

## Toward a Native Art

The great flowering of American modern art since 1945 has origins that go back much earlier—to the years after World War I, when writers, critics, and artists argued over the cultural health of the nation. Europe beckoned, and many, including Ernest Hemingway, fled to Paris. But others remained in Manhattan to do battle in little magazines such as *Soil* and *Broom*. Was America in the 1920s a sinkhole of crass “commercialism,” or were the new industrial machines, consumer gadgets, and advertising signs themselves a living native art? Historian Wanda Corn tells how this debate, now largely forgotten, helped lead to the vigorous original American art that we see today.

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by Wanda M. Corn

Art historians have long regarded the 1940s and '50s as the period when New York City became the world's art center.

Spurred on by European artists such as Piet Mondrian and André Breton, who took refuge in Manhattan during World War II, American painters developed their own native avant-garde. The large, vigorous abstractions of New York School artists such as Jackson Pollock, Adolph Gottlieb, and Willem de Kooning were hailed internationally as America's first major contributions to art. New York City has been on top ever since—its schools, studios, museums, and galleries a magnet to painters, as Paris was earlier.

But what happened in postwar New York had its beginnings much earlier. Although largely forgotten

today, a cultural battle raged on American soil during the 1920s. Silently with palette and brush, or vocally in a bevy of short-lived “little” magazines, American intellectuals debated how to create an original art.

One problem, some maintained, was that America's best artists chose to work overseas. Many U.S. writers and painters—F. Scott Fitzgerald, T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Alfred Maurer—sought abroad what they could not find at home: a lively international cultural scene and a public receptive to new forms of expression. “Paris was our mistress,” mused one American literary expatriate. In the city's cafés, they “drank black coffee by choice, believing that Paris itself was sufficient alcohol,” critic Mal-

colm Cowley recalls.

One young writer of the day, Waldo Frank, studied his compatriots as they frequented these cafés and complained about America's materialism and insensitivity to the arts. He was struck by the irony of the situation. Here were some of America's finest "conveyers of truth, creators of beauty," he wrote. "They sneered, they jeered, they swore they were done with the barbaric land that had given them birth." But how would America's cultural life ever improve, he wondered, if its creative talents refused to "endow America with what they accused America of lacking?" Yet Frank understood their dilemma.

The years surrounding World War I in the United States had witnessed the speedy acquisition of cars, movies, and radios; ragtime, jazz, and the tango; hot-dog stands, dime stores, gas stations; packaged cigarettes, alarm clocks, safety razors; skyscrapers, grain elevators, and assembly lines; billboards, national brand-name consumer products, and tabloids. Was it possible to create art from this?

Two quite different groups of American painters, writers, and critics attempted to provide an answer.

### Spiritual Refuge

The first group was led by Frank and his fellow writers for *Seven Arts* magazine—Van Wyck Brooks and Paul Rosenfeld.\* It included the circle of painters associated with noted photographer Alfred Stieglitz, most notably Marin, Hartley, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Arthur Dove.

\*The first issue of *Seven Arts* appeared in New York in 1916. The magazine folded the following year when its backers objected to the pacifist position on World War I taken by some of its editors and contributors.

# BROOM



“ FEBRUARY · 1922

The son of a well-to-do merchant, Stieglitz (1864–1946) devoted himself, during the early years of this century, to gaining recognition for photography as a fine art. He pioneered in taking art photographs with a small, hand-held camera. As an entrepreneur, he promoted the medium through his magazine, *Camera Work*, and in his gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan.

Stieglitz also championed modern painting and sculpture. Five years before the famous 1913 New York Armory Show, which introduced modern European art to the American public, he exhibited works by Matisse and Rodin at "291."

Stieglitz believed that American art should be elegant and expressive; it should provide spiritual refuge from the crassness of the everyday world. Thus, his taste ran to the highly charged abstract and semi-

abstract still lifes and landscapes of Marin, Dove, Hartley, and O'Keeffe—painters who were working with modern colors and forms and consciously striving to arrive at a uniquely American expression.

### No Ordinary Folk

Stieglitz and the writers in *Seven Arts* despaired of American life. They found it repressed, materialist, and—to use one of their favorite words—*vulgar*. Stieglitz criticized automobile designs “for their lack of quality and feeling.” Even the debonair songs of George Gershwin did not escape attack. Paul Rosenfeld claimed that Gershwin could “never long transcend the plain of things that please a public incapable of discrimination.”

Naively, but not surprisingly, these critics, who grew up during the optimistic Progressive era, believed that artists could help reform society. If their art was sufficiently spiritual and emotional, they argued, it would give Americans the satisfaction of having an “inner life” and their own culture free of European influences.

To achieve this, the artist must sink roots into American soil and rise above gross commercialism. Members of Stieglitz's circle saw themselves as a class apart. They centered their lives around creative and intellectual activities; they consciously kept to themselves and close to nature, rarely socializing with ordinary folk.

Another group rose to defend America. Its members eagerly embraced just those qualities of U.S. culture that Stieglitz, O'Keeffe, and their friends disdained.

In 1916, as *Seven Arts* was calling for a new spirit in American art, another small magazine, the *Soil*, was loudly proclaiming that America already had a genuine culture. Intellectuals simply didn't know where to look for it: in comics and dime-store novels; in vaudeville; in the design of bridges and skyscrapers.

Robert Coady (1876–1921) was a sometime painter, writer, art dealer, and publisher, and the guiding spirit of the *Soil's* short run of five issues in 1916–17. We know little else about him. But he was perhaps the first to argue that America's lively mass culture embodied lessons for the high priests and priestesses of the fine arts.

Coady had Walt Whitman's reverence for street life. He often wrote with the bard's gusto, adding his own brand of fervent evangelism. Art, he declared, “comes from a feeling of human being. It is an extension of life and travels the earth and goes on to eternity.”

### No Gentlemanly Airts

Trained at New York's Art Students' League, Coady began his career abroad, among the American expatriates and European modernists. He was, someone once remarked, a “pugnacious red-headed Irishman.” He had none of the gen-

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tlemanly airs of the *Seven Arts* crowd.

It is not known how long Coady lived in Paris before World War I. He was probably doing some painting there when he became a close friend of a young American sculptor, Michael Brennan. In 1914, Coady returned stateside and, with Brennan as his European agent, started the Washington Square Gallery in New York's Greenwich Village.\*

His exhibits were highly eclectic—at first glance. He showed the European avant-garde painters (Picasso, Juan Gris, André Derain, Matisse). He displayed African and South Sea Island sculpture and art by children. As far as is known, he did not exhibit or sell works by modern American artists.

Coady had a theory about art and culture. He never entirely articulated it, but he hinted at in the *Soil*. He championed art that was intuitive and freely expressive, and despaired of art that was overly intellectual or theoretical, that depended on artistic conventions, or that was removed from life. Genuine art, for him, was unencumbered by the interference of teachers. Art, he wrote, should grow from the soil, "naturally, healthfully, beautifully."

So he illustrated *Soil* with reproductions of work he considered genuine and expressive: archaic Greek statues; Egyptian paintings; works by Toulouse-Lautrec, Cézanne, and Henri Rousseau; photographs of American machines, prize fighters, rodeo riders, and entertainers.

Such appreciation of the primitive and spontaneous did not originate with Coady. He acquired it in Paris,

where, before World War I, it had become a vogue among Europeans. His friend in Paris, the American painter Max Weber, had been studying African art. And Coady had gotten to know the naive painter Rousseau, of whom Weber was an early admirer.

But Coady's penchant for everyday Americana, from machines and skyscrapers to baseball and jazz, was something new to the New York art world.

#### "Who Will Paint?"

To Coady, the fine arts in America were neither original nor authentic. They were, he wrote, "our academic imitations of the French academy," or "our technical imitations of the Franco-Spanish school." What was "young, robust, energetic, naive, immature, daring, and big spirited" in American culture were industry, commerce, the cities, and, especially, the great swirl of ethnic groups. Here, he wrote, "traditions are being merged, blood is being mixed." The result was a brand new culture. Coady became its cataloguer.

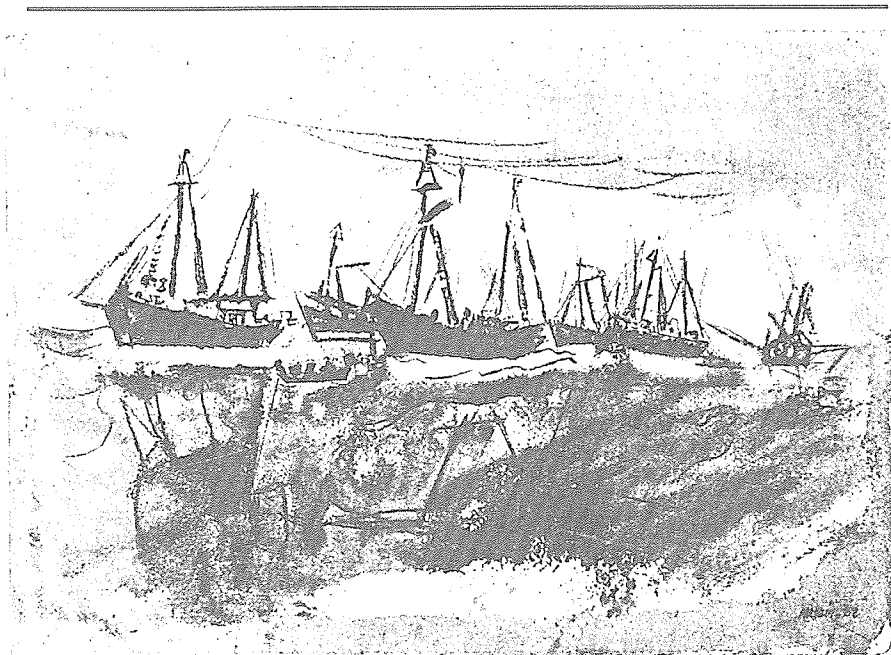
In the *Soil's* first issue, he sang a Whitmanesque hymn to the American scene:

The Panama Canal, the Skyscraper and Colonial Architecture. The East River, the Battery and the "Fish Theatre." The Tug Boat and the Steamshovel . . . The Steel Plants and the Electrical Shops. The Bridges, the Docks, the Viaducts . . . Indian Beadwork, Sculptures, Decorations, Music and Dances . . . Ragtime . . . The Cigar-store Indians . . . The Shoemakers, the Haberdashers and Clothiers. . . .

Coady went on like this for almost two full pages.

The *Soil* ran articles on the American language, on industrial machines, and on the Woolworth Building in New York. It reported on

\* Three years later, he relocated to 489 Fifth Avenue and named his new establishment the Coady Gallery.



Courtesy of Kennedy Galleries.

dressmaking and serialized a dime novel by Nick Carter. Photographs of celebrities such as comedian Bert Williams and the circus clown "Toto," of sports figures including prizefighter Jack Johnson and swimmer Annette Kellerman, were interspersed among reproductions of European cubist and abstract paintings.

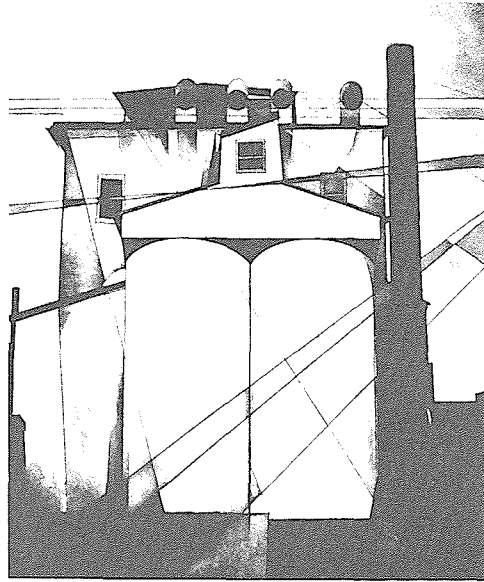
As for America's modern artists, Coady accused them of blindly following the "isms" of Europe and missing what was around them. "Who will paint New York! Who?" he asked. A mock advertisement in the *Soil* announced an exhibition of Freedom of Movement in Light and Space—at the Aquarium, Battery Park, New York City. Another "ad" offered art lessons in Henri Rousseau's Paris studio. (Rousseau had been dead for seven years.)

Trying to make sense of these harangues, taunts, and jibes, at least one historian has compared Coady's distaste for fine art to the Dadaists' anti-art rhetoric.\* But this ignores Coady's intent.

Coady did have a sense of play like the Dadaists, and he was iconoclastic. But he was also an earnest cultural nationalist. Like Waldo Frank, Coady believed in the possibility of a new American art as original as that of Europe. ("With art in abundance and our arteries young, why should we nibble on a dead end of Europe?")

\*The Dadaists were a group of western European writers and artists that included poet Tristan Tzara and painter-sculptor Marcel Duchamp. During the 1910s and early '20s, they embraced chance and irrationality. A typical piece of Dada art is Duchamp's "ready-made" *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), which is just that—an ordinary bicycle wheel, mounted on a kitchen stool.

At left is John Marin's *Deep-Sea Trawlers, Maine, No. 1*, (1932). At right, *My Egypt* (1925) by Charles Demuth. During the 1920s, Demuth began to depict the landscape—steel mills, derricks, water tanks, smokestacks, grain elevators—near his home in Lancaster, Pa. He also drew experimental abstractions based on the rhythms of jazz.



Charles Demuth. *My Egypt*. 1927. Oil. 35 1/4 x 30 inches. Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

he asked.) He just offered a very different strategy for cultivating it.

Coady prescribed a mixture of social and cultural reforms: "Free music, dancing, vaudeville and movies should be in all parks and public schools." Saturdays should be holidays "in honor of our masters in art, science, and industry." Cities should offer free public exhibitions of both the arts and the sciences. And artists should respond to America's popular culture.

But for all Coady's enthusiasm and unorthodox charm, he seems to have had little direct influence on the artists of his time.

Then, in 1921, Coady's mission was taken up by a new magazine called *Broom* (1921–24). Among its first editors was Harold A. Loeb, who had just graduated from Princeton. Loeb backed the magazine with his

inherited wealth and kept it solvent partly by taking advantage of the international dollar exchange and publishing out of Rome, Berlin, and New York.

*Broom* began by soliciting essays, poetry, and art works from Europeans as well as Americans. The first few issues, Loeb later recalled, were not very distinctive. If early numbers of *Broom* had a point of view, it was simply to support art that was modern and that reflected a "higher consciousness." The magazine published many of the same writers who had appeared in the now-defunct *Seven Arts*—James Oppenheim, Sherwood Anderson, and Waldo Frank.

What the magazine lacked, Loeb complained, was direction. Its art reproductions were diverse: Joseph Stella's cubist *Brooklyn Bridge*; Juan

Gris's cubist still lifes; Picasso's drawing of Igor Stravinsky; sculptor Jacques Lipschitz's bust of Jean Cocteau; a painting of a vase with flowers and a drawing of a nude by Matisse; Rockwell Kent's gloomy *Newfoundland Dirge*.

### The French Connection

Then, in May 1922, Loeb, who was living abroad, wrote an article entitled "Foreign Exchange." The essay was about the French influence on American literary expatriates. Two things struck him. First, Americans such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were displaying a new concern with form and a fastidiousness about their language. And, second, expatriates—this flabbergasted Loeb—were beginning to re-evaluate their own country, taking a cue from their European friends. It was not, Loeb wrote, intellectual America that interested the Europeans but "that other America of the skyscrapers, of the movies, of the streets."

French writers and artists such as Jean Cocteau and Marcel Duchamp were scrutinizing contemporary America, hoping to capture "the crudeness of the amazing contrasts of the age and the speed of its mechanism." These Europeans had no patience with Yankees who praised French culture while demeaning their own. It was precisely America's gracelessness that the French loved.

Loeb's perceptions are echoed in Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return* (1934), Waldo Frank's *In the American Jungle* (1937), Alfred Kreymborg's *Troubadour* (1925), and Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* (1964). From about 1915 on, and increasingly during the 1920s, the European avant-garde provided a kind of therapy for American literati who, like Loeb, had been brought up to

think of their country as a puritanical wasteland.

Most of these Europeans had never been to America and knew it only through film, magazines, and recordings. But they were captivated. Philippe Soupault tried to write in what he called the "American tempo," picked up from U.S. movies. Fernand Léger did cubist drawings of Charlie Chaplin (which *Broom* published). Darius Milhaud wrote orchestral music derived from American jazz and ragtime rhythms. And architect Le Corbusier exulted over the "classic" design of American grain elevators, factories, and skyscrapers.

### Capitalist Beauty

Loeb's own conversion was swift, and his new enthusiasm for American culture gave *Broom* the editorial direction it needed. In "The Mysticism of Money" (*Broom*, September 1922), he dressed down those U.S. writers such as Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Paul Rosenfeld who "hammer the country for its emptiness of beauty."

Opening the essay as if it were an anthropological treatise, Loeb declared that every nation's art history had three phases: The archaic or creative period, when art forms are invented in response to the culture's dominant religion; the classic period, when those forms are perfected; and the decadent period, when traditional forms become exhausted.

The art of Europe, Loeb claimed, was in the decadent period and declining. American culture, on the other hand, was in the archaic period. Anonymous workmen were creating exciting new forms, inspired by the country's own "religion" of capitalism. Great machines, advertising, skyscrapers, bridges, and factories—such was America's

“archaic” art.

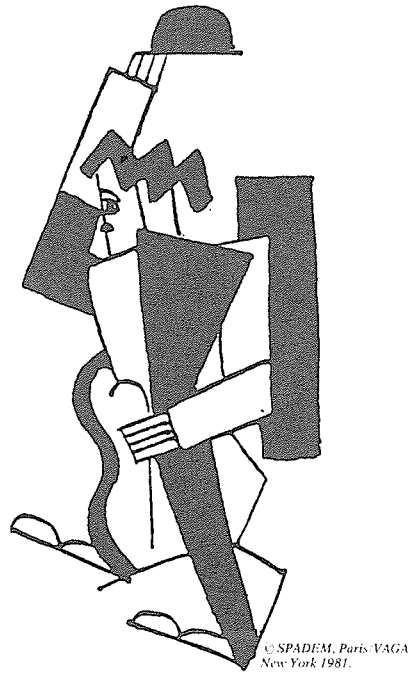
If this sounds like Robert Coady, it is because Loeb had discovered *Soil*. Earlier, when he wrote “Foreign Exchange,” Loeb credited *only* the Europeans for their grasp of American popular culture. Now he acknowledged Coady’s early efforts on the home front.

### An American Original

“The Mysticism of Money” was, in fact, a careful digest of Coady’s ideas. But Loeb was less impulsive than Coady; he came across as a serious critic of American civilization, not as a fiery preacher. And because he seemed so serious and analytical, he offered a much more convincing challenge to American intellectuals and artists than Coady ever had. It had been easy in 1916 to ignore Coady. In 1922, Loeb emerged as a scholar of popular culture, offering a genuine alternative to the critics’ prevailing pessimism about the state of American art.

Meanwhile, the French avant-garde continued to influence a handful of American painters. Most U.S. artists in Paris were still content to work within the modern cubist and abstract styles of Europe’s guiding lights. But at least one American artist of the 1920s—Gerald Murphy (1888–1964)—was to prove something of an original.

Murphy was the wealthy, adventurous, and stylish son of the owner of New York’s chic leather-goods store, Mark Cross & Co. After taking his B.A. at Yale and a two-year graduate course at the Harvard School of Landscape Architecture, Murphy, with his wife and young children, sailed for Europe in 1921—to escape from family pressures, to study European gardening, and to live the “good life.” In Paris and Antibes,



*Fernand Léger's cubist Charlie Chaplin, from Broom, January 1922.*

where he and his wife, Sara, established homes, they became friends of Picasso, Fernand Léger, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and John Dos Passos.

The French and American avant-garde liked Murphy instantly—partly because of his unabashed Americanness, expressed in his penchant for jazz and country-and-western music. The Murphys called their Riviera home Villa America and posted an abstract design of the U.S. flag near its gateway. Here they often served home-grown sweet corn and tomatoes to their guests. And they threw extravagant but beautifully planned parties.

We can glimpse something of their elegant life in the first half of Fitz-





*In pursuit of an original American art, Georgia O'Keeffe painted semi-abstractions of America's natural landscapes. At left is her Jack-in-the-Pulpit, No. 2 (1930). In Paris, Gerald Murphy celebrated a new age of American gadgetry with Razor (1924), at right.*

Collection of the artist. Photo by Malcolm Varon.

gerald's *Tender Is the Night* (1934), where the character Dick Diver is modeled on Murphy. Keeping up with Gerald and Sara, recalled Dos Passos, was like "trying to live in heaven."

Murphy was not trained as a painter. But when he saw the work of Georges Braque, Picasso, and Juan Gris in the window of a Paris gallery, he was hooked. "If that's painting," he wrote, "it's what I want to do." He and Sara immediately signed up to take lessons from Natalia Goncharova, a Russian abstract artist living in Paris. But Murphy quickly developed a style and imagery of his own, one that combined cubism with American subject matter.

His *Boatdeck* (1922, now lost) was an 18-foot-high vertical canvas of smokestacks and ventilators as seen from the deck of an ocean liner. It recalled Murphy's own experience crossing the Atlantic and, in its

clean, crisp forms, his fondness for things mechanical. For his still life *Razor* (1924), Murphy shunned the glasses, bottles, and guitars that were the familiar subjects of European cubist paintings. Instead, he chose new American gadgets—a safety razor, a fountain pen, and a box of matches.

In *Cocktail* (1927), he painted a corkscrew, martini glasses, cigars, and a cocktail shaker. Murphy had fled the business world of his father only to paint on a heroic scale the very objects for sale in his father's store.

The Europeans loved Murphy's work. Picasso praised his paintings as "simple and direct and . . . Amuriken, certainly not European." Léger said he was "the only American painter in Paris."

Although never reproduced in *Broom's* pages, Murphy's art fit neatly into the magazine's aesthetic.



Dallas Museum of Fine Arts.  
Foundation for the Arts Collection.  
Gift of Mr. Gerald Murphy.

His paintings, which received remarkably little attention in the U.S. press, would have complemented the American poems there by Carl Sandburg, Wallace Stevens, E. E. Cummings, and William Carlos Williams. By 1923, America had taken center stage in *Broom*. Italian futurist Enrico Prampolini wrote on the esthetic of the machine. American poet Amy Lowell submitted verse about New England lilacs. Industrial machinery, rendered in cubist and futurist compositions, graced *Broom's* covers.

The magazine also added two new young boosters of popular culture to its staff—Matthew Josephson (1899–1978) and Malcolm Cowley (b. 1898).

After graduating from Columbia in 1920 and working briefly as acting editor of the *Newark Morning Ledger*, Josephson had set out for Europe. In 1922, he started a small magazine, *Secession*, in Vienna; later that year, he joined forces with Harold Loeb.

Cowley, a graduate of Harvard (1920) and France's University of Montpellier (1922), signed up with the *Broom* about the same time.

In Europe, both men had made friends among the avant-garde, particularly the Dadaists. The anti-art rhetoric of the latter spurred their youthful rebellion against the high-toned view, championed by Waldo Frank and Paul Rosenfeld, that art was a refined, spiritual experience.

Cowley and Josephson were drawn to Loeb's view of America's cultural assets like bees to honey. They wrote a series of colorful essays promoting Loeb's doctrine, fully aware that they would infuriate the reigning American literary lights. Among the best essays, if not the most outrageous, was Josephson's "The Great American Billposter," in the November 1922 *Broom*.

Josephson argued that advertising was one of America's finest native

arts, reflecting "the national temperament with great clairvoyance." Advertisements were "the most daring and indigenous literature of the age." They were, he claimed, "far more arresting and provocative than 99 percent of the stuff that passes for poetry in our specialized magazines."

Josephson found a line by Keats ("The beaded bubbles winking at the brim") no more poetic than one by an anonymous ad man ("Meaty Marrow Oxtail Joints"). Applauding the typography and layout of ads, as well as their quick cheery rhythms, he urged young writers to "become more sensitive to the particular qualities in their material environment."

In the same issue, Cowley published "Valuta," an expatriate's ballad to America, "my land of cowboys of businessmen of peddlers peddling machinery." The poem incorporated lines from songs of the day and swung with the rhythms of popular music.

Within the next few years, some of America's best-known writers seemed to respond to Josephson's toast to ad men. E. E. Cummings wrote short, snappy poems that sounded like advertising jingles. John Dos Passos interrupted the narrative of his *U.S.A.* trilogy (1930-36) with cinematic "newsbreaks." And in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), F. Scott Fitzgerald erected a prominent roadside billboard featuring a gigantic pair of eyes to haunt his characters with the commercialism of the age.

In the December 1922 issue of *Broom*, Cowley and Josephson added a dash of kerosene to the fires of the now-escalating culture debate. Cowley wrote a thinly veiled satire of Van

Wyck Brooks, while Josephson lambasted Waldo Frank's latest novel, *City Block*. Clearly enjoying himself, Cowley pointed out the absurdity of Brooks seated at "a typewriter which is the most finished product of a mechanical civilization," while thundering against American grossness, puritanism, and "the commercial ugliness of cities."

#### And Now Warhol

Josephson attacked Frank for his psychoanalytic prose and "vague and flaccid vocabulary"; he urged writers to seek a greater "articulateness and precision of expression," exactly those qualities that he had earlier found and praised in advertisements.

Clearly, two schools of thought about American art had developed: Cowley and Josephson's belief that American mass culture was a vital resource, and Waldo Frank's position that U.S. culture was inimical to the fine arts.

Waldo Frank was willing to concede that jazz, Gershwin, and the *New York Daily News* were folk art—that is, art of the people. But he remained convinced that these were not fonts of "high art." Realizing the limitations of pop culture, he believed, provided "one of the incentives for the production of great art."

Another former writer with *Seven Arts*, Paul Rosenfeld, roundly rebuked European intellectuals for their fantasies about American popular culture. All the Europeans' talk about jazz and Charlie Chaplin would be harmless, he concluded in an essay in *Dial*, except for the fact that it is providing our "embryonic artists with cheap formulae, keeping them from working from their sensibilities."

For Rosenfeld and Frank, a great

\**Valuta* is a French term meaning a currency's foreign-exchange value.

American art was dawning—not in the gadgets and mechanical cubism of Gerald Murphy but in the transcendental nature studies and stately cityscapes of the Stieglitz circle. Such works, Rosenfeld wrote in *Port of New York* (1924), proved “we have taken root. No longer do we yearn to quit New York” for the cultural offerings of Europe.

Rosenfeld believed an American modernism was possible. But unlike Josephson and Cowley, he foresaw an art of refinement and beauty, not one built upon the popular idioms of advertising, jazz, and industry.

The arguments between the two camps continued throughout the 1920s but were quickly forgotten in the Depression years when social issues became the critics’ central concern. During the 1940s and ’50s, when young artists such as Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, and Mark Rothko chose not to go abroad for training, they seemed confident that they could develop their styles just as well in New York. Their self-reliance grew, in part, out of the ebullience of that earlier generation of artists and writers who believed that “American art” was not necessarily a contradiction in terms.

The discussion of whether American modernism should assimilate the materials of everyday life, or transcend them, did not die. During

the late 1950s and ’60s, when the pop artists—Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Roy Lichtenstein—challenged the lofty transcendentalism of the New York School, they replayed themes from the 1920s.

Indeed, there was something *déjà vu* about their enthusiasm for mass advertising and popular culture and their determined attacks on the works of Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. The large, colorful abstractions of Pollock, Rothko, and the New York School, they claimed, were too remote, turgid, and detached from life.

For the pop artists—as for Cowley, Josephson, and Murphy much earlier—modern American painting had to be built upon the nitty-gritty of American life, upon ads, national brands, comic strips, and gadgets. The artists of the New York School and their critics fought back, of course, claiming that theirs was a homegrown, deeply expressive art rising out of personal exploration and a commitment to locale—precisely what *Seven Arts* had called for several decades before.

Thus, though rarely acknowledged, the cultural battles of the 1920s smoothed the way for the great flowering of modern art in New York City after World War II that continues to influence painters across America to this day.