

## ***American Artists Paint the City:* Katharine Kuh, the 1956 Venice Biennale, and New York's Place in the Cold War Art World**

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“Though it is common practice to consider the Middle West more American in appearance and feeling than New York, still most artists use this, the largest metropolis, as their symbol.” Katharine Kuh (1904-1994), curator of modern art for the Art Institute of Chicago, made this remarkably frank and controversial observation as she promoted *American Artists Paint the City* in 1956. Held in the American pavilion during the 28th Venice Biennale, and so positioned as a showcase for the nation's best and brightest talents, the exhibition united paintings by early twentieth-century realists, those in Alfred Stieglitz's circle, and Abstract Expressionists around thematic representations of New York City by artists who worked there. By linking the New York School to a diverse array of domestic artists, Kuh hoped to cement its place in an American modernist canon that her exhibition would help to define. Sadly, Lawrence Alloway's historical analysis of the Venice Biennale, published in 1968 and the sole account for so many decades, failed to acknowledge the curator's contributions and her vision of continuity among twentieth-century American art movements was effectively buried for decades. Kuh's forgotten role in mediating representations of American art deserves rehabilitation because by heralding New York painters as the ambassadors for an American national art, she prefigured an achievement widely credited to Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).<sup>1</sup>

*American Artists Paint the City* positioned the New York School as inheritors of a new world modernist heritage in the mid-1950s, a view only recently

taken up by revisionist art historians. By grounding her exhibition concept in American exceptionalism and uniting it thematically around the iconic American city, Katherine Kuh appeared to reinforce the case for an American modernist pantheon. Yet, despite its compatibility with cold war exceptionalism, widespread public interest in America's cultural identity, and the popularity of stylistic pluralism among domestic curators in 1956, Kuh's Biennale show precipitated widespread criticism and elicited powerful opposition from established interests. Her diverse, historically infused program antagonized those domestic dealers and collectors most eager to identify a mature and singularly American brand of modernism emerging out of the world's newest cultural center, Manhattan. Her juxtaposition of realist and abstract canvases confused and upset many artists and critics, who doubted that the urban theme could meaningfully connect such varied techniques. The exhibition especially enraged Chicago's art community, which had long struggled against its marginalized place in the art world and perceptions that regional painting was too idiosyncratic to exemplify the shared artistic values of the nation. Above all, Kuh's American modernist continuum struck most international jurors as a chauvinistic and pretentious effort to undermine European ascendancy in the transatlantic art world.

By antagonizing significant segments of the art world, Katharine Kuh opened the door for other champions of Abstract Expressionism to align it with a broader international narrative. Just two years after the 1956 Venice Biennale, several touring and domestic exhibitions actively promoted a small group of New York School painters including Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning as the culmination of a European-inspired, American-produced aesthetic embodying universal values. Intellectually bolstered by Clement Greenberg and promoted actively by MoMA, this interpretation of Abstract Expressionism quickly crowded out alternative voices. In the end, Greenberg's formalist, internationalist interpretation of Abstract Expressionism proved much more flexible in negotiating and reconciling many—though not all—the competing interests of the western art establishment. Its rapid dominance of art historiography, facilitated by the cold war utility of international modernism as a tool with which to win over the moderate European left, obscures the importance of institutional politics in shaping canonical aesthetic priorities. The fate of *American Artists Paint the City* reveals this hidden history.<sup>2</sup>

International competitive juried exhibitions like the Venice Biennale are sites where innumerable individuals—artists, curators, jurors, critics, and spectators—participate in the creation of canons that over extended periods of evaluation and reevaluation are either supported and upheld or challenged and then modified. The Italian showcase of world art established in 1895 initially resembled in its spirit, purpose, and organization the many World's Fairs of the turn-of-the-century. As the twentieth century progressed this genteel competition, an artistic Olympics of sorts that lasted from June to October every other year, became more openly competitive as artists from around the globe vied for prizes awarded by a jury of international experts. Thoroughly in keeping with the

Fascism of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini and the political polarization to the extreme right and left worldwide, prizewinning artworks were clearly emblematic of national cultural achievement by the 1930s, when the Venice Biennale became a state-sponsored event independent of the city and overseen by a governing committee. At this time, many participating countries began to build permanent pavilions designed in national vernacular styles in the city's *Giardini di Castello*, the official site for this event. Opened on May 4, 1930, and still standing today, the American pavilion designed by Delano & Aldrich of New York has a Doric portico and frieze on the exterior and contains inside four equally sized galleries placed around a cupola. Although inspired by an architectural idiom readily associated with the United States capitol building, America's pavilion received no federal funding and these circumstances made it unique. Private benefactors with ties to the Grand Central Galleries in New York City and led by Walter L. Clark, a business partner of J.P. Morgan, paid for both its construction and its maintenance for two decades.<sup>3</sup>

Ownership changed hands in 1953 when MoMA purchased the American pavilion with the assistance of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, which also provided a five-year \$125,000 annual grant to support exhibitions in Venice. Porter A. McCray, head of the museum's International Council (IC) between 1953 and 1962, also used these funds for touring exhibitions abroad. Presided over by its president Nelson Rockefeller and guided by Barr's vision, MoMA had both the deep pockets and discriminating tastes needed to cultivate effectively Europe's appreciation of the aesthetic merits of contemporary American art. Its support was never just about the art, however. MoMA's directors, presidents, and donors had close ties to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and accepted open and indirect subsidies for organizing anti-communist cultural campaigns abroad. In May 1955 George F. Kennan, a former director of the State Department's Policy Planning Committee and former Ambassador to the Soviet Union (1949-1953), spoke to the International Council about using touring exhibitions to persuade Western Europeans that American culture was more than just commercialized popular entertainment. It was imperative, he explained, that America "show the outside world both that we have a cultural life" and that "we care enough about it, in fact, to give it encouragement and support here at home." Assaults on abstract and non-representational painting by Michigan Congressman George A. Dondero and other conservatives in government and the private sector made the latter more difficult. During his infamous 1949 address "Modern Art Shackled to Communism" Dondero declared that "so-called modern art" was a "weapon of communism, and the Communist doctrinaire names the artist as a soldier of the revolution." He also named Barr a leading Communist in America's art world. In response to such attacks, MoMA lessened the "risk of having its patriotism impugned" by sending progressive art overseas rather than exhibiting it domestically where it was more likely to upset conservative museum trustees, lawmakers, and newspaper editors.<sup>4</sup>

By 1953, Alfred Barr had already curated numerous overseas traveling exhibitions of American art and the newly appointed United States Commissioner for the Venice Biennale had specific plans for the American pavilion. The advancement of American painting and sculpture to a status comparable with or even surpassing contemporary trends in Europe preoccupied Barr and his associates. Not since 1895 when jurors selected James Abbott McNeill Whistler for the premier painting prize had an American received this recognition and consequently, receipt of a major honor became the primary indicator of success for Barr and the art press. Pursuit of this goal led to his rejection of the conventional practice of featuring one or two works by a sizeable number of artists in the national pavilions in favor of more experimental formats. For the 25th Venice Biennale of 1950, for instance, he hoped to direct critical attention to large-scale canvases by three “young leaders” of American painting—Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning, and Jackson Pollock, who had created in his opinion “perhaps the most original art among the painters of his generation.” The decision to devote half of the American pavilion to a retrospective for the 80-year-old painter John Marin, however, drew attention away from the younger artists. Although European authorities saw Marin as a true star among America’s artists, this admiration did not result in an exhibition prize. Instead, the judges awarded the top honors in both painting and sculpture to a pair of Frenchmen, Henri Matisse and Ossip Zadkine. Some success came in 1952 when Alexander Calder received the Grand Prix for Sculpture at the 26th Biennale, but the prestigious painting award remained elusive.<sup>5</sup>

Two years later in 1954, when Surrealism provided a broadly defined organizing theme for the entire festival, Barr and his co-organizers heavily featured the still unorthodox gestural paintings of Dutch-born artist Willem de Kooning. The American pavilion presented 27 canvases ranging from his earliest abstractions to his more recent figural works as an outgrowth of Surrealism. The format annoyed critics on both sides of the Atlantic. As *Time* complained, the exhibition did not provide a “representative showing” of modern American painting, which it rightly observed had “neither a dominant style nor authoritative quality.” MoMA struggled to elevate de Kooning’s status at the 1954 Venice Biennale and evidence suggests that he remained to many a foreign-born U.S. resident rather than a true American artist. More significantly, within the broader international scene, de Kooning and his fellow Abstract Expressionists hovered at the periphery of the inner circle in 1954. That year Biennale judges awarded the top prize in painting to the German-born Surrealist Max Ernst, whose prodigious output had already been sufficiently historicized as well as validated through inclusion in private and museum collections. During the early 1950s, representatives from the United States vigorously pursued a prize, but lacked a clear strategy to win one. Awareness that European jurors failed to take the Americans as seriously as they wanted led to a more heavy handed play for recognition in 1956.<sup>6</sup>

To alleviate the pressures of the time-consuming and costly process of organizing exhibitions for the Venice Biennale, MoMA periodically invited other

museums to curate for the American pavilion. In 1955 Daniel Catton Rich, the Director of the Art Institute of Chicago, accepted an invitation to serve as commissioner for the 28th Venice Biennale scheduled to open in the summer 1956. The Chicagoan was a logical choice given his prior involvement with the State Department's Advisory Committee on Art, the National Commission of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), for which he had served as president. Although MoMA's International Council provided supplementary funding, Rich was obliged to secure a financial backer. Arnold Maremont, a contemporary art collector and the board chairman of the Chicago-based Thor Corporation, agreed to contribute \$30,000 towards the installation of an exhibition in the American pavilion. Aware that extensive press coverage at home and abroad could either enhance or impair his own museum's reputation; Rich assigned all curatorial responsibilities to a trusted ally, Katharine Kuh.<sup>7</sup>

*My Love Affair with Modern Art: Behind the Scenes with a Legendary Curator*, published posthumously in 2006 and edited by Avis Berman, provides the most comprehensive account of Katharine Kuh's long life (she died at age 89 in 1994), and her many professional accomplishments as an art dealer, educator, curator, and critic. Guiding the general public along a path towards understanding and acceptance of modernism, and especially abstract art, was the overarching goal connecting the various phases of her career. This commitment first surfaced in 1935 when the Katharine Kuh Gallery located on North Michigan Avenue became the first in Chicago devoted to such prominent European modernists as Wassily Kandinsky, Joan Miró, and Pablo Picasso as well as American abstractionists like Alexander Calder and Stuart Davis and photographers Ansel Adams, Man Ray, and Edward Weston. Such forward-thinking views and a willingness to forgo profits to promote an art that had genuinely captivated her drew the unwelcome attention of Josephine Logan's reactionary Sanity in Art group. Members disrupted business by accosting potential clients outside Kuh's gallery and loudly denouncing modern "trash" within its walls. Incited by Eleanor Jewett, the *Chicago Tribune's* intransigent art critic, such complaints continued to dog Kuh long after abandoning her business in 1942. Joining the Art Institute of Chicago as curator of the Gallery of Art Interpretation two years later, her thought provoking yet accessible exhibitions for this adult education space quickly led to more challenging, high-status curatorial opportunities and progressively louder complaints. One of the more notable events was *American Abstract and Surrealist Art*, a thematic invitational exhibition that opened in November 1947 to mixed reviews. A "great deal of hostility on the part of the people" prompted the Institute to circulate via press releases the praise of East Coast authorities like Barr, who commended Kuh's assembly of a noteworthy exhibition containing "a great many new faces and real talent." Her local admirers also praised it. Frank Holland of the *Chicago Sun-Times* observed that in "New York and Eastern museum circles there is a feeling of wonderment and chagrin that the Art Institute in Mid-Western Chicago had the imagination and

courage to organize such a remarkable and worthwhile show.” Many more fresh exhibitions and imaginative educational programming would follow, but only *American Artists Paint the City* and the extraordinary opportunity to serve as America’s curator would subject Kuh’s curatorial vision to international scrutiny and debate.<sup>8</sup>

*American Artists Paint the City* married a cold war American studies sensibility to an enthusiastic spirit of outreach. An educator at heart, Katharine Kuh conceived of the American pavilion as a didactic space in need of an upbeat and celebratory unifying theme promoting an art “as American as skyscrapers and hot-dogs.” Heartland imagery, which brought to mind the government’s direct involvement in the arts during one of the nation’s worst economic crises, was unsuitable because it did not demonstrate the economic, cultural, and political stature America had acquired after World War II. Agrarian themes also neglected the growing international importance of Manhattan’s art market. With these thoughts in mind, she envisioned an exhibition that would guide spectators through a series of comparisons between abstract and representational treatments of a common theme, the American city. She offered this justification of her thematic choice in a 1955 press release:

Our cities amaze us, outlined against both coasts or seen from a distance across the vast plains of Texas, Illinois, and Iowa. The light in America, almost always brighter than in Europe, defines our surroundings with intense precision, accounting in part for the American artist’s emphasis on the specific rather than the general.

*American Artists Paint the City* seems an appropriate theme for a group of paintings, which have developed, chiefly from our own roots. Since American cities differ from those in Europe both in appearance and in history, our painters have tended to evolve a personal method of interpreting them. This is not to say that European influences are absent from such works, but rather that native expression is here more strongly felt.<sup>9</sup>

Kuh’s statement suggests a thematic inclusiveness that embraced a variety of American places and traditions. She alluded to skylines on both seaboard and the plains as beacons providing a common inspiration. The distinctively American “appearance” and “history” of the cities provided an environmental rationale for the development of an American modernist tradition, since “our painters have tended to evolve a personal method of interpreting them” with minimal European precedents. The breadth of Kuh’s stylistic choices suggested the metropolis could bring together people of diverse backgrounds. Yet by focusing on New York as an emblem of urban life, and urban life as a representation of American exceptionalism, the exhibition labored to disguise myriad antagonisms. The paintings exhibited systematically ignored conflict and confrontation between

social groups, just as Kuh avoided fundamental differences between aesthetic principles or regional artistic interests to create the appearance of consensus and continuity.<sup>10</sup>

Opening in June 1956, and closing in October, *American Artists Paint the City* did not continue Barr's selective focus but rather contained 46 stylistically diverse paintings by 35 artists of different ages. Works by Lyonel Feininger, John Marin, and Charles Sheeler greeted visitors as they entered the American pavilion. Emerging as mature painters during the first three decades of the 20th century, they had infused realism with various aspects of European modernism to express the futuristic look and energetic pace of New York City. Meanwhile realist peers such as Edward Hopper had captured the "loneliness" that was "typical of life in large American cities," according to Kuh. This mood, as revealed in *Early Sunday Morning* (1930), linked Hopper to a diverse assortment of urban scene painters who had exposed the "less privileged side of American city life" without turning their canvases into "forums for propaganda." In a preemptive maneuver Kuh neutralized any potentially controversial content that could conceivably have been read into the paintings by government officials or private citizens by deftly avoiding any discussion of crime rates, growing racial tensions, white flight to suburban communities, or the slum clearance programs that accompanied urban renewal in major American cities. Although she acknowledged that "cacophonous traffic, soaring architecture, mammoth factories and sprawling slums are commonplaces," she underscored that "it remained for the writers and painters of America to discover new romance in these very elements." Viewed in this manner, the commuters in George Tooker's *The Subway* (1950) merely tried to keep up with the hurried pace of modern city life rather than struggled with the anxiety-inducing culture of surveillance in cold war America. The crowded composition of Jacob Lawrence's *Chess on Broadway* (1951) simply reflected the "chaos" of daily life under "Broadway's glaring neon lights" rather than an African American's perspective on the resiliency needed to endure and fight the racism contributing to urban poverty. Kuh's emphasis on the celebratory or the purely aesthetic possibilities of urban imagery typified the work of curators and art historians at mid-century, well before the widespread adoption of Marxist theoretical approaches and social art history popular since the 1970s.<sup>11</sup>

Far more interested in the promise of the city than urban realities, Katharine Kuh clearly preferred paintings like Joseph Stella's *Brooklyn Bridge: Variation on an Old Theme* (1939) that depicted the monuments and skyscrapers that had made Manhattan the embodiment of an entire nation's aspirations. The catalog revealed this preference by strategically placing literary excerpts exalting the beauty of the skyscraper next to reproductions of paintings like Georgia O'Keeffe's *New York, Night* (1929). It "seems to soar up with an aspirant, vertical glittering magnificence to meet the stars," read the accompanying passage by American novelist Thomas Wolfe. The city's "jewel-like luminosity" at night particularly appealed to Kuh's polished sensibilities. Like O'Keefe's crisp, simplified forms,

the many nocturnes on display both sanitized and obscured the urban ugliness she wished to avoid.<sup>12</sup>

Believing that the Seattle-based painter Mark Tobey best expressed “all the shining lights of America,” the curator made him the star attraction of *American Artists Paint the City*. Whereas one or two works represented all of the other artists, four Tobey canvases hung in the American pavilion. The painter’s favorable reputation in New York art circles and the curator’s own efforts to help dealer Marian Willard sell his elegant, Asian-inspired canvases to Chicagoans partly explains this decision. His semi-representational renderings made of rhythmic lines, which had a graceful fluidity inspired by an eastern economy of means, proved critical. *City Radiance* (1944) and *Neon Thoroughfare* (1953), for example, each expressed the city’s iridescence at night through his “white writing” technique, a method that the painter insisted was not wholly abstract. Kuh later conceded that Tobey’s small scale paintings were never directly “related to Abstract Expressionism, despite the occasional resemblance to it,” but at the time his work allowed her to connect a realist vein of American painting to the controversial turn toward non-representation taken by a relatively small, but much discussed group of artists in Manhattan.<sup>13</sup>

The exhibition catalog assumed special significance as a means to convince others of the theme’s soundness and the merits of the most contemporary artworks. “If American artists paint their cities abstractly,” Kuh wrote, “they may be recording quite realistically what they see, for the angularity, speed and transparency of their surroundings often appear abstract when viewed out of context. Steel buildings under construction become skeletons to look through as glass windows turn into reflecting mirrors.” To underscore this point visually, a photograph of an I-beam from a construction site appeared in the catalog next to reproductions of two canvases. Kuh encouraged viewers to see the broad black strokes in *New York*, a 1955 canvas by Hedda Sterne, as a “skyscraper’s steel skeleton” set against “the scintillating colors of city lights” at dusk. Similarly, she suggested that Franz Kline exaggerated the features of a single building to “symbolize a whole metropolis” in his 1953 painting of the same name. Through brushwork both Sterne and Kline had captured the “staccato excitement” of New York and this energy linked their work to the “vibrant rhythms” of “life in this teeming, swarming city” expressed by Jackson Pollock’s *Convergence* (1952). Dwelling on Pollock’s overall lack of compositional focus, Kuh identified the painting as an object “intended less to be looked at than entered into.” That is why, she explained, it “envelops one with the same insistence as the city itself.” The “picture, like the city itself, seems to have no beginning, no boundaries, no end,” she observed of both Pollock’s canvas and de Kooning’s *Gotham News* (1955).<sup>14</sup>

As Katharine Kuh formulated her exhibition concept in 1955, she worked in the gap between an Americanist canon then restricted to art created before WWII and a Modernist canon originating from the art and aesthetic philosophies of Western Europe. At the time, it was unclear to which canon Abstract



Expressionism properly belonged. Kuh's presentation of new art by younger artists solely within the context of American modernism made the 28th Venice Biennale especially notable at a time when few histories of American art had been published. *Art and Life in America* (1949) stands apart because Oliver Larkin examined painting and sculpture within a broader social context and, as publishers Rinehart and Company claimed, it told the story of "the growth of democracy through art in a free country." A similar theme runs through the catalog for *American Artists Paint the City*, which also reveals the growing influence of cold war American studies scholarship. Kuh drew inspiration from the myth-symbol approach popularized by Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1948), which examined national legends, icons, artifacts, and rituals to ascertain the essential characteristics of the "American Mind" or consciousness. Encouraged by cultural commentators such as *Harper's Magazine* editor John Kouwenhoven to determine "What's 'American' About America," sympathetic museum curators established galleries of American art to accentuate the unique circumstances of its creation. Published as the Venice Biennale opened, Kouwenhoven's essay identified soap operas, comic strips, jazz, and above all Manhattan's skyscrapers as quintessential American forms for emphasizing the process of creation over the end product. Always complete but never finished, the New York skyline could conceivably extend itself upward or (following the gridiron street plan) outward indefinitely. According to Kouwenhoven, New York skyscrapers reflected the vitality, mobility, and opportunity of their native land, highlighting the absence of similar values in the Soviet Union's closed, static society.<sup>15</sup>

After World War II, when the Venice Biennale attracted on average 200,000 visitors from around the world per season, the American pavilion's contents stirred increasing interest among critics. America's emerging superpower status inevitably escalated this attention, which increased during the 1950s as traveling art exhibitions assumed a central place in the United States cultural-exchange program. The 1956 Venice Biennale opened just days after jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie completed a tour of the Middle East on behalf of the state department. Designed in part to counter Soviet accusations that American materialism stifled artistic creativity, Gillespie's tour repeatedly connected jazz to democratic freedom of expression through the lectures of government escort (and jazz critic) Marshall Stearns. Similarly, the Soviet Union's participation in the Venetian art fair for the first time since 1932 provided a unique opportunity in 1956 for the United States press corps to connect visual art to the political circumstances of its production in each country. Not surprisingly, reporters applauded an American system that provided the freedom for artistic individualism to flourish, a theme that would come to dominate the discourse surrounding Abstract Expressionism just as it framed the promotion of jazz. Conversely, Soviet artists suffered because, as *Art News* reported, "politics" took "precedence over esthetics."<sup>16</sup>

Widespread support in the domestic press for art's cold war mission may have convinced Katharine Kuh that an exhibition uniting Abstract Expressionism with an American modernist tradition would receive a favorable reception at home

and at least thoughtful consideration abroad. Instead, she was both surprised and hurt by the overwhelmingly negative response to *American Artists Paint the City*. Only *Arts* magazine considered her thematic approach both daring and relevant. America's realists and its abstract painters, it agreed, had indeed grappled with a common problem—finding a form and a style to express the “multiplicity” and the “turbulence” of the urban experience. The curator's inclusion of recent work by the New York School, the reviewer nevertheless anticipated, would surely make it the most controversial exhibit at the Venice Biennale. This prediction proved true.<sup>17</sup>

The New York School's dominance by 1956 has been vastly overstated in scholarship and many reviewers at the time questioned the quality of the representative artworks hanging in the American pavilion. Although the *London Sunday Times* declared Pollock's *Convergence* the “finest entry in the entire Biennale,” most art critics and other journalists disagreed. *Time* magazine, for instance, openly admired older painters such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Edward Hopper because their paintings appeared more skilled and accomplished than canvases by Pollock or de Kooning. It described the latter's *Gotham News* as possessing “no relation to any city unless it was the City of Dreadful Night.” The Paris based journal *Beaux-Arts* concurred, identifying it as the “most unsightly and the least readable painting” in the entire Venice Biennale.<sup>18</sup>

Critics also questioned the relevance of Abstract Expressionist paintings to Kuh's urban motif. The *Züricher Zeitung* conceded that in the main her choices expressed the “experience of city life, skyscrapers, chains of light, the madness of urban tempo and sensations of loneliness among tumultuous crowds.” The Abstract Expressionist paintings, however, did not pertain to her city theme. Kuh, it opined, had included their work simply because it was “the last word in style.” More importantly, European newspapers insinuated that Kuh had misrepresented the new abstraction, which did not require a literal subject. “In the future,” the *Züricher Zeitung* advised, “would it not be better to allow the freedom which artists need and thus reject the idea of a theme with its suggestion of dogmatic discipline?”<sup>19</sup>

Many American reviewers agreed that Kuh's thesis had confused the foreign public's understanding of contemporary American painting. The most damning appraisal of the exhibition concept appeared in the September 1956 issue of *Art News*. Reviewer Milton Gendel described it as “agilely strung together, on the slender thread of the city theme” and “almost comic in the liberal interpretation of its subject.” Rejecting the curator's suggestion of an environmental influence, he denied that the New York School artists painted the city and claimed they objected to such strict analysis of their work. The artists themselves expressed more ambivalent reactions than Gendel suggested. “It's not so much that I'm an American: I'm a New Yorker,” mused Willem de Kooning. “I think we have gone back to the cities.” Jackson Pollock, on the other hand, refuted such overly literal readings of his work during a 1956 interview with Selden Rodman, who described the painter's reaction to *American Artists Paint the City*:

“What a ridiculous idea,” he said, “expressing the city—never did it my life!”

“I don’t think it’s so ridiculous,” I said. “Aren’t you all doing it—consciously or unconsciously? I feel it in your painting, and in Kline’s and Bill de Kooning’s, not to mention artists like Tobey and Hedda Sterne and O’Keefe, who admittedly are doing it. What are you expressing, if you’re not expressing the turbulence of city life—or your reaction to it?”

He thought hard, grimacing with the effort. “Nothing so specific...My times and my relation to them...No. Maybe not even that. The important thing is that Cliff Still—you know his work?—and Rothko, and I—we’ve changed the nature of painting.”<sup>20</sup>

Pollock was correct. Abstract Expressionism had reoriented painters and its lessons would lead them to explore divergent paths. Appearing in the October 1958 issue of *Art News*, painter Allan Kaprow’s “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” declared the end of painting’s primacy in the arts and rejected the artwork as an object thus leaving the artist “preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life.” All of this lay in the near future in the fall 1955 when Kuh traveled to Manhattan on a quest for Abstract Expressionist paintings. “I had made up my mind that Pollock, de Kooning, and Kline must be included” and “I was inclined to believe that all three of them were at least partially indebted to New York,” she recalled in her memoir. Kuh’s calculated choice of titles shored up her selections and the artists participated in the naming process. Franz Kline often used place names, especially locations near his birthplace Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, for titles and so he was unperturbed when Kuh after surveying the contents of his Third Avenue studio christened one untitled canvas *New York*. Kline then escorted the curator to Willem de Kooning’s nearby studio where the genial spirit of cooperation continued. “After a sociable drink or two,” Kuh reminisced, “I noticed the occasional and nearly invisible traces of newsprint pressed into the pigment. According to de Kooning, this technique gave texture to the painting and at the same time amused him, so the picture was promptly baptized *Gotham News*.” De Kooning perhaps had a greater say in the naming process than Kuh acknowledged. The title fit nicely with others used by the painter, who had already alluded to the urban environment through embedded imagery in *Excavation* (1950) and later used titles, *Merritt Parkway* (1959) for instance, and analogies comparing his energetic merging, diverging, and converging broad strokes of color to the circulation of traffic via on and off ramps. Connecting Pollock’s paintings to the city was not so easy. When Kuh arrived at his studio in 1955, the precedent of allowing others to title the classic drip paintings, and thereby shape the public’s understanding of their significance, had already been established by Clement Greenberg, who accentuated the enigmatic vaporous qualities of *Number 1, 1950* by renaming it *Lavender Mist*. Kuh

followed his lead. After noticing a fan shaped arrangement of paint trails terminating at the center lower edge of one three-year old canvas, the curator titled it *Convergence*; a word she explained “had a little something to do with city life.” Pollock complained, but did little to challenge the curator’s contextualization of his painting. A sizeable international audience saw *Convergence* and many reporters discussed it albeit within the context of the city theme and in the end, this benefited the artist far more than it ever harmed him.<sup>21</sup>

Katharine Kuh exercised far greater control over the meanings assigned to Abstract Expressionist canvases than her detractors realized then or historians do today. More significantly, little evidence exists to suggest that she was daunted by the task or cowed by the opinions of now vaunted authorities like Clement Greenberg whose pioneering role in winning critical and institutional acceptance for Abstract Expressionism has been well documented, mythologized, and sometimes demonized. Indeed, the critic and curator used similar strategies to make bold claims about the enduring importance of a body of artworks they mutually admired. For various reasons, Greenberg’s relentless promotion of the New York School as “the most original and vigorous art in the world today” did much more to ensure its short-term success and enduring art historical importance. “American Type Painting,” an essay that first appeared in 1955, provides an early version of Greenberg’s formalist position that fortified this push for recognition. “It seems to be a law of modernism—thus one that applies to almost all art that remains truly alive in our time—that the conventions not essential to the viability of a medium be discarded as soon as they are recognized,” he declared. In an address to an estimated five million listeners as part of the Voice of America’s Forum Lecture series broadcast in May 1960, which solidified his reputation as the critical voice of his era, Greenberg elaborated on his interpretation of modern art’s inherently self-referential trajectory. “The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself—not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence,” he explained. Greenberg envisioned modern art upholding “past standards of excellence” by repeatedly dismantling established conventions. His stance dictated a separation between the internal logic of painting as a practice and the aims and needs of the individual painter. Greenberg summarized his eventual dismissal of non-technical criteria when he told Saul Ostrow in 1994, “I never fooled around with meaning.”<sup>22</sup>

While Clement Greenberg is commonly thought to have focused exclusively on formal ties between Abstract Expressionism and various European “isms,” and especially Cubism, he explored other canonical points of departure to connect the style to American traditions in the 1940s. In particular, he exploited notions of fraternity and paternity to unite John Marin and Jackson Pollock for the purpose of shaming MoMA into increasing its support for the New York School. The museum had already exhibited and collected work by Marin, yet in the late 1940s Greenberg complained to Alfred Barr about “how remiss the museum has been lately in its duty to encourage modern American art . . . how little, how

woefully little the Museum has to show for the expenditure of so much money, space, time, energy and—at least on the part of some—devotion.”<sup>23</sup>

By stressing commonalities between Marin and Pollock, Clement Greenberg helped persuade MoMA to adjust its exhibition schedule in favor of Abstract Expressionism. In 1942 Greenberg identified Marin as possibly “the greatest living American painter.” This opinion spread as *Art News* editor Thomas Hess reported in 1948 that he was “accepted without question as one of the greatest living American artists” and the same year readers of *Look* magazine ranked Marin first in response to the question: “Which ten painters now working in the United States, regardless of whether they are citizens, do you believe to be the best?” During this same period, Greenberg declared Pollock among the “six or seven best young painters we possess” in 1944 and “the most powerful painter in contemporary America” in 1947. *Life* questioned this assessment in August 1949 with its feature story “Jackson Pollock: Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?” but the following year the two painters appeared together in the 25th Venice Biennale. Marin, as previously noted, drew greater admiration in Europe because his paintings sprang from his experiments with Impressionism. Greenberg took notice and, encouraged by the contrived comparison with Marin, began to reposition Abstract Expressionism as both grounded in an American modernist past and progressing through its mastery and assimilation of the lessons of Europe’s avant-garde.<sup>24</sup>

Unlike Greenberg, many members of America’s arts establishment demonstrated open skepticism about Pollock’s accomplishments and Abstract Expressionism in general, seeing it simply as one of many artistic achievements worthy of inclusion in a history of the nation’s art. Nevertheless, this attitude also facilitated the New York School’s incorporation into an American modernist pantheon. Significantly, Greenberg’s peers approached canon construction as a consensual decision-making process and demonstrated tolerance of dissenting opinions and contrasting tastes. Prominent art authorities like John I. H. Baur, Lloyd Goodrich, Dorothy C. Miller, and James Thrall Soby, who co-authored and published *New Art in America: Fifty Painters of the 20th Century* in 1957, believed that they lived in an “age of individualism in the arts.” By featuring a wide spectrum of artists from John Sloan to Jackson Pollock, the book acknowledged the breadth of approaches used by American painters. “In spite of the recent popularity of abstraction,” its concluding statement reads, “it is apparent that the last fifteen years has produced, in America, a greater diversity of styles, subjects and attitudes than any comparable period of the past.” MoMA shared this perspective and curator Dorothy Miller selected stylistically and conceptually diverse artworks by well-known and emerging artists living throughout the United States for the museum’s closely followed “Americans” exhibition series, which did not feature Abstract Expressionism before 1952. Despite Greenberg’s best efforts, many important powerbrokers and institutions in America’s art world, in particular Alfred Barr and MoMA, refused to support fully Abstract Expressionism. The museum’s permanent collection and rotating exhibitions featured a spectrum of

creative activity rather than focusing attention on the work Greenberg valued most.<sup>25</sup>

In 1956, when Greenberg's formalism was neither fully formed nor widely discussed, the competing and evolving interdisciplinary contextual approach to American art and culture used by Katharine Kuh was equally viable. By focusing the viewers' attention on something unique to the United States, its skyscrapers, and portraying the artists as responding to this distinctly American environment rather than working with European subjects, the curator underscored the nation's urban development that had encouraged the maturation of American arts. She defied convention at the 1956 Venice Biennale by constructing a unique thematic exhibition, confident of widespread if not universal backing for her inclusive approach. In another departure from custom, she distributed a free illustrated catalog containing instructional aides (primarily photographs and literary passages about the city) to help visitors, critics, and judges better understand the continuities between the old and the new American art, which had finally shaken both the "narrow nationalism" of the 1930s and its "over-dependence" on the masters of European modernism. Well aware of the future importance of catalogs as documentary evidence validating works of art, Kuh astutely manipulated the power of the printed word and the visual appeal of reproductions in an attempt to persuade an international audience to accept American modernism on its own terms. Despite her best promotional efforts, Kuh struggled to effectively communicate and defend her thesis against considerable skepticism and ire. The mixed reviews typified this fractious period of trial and error, when the nation's art authorities squabbled over the best ways to contextualize American modernism and persuade audiences to accept it. The growing notoriety of Abstract Expressionism, and attempts to integrate it into an American canon, brought these tensions to the fore. The curator's ineffective effort, and the subsequent manipulation of Abstract Expressionism within an alternative international narrative, owed much to the changing internal dynamics of the art world at mid-century. Growing concerns about the fate of regional movements and much discussion about national identity, artistic pluralism, and cultural elitism accompanied this paradigmatic shift.<sup>26</sup>

Katharine Kuh and the Art Institute's director Daniel Catton Rich arrived in Venice in June 1956 for four days of opening ceremonies, which she described in a letter as a "crazy marathon with too much wine, champagne, artists, different languages and the interminable Chicagoans," a flock of wealthy collectors requiring her undivided attention. We "got through without any major disaster" she wrote her mother seemingly unaware that *American Artists Paint the City* had angered several constituencies in Chicago's art community. A variety of newspapers carried an open letter written by University of Chicago professor and local Artists' Equity president Harold Haydon, who drew attention to an escalating curatorial predisposition to present Manhattan as a distinct geographic zone of artistic achievement by literally counting the number of references in the catalog to major cities besides New York City. As it happened, Kuh had

mentioned her hometown only six times in a catalog essay that made no mention of Miami, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, or Boston. Her assertion that the nation's largest metropolis was "the cumulative symbol of urban America," while the "smoke drenched silhouette" of Chicago was simply an apt expression of the "decadence and dustiness of middle western life," also smacked of geographic prejudice. Far worse, in Haydon's opinion, the curator had rhapsodized over the "greater loftiness and complexity" found in paintings by the New York School and this had given outsiders the impression that Chicago was "unimportant as a cultural center and not a fit subject for painting."<sup>27</sup>

Haydon and members of Artists' Equity rightfully argued that Kuh had masterfully twisted her theme to include New Yorkers, but had failed to use it to benefit her hometown arts community. The thoughtless decision to use a map of downtown Chicago to decorate the catalog's cover only served to accentuate their exclusion. Work by two Chicago artists did appear in the exhibition, however. *Multiple Exposure*, a commissioned photomural by noted Chicago photographer Harry Callahan, hung at the pavilion's entrance. Aside from *Beaux-Art*, which declared it the best artistic interpretation of the city in the entire show, critics and visitors alike appear to have considered it a decorative embellishment rather than part of the exhibition. A second Chicago artist, Ivan Albright, was represented by a still unfinished canvas titled *Poor Room—There Is No Time, No End, No Today, No Yesterday, No Tomorrow, Only the Forever, and Forever, and Forever, Without End* (1942-1963). To connect the painting to the exhibition's theme, Kuh pointed to affinities between the "microscopic intensity" of the painter's approach and the "dreary detail" of city life and Chicago's literary tradition, especially Upton Sinclair's brutally graphic account of conditions in the city's stockyards in *The Jungle* (1906). Unconvinced, A. James Speyer, who covered Chicago for *Art News*, insinuated that Albright had simply added the prefix "Poor Room" to the title at Kuh's request to conjure up the image of tenement housing. No evidence supports this claim, at least in this instance. Instead, hints of architecture from a bygone age, the painter's celebrity, and the admiration for his work in some circles both in and outside of Chicago primarily accounts for his inclusion in the exhibition.<sup>28</sup>

Accusations of collusion offended Albright. "[Artists' Equity] behave[d] like a union looking for an employer," he snapped to a *Newsweek* reporter. "The Art Institute just didn't see fit to employ them." Albright missed the point of a protest fueled by many years of actual and perceived neglect. After a long hard battle for local recognition and respect, the national art press had finally begun to cover the activities of Exhibition Momentum, a progressive artist run exhibition society. Formed in 1948 and born out of strained relations between the museum and M.F.A. students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, this group led by painter Leon Golub challenged Rich, the administrative head of both entities, to do more to support the city's younger, emerging artists. Exhibition Momentum sought to secure regional and national recognition for Chicago artists through annual competitive exhibitions juried by such important members

of the New York School as painter Jackson Pollock, critic Clement Greenberg, and Manhattan gallery owner Betty Parsons. By 1956 both the artists and the Institute had established ties with the same group of art authorities in Manhattan, who interestingly enough acted as gatekeepers of America's regional art centers. These promising conditions made Kuh's omission of Exhibition Momentum artists difficult to accept, but understandable. The theme that had complicated her integration of Abstract Expressionist paintings contributed to their exclusion. Today classified loosely with the Chicago Imagist artists of the 1960s, Golub, H.C. Westermann, and other group members developed an idiosyncratic body of imagery that drew from politics, mythology, psychology, and deeply personal sources. Although Kuh simply did not *see* the city or *feel* urban energy in any of their paintings, she was sensitive to their needs and made efforts to promote regional artists. In 1956, as chair of the selection committee for *New Talent in the USA*, she chose seven Chicago artists for an exhibition featuring twenty-four "young, gifted, and relatively little known American artists" that with the support of the influential magazine *Art in America* toured the nation. For some, this was too little too late. Chicago's younger artists began moving to Manhattan and Paris in greater number during the final years of the decade. Location mattered by 1956 in the promotion of American art both at home and abroad.<sup>29</sup>

Whereas many of Chicago's emerging artists belonged to Exhibition Momentum, Artists' Equity attracted a cross section of people united by such concerns as fair treatment in the art marketplace and censorship. Group members resisted what they perceived as an emerging set of national artistic standards generated by New York's authorities and they challenged suggestions that most regional artworks were either derivative of those created in Manhattan or of a lesser quality. Like other factions of Chicago's art community, Equity members regarded Kuh a traitor to her city and her exhibition a "blow to civic pride." Among others, critic Eleanor Jewett of the *Chicago Tribune* insisted that the Institute exhibit *American Artists Paint the City* so that all could see this "bitter betrayal of both Chicago art and American art." An abridged version was incorporated into the museum's 62nd Annual American exhibition opening in January 1957. Tempers soon flared after a jury of three New Yorkers awarded substantial prizes to canvases by Franz Kline and Hedda Sterne previously exhibited in Venice. Shortly after, the Society for Contemporary American Art, a consortium of prominent collectors, acquired Sterne's painting for the Institute's permanent collection. The year before it had added Pollock's *Grayed Rainbow* (1955); an acquisition that Kuh later recalled "incurred the wrath of many Chicago art patrons" because the *Tribune*, under the headline "Kuh Kuh Must Go," had presented the purchase "as a civic calamity." For years, the Institute's detractors had accused Kuh of encouraging high profile collectors to buy only art with the "New York seal of approval" and this, they complained, had reduced Chicagoans to "consumers rather than creators" of their own culture. Adversaries overestimated the curator's power and persuasiveness. Kuh often failed to convince the Institute's trustees to acquire contemporary artworks including *Gotham News* and *Convergence*,



which the Albright Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo purchased in 1956 and then lent to her for display in the American pavilion. In any case, growing concern about the museum's acquisitions program coupled with "very hot domestic criticism" of *American Artists Paint the City* enabled the city's artists to apply greater pressure on the museum. However, the press also made them seem bitter, the city's residents overly conservative in their tastes, and its elite—especially the museum's staff—foolishly determined to prove themselves *au courant*.<sup>30</sup>

Katharine Kuh's contribution to New York's status as America's—and the world's—premier art center alienated her potential supporters in the Chicago art world by marginalizing her hometown's contributions to American artistic identity. Outside Chicago, the curator's willingness to place her educational objectives above a prize-winning strategy at the 1956 Venice Biennale drew sharp criticism. Unsympathetic reviewers complained that the theme misrepresented contemporary American painting and directed attention away from the unique talents of those painters most capable of impressing the national commissioners belonging to the jury. As a result, no American won the *Grand Prix* for painting. "None of our people could win prizes because we had no one-man show," an exasperated Kuh told the press. Filling an entire pavilion with one artist's work was not required, but more work by fewer than five artists had become the norm. This misinformation and the curator's defensiveness simply added credibility to her detractor's claims about America's pavilion. Within the *mélange*, no one painting or painter—not even Tobey—stood out as the obvious focal point.<sup>31</sup>

The critical reaction to *American Artists Paint the City* reveals a struggle among art experts to find the right combination of artists and styles to secure desired recognition in the form of a major painting prize. Biennale historian Lawrence Alloway complained that American commissioners in the 1950s "never hit on the right artist in sufficient quantity at the right time; it amounted almost to a kind of accidental collaboration with the European desire to ignore American art." Between 1948 and 1956, the jurors awarded the top prizes to new work by elderly artists like Henri Matisse rather than recognizing the excellence of emerging or mid-career artists. Alloway concluded that they intended to pay tribute to the "still-productive greatness" of Europe's modern masters who had survived WWII. But this explanation does not fully account for America's failure to win a prize in 1956, as not all the prizes went to older artists and not all the participating countries clung to the past. Whereas Jacques Villon, the 80 year-old brother of Marcel Duchamp, received the top painting prize in 1956, the sculpture prize went to Lynn Chadwick, a 41 year-old British sculptor. Instead, Europe's commissioners, the custodians of a European originated canon, bristled at New York's self-proclaimed status as the world's art center and were not yet ready to accept American modernism on an equal footing to the western European tradition. It remained, therefore, for leading critics and museums to embrace Abstract Expressionism as a representation of universal values that rose above nationality and politics and to emphasize transatlantic contributions to its development. Paradoxically, this endeavor received the support of eminent institutional figures

in the United States who had previously championed Abstract Expressionism's place in a distinctively American canon.<sup>32</sup>

MoMA's embrace of Abstract Expressionism and wholehearted promotion of the style abroad stemmed in part from the demands of its cooperation with the American government's cultural exchange program. Support for the Soviet Union in Western Europe following its participation in a 1955 World Peace conference, which continued to grow despite its use of military force to suppress Hungarian liberalization in November 1956, unsettled American foreign policymakers. Around this time, the international council realized fully the propaganda potential of Abstract Expressionism. Hyped as "free enterprise painting," a catch phrase coined by Nelson Rockefeller, these artworks were packaged to convincingly articulate an anti-Communist ideology. Rockefeller money ensured the support needed to send paintings by self-avowed apolitical artists abroad on both overt and covert anti-Communist cultural campaigns that never would have succeeded without a substantial body of clearly superior artworks capable of attracting followers or generating resistance and debate. These canvases may have been an emblem of liberal democracy, but they illustrated nothing. Wonderfully blank in some respects and highly evocative in others, these artworks were "politically silent" when compared to contemporaneous realist paintings, which some commentators, Greenberg among them, associated with Soviet aesthetic values. Emphasizing the artwork rather than the artist's nationality or politics, Greenbergian formalism proved ideologically useful to MoMA and its international council because it effectively removed the analysis of Abstract Expressionism from a specific historical, social, and political context. A new formalist narrative was more palatable to Europeans, and helped split the European Left between those who embraced Modernism (and hence admired the U.S. contribution) and the Stalinist Left that debunked Modernist decadence.<sup>33</sup>

American art, especially Abstract Expressionism, struggled to win international acceptance during the 1950s to a much greater extent than art history textbooks generally acknowledge. During the late 1940s, Clement Greenberg's claim that "the main premises of Western Art have at last migrated to the United States, along with the center gravity of industrial production and political power" drew charges of "chauvinist exaggeration" of American artistic might. Such claims grew louder in the 1950s, when Katharine Kuh's overly patriotic exhibition catalogue declared "the light in America, almost always brighter than in Europe" and thus intimated that everything about America was somehow more innovative and intrinsically superior. Widespread criticism of *American Artists Paint the City* suggests that Abstract Expressionism's success at home and abroad was hardly inevitable. It required appropriate institutional support and a suitable intellectual context. Kuh's attempt to link the country's artistic past (the realist tradition) to its future (non-objectivity) represented the most cogent contemporary effort to place America's abstractionists in a larger developmental structure that demonstrated the sequential growth of the country's art. Her approach, however, offended numerous entrenched interests and unwittingly weakened ongoing efforts to earn

international respect and recognition for Abstract Expressionism. Its supporters were acutely aware that this painterly approach was no longer new, and given a growing penchant for novelty in art world—a byproduct of the embrace of avant-gardism—time was passing rapidly. Their concern over repeated failures to win a prize increased following the premature death of Jackson Pollock in August 1956. A tribute in *Art News* set the tone for future discussions when it declared him the “first successfully to liberate painting from the dominant conventions of the School-of-Paris cuisine.” Yet the break was hardly as complete as the journal suggested. *Jackson Pollock 1912-1956* and *The New American Painting*, two exhibitions touring Europe in 1958, drew attention to the interconnection between Pollock’s American and French influences. As Nancy Jachec notes, the retrospectives “highlighted the way in which his painting derived from yet departed in a uniquely American way from European precedents, thus placing him at the tip of international modernism’s trajectory of development.”<sup>34</sup>

Scholars frequently discuss these two exhibitions as if the success of the New York School was a *fait accompli* by 1958. Discussions over the decade had led to its inclusion in a domestic canon by 1956, but a place in an internationalist canon was hardly assured. Manhattan may have become the global center of art publishing and sales, but Europe’s most prestigious competitive juried exhibition remained one of the real proving grounds of merit and French modernism the yardstick of accomplishment. The 1958 exhibition in the American Pavilion, co-curated by Frank O’Hara and Sam Hunter, featured two New York School sculptors—Seymour Lipton and David Smith—and two ageing abstractionists—Mark Rothko and Mark Tobey. While Rothko, a central member of the New York School, received a second-place prize for painting the less celebrated artist Mark Tobey won the *Premio de Comune di Venezia* for *Capricorn* (1958). This triumph validated Kuh’s assessment of his importance two years earlier. Tobey’s peripheral relationship to the New York School calls into question claims that Abstract Expressionism enjoyed a widespread institutional “ideological dominance” by the decade’s end and that Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning were widely regarded as its most important painters. Even when the Ministries of Public Instruction awarded Franz Kline a first prize at the Venice Biennale of 1960, jurors commended the painter’s singular achievement rather than Abstract Expressionism as a school.<sup>35</sup>

Although the New York School paintings have functioned historiographically “as the collective image or the representation of a nation,” in reality a broader spectrum of paintings continued to represent “national beliefs and objectives” abroad in the 1950s. Katharine Kuh’s placement of Abstract Expressionism within a distinctly American narrative was never idiosyncratic and the USIA continued to use this approach after 1956. The *American National Exhibition*, which opened in Moscow in July 1959 and was seen by 2.7 million Russians over a six-week period, presented Abstract Expressionism within a broad developmental narrative. Curated with input from Lloyd Goodrich, Edith Halpert, and Alfred Barr, it featured paintings by William Glackens and John Sloan, Ben

Shahn and Thomas Hart Benton, Edward Hopper and Jackson Pollock among others. Composed entirely of reproductions of paintings by a similar group of artists, *Twentieth Century Highlights of American Painting*, sent overseas by the USIA in 1958, brought the broadest spectrum of American painting to more diverse locales—Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East—than any other touring exhibition of the period.<sup>36</sup>

These large-scale, inclusive exhibitions organized by the USIA and the Smithsonian Institution in the 1950s and 1960s were meant to persuade Europeans of the nation's cultural achievements and innovations. Repeat appearances of Abstract Expressionism at the Venice Biennale and other international art fairs helped it finally win international acceptance by the end of the 1950s. Despite the many declarations of support for individual artistic expression and appreciation for a diversity of painterly styles, a rethinking of standards, goals, and strategies by the international council between 1956 and 1958 resulted in a repackaging of Abstract Expressionism that effectively removed it, albeit temporarily, from an American canon and placed it securely within the universal modernist canon. *American Artists Paint the City* aided ongoing efforts to position New York as the world's premiere art center and the New York School as America's artists as part of a larger effort to demonstrate the freedom of creative expression in a democratic society. Kuh's Chicago detractors had bitterly opposed the concentration of influence in Manhattan but Abstract Expression, its talismanic form, was well on its way to becoming a national art of international significance by 1956. *American Artists Paint the City* proved a turning point in the ascendancy of both the city and the style. More significantly, perhaps, the failure of Katharine Kuh's exhibition to secure the endorsement of European jurors opened the door for formalist critics such as Clement Greenberg to win widespread recognition for Abstract Expressionism—America's leading contemporary innovation—as a culmination of European internationalist rather than peculiarly American developments.

### Illustrations

**Figure 1:** “Views of the American Pavilion at the 28th Venice Biennale.” See *The Art Institute Quarterly* 50 (1956).

**Figure 2:** Edward Hopper, *Early Sunday Morning* (1930). Oil on canvas, 35 3/16” x 60 1/4”. The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York. See Artchive <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/H/hopper/earlysun.jpg.html>

**Figure 3:** George Tooker, *The Subway* (1950). Egg tempera on gesso panel, 18” x 36”. The Whitney Museum of American Art. See website for *George Tooker: A Retrospective* Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, January 30–April 5, 2009 <http://www.pafa.org/Museum/Exhibitions/>

Past-Exhibitions/George-Tooker-Exhibition/Exhibition-Images/Exhibition-Images/162/vobId\_\_541/

**Figure 4:** Joseph Stella, *Brooklyn Bridge: Variation on an Old Theme* (1939). Oil on canvas, 70" x 42". The Whitney Museum of American Art. See The AMICA Library Through Cartography Associates [http://amica.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/view/search?q=AMICOID=WMAA.42.15%20LIMIT:AMICO~1~&sort=INITIALSORT\\_CRN%2COCS%2CAMICOID&search=Search](http://amica.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/view/search?q=AMICOID=WMAA.42.15%20LIMIT:AMICO~1~&sort=INITIALSORT_CRN%2COCS%2CAMICOID&search=Search)

**Figure 5:** Georgia O'Keeffe, *New York, Night* (1928-29). Oil on canvas, 40 1/2" x 19 1/8". The Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and Sculpture Garden, The University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska. See Katharine Kuh, *American Artists Paint the City*, xxviii th Biennale, Venice, 1956 (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, The Lakeside Press, 1956).

**Figure 6:** Mark Tobey, *City Radiance* (1944). See Katharine Kuh, *American Artists Paint the City*, xxviii th Biennale, Venice, 1956 (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, The Lakeside Press, 1956).

**Figure 7:** Photograph of an I-beam. See Katharine Kuh, *American Artists Paint the City*, xxviii th Biennale, Venice, 1956 (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, The Lakeside Press, 1956).

**Figure 8:** Hedda Sterne, *New York* (1956). Oil on canvas, 32 1/8" x 50 1/8". The Art Institute of Chicago. See Art Institute of Chicago <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/86286>

**Figure 9:** Franz Kline, *New York* (1953). Oil on canvas, 79" x 51". The Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. The Artchive [http://artchive.com/artchive/K/kline/new\\_york\\_ny.jpg.html](http://artchive.com/artchive/K/kline/new_york_ny.jpg.html).

**Figure 10:** Jackson Pollock, *Convergence: Number 10, 1952* (1952). Oil and enamel on canvas, 7' 9 1/2" x 12' 11". The Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. The Artchive [http://www.artchive.com/artchive/P/pollock/pollock\\_convergence.jpg.html](http://www.artchive.com/artchive/P/pollock/pollock_convergence.jpg.html)

**Figure 11:** Willem de Kooning, *Gotham News* (1955). Oil on canvas, 69" x 79". The Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. Albright Knox Gallery Education [http://www.albrightknox.org/ArtStart/Kooning\\_t.html](http://www.albrightknox.org/ArtStart/Kooning_t.html)

**Figure 12:** Map of Chicago on Exhibition Catalogue Cover. See Katharine Kuh, *American Artists Paint the City*, xxviii th Biennale, Venice, 1956 (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, The Lakeside Press, 1956).

**Figure 13:** Ivan Albright, *Poor Room: There Is No Time, No End, No Today, No Yesterday, No Tomorrow, Only the Forever, and Forever, and Forever, Without End* (1942-1963). See *Ivan Albright*, edited by Susan F. Rossen (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago; Distributed by Hudson Hills Press, New York, 1997), figure 40.

## Notes

1. Katharine Kuh, *American Artists Paint the City, xxviii th Biennale, Venice, 1956* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, The Lakeside Press, 1956), 8; Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale, 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1968), 136, 140, 144. Alloway possibly overlooked Kuh's effort to promote contemporary art because he first attended the Venice Biennale in 1958.

2. Nancy Jachec, *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism, 1940-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 159-160; Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 51.

3. Alloway, *Venice Biennale*, 17-18; Philip Rylands and Enzo Di Martino, *Flying the Flag for Art: The United States and the Venice Biennale, 1895-1991* (Richmond, VA: Wyldbore and Wolferstan, 1993), 13, 29, 34, 50, 59, 62. Pavilion rental fees as well as entry ticket and catalogue sales subsidized the otherwise state sponsored art fair. Walter L. Clark, president of Central Art Galleries; a not-for-profit exhibition space opening in 1922 at New York's Grand Central Station raised \$25,000 in 1929 for the construction of the American Pavilion and William A. Delano, president, New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, designed it free of charge.

4. Rylands and Di Martino, *Flying the Flag*, 108-109; Jachec, *Philosophy and Politics*, 166; Alexander Eliot, "Art; Under the Four Winds," *Time*, June 28, 1954: 74; Milton Gendel, "The Iron Curtain in the Glass Factory," *Art News* 55 (September 1956): 26, 59; Lynn Zelevansky, "Dorothy Miller's 'Americans', 1942-63," in *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: At Home and Abroad*, ed. John Elderfield (New York: The Museum of Modern Art/Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 82, 91; Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 257, 260, 262, 267, 272. Saunders quotes George Kennan, "International Exchange in the Arts, Address to the Council of MoMA," 1955, printed in *Perspectives* (Summer 1956). MoMA president Nelson Rockefeller, son of the museum's co-founder Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, recruited the Viennese born Rene d'Harnoncourt for the directorship following Barr's departure in 1943. Saunders contends that both Rockefeller and former Secretary of State for Air William Burden, who became MoMA's president in 1956, had CIA ties, as did d'Harnoncourt, who "openly lobbied Congress during the 1950s to finance a cultural campaign against Communism." See Saunders, 257, 260. In 1954, the Grand Central Galleries sold the American Pavilion to MoMA for \$25,000 and its staff organized five exhibitions before the United States Information Agency assumed the responsibility in 1962 followed by the National Collection of Fine Arts of the Smithsonian Institution in 1965. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum bought the pavilion in 1987.

5. Alloway, *The Venice Biennale*, 136, 139-140; Duncan Phillips, "7 Americans Open in Venice—Marin," *Art News* 49 (June 1950): 22. In 1950, Barr shared the Commissioner position with Alfred M. Frankfurter of the Cleveland Museum of Art. *Art News* featured curatorial statements by both men.

6. Alexander Eliot, "Art; Under the Four Winds," *Time*, June 28, 1954: 74, 77; Zelevansky, "Dorothy Miller's 'Americans,'" 69; Rylands and Di Martino, *Flying the Flag*, 90-92, 105-106, 108-110, 280, 282-284; Clement Greenberg, "American Type Painting," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 234-35. For a thorough discussion of the 1954 exhibition, see Francis Pohl, *Ben Shahn: New Deal Artist in a Cold War Climate, 1947-1954* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989). The Grands Prix was established in 1938 and in 1952, Alexander Calder was the first American recipient. See Rylands and Di Martino, Appendix III (Prizes Awarded to American Artists at the Venice Biennale, 1895-1990) and Appendix X (The Grands Prix, 1938-1990).

7. Avis Berman, ed., "Preface," *My Love Affair with Modern Art: Behind the Scenes with a Legendary Curator* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2006): xxiii; "Real Yankee Art Traveling to Italy; Chicago's Institute Aide to Pick 50 Works for '56 Venice Show," *Chicago Daily News*, 23 May 1955: 3; Art Institute Scrapbook, vol. 85-89, 1950-1956, Roll 16; "American Artists Paint the City," News Releases from the Art Institute of Chicago, March 27, 1956 and "Art Institute Director Resigns," News Releases from the Art Institute of Chicago, April 28, 1958, Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago, News Releases, 1956-1959. 708.1 C53n: 31 and one-page letter from Porter A. McCray, Director of International Programs, The Museum of Modern Art to Katharine Kuh dated August 24, 1955, Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1000-D190. Correspondence, Office of the Registrar,

Loan Exhibitions, Venice Biennale, 1956. Chicago newspapers broke the story before, as Porter A. McCray chided Kuh, "Dan's appointment as commissioner had been confirmed and the invitation for participation in the Biennale had been officially issued."

8. Katherine Kuh, *Who's Who of American Women*, 8th edition, 1974-1975 (Chicago, IL: Marquis Who's Who, Inc., 1973), 535-536; Berman, "Preface," xxv; Daniel Catton Rich, "The Windy City, Storm Center of Many Contemporary Art Movements," *Art Digest* 26 (November 1, 1951): 28; Avis Berman, "The Katharine Kuh Gallery: An Informal Portrait," in *The Old Guard and the Avant-Garde: Modernism in Chicago, 1910-1940*, ed. Sue Ann Prince (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 155-57; Susan F. Rossen and Charlotte Moser, "Primer for Seeing: The Gallery of Art Interpretation and Katharine Kuh's Crusade for Modernism in Chicago," *Museum Studies* 16, no. 1 (1990): 8, 11-14; John W. Stamper, *Chicago's North Michigan Avenue: Planning and Redevelopment, 1900-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 165-167; Avis Berman, "An Interview with Katharine Kuh," *Archives of American Art Journal* 27, no. 3 (1987): 2, 5, 9; John W. Smith, "The Nervous Profession: Daniel Catton Rich and The Art Institute of Chicago, 1927-1958," in *One Hundred Years at the Art Institute: A Centennial Celebration*, *Museum Studies* 19, no. 1 (1993): 65, 67-68; "Committee on Painting and Sculpture Meeting" (February 27, 1947) Record of the Art Institute of Chicago, vol. 19: 51, Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago; Frank Holland, "World of Art: All Abstract Show to Form Next American Exhibition," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 4 May 1947 and Eleanor Jewett, "Voice of the People: Modern Art," *Chicago Tribune*, November 26, 1947 Scrapbook of Art and Artists of Chicago, Rolls 7-9, 1947-1950, Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago, and "58th Annual American Exhibition: Abstract and Surrealist Art from November 6 through January 11, 1948," News Releases from the Art Institute of Chicago, November 11, 1947, Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago, News Releases, 1945-47. 708.1 C53n: 31. Kuh earned art history degrees at Vassar College (AB. 1925) and the University of Chicago (MA. 1929). Her doctoral studies at New York University ended in 1930 with marriage to Chicago businessman George E. Kuh. Following a divorce in 1936, Kuh ran a gallery in the now demolished Diana Court Building (Holabird and Root, 1928-1929) located at 540 North Michigan Avenue. World War II and Kuh's aversion to selling art both contributed to her gallery's demise in April 1942. Kuh later attributed her daringness to her friendship with Alfred Barr, who had been her art history survey professor at Vassar. See Katharine Kuh, "Alfred Barr: Modern Art's Durable Crusader" in *The Open Eye: In Pursuit of Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 40-46. Kuh and her co-curator Frederick Sweet spent months traveling "over twenty-four thousand miles" of the country by car, bus, and train looking for fresh talent and their emphasis on the American followers of Surrealism reveals the influence of a book, *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America* (1944), by gallery owner Sidney Janis.

9. Rossen and Moser, "Primer for Seeing," 11, 14-16 and Kuh, *American Artists*, 7, 8. *Paintings of New York by Leading American Artists*, a 1953 exhibition at the Downtown Gallery celebrating the Tercentenary of New York City organized by friend Edith Gregor Halpert inspired Kuh. For more information, see Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution, Downtown Gallery Papers, Reel ND 13, Celebrating the Tercentenary of the City of New York, Paintings of New York by Leading American Artists, February 17 through March 7, 1953, The Downtown Gallery, 32 East 51 Street, New York and "Tercentenary of New York Shown at Art Exhibit," *Town and Village*, New York (February 19, 1953).

10. Kuh, *American Artists*, 7-8.

11. Rylands and Di Martino, *Flying the Flag*, 63-64, 111, 238; Kuh, *American Artists*, 7, 16-18, 21, 38, and Francis Frascina, "Institutions, Culture, and America's 'Cold War Years': The Making of Greenberg's 'Modernist Painting'" *Oxford Art Journal* 26.1 (2003): 79. In 1947, Dondero alleged that both Rich and Barr were Communists. See Stonor Saunders, *Cultural Cold War*, 256.

12. Kuh, *American Artists*, 9, 13, 22, 27.

13. Kuh, *American Artists*, 11, 22, 29; "Mark Tobey, Painter of 'White Writing,' One-Man Exhibition in Gallery of Art Interpretation," News Releases from the Art Institute of Chicago, April 11, 1955, Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago, file 4: 17, Gallery of Art Interpretation, Mark Tobey, January 15-March 15, 1955, and Kuh, *My Love Affair*, 215, 220, 223, 225. Tobey's friend and fellow painter Lyonel Feininger lent *City Radiance* (1944) to Kuh for 1956 Biennale. His statement originated from a 1954 essay submitted to the *Art Institute of Chicago Quarterly*. "His method, no matter how inventive, was never the final message; it was merely an indispensable tool," Kuh later observed of a painter she considered "an essential influence on twentieth-century American art."

14. Kuh, *American Artists*, 22, 30-31. For another discussion of the "urban or landscape overtones" of Kline's abstractions, see Harry F. Gaugh, *The Vital Gesture: Franz Kline* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 107.

15. Wanda Corn, "Coming of Age: Historical Scholarship in American Art," in *Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings*, ed. Mary Ann Calo (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 2, 3, 7; Cynthia Mills, "Textbooks for a New Generation," *American Art* 16 (Summer 2002); Richard Meyer, "Mind the Gap: Americanists, Modernists, and the Boundaries of Twentieth-Century Art," *American Art* 18, (Fall 2004): 5, 7, and Alan Wallach, "Oliver Larkin's Art and Life in America: Between the Popular Front and the Cold War," *American Art* 15 (Fall 2001): 80. Wallach refers to Rinehart and Company flyer for *Art and Life in America* (ca. 1949), box 494 (Larkin files), Smith

College Archives, Northampton, Mass. See also John A. Kouwenhoven, "What's 'American' About America," *Harper's Magazine* 213 (July 1956): 25-33.

16. Hugo van Wadenoyen, "Big Biennale; Awards," *Time*, July 9, 1956: 52, Milton Gendel, "The Iron Curtain in the Glass Factory," *Art News* 55 (September 1956): 24, 25, and Jachec, "Abstract Expressionism and the International Council," 161, 189. On Gillespie's tour see Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 27-43. Claims of greater freedom were ironic given the controversy surrounding *Sport in Art*, which had been organized by the American Federation of Arts (AFA), the USIA, and *Sports Illustrated*, to represent the United States during the 1956 Summer Olympic Games in Sidney, Australia. In the spring 1956, Texas tycoon H. L. Hunt, a supporter of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, organized a campaign against the exhibition because it featured ten artists mentioned in HUAC's annual report that prompted USIA to cancel its appearance in Australia. Dismayed by this action, AFA issued "A Statement of Artistic Freedom" encouraging the nation's government to embrace and promote cultural openness because "freedom and diversity are the most effective answers to totalitarian thought control and uniformity, and the most effective proof to the strength of democracy." See "A Statement of Artistic Freedom," *Arts* (July 1956).

17. "American Artists Paint the City," *Arts* 30 (June 1956): 26, 28, 29. Most critics quoted verbatim passages from Kuh's catalogue text.

18. "New Worlds of the New World," *Time* 67, June 18, 1956: 80; Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution, Katharine Kuh Papers, Reel 2226, "International press excerpts, American Artists Paint the City, xxviii Biennale, Venice, 1956, *Beaux-Arts*, Paris, 26 June 1956, unpaginated; Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution, Katharine Kuh Papers, Box 1 of 8, Handwritten letter dated June 23-morning-Paris to Mother from K (Katharine Kuh), Villa Capponi Arcetri, Florence, the home of Henry Clifford, and Kuh, *My Love Affair*, 139.

19. Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution, Katharine Kuh Papers, Reel 2226, "International press excerpts, American Artists Paint the City, xxviii Biennale, Venice, 1956, *Zürcher Zeitung*, Summer, 1956, unpaginated.

20. Milton Gendel, "The Iron Curtain in the Glass Factory," *Art News* 55 (September 1956): 23, 26-27, 59-60; Willem de Kooning, "Content is a Glimpse," excerpts from an interview with David Sylvester in *Location* (Spring 1963): 46; quoted in Harold Rosenberg, *de Kooning*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1978), 206; Selden Rodman, *Conversations with Artists* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1957), 84. Critics had already suggested that Abstract Expressionism reflected the urban environment. See Thomas B. Hess, *Willem de Kooning* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968), 103; Clement Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture" (1947) in *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, ed. John O'Brian, 166.

21. Kuh, "A Day with Franz Kline," *My Love Affair with Modern Art*, 229, 232-233; Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *Art News* (October 1958), 56-57. Aside from acknowledging that Pollock "vehemently disapproved of any theme," Kuh kept her commentary about the painter brief. Once his painting entered the Albright Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York in 1956, the title became permanent but the word convergence soon lost its association with the city.

22. Clement Greenberg, "The New York Market for American Art," *The Nation*, June 11, 1949, in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, ed. John O'Brian, 322; Clement Greenberg, "American-Type Painting" (1955/1958), *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 208, 210, 220; Frascina, "Institutions, Culture," 69; Saul Ostrow, "Clement Greenberg: The Last Interview" (1994) in *Clement Greenberg: Late Writings*, ed. Robert C. Morgan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 239; Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1993), 774, 779. First published in *Forum Lectures* (Voice of America), Washington, DC, 1960, "Modernist Painting" was reprinted in *Art and Literature*, no. 4 (Spring 1965), 193-201. Greenberg stressed the autonomy of the art object and a self-critical mission to "eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any art." This push towards flatness began with Impressionist Claude Monet, who had "threatened the easel-picture convention" through mural scale canvases with all-over compositions and was furthered by Pablo Picasso, who dismantled the illusion of real objects in a deeply receding space through their monochromatic color gradations and value contrasts in conjunction with faceted forms. See Clement Greenberg, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture" (1948), *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 155, 157.

23. Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Missionary for Modern Art* (Chicago & New York: Contemporary Books, 1989), 248; quoted in Marcia Brennan, "The Contest for the Greatest American Painter of the Twentieth Century: Alfred Stieglitz and Clement Greenberg," *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), 240.

24. Thomas B. Hess, "Marin," *Art News* 46 (January 1948): 25; "Are These Men the Best Painters in America Today?" *Look* 12, February 3, 1948: 44 quoted in Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory*, 233, 243-244, 245, 259, 263.



25. John I. H. Baur, Lloyd Goodrich, Dorothy C. Miller, James Thrall Soby, and Frederick S. Wright, eds., *New Art in America: Fifty Painters of the 20th Century* (Greenwich, CT: The New York Graphic Society/Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 222; Zelevansky, "Dorothy Miller," 61. A change in MoMA's stance on Abstract Expressionism occurred in 1956, when "12 Americans" paired Franz Kline with West Coast abstractionist Sam Francis and an assortment of peripheral New York School artists—Ernest Briggs, James Brooks, Philip Guston, Grace Hartigan, and Larry Rivers. The late date of this exhibition and others like it demonstrate the provisional status of Abstract Expressionism. Portrayals of Clement Greenberg as an all-powerful figure have skewed our understanding of the attitudes, values, and activities of the nation's art world by the mid-1950s, when his reputation reached an all time low following his loss of an editorial position with the journal *Commentary* in 1957 and widespread contempt following a 14 month stint as a salaried art consultant for the French and Company Gallery in New York. Most of his revisions to earlier published essays were completed between December 1958 and February 1960. See Florence Rubenfeld, *Clement Greenberg: A Life* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 205-15, 222, 238-239; Frascina, "Institutions, Culture," 73-74. For other perspectives, see Tim Hilton, "Clement Greenberg," *New Criterion* 19, no. 1 (September 2000); "Clement Greenberg: As the Art World Remembers Him" (Interviews with John Russell, Hilton Kramer, William Rubin, Robert Rosenblum, and Linda Nochlin), *The Art Newspaper* (June 1994): 4.

26. Kuh, *American Artists*, 7-8; Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value*, 46-47. "As for the show in general, it continued [sic] to be a definite success. Attendance is very good and comments continue to be decidedly favorable. I have had innumerable requests for catalogue and photographs both here and through the mail. I feel the 'propaganda' aspect of the thing has been very successful," observed Institute employee Bill Bradshaw, who dismantled the exhibition. See one-page letter from Bill Bradshaw to Daniel Catton Rich dated October 6, 1956, Correspondence, Office of the Registrar, Loan Exhibitions, Venice Biennale, 1956, Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1000-D190. Much like E. P. Richardson in *Painting in America: The Story of 450 Years* (1956), Kuh attempted to show how American art had successfully moved beyond the influence of European movements and she stressed that its full appreciation required "understanding of the sources, interrelationships, and difficulties that produce this art." See Corn, "Coming of Age," 6; Katharine Kuh, "Art's Voyage of Discovery," *The Open Eye: In Pursuit of Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 194.

27. Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution, Katharine Kuh Papers, Box 1 of 8. Handwritten letter dated June 23-morning-Paris to Mother from K (Katharine Kuh) and Handwritten letter dated Monday, May 28, 1956 to Mother from K (Katharine Kuh), Villa Capponi Arcetri, Florence, the home of Henry Clifford; Kuh, *American Artists*, 18, 22, 27; Emery Hutchinson, "Smoked-Drenched...Decadence? Artists Here Get Civic Dander Up," *Chicago Daily News*, 18 June 1956; Madeline Tourtelot, "Equity Hits Institute Selections," *Chicago American*, 29 June 1956, Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago, Art Institute Scrapbook, vol. 85-89, 1950-1956, Roll 16; "Does City Favor Its Own Art?" *Chicago American*, 23 April 1956, 8 and "Artists Riled Over Display's Slur to City," *Chicago Tribune*, 6 June 1956, Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago, Scrapbook of Art and Artists of Chicago, Rolls 10-15, 1951-1959. Hayden noted that 29 of the 35 painters selected lived in New York and that Joseph Frieber and Fred J. Berman, both painters from Milwaukee, were the only other Midwesterners.

28. Kuh, *American Artists*, 7; "American Artists Paint the City," *Arts* 30 (June 1956): 28; Gendel, "The Iron Curtain in the Glass Factory," 59; A. James Speyer, "Art News from Chicago; Biennale Fever," *Art News* 55 (May 1956): 18; Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution, Katharine Kuh Papers, Reel 2226, "International press excerpts, *American Artists Paint the City*, exhibition assembled by Katharine Kuh, Curator of Modern Painting and Sculpture, The Art Institute of Chicago, xxviii Biennale, Venice, 1956," *Beaux-Arts*, Paris, 26 June 1956; "American Artists Paint the City, Insurance Valuation," Correspondence, Office of the Registrar, Loan Exhibitions, Venice Biennale, 1956, Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1000-D190 and two-page letter from Bill Bradshaw to Katharine Kuh dated October 15, 1956, Correspondence, Office of the Registrar, Loan Exhibitions, Venice Biennale, 1956, Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1000-D190. High humidity in Venice had "slightly warped" Callahan's photomural mural measuring 9' x 6 1/2" but it was in good enough condition to appear in the 1956 American Annual.

29. "Art: Tempestuous," *Newsweek*, July 1956: 46; Katharine Kuh, "Foreword...New Talent in the U.S.A.," *Art in America* 44 (February 1956): 10-16. In January 1956 letter co-signed by gallery owners Sally Fairweather and Shirley G. Hardin, collectors Earle Ludgin and Joseph R. Shapiro, and Daniel Catton Rich, Kuh invited Miller to tour the studios of 13 Chicago artists because curators from the east "so rarely visit this city." The seven Chicago artists featured in *New Talent in the USA* were Don Baum, Cosmo Campoli, Leon Golub, Roy Gussow, Max Kahn, Le Roy Neiman, and Abbott Pattison. See Zelevansky, "Dorothy Miller's 'Americans,'" 75.

30. Frank Getlein, "Painting Moderns in Chicago," *The New Republic*, March 11, 1957: 22; "Art: Tempestuous," *Newsweek*, July 1956: 46; Sydney J. Harris, "Strictly Personal: Why Should New York Have Monopoly on Art?" *Chicago Daily News*, 1 June 1953, Scrapbook of Art & Artists of Chicago, 1951-1959, Rolls 10-15, Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago; "Art: What Wins a

Prize?" *Time*, January 21, 1957, 54; Kenneth Shopen, "Have We Got an Inferiority Complex? If N.Y. Did It, It's Art, If Chicago Does It, It's Doubtful," *Chicago Daily News*, 17 September 1954," and Eleanor Jewett, "Biennale Is Under Fire by Critics," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 July 1956, Art Institute Scrapbook, vol. 85-89, 1950-1956, Roll 16, Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago; "16th Annual exhibition Society for Contemporary American Art Members Select 40 Paintings and Sculptures," May 10, 1956, "Ten Prizes Amounting \$6,100.00 Awarded 62nd American Exhibition," January 9, 1957 and "1956 Acquisitions by the Art Institute," November 6, 1957, News Releases from the Art Institute of Chicago, Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago, News Releases, 1956-1959. 708.1 C53n, and Katharine Kuh, "Introduction: Sorting Out and Summing Up," *My Love Affair with Modern Art*: 30, 233. The jury (MoMA curator Dorothy C. Miller, sculptor Theodore Roszak, and painter Arthur Osver) awarded the Ada S. Garrett Prize of \$750.00 to Hedda Sterne and the Norman Wait Harris Silver Medal and Prize of \$500.00 to Franz Kline. Members of the Society for Contemporary American Art, a non-profit organization affiliated with the Institute included such notable Chicago collectors as Leigh and Mary Block, Maurice Culberg, Noah Goldowsky, Earle Ludgin, Samuel and Florene Marx, Walter P. Paepcke, and Joseph Shapiro as well as Joseph Hirshhorn of New York. Seymour Knox and Gordon Smith, director of the Albright Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York checked to see if the Institute wanted to acquire the Pollock and de Kooning paintings. "Of course, I wanted them all—they were marvelous paintings and marvelous bargains—but my trustees wouldn't back me up," Kuh remarked in her memoir.

31. Avis Berman, in *My Love Affair with Modern Art*, xxiii & xxv. See also "Oral History of Katharine Kuh, Interviewed by John W. Smith," January 26-27, 1993. The Art Institute of Chicago, 72, 76. Both Kuh's papers and a 1993 interview reveal her struggles against real and perceived ostracism because of her gender and Jewish ethnicity, which may have contributed to her inability to deflect successfully criticism of her handling of the 1956 Venice Biennale. Under normal circumstances, the curator of the American pavilion also received the title of U.S. commissioner and with it the honor of serving on an international jury selecting prizewinning artists and artworks. "Katharine took it for granted that she would be commissioner," remarked long-time friend Avis Berman, who concluded, "No woman commissioner had ever represented the United States to date, and the government authorities were not ready to break the tradition."

32. Shelley Hornstein, "The Shape of Time and the Value of Art," in *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, State Institutions, and the Value(s) of Art*, ed. Jody Berland and Shelley Hornstein (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2000), 220, 221-222, 229; Gendel, "The Iron Curtain in the Glass Factory," 59, 60; Alloway, *The Venice Biennale*, 137, 140, 144, 149; "American Artists Paint the City," News Releases from the Art Institute of Chicago, March 27, 1956. Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago, News Releases, 1956-1959. 708.1 C53n: 31. Daniel Catton Rich served with other national commissioners on a jury responsible for the award of major prizes, while Kuh shouldered the blame in the press for the failure of an American to win one. Previous winners included Georges Braque (1948), Henri Matisse (1950), Raoul Dufy (1952), and Max Ernst (1954). See Rylands and Di Martino, Appendix IV (American Commissioners, Curators, Committee and Jury Members, 1897-1991), Appendix VII (Principal One-Man Exhibitions at the Venice Biennale, 1895-1990), and Appendix X (The Grands Prix, 1938-1990).

33. Jachec, *Philosophy and Politics*, 159-160, 166; Stonor Saunders, *Cultural Cold War*, 258, 267-268; Frascina, "Institutions, Culture," 92. See also Hilton Kramer, "Clement Greenberg and the Cold War," *The New Criterion* 11 (March 1993), 4-9. Greenberg's resistance to such readings is evident in a 1978 interview with Saul Ostrow. When asked if the emphasis on autonomy in "Avant-Garde and Culture" (1939) and other essays was a "political stance" and a "form of resistance to bourgeois cultural dominance," he responded, "If you read me carefully you won't find any political factors entering my writing about art. Maybe about culture in general, yes, but about art as art, never." See Ostrow, "Clement Greenberg: The Last Interview," 237.

34. Clement Greenberg, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture" (1948), *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 155; Alloway, *Venice Biennale*, 28; Thomas Hess, "Jackson Pollock, 1912-1956," *Art News* 55 (September 1956): 44, 57; Jachec, *Philosophy and Politics*, 159. Jackson Pollock 1912-1956 (January-December 1958) toured Rome, Basel, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Berlin, London, and Paris. Touring Europe in 1958, *The New American Painting*, an exhibition curated by Dorothy Miller, also helped create a narrative for Abstract Expressionism within an internationalist modernist tradition specifically indebted to Europe but coming to fruition in America. MoMA responded to repeat requests by European curators for such an exhibition and this calls into question claims by Frascina and Saunders that MoMA's International Council backed by Rockefeller's money foisted these exhibitions upon a European public. See Frascina, "Institutions, Culture," 97; Zelevansky, "Dorothy Miller," 91.

35. Michael Krenn, *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 197; Gendel, "The Iron Curtain in the Glass Factory," 59, 60; Alloway, *Venice Biennale*, 137, 140, 144, 149, and Rubinfeld, "Clement Greenberg," 210-211. Robert Rauschenberg's win in 1964 was controversial because the American Commissioner, Alan R. Solomon of the Jewish Museum in New York City, elected to exhibit his work in the former offices of the U.S. Consulate located outside the Giardini. For more information

see Jane De Hart Mathews, "Art and Politics in Cold War America," *American Historical Review* 81 (October 1976): 762-87 and Christine J. Mamiya, "We the People: The Art of Robert Rauschenberg and the Construction of American National Identity," *American Art* (Summer 1993): 40-63.

36. Hornstein, "The Shape of Time and Value of Art," 220, 222, 228 and Krenn, *Fall-Out Shelters*, 148-149, 154, 156, 158-159.