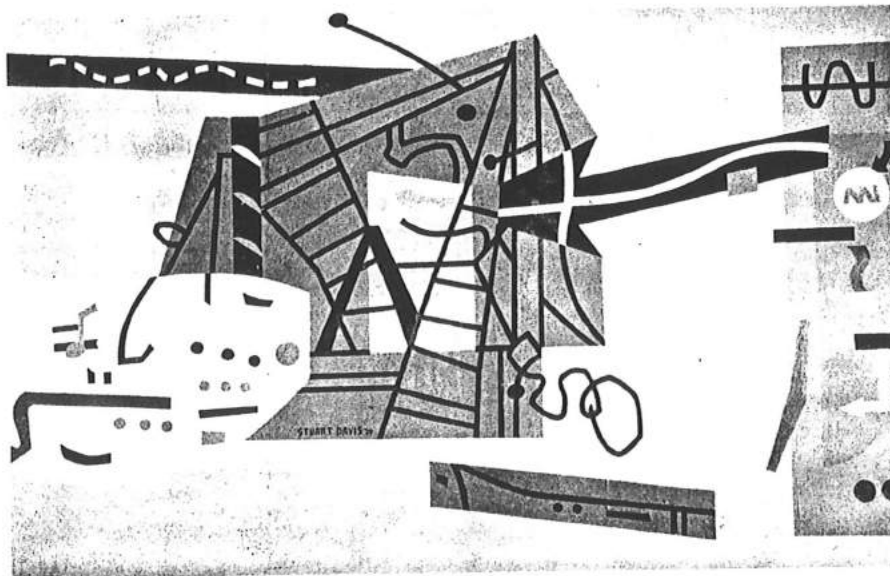
LOGIC over observation: "Bull Durham," created in 1921.

the Bowery, burlesque shows, Brooklyn Bridge, Negro saloons." These last were in Newark, where Negro pianists and singers were helping shape ragtime toward jazz and swing, a development of the American musical genius which has always fascinated Davis. It was on these drawing trips that he got his impressions of the industrial urban scene which he uses so effectively in his interpretations of the contemporary American world.

In June, 1913, one of Davis' cover designs for *The Masses* was selected by the columnist F.P.A. as "the best magazine cover of the year." Mainly through this the artist got an assignment to do drawings for *Harper's Weekly*, then being revived by Norman Hapgood. Far more important to the nineteen year old artist was the Armory Show which came in February of that year. Davis says that this event, in which he was represented by five watercolors similar to *Negro Saloon*, was "the greatest single influence" in his work. He began to realize that "reliance on the vitality of subject matter to carry the interest prevented an objective appraisal of the dynamics of the actual color-space relations on the canvas. I became vaguely aware of this on seeing the works at the Armory Show, but it took years to clarify the point."

What he got from the Armory Show is apparent in such paintings as *Gloucester Terrace* (1916) and *Yellow Hills* (1919). The Henri School had prepared him for the message of Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Matisse. The influence of Cézanne was slower in developing. The Armory Show confirmed his interest in surface, in summary handling, broad generalization of form, and emotional rather than an imitative use of color. It was with work of this kind that he made his bow to the New York art world in 1917 in his first one man show. During the years immediately following his interest in the more severe logical geometry of Cézanne, Seurat, and the Cubists was growing. He was drawn to this point of view by temperament and helped to it by his acquaintance with such artists as Charles Demuth, whom he had met on one of his trips to the New England coast.

The pictures painted during the 'twenties assert the supremacy of logic over the facts of observation. One sees this in *Cigarette Papers*, *Lucky Strike*, and *Bull Durham* done in 1921; in *Two Trees* and *Supper Table* done in 1925; and even more clearly in the egg-beater series begun in 1927, with their severe simplification and their insistence on the two dimensional character of the canvas (see cover). In 1927 he "nailed an electric fan, (Continued on page 32)



MURAL which Davis painted in 1929 for Studio B, radio station WNYC, typifies his preoccupation with mechanical aspects of our time and later interest in modern music forms such as jazz and boogie-woogie.

Feb 9, 1936 Frame 538

Historic Congress of Artists to Represent Finest Traditions of American Culture

SUNDAY WORKER FEB. 9, 1936

By Jacob Kainen

When the American Artists' Congress opens its sessions with the public meeting at Town Hall in New York on Friday evening a great deal of the credit for the prodigious work of organizing it should go to Stuart Davis, secretary of the Congress.

America's foremost abstract artist, Davis was one of the original bad-boys who shocked the philistine tastes of the old-hatters by departing from the realistic tradition. Quick to sense contemporary needs, Davis became conscious of the need to create a mass front of artists of all esthetic tendencies to combat the great menace of war and fascism, and to rise to the defense of culture. And so last summer, in conjunction with a group which included Isamu Noguchi, Arnold Blanch, William Gropper, Niles Spencer, Nicolai Cikovski, George Ault, Harry Sternberg, Harry Gottlieb and several other artists, Davis helped launch the first plans for the American Artists' Congress.

STUART DAVIS
Secretary of the Artists Congress to open Friday.

ROCKWELL KENT
Artist and author who will address the Congress.

Looking up from a mass of documents, Davis said, "Sit down. I'll be with you in a minute." The voice was hard-boiled and realistic, devoid of the soft manner of the professional esthete; a voice that disdained circumlocution and cut straight to the point at issue. Everything about him bore out the impression of a man who made no compromise with his convictions; the deep chest, cocky like a pouter-pigeon's; the blue eyes that looked at you appraisingly; the mobile mouth that twisted an emphatic word.

Wide Response

"How are things shaping up as the date of the Congress approaches?" I asked.

"Fine. Fine. Messages of greeting are pouring in from almost every state in the Union. Not only that, but we are receiving greetings from other countries. A few days ago we received messages of solidarity from twenty-five artists and writers of the Argentine and warm letters from the Argentine publications Editorial Claridad and La Revista Actualidad. American artists from all over the country are en route to New York. Large delegations are coming in from Chicago, Minneapolis, St. Louis and other points. Luis Arenal says that a strong representation will be here from Mexico. Without doubt, the Congress will be the most important single event in American art since the Armory show of 1913, which so strongly affected the ideas and styles of American artists.

"Can you definitely announce the list of speakers for the opening night at Town Hall on Friday?

"Yes. Lewis Mumford will be chairman for the evening. I will talk on 'Why an Artists' Congress'; Paul Manship will explain why the established artist is opposed to Fascism; Rockwell Kent will have as his subject, 'What is Worth Fighting For?'; Joe Jones will talk on the repression of art in America; Aaron Douglas will speak on the Negro in American Writers and for organized White will talk on 'Art in the Soviet Union'; George Biddle will tell why artists should boycott the exhibition to be held in Berlin in conjunction with the Olympic Games; Heywood Broun will talk for the League of American Writers' and for organized labor; and Peter Blume will sum up the evening with a paper entitled 'The Artist Must Choose.' However, I hasten to add that all the speeches will be short and snappy. Perhaps some of them will be broadcast."

"Can you give me the program for the closed sessions?"

Program for Congress

"Certainly. Saturday morning the Congress members will go into the closed sessions at the New York School for Social Research. Papers will concern themselves with the general problem of the artist in society: The first paper will be 'The Social Basis of Art,' by Meyer Schapiro: Lynd Ward will follow with 'Race and Nationality in Art'; Jerome Klein will finish the morning's work with a paper on 'The Artist and His Audience.' Discussions will follow each paper. Saturday afternoon the general topic will be 'Problems of the American Artist.' The papers will deal with 'Tendencies in American Art' with Saul Schary or Arnold Blanch as the speaker; 'The Government in Art' with the speaker as yet undesignated; and 'Fascism, War and Art,' also with no speaker assigned.

"The third closed session on Sunday morning will deal with the economic problems of the artists today. The first paper will discuss these questions. Alexander Stavenitz will deliver the paper. Next will come a paper by Henry Billings on the history of artists' organizations in America. Ralph Pearson will then talk on 'Museums, Dealers and Critics,' after which Katherine Schmidt will explain the rental policy of the Society of Painters, Sculptors and Gravers. The Artists' Union will give a report of its activities, and other art roups will report. Sunday afternoon, the entire closed session will be given to the planning and formation of the permanent orgaization."

Letters From Afar

"By the way," he added, "you should look at some of the letters we got from artists throughout the country. For instance, take a glance at this hot letter from Walter Ufer, of Taos, New Mexico. Ufer is an old established National Academician. Listen to this. 'You cannot chew medals. Come out of the ether, etc., etc., in order to put actual dollars in their pockets instead of just hot air and prove that artists are willing to help make the world better for all mankind regardless of color or creed.' On the back of the envelope is the stamp of the Labor Party of New Mexico."

"A little more official information," he continued. "Friday afternoon before the Congress opens, a reception will be given to the out-of-towners at the A. C. A. Gallery, 52 West Eighth Street. The artists forming the welcoming committee are Theresa Bernstein, president of the New York Society of Women Artists; Doris Lee; Alexander Stavenitz and others. Tickets for the opening night session can be procured at the A. C. A. Gallery or at Town Hall."

Biblio

Sunday Worker 2/9/36 interview w/ SD

Post

exhibit of ... tography.

The American Artists' Congress, 66 Fifth Avenue, has just issued in an edition of 3,000 copies the book of the first congress, containing the whole story of the platform and far-reaching discussions, ranging around the opposition of progressive artists to war and Fascism, that took place at the challenging sessions in this city last February. Forty well-known artists and writers, among them Lewis Mumford, Stuart Davis, Rockwell Kent, Peter Blume, Max Weber, Meyer Schapiro, J. C. Orozco, D. A. Siqueiros, Joe Jones, George Biddle and Louis Lozowick, contribute articles on esthetic, cultural and economic questions of prime interest

THIS IS A CALL to all artists, of recognized standing in their profession, who are aware of the critical conditions existing in world culture in general, and in the field of the Arts in particular. This Call is to those artists, who, conscious of the need of action, realize the necessity of collective discussion and planning, with the objective of the preservation and development of our cultural heritage. It is for those artists who realize that the cultural crisis is but a reflection of a world economic crisis and not an isolated phenomenon.

The artists are among those most affected by the world economic crisis. Their income has dwindled dangerously close to zero.

Dealers, museums, and private patrons have long ceased to supply the meager support they once gave.

Government, State and Municipally sponsored Art Projects are giving only temporary employment — to a small fraction of the artists.

In addition to his economic plight, the artist must face a constant attack against his freedom of expression.

Rockefeller Center, the Museum of Modern Art, the Old Court House in St. Louis, the Coit Memorial Tower in San Francisco, the Abraham Lincoln High School, Rikers Island Penitentiary — in these and other important public and semi-public institutions, suppression, censorship or actual destruction of art works has occurred.

Oaths of allegiance of teachers, investigations of colleges for radicalism, sedition bills aimed at the suppression of civil liberties, discrimination against the foreign-born, against Negroes, the reactionary Liberty League and similar organizations, Hearst journalism, etc., are daily reminders of fascist growth in the United States.

A picture of what fascism has done to living standards, to civil liberties, to workers' organizations, to science and art, the threat against the peace and security of the world, as shown in Italy and Germany, should arouse every sincere artist to action.

We artists must act. Individually we are powerless. Through collective action we can defend our interests. We must ally ourselves with all groups engaged in the common struggle against war and fascism.

There is need for an artists' organization on a nation-wide scale, which will deal with our cultural problems. The creation of such a permanent organization, which will cooperate with kindred organizations throughout the world, is our task.

SIGNERS OF THE CALL FOR THE AMERICAN ARTISTS CONGRESS

Berenice Abbott
Yarnall Abbott
Albert Abramovitz
Harry Ackerman
Bertrand Ruben Adams
Kenneth M. Adams
Lawrence Adams
Ivan le Loraine Albright
Rifka Angel
Annot
George Ault
Milton Avery

Peggy Bacon
Phil Bard
Will Barnet
Herman Baron
Thomas W. Barrett, Jr.
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Norman Bel Geddes
Ben Benn
Ahron Ben-Shmuel
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Bernece Berkman
Saul Berman
Lucian Bernhard
Henry Bernstein
Theresa Bernstein
Jolan Gross Bettelheim
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Joseph Biel
Henry Billings
Emil Bisttram
Arnold Blanch
Lucile Blanch
Lou Block
Peter Blume
Walter Bohanan
Aaron Bohrod
Ilya Bolotowsky
Cameron Booth
Henry Albert Botkin
Louis Bouché
Margaret Bourke-White
Julian Bowes
Ernest Brace
Edith Bronson
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Sonia Gordon Brown
George Byron Browne
Beniamino Bufano
Jacob Burck
Paul Burlin
Dorothy Randolph Byard

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Florence Cane
Frank Carson
Dane Chanase
Warran Cheney
Nicolai Cikovsky
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Hy Cohen
Sonya Cohen
Howard Cook
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Vincent D'Agostino
Gustaf Dalstrom
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Milton Douthat
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Werner Drewes
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Mabel Dwight

Stuart Edie
Camilo Egas
Dorothy Eisner
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Maurice Freedman
Arnold Friedman

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Todros Geller
Hugo Gellert
Eugenie Gershoy
Lydia Gibson
C. Adolph Glassgold
Enrico Glicenstein
Maurice Glickman
H. Glintenkamp
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Mordecai Gorelick
Adolph Gottlieb
Harry Gottlieb
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D. S. Greenbaum
Grace Greenwood
Marion Greenwood
Waylande Gregory
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Chaim Gross
John Groth
Bernar Gussow
James Guy

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Thomas Handforth
Murray Hantman
Minna Harkavy
Louis Harris
Abraham Harriton
Bertram Hartman
Theodore G. Haupt
Alonzo Hauser
Zoltan Hecht
Albert Heckman
Harry Hering
Eugene Higgins
Hilaire Hiler
Stefan Hirsch
Albert Hirschfeld
Carl Hoeckner
Carl R. Holty
Emil Holzauer
John Langley Howard
Loretta Howard
Leo. T. Hurwitz

Eitaro Ishigaki

Rudolf Jacobi
Herbert Kent Jennings
Grace Mott Johnson
Mary O. Johnson
Sargent Claude Johnson
Harry Donald Jones
Joe Jones
Mervin Jules

Jacob Kainen
Louis Kamm
Martha Ryther Kantor
Morris Kantor
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Sam Karp
Leo Katz
Irving Katzenstein
Valeria Kaun
Rockwell Kent
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Jerome Klein
Karl Knaths
Frederic Knight
Benjamin Kopman
Eve Kottgen
Yankel Kufeld
Yasuo Kuniyoshi

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A. F. Levinson
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Sidney Loeb
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Erle Loran
Barbara Lotham
Margaret Lowengrund
Louis Lozowick
Eugene Ludins
Ryah Ludins
Helen Lundenberg
Gwen Lux

Helen Mann
Paul Manship
Berta Margoulies
Herman Maril
Jack Markow
Jan Matulka
Austin Mecklem
Joseph Meert
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Knud Merrild
William Meyerowitz
Edward Millman
Winifred Milius
Florence Minard
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Bruce Mitchell
Ross Moffett
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Eugene Morley
Peter Muller-Munk
Lewis Mumford
Helen McAuslin
Miriam McKinnie

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Reuben Nakian
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Isamu Noguchi

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Moses Oley
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William Owen

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Augustus Hamilton Peck
Fritz Pfeiffer
Esther Phillips
Girolamo Piccolli
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Hobson Pittman
Joseph Pollet
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A. Redfield
Anton Refregier
Bertram Reibel
Philip Reisman
Louis Ribak
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Boardman Robinson
Gilbert Rocke
Kurt Roesch
Robert Bruce Rogers
Elsa Rogo
Emanuele Romano
Arnold Ronnebeck
Doris Rosenthal
Theodore Jay Roszak
Lincoln Rothschild
Andree Ruellan

William Sanger
Leo Sarkadi
Concetta Scaravaglione
Meyer Schapiro
Saul Schary
Katherine Schmidt
Arthur Julian Schneider
Georges Schreiber
Alfred A. Sessler
Ben Shahn
Joseph M. Sheridan
William Siegel
Bernice Singer
William Earl Singer
Mitchell Siporin
Clara Skinner
Jean Paul Slusser
David Smith
Jacob Getlar Smith
Miron Sokole
Serge Soudeikine
Moses Soyer
Raphael Soyer
Walt Speck
Niles Spencer
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Benton Spruance
Maxwell B. Starr
Alexander Stavenitz
William Steig
Ralph Steiner
Joseph Stella
Algot Stenbery
Harry Sternberg
Louis King Stone
Paul Strand
Jay Sutton
Sakari Suzuki
James Johnson Sweeney
Sam Swerdloff

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Tschacbasov
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Charmion von Wiegand
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Warren Wheelock
Francis Robert White
Donald Williams
Barbara Willson
Gilbert Wilson
Arnold Wiltz
Caleb Winholtz
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Ann Wolfe
Hamilton Achille Wolf
Adolp Wolff

Chikamichi Yamasaki
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Gyula Zilzer
Santos Zingale
Nicola Ziroli
Marguerite Zorach
William Zorach