



IdeAs

Idées d'Amérique

11 | Printemps/Été 2018

Modernités dans les Amériques : des avant-gardes à aujourd'hui

Redefining Modernism: Stuart Davis's Cold War *Champion series*

Redéfinition du modernisme à travers les œuvres du peintre états-unien Stuart

Davis: la série des Champion, peintre pendant la Guerre Froide

Redefinición del Modernismo en las pinturas de la Guerra Fria del artista

Estadounidense Stuart Davis: la serie de los Champion

Kamila Benayada



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ideas/2385>

DOI: 10.4000/ideas.2385

ISSN: 1950-5701

Publisher

Institut des Amériques

Electronic reference

Kamila Benayada, « Redefining Modernism: Stuart Davis's Cold War *Champion series* », *IdeAs* [Online], 11 | Printemps/Été 2018, Online since 09 July 2018, connection on 01 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ideas/2385> ; DOI : 10.4000/ideas.2385

This text was automatically generated on 1 May 2019.



IdeAs – Idées d'Amérique est mis à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.

Redefining Modernism: Stuart Davis's Cold War *Champion* series

Redéfinition du modernisme à travers les œuvres du peintre états-unien Stuart Davis: la série des Champion, peinte pendant la Guerre Froide

Redefinición del Modernismo en las pinturas de la Guerra Fria del artista Estadounidense Stuart Davis: la serie de los Champion

Kamila Benayada

- 1 Born in 1892, American painter Stuart Davis grew up in Philadelphia and New York as modernity shaped the American metropolis and European modernist aesthetics were discovered in galleries and magazines like Alfred Stieglitz's or later at the Armory Show of Modern Art (New York, 1913). After the Show, Davis decided to be a "modern artist" (Davis, 1945), without actually defining the term 'modern'. Art critics and art historians explain that he wanted to develop a modernist pictorial language following the aesthetic innovations of Duchamp, Picabia, or Matisse¹. Davis acknowledged the importance of these artists for his work (1945). He experimented in form, working first towards flatness and a negation of illusory depth, then negating the importance of subject matter. He has been called a Cubist, an abstract artist, a modernist, and a post-Cubist, but this circumscribed his work to a limited territory, outside that of the second 'modernists' (Abstract Expressionists) and the 'post-modernists' (Pop Artists for example). By the late 1940s, critics and art dealers declared Davis to be outdated, too preoccupied with the past, and not enough with the concerns of his contemporaries: Clement Greenberg wrote in 1947: "(Davis's art) does not show us enough of ourselves and of the kind of life we live in our cities, and therefore does not release enough of our feeling" (in Lane 1991: 79). Gallery owner Samuel Kootz wrote in 1949 that Davis was one of the "pioneers in the revolt from the American tradition of Nationalism and of subservience to the object". However, Kootz considered his art "objective", while the new generation was creating "from an internal world rather than an external one" (Kootz S, 1949). Davis in turn attacked the younger generation and the galleries and critics supporting them: "Kootz, Greenberg, Barr, Janis, etc. represent Art Ideas which are oriented toward progress", he

recognized, but “I like popular culture, Topical Ideas, and not High Culture or Modernistic Formalism. I care nothing for Abstract Art as such, but only as it evidences a contemporary language of vision suited to modern life.” (SDP 17/12/50).

- 2 I would argue that while Clement Greenberg’s rhetoric of rupture² put forward a new group presented as the avant-garde, Davis’s works of the last two decades of his life (examined through the *Champion* series) are not *passé*, that they are in fact a complex and critical (re-)examination of early modernism. Davis continued to work in a way that disregarded the canon imposed by critics (Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg) and gallery owners (Kootz), exploring and reexamining the forms and shapes of his and other artists’ visual language, advancing and retreating, adding and deducting, so that his work is about flux, pluralism, process and experience, exploring those “dislocations of the experience of time and space” which constitute modern experience (Smith, 2014: 279). I propose that he was questioning visual expression, reconceptualizing modernism, adapting it and making it “suited to modern (or contemporary) life”. This critical re-examination of the past, including the artist’s own past, is precisely what constitutes Modernism for Greenberg³.
- 3 I will be looking at a series of paintings from a matchbook cover advertising Champion spark plugs (“America’s favorite’ spark plug”): *Little Giant Still Life* (1950)⁴, *Study After Little Giant Still Life* (ca.1950), *Little Giant Still Life (Black and White Version)* (1950-53)⁵, *Visa* (1951)⁶, and *Schwitzki’s Syntax* (1961)⁷. In these paintings, having (essentially) fixed the contours of various shapes, Davis changes mainly the color configuration of each work and in some cases the size of the canvas. The series thus appears as a formal exploration of color relationships within a given pattern. However, if taken with other works of the same period, the group of paintings establishes relations with one another, with the visual environment of popular culture, but also with earlier French and American modernism. In light of his, Davis’s late work seems backward-looking, but the artist’s strategy is another take on modernism in that it is concerned with interrelationships, reconceptualizations, movement, and self-criticism.

“Popular culture and Topical Ideas”: drawing (from) the contemporary environment.

- 4 At various stages of his life, Davis made lists of the things that made him want to paint, and they were mainly (but not only) things derived from popular culture: in 1940, writing about the content of the painting *Hot Still Scape*, he explained that what caught his eye was “[...] the product of everyday experience in the new lights, speeds, and spaces of the American environment. And it is important to note that our environment includes modern art as a living element [...]” (SDP 2/9/40).
- 5 The series under study derives from three ordinary products: the spark plugs, the matchbook on which the advertisement was printed, and advertising, which brought the two, medium and content, together in the same space. This strategy is post-modernist, as the works “appropriate kitsch or pop culture” and “reproduce it within high culture” (Turner, 1990: 7). Davis also borrows from Cubist collage, taking elements from advertisement as the Cubists took elements from newspapers. Working in a Cubist-inspired language, with similar concerns to the Cubists places him in a backward-looking position primarily concerned with perpetuating a tradition of the past. What struck him

in his visual environment is not typical of the 1940s: “[...] negro-boy hitching posts, white iron vases on green lawns, trotting horses, oyster houses, carriage wood-carving and fitting. New England blue skies and waters, superhighways, the proportions of 100 story buildings, gasoline pumps, taxis, billboards, cigarette packages, garages, neon tubes, music through radio, motion-picture juxtapositions, skywriting, etc.” (SDP 2/9/40). His list is old-fashioned but also timeless, as he goes against what Rosenberg called the “tradition of the new” (1965), where innovation and movement, rather than stasis, are seen as an American tradition. These references to past aesthetics place Davis in the French Cubist territory. In the ideological environment of the 1950s, that would have been aesthetic as well as ideological treason: the ‘champion’ nation was to be independent artistically as it was militarily, economically, and ideologically, and post-WW2 modernists were the torch-bearers of US democracy across the world. And according to the post-WW2 canon (essentially as defined by critics Greenberg or Rosenberg), the younger generation of American artists had to break free from the first modernists who worked with and around Alfred Stieglitz, Duchamp and Picabia, and were considered too European.

- 6 The contemporary environment Davis works from is both internal and external, from the world around him and works of other artists, and from his own previous compositions (this is what Cooper calls ‘recursion’)⁸. In 1927, Davis used the matchbook in *Matches*; *Percolator* is a composition based on a percolator; Duchamp used a chocolate grinder for his *La Broyeuse de Chocolat* in 1914. Davis’s dialogue with Duchamp started earlier: in *ITLKSEZ* (1921), after Marcel Duchamp’s *LHOOQ*, or the *Odol* paintings (1924) which had a bottle of mouthwash as their centerpiece as did Duchamp’s *Belle Haleine*, *Eau de Voilette*, of 1921. The spark plug was also used in Picabia’s machine portrait of a young American girl (*Portrait d’une jeune fille américaine dans l’état de nudité*), published in Stieglitz’s magazine 291 in 1915. So working on the spark-plug theme continues the dialogue with Duchamp, Picabia, and Stieglitz started in the 1920s, working in a tradition of the ‘old’. But Davis takes the theme towards other concerns: the “Topical Ideas” and the “popular culture” that the artist opposes to “High Culture” and “Modernistic Formalism”. The titles of the paintings contradict the flamboyant statement of the word *Champion*: three of the paintings in the series are ‘little giant’, ‘still (or dead) life’. The words in the title contradict one another. But Davis was also playing with the canon that made Abstract Expressionists the champions of American art, just as Duchamp and Picabia played with the art world’s conceptions of what art was: for Clement Greenberg, the works of minorities (women, African-Americans) were too personal, could not be objective, and so were “kitsch” (1939), but this type of artwork might well be labelled un-American as it pointed to the failings of American democracy (its inability to guarantee liberty, equality, and the pursuit of happiness to minorities), making the ‘champion’ seem small indeed, and its original values no longer valid (or, ‘dead’ as in the ‘still life’). As un-American activities were again looked into (at the end of the 1930s, conservative congressmen had refused to use public money for relief for left-wing artists; and President Truman later investigated civil-servant loyalty), Davis chose to paint large canvases with/of the word ‘Champion’, giving them titles that opposed the heroism implied in the word ‘champion’⁹. Furthermore, the fourth painting in the series, *Visa*, brings to mind the visa policy of the US government concerning ‘un-American’ members and suspected members of the CPUSA (Communist Party of the USA) who were denied passports, while communists from the rest of the world were denied entry into the US.

- 7 This places Davis in a position between the first modernists whose preoccupations he integrates in his works, and the later artists whose affiliations also included Duchamp (Jasper Johns or Robert Rauschenberg using 'found' objects in their works). In this sense, how should one interpret the meaning of the term 'post-Cubist' used by critics to describe Davis's later work¹⁰: is he 'post' as in 'after'¹¹? Or as 'against'? The tension between the two parallels that which exists between different interpretations of 'post-modern'. It seems that, looking at Davis's *Champion* paintings, he is neither after nor against, but rather acts as a connection, a hyphen between the first modernists and the artists of the post-WW2 period. His work is not a last breath of early modernism, but rather it erases borders between it and some artists of the younger generation, showing these borders to be porous rather than rigidly fixed. His modernism is constructed around a horizontal relation as well as a vertical genealogy¹².

“Color-space events”: experimenting with the tools of art: creating difference within sameness, and movement within stasis

- 8 Apollinaire defines Cubism as the art of painting new constellations from formal elements borrowed not from visual reality, but from conceptual reality (1913 : 272), where words and advertising are used because they play an aesthetic role in the modern city (*ibid*). Davis was certainly influenced by Cubism. He was also influenced by Duchamp and Picabia's idea that art was produced in relation to industrial (re-)production. But these influences are mere starting points, in the same way as the spark plug creates the spark that will make a car start (Davis referred to himself as a car in motion when describing his work on *Motel/ Ow! in San Pow*¹³ in August and September 1951).
- 9 In 1957 Davis explained that he was creating a “color-space event” on the canvas (“I simply call the things that happen when you use two colors, and the process of drawing and painting, a color-space event”, in Arnason: 44). “This informed usage of the word ‘art’ refers to nothing else but the artist’s abstraction of the color-space of the subject” (Davis, 1941: 102). The color-space event was the result of a juxtaposition of two or more colors and/or shapes, the interrelationship of the different parts.
- 10 Here, Davis uses a pre-existing combination of spaces, the name of the brand, and re-composes the shapes through color-combinations. Taking the matchbook, Davis made diagonal lines across the letters H, P, and O, later adding new shapes and colors, changing the size of each letter, the space in which they stand, and adding frames, planes and other shapes.
- 11 The first version's palette is large, and establishes a system of shapes used in the later versions. The second *study* is smaller, with a reduced palette, and a top coat thinned out to reveal the under-coat, so that the effect is of both a juxtaposition of colored shapes, and a superposition of coats of paint, and layers of color. The emphasis on flatness and two-dimensional space is made more ambiguous in this second version, as the layering creates depth. The study's central shape in black and white sets the tone for the third *Black and White Version*. This looks more like a sketch but is a complete work for Davis, with thin black lines interrupting an all-over white space. In the study, Davis's signature is placed in a blue rectangle, collage-like. That space becomes a white rectangle in the black and white version, with no signature, no identification of the painting as his, as if

the italics might clash with the bold letters of the word 'champion': being a version of another 'Davis', this needs no identification other than its relations with the other versions.

- 12 *Visa* (1951) has a large colorful palette. The space of the artist's signature is now a blue rectangle and the signature has migrated to the outer painted frame. Davis adds a fish-like squiggle in the top left, and the words ELSE at the bottom, and "The Amazing Continu-ity" on the right. ELSE was used to indicate the neutrality of subject matter (anything ELSE could have been used) (Cooper, 2016: 48). The discontinued, interrupted letters of "The Amazing Continu-ity" indicate his aesthetics based on reusing past works. It also places the painting within Greenberg's definition of art: "Art is - among other things - continuity, and unthinkable without it." (Greenberg, 1961: 314). Words included in the painting link theory and practice in one space, as theory becomes a colored shape equal to the other colored shapes on the canvas (Lane, 1978). The word ELSE appears in another contemporary painting, *Owh! in San Pao* based on his 1927 *Percolator*. So these paintings, while not one of the *Champion* series, are related to it through the word ELSE.
- 13 Finally, *Schwitzki's Syntax* painted a decade later is a composition in black and white, with a primary color, red, and a secondary one, green, which is also its complementary color. Davis adds a number of elements, playing on doubles and opposites (X and S (which are reversible letters), discs, the infinity sign...). Along the top is a line made by masking tape with a black line drawn along it. The space is cut in two, and the space of the tape is itself cut by the drawn black line, mirroring the other cut shapes: the letters H, P, and O, the disks, and the spaces framing the words. This work is about opposites and interruption as much as about continuity/infinity/affinity. It is about arrangement, organization, and as indicated in the title, 'syntax', of the spaces on the canvas, but also of the syntax of the series, or of the cluster of paintings of the 1950s¹⁴.
- 14 Indeed, this particular cluster's syntax is based on association: between the shapes, between the works in the series, between these works and others, and between these works and their cultural and political contexts. They acquire sense through the articulation of shape with shape (and each letter's shape next to another's produces a 'readable' word), color with color, painting with painting, and so on. Rather than underlining sameness and stasis, the co-existence of the individual paintings in the series stresses difference, but not one that induces rupture, it produces continuity, or flux, through correlation and connectedness. There is continuity in dis-continuity, as in the interrupted word which retains its meaning in spite of the break, and in spite of the change in line. The experience induced by Davis's paintings is an experience of transition and the transitory. Thus, Clément Oudart's interpretation of the poet Robert Duncan's modernity applies to Davis: " He apprehends modernity not as a given, a quality considered as acquired, inherited, or decreed, but as a value that goes through event and the experience of thought. Thus modernity as value and as operation renews itself in the experience of the transitory."¹⁵ (my translation). For Oudart, the event in Duncan's work is passage or flux (*ibid*), and for Davis, it is in the relation between color-shapes, but relation is precisely that: flux or passage. And that movement is not in the empty shapes, or in the equally empty word, but in the transformation of the shapes through color. So this series is about modernity, rather than about tradition (understood as simple retrospection). It is about modernism as critical affiliation to a tradition going back to early modernism, Cubism and Duchamp and Picabia.

Clusters and Relations: modernity/modernism.

- 15 Davis is clearly not painting according to the canon of modernism defined by Greenberg who promoted 'pure' non-ideological art against popular art, or the art of Braque and Eliot against Tin Pan Alley music and the front pages of the *Saturday Evening Post* (1939). The works of artists discovered and promoted by Greenberg had broken with both Regionalist kitsch and European or Parisian modernism. A decade later, on 11th August 1953, Davis wrote his gallery owner, Edith Halpert: "I am strictly a European (French, that is) man myself, altho [sic] forced by birth and circumstance to live in the American Art Desert as exile. And then of course the 'Europe' I mentally dwell in no longer exists in actuality." (EHP). Davis placed himself in a time-warp, outside of his time, and in a time-space that did not in fact exist. Similarly, the 1950s paintings pose a historical problem in that they were not painted according to the 'modernism' that was dominant in the 1950s. They seem to go against that vision of art because of their hybrid quality, but are in fact in line with Greenberg's definition of it as self-defining and self-critical (Greenberg 1961, 309). Nor did they come at a historical time when they could be labeled 'post-modern'. They are 'post'-cubist and 'post'-Duchamp as a continuation of both, remaining in the modernist tradition, being iconoclastic, marginal, heretical in their criticism of high modernist norms, but also in that they are about flux and movement through time and space, through their multiple connections. The tradition of the first avant-garde (Duchamp, Picabia, the Cubists) is re-examined in a "constellation" (Apollinaire) that projects into the future. Davis paints in three tenses: past, present, and future: past in the use of advertising, words, popular culture; present in the abstractness of his non-referential color-shapes; and future, first as some of the elements of Pop Art are apparent in these paintings, and in the transformations operated in and with each painting. Critics referred to his pictorial language when they called him a 'post-cubist', but Davis's modernism is not only about language (or the HOW in his painting), it is about process: each finished work is in fact incomplete (and the process ends with his last painting, *Fin*, of 1964), and that very incompleteness allows the artist to move on to another attempt, another experience and another expression of it. His works revisit previously suggested ideas or configurations. All these elements, or events, coexist on each canvas, and also in the series as a whole, revisiting the cubist concept of simultaneity. The spark plugs are everywhere, in the past as much as in the present, in his reception of tradition and in his reworking of it.
- 16 Davis's works are multiple spaces: the space of color relations, the space of temporal and historical relations (with tradition and with a Paris of his memory/imagination), and a space where he expresses his ideas about art as practice (with the inclusion of his 'rules' of painting: ELSE, *The Amazing Continuity*, etc). And the canvas acts as a percolator, allowing his art theory, and his multiple affiliations to seep through the painting and become purified.
- 17 But Davis's art is not 'pure'. Rather it is a mongrel art, an art of aggregates, taking bits and pieces from here and there, and it is an art of motion as works evolve with new additions or transformations. One could talk of an ecology of Davis's art: works react to one another and to their environments; they also react as living organisms changing with every new color configuration, and as new elements added produce a new work. But it is unquestionably 'art for art's sake' in that each work is fundamentally about art (they are

also, but to a lesser degree, about the environment in which art is produced). Davis did indeed insist that his works had the 'environment' as a starting point, but he also repeatedly stated that the work of art was not about that: "Today I disassociate the painting experience from general experience and attain a universal objective statement that transcends the subjectively particular. The emotion is given an intellectual currency beyond time and place." (SDP July 1943).

- 18 Distance with the Abstract Expressionist canon and critical affiliation with various traditions are also a means for Davis to place himself within another tradition: the utopian tradition of freedom in the United States. Davis insisted that modernism and abstraction were an expression of freedom of speech (Davis, 1941, for example). The *Champion* series, in which individual paintings get bigger and bigger, is an affirmation of that freedom of speech in a context dominated by the High Modernist canon (and by the fight against 'un-American' and 'subversive' activities and thoughts), in which that freedom was in effect denied. As such, they affirm Davis's humanism, his political modernity, that utopian tradition which comes from the Enlightenment, which Greenberg considered as the root of aesthetic Modernism: "The self-criticism of Modernism grows out of [...] the criticism of the Enlightenment" (Greenberg, 1961: 308). And this in turn is also an affirmation of his aesthetic modernism. Davis, as in the past – the 1930s especially – is a 'champion' of these causes.

Conclusion

- 19 This series of *Champion* paintings around a theme and a form determined by an advertisement is typical of Davis's polymorphous art: it constantly evolves, it is a permanent project, an exploration through the various color-shapes that each painting represents, and that add up. They do not add up to produce a totality, as there is no end in Davis's experimentation, but they produce a complexity of meaning and effect. This places Davis's modernism within a modernity of flux, in a context that would place him in a modernity of the past. Davis works against the canon, against fixedness, and against time, in a utopian quest that is both out of place and out of time: not in the sense that it is unsuited to its environment, but in that it fits within a conception of place that is elastic, and comprises environments that are diverse, transnational and borderless. In the same way, they are out of time in that they do not fit in with the definitions of modernism of the late 1940s and 1950s, they go beyond the borders of those definitions in space and time. Thus, his modernism is one of historicity, taking Henri Meschonnic's definition of the term historicity: "Historicity is one aspect of modernity. At once the always present and the subtle contradiction with everything that made a moment what it was and which that moment passes. But together the result of the past and the infinity of meaning."¹⁶ (my translation).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Apollinaire, Guillaume, "Die Moderne Malerei", *Der Sturm*, n° 148-9, Berlin, Feb. 1913.
- Arnason, H.H., *Stuart Davis*, exhibition catalogue, Minneapolis: Walker Evans Center, 1947.
- Davis, Stuart, "Abstract Art in the American Scene", *Parnassus* 13, March 1941.
- , "Autobiography", in Stuart Davis, New York: American Artists Group, 1945, in Kelder: *infra*, p. 23-25.
- , Stuart Davis daily calendars, Archives of the Estate of Stuart Davis, in Sims, below.
- Greenberg, Clement, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, Boston, Icon Press, 1961.
- , "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture", *Horizon* (Oct.1947)
- , "Avant-garde and Kitsch", *Partisan Review*, Fall 1939, reproduced in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, p. 3-21.
- , "Modernist Painting", 1961, radio broadcast lecture 14 of *The Voice of America Forum Lectures : The Visual Arts*, reproduced in Frascina and Harris, *infra*, p. 308-314.
- Frascina, Francis, and Harris Jonathan, eds, *Art in Modern Culture*, London: The Open University and Phaidon Press, 1992.
- Haskell, Barbara and Harry Cooper, eds., *Stuart Davis, In Full Swing*, exhibition catalogue, Whitney Museum of American Art and The National Gallery of Art, Washington, New York and Munich, 2016.
- Kelder, Diane, *Stuart Davis, a Documentary Monograph*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1971.
- Kootz, Samuel, Rosenberg, Harold, *The Intrasubjectives*, exh. cat., New York: Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, 1949.
- Lane, John R., "Stuart Davis in the 1940s", in Sims, *infra*, p. 70-81.
- , *Stuart Davis : Art and Art Theory*, exh.cat., New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1978.
- Meschonnic, Henri, *Modernité Modernité*, Paris, Gallimard, Folio Essais, Verdier 1988.
- Oudard, Clément, *Les Métamorphoses du modernisme*, Paris : Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2010.
- Rosenberg, Harold, *The Tradition of the New*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1965.
- Sims, Lowery Stokes, *Stuart Davis, American Painter*, exhibition catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 23 Nov. 1991- 16 Feb. 1992, New York : Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1991.
- Smith, Terry, "Rethinking Modernism and Modernity Now", *Filozofski vestnik*, vol. xxxv, n.2, 2014, p. 271-319.
- Turner, Bryan S., ed., *Theories of Modernity and Post-modernity*, London, Sage, 1990.
- ARCHIVES:**
- Stuart Davis Papers, Harvard University Art Museums, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass. (SDP)
- Edith Halpert Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. (EHP)
- WORKS CITED:**

Stuart Davis:

ITLKSEZ, 1921, watercolour and collage on paper, Smithsonian Art Museum (and the Renwick Gallery), Washington D.C.

Odol, 1924, oil on canvas (o/c), MoMA, New York.

Odol, 1924, oil on cardboard, Cincinnati Art Museum.

Matches, 1927, o/c, Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA.

Percolator, 1927, o/c, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Little Giant Still Life, 1950, o/c, 33 x 43 in. (83,8 x 109,2 cm), Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

Study After Little Giant Still Life, ca.1950, o/c, 12 x 16 in. (30,5 x 40,6 cm), Estate of Stuart Davis.

Little Giant Still Life (Black and White Version), 1950-53, casein and traces of pencil on canvas, 33x43 in. (83,3 cm x 109,2 cm), private collection.

Visa, 1951, o/c, 40 x 52 in. (101,6 x 132,1 cm), MoMA, New York.

Schwitzki's Syntax, 1961, oil, wax emulsion, and masking tape on canvas, 42 x 56 in. (106,7 x 142,2 cm), Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

Owh! in San Pao, 1951, o/c, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Marcel Duchamp:

La Broyeuse de Chocolat, N.2, 1914, oil, graphite, and thread on canvas, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

LHOQ, 1919, pencil on postcard, private collection.

Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette, 1921, perfume bottle with collage label, inside cardboard box, private collection.

Francis Picabia:

Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité, 1915.

NOTES

1. See for example Barbara Haskell's essay 'Quotidian Truth. Stuart Davis's Idiosyncratic Modernism' (2016), or Henry Cooper's essay, 'Unfinished Business. Davis and the Dialect-X of Recursion' (2016).
2. Greenberg explained that the role of journalism, and indeed his own, was to hail each new phase of Modernism as "a start of a whole new epoch in art, making a decisive break with the past." (Greenberg, 1961, p. 311).
3. Greenberg wrote, "I identify Modernism with the intensification, almost the exacerbation, of this self-critical tendency that began with the philosopher, Kant." (Greenberg, *ibid*, p.308)
4. www.whitney.org/WatchAndListen/1365
5. www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2015/american-art-n09425/lot.37.html
6. www.wikiart.org/en/stuart-davis/visa-1951
7. <http://www.artsy.net/artwork/stuart-davis-visa>
8. Davis's self-quotation is examined by art historians like Harry Cooper (2016) or William Agee (1992), but not as defining Modernism as self-criticism.
9. Cooper connects the titles with the film production of the 1930s and 1940s (2016: 48).

10. Lane and Sims for example (1991).
11. Cooper explains that “Cubism [was] the imitative crime [Davis] was often charged with” (Cooper, 2016: 39).
12. For Oudart, ‘meta-modernism’ is constructed around a horizontal relation of flux rather than vertical, or genealogical relation which would be oppressive: « Le metamodernisme [...] se construit implicitement sur la relation, soit une relation ambulante et fluctuante (horizontale) plutôt qu’un rapport oppressant dans une généalogie (verticale) » (Oudart, 2010: 33).
13. “Put the Shift in Reverse”, “Went into 4th Speed”, “Grinding Gears”, for example (Davis, calendars, in Sims, 1991: 276).
14. Here, I use the word ‘series’ to refer to the *Champion* paintings, and ‘cluster’ to refer to all the paintings related to the series. Cooper calls them ‘groups’ (2016).
15. « Il appréhende la modernité non pas comme une donnée, une qualité considérée comme acquise, héritée ou décrétée, mais comme une valeur qui passe par l’évènement et par l’expérience de la pensée. Ainsi, la modernité comme valeur et comme fonctionnement se renouvelle dans l’expérience du transitoire. » (Oudart, 2010: 24)
16. « L’historicité est l’un des aspects de la modernité. À la fois le toujours présent et la contradiction tenue avec tout ce qui a fait un moment et que ce moment passe. Mais ensemble la résultante du passé et l’infini du sens. » (Meschonnic, 1988: 12)
-

ABSTRACTS

Stuart Davis’s *Champion* paintings of the 1950s and ‘60s re-examine and re-conceptualize early modernism, adapting it to a new environment, by defining an esthetics of inter-relations: with his own earlier works, with French and American modernism, and with the visual environment of popular culture, thereby creating flux within a visual constellation.

La série des tableaux *Champion* de Stuart Davis, des années 1950-60, ré-examine et reconceptualise les œuvres du premier modernisme en les adaptant à un nouvel environnement. Davis définit ainsi une esthétique de la relation avec ses propres œuvres antérieures, avec les modernismes français et américain, et avec l’environnement visuel de la culture populaire, créant ainsi une esthétique du mouvement au sein d’une constellation visuelle.

Las pinturas de la serie los *Champion* de Stuart Davis de los años 1950 y 1960 llevaron a la reexaminación y reconceptualización del modernismo temprano, adaptado a un nuevo entorno. Davis lo hace definiendo una estética de interrelaciones con sus propias obras anteriores, con el modernismo francés y americano, y con el entorno visual de la cultura popular, creando así un flujo dentro de una constelación visual.

INDEX

Keywords: flux, connectedness, transition, Cubism, constellation

Mots-clés: flux, relation, transition, cubisme, constellation

Palabras claves: flujo, relación, transición, cubismo, constelación

AUTHOR

KAMILA BENAYADA

Maître de conférences à l'Université d'Orléans, PoLEN. UFR Collegium Lettres, Langues et Sciences Humaines, 10 rue de Tours, BP 46527, 45065 Orléans cedex 2. kamila.benayada@univ-orleans.fr.