ABSTRACT

Title of Document:	PERFORMING THE NEW FACE OF MODERNISM: ANTI-MIMETIC PORTRAITURE AND THE AMERICAN AVANT-GARDE, 1912–1927
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At the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession in 1912, Alfred Stieglitz received the final proofs for Gertrude Stein's experimental text portraits "Henri Matisse" and "Pablo Picasso" and subsequently published these poems in the journal *Camera Work*. Soon afterward a number of visual artists working in the United States began grappling with the implications of such hermetic depictions. Entering into a trans-Atlantic conversation, this fledgling modernist community created radical images that bear witness to the evolving nature of subjectivity and to an extensive culture of experimentation in portraying the individual in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

One of the most salient aspects of the modernist worldview was the desire to break with the past. Earlier styles, exhibition standards, subject matter, and teaching methods all came under attack, but none more basic—and symbolic—than the ancient Greek (via the Renaissance) idea of mimesis. Freed from the expectation to replicate

reality "impartially," painters and sculptors began instead to emphasize more and more their own subjective experiences through expressive color choices or formal exaggerations. Portraiture, previously so closely linked to flattering transcription and bourgeois values, became the genre *par excellence* for testing modernist ideals and practices. This doctoral thesis examines the small group of artists working in the United States who advanced an extreme, anti-mimetic approach to portraiture through the dissociation of the sitter from his or her likeness.

Drawing on performance theory, this dissertation re-imagines the portrait as a series of events within a social nexus. It also aims to reaffirm the agency of the United States avant-garde in the 1910s and 1920s as its members sought to establish, and then maintain, their status on the American cultural scene specifically through the employment of unconventional portraiture. Through the contextualization of particular objects, the consideration of period poetry, and the incorporation of newly available archival sources, the research presented here illuminates the complex intersections of modernity, representation, and subjectivity, and charts the changes in a specific mode of visual production during the fifteen-year span of 1912–1927, thereby demonstrating Charles Demuth's dictum that "In portraiture…likeness is a means not an end."

PERFORMING THE NEW FACE OF MODERNISM: ANTI-MIMETIC
PORTRAITURE AND THE AMERICAN AVANT-GARDE, 1912–1927

By

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Prudence Mae Walz and A. Frederick Walz, Jr.

collections team of Barbara Buhler Lynes, Heather Hole, Eumie Imm Stroukoff, Dale Kronkright, Judy Chiba Smith, Kelly Swickard, Monica Chevalier Schofield, Darrah Wills, and Alan C. Braddock—for their demonstrable interest in this project. In addition, the 2007–2008 Fellows hold a special place in my heart, not only for their intelligence and generosity but also for their friendship. I could not have asked for better associates than Elizabeth Hutton Turner, Jonathan Weinberg, Carolyn Kastner, Elizabeth "Libby" Bischof, and Christopher "James James" Reed.

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<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

In early 1914 Pablo Picasso completed the collage *Dice, Packet of Cigarettes, and Visiting-Card* (fig. 0.1) and delivered the work to the home of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas at 27, rue de Fleurus, Paris.[1] The composition of this small and simple synthetic cubist *papier collé* belies the work's large and complex preoccupations and consequences. The drawing's immediate conceptual concern implicates the viewer in a philosophical game about the nature of reality. Using the language of still life, the visual conceit in play offers a tabletop surface—indicated by the thick graphite lines that cleanly meet at a right angle in the top third of the sheet—upon which a cluster of everyday objects casually repose. These articles, from left to right, include: a black-and-white pair of dice, with sides exhibiting six and four pips, respectively; a yellow pack of twenty Élégantes cigarettes; and a pre-printed visiting card from Stein and Toklas with their address in the lower right-hand corner.

In his important essay, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," Daniel Joseph Singal states that "the quintessential aim of Modernists has been to reconnect all that the Victorian moral dichotomy tore asunder…."[2] He goes on to parse out these socio-cultural goals:

> To integrate once more the human and animal, the civilized and savage, and to heal the sharp divisions that the nineteenth century had established in areas such as class, race, and gender.[3]

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[1] For a more complete account of this anecdote, see Chapter Two, note 78.
[2] Daniel Joseph Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," *American Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 12.
[3] Ibid.

If, as Singal suggests, the phenomenon of modernism arose as "a response to the cultural malaise brought about by late Victorian repression," then Picasso's *Dice, Packet of Cigarettes, and Visiting-Card* may be successfully interpreted as a measured volley in a larger assault against the values of nineteenth-century propriety. Not surprisingly, the collage, through the discursive undertones jostling just below the work's surface of banality, also envisions a new aesthetic and moral universe.

In its role as interventional wedge, the collage "pictures" the transgression of several Victorian cultural conventions. Picasso literally upends Renaissance perspectival rules by presenting the front, back, and sides of the depicted tabletop items simultaneously. In gluing part of a discarded cigarette package to the surface of his drawing, the artist punctured the Victorian propensity to pigeonhole aspects of human experience by breaking down the barriers between "art" and "life." While Alice B. Toklas was a heavy smoker, "[s]moking cigarettes in this period," as Patricia Leighten has noted, "was still enormously daring for women…."[4] Yet Picasso ineluctably drew the attention of contemporary viewers to this controversial, even scandalous, issue by centralizing the packaging of a brand targeted at female tobacco users, the only passage of color on the otherwise monochromatic sheet. Iconographically dice traditionally signify gambling and licentiousness; here they suggest how Stein, in her unconventional writing style, subverted the nineteenth-century's predisposition to rules and order through her employment of chance and nonsense. The game pieces (a homogenous, if unequal, pair of objects) only hint at what the calling card makes explicit: Miss Stein and

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[4] Patricia Leighten's brief essay on the collage inspired much of my thinking about the work and its social context. See Leighten, "*Dice, Packet of Cigarettes, and Visiting-Card*" (catalogue no. 7) in Susan Greenberg Fisher et al., *Picasso and the Allure of Language* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Art Gallery, 2009), 70.

Miss Toklas cohabitate at a particular address, a direct challenge to Victorian ideas of family, futurity, responsibility, and heteronormativity. That *Dice, Packet of Cigarettes, and Visiting-Card* functions as a portrayal of the lesbian couple—but without the customary benefit of physiognomic likeness—touches upon the subject of the six chapters that follow.

Indeed, *Dice, Packet of Cigarettes, and Visiting-Card* serves as just one case in point of the slow but inexorable demise of description that took place within the realm of the visual arts as modernism gathered force in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The powerful influence of European abstraction and the increasing ease and availability of photography hastened this aesthetic revolution because such developments called into question the necessity for painters and sculptors to painstakingly reproduce the "real" image of the natural world around them. These heady circumstances fomented an unprecedented crisis for the genre of portraiture, one that would have long-lasting effects on the cultural heritage of the United States.

At the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession in 1912, Alfred Stieglitz received the final proofs for Gertrude Stein's experimental text portraits of Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso and subsequently included these poems in the journal he lovingly edited, *Camera Work*. Soon afterward a number of visual artists working in America began grappling with the implications of such hermetic depictions.[5] Eventually entering into a

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[5] In employing the idiom "America," I follow Wanda Corn who explicated her own usage of the word this way: "By 'America,' I mean the United States, and not the North American continent or the Americas. Like 'avant-garde,' this too is something of a period term, one that virtually everyone used to describe the nation until the 1930s, when the country became to be better known as the United States." See Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915–1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), xviii. The modernist community, however, imagined and re-imagined itself at various junctures as trans- (or even supra-) national. That being said, this dissertation treats art created by a full complement of North American and European artists working on the Continent and in the United States. Given the affiliative fluidity of members of the avant-garde during the historical moment in

trans-Atlantic conversation, the emerging international modernist community created revolutionary images that bear witness to the evolving nature of subjectivity and to a substantive culture of artistic experimentation in portraying the individual. Landmark examples—in a variety of media—such as Marsden Hartley's oil on canvas, *Portrait of a German Officer*, 1914 (fig. 2.7); Francis Picabia's ink drawing and collage *Ici C'est Ici Stieglitz*, 1915 (fig. 1.6); Alfred Stieglitz's photograph of clouds entitled *Portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe, No. 2*, 1923 (fig. 4.15); and Arthur Dove's assemblage *The Critic (Royal Cortissoz)*, 1925 (fig. 3.22), all evidence the innovative turn toward unconventional portraiture in the first decades of the twentieth century.

One of the most salient features of the modernist worldview was the desire to break with the past—and visual artists after the turn of the twentieth century took this impulse seriously. Earlier styles, exhibition standards, subject matter, and teaching methods, all came under attack, but none more basic—and symbolic—than the ancient Greek (via the Renaissance) idea of mimesis. Freed from the expectation to replicate reality "impartially," painters and sculptors began instead to emphasize more and more their own subjective experience through expressive color choices or formal exaggerations. Portraiture, previously so closely linked to flattering transcription and to upper class and then bourgeois values, became the genre *par excellence* for testing

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question, I endeavor to be as careful and precise as possible when identifying artists by place of birth or (permanent or temporary) homeland of choice. Much of the story that follows unfolds in New York City. Indeed, this fact predisposes me to utilize the convenient shorthand "American" to discuss work created in a particular East Coast urban center by a particular class of people under particular circumstances. According to my research, the majority (though not all) of the United States artists who engaged in the anti-mimetic portraiture dialogue lived and worked in and around Manhattan. The reader, however, should not assume that New York modernist aesthetic praxis somehow stands for all artistic working methods and products from across this expansive country in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The warp and weft of history comprises many narratives, even modernisms in the plural; the pages to come trace an "American" strand, true—but only one among many.

modernist ideals and practices.[6] This dissertation examines the small group of artists

working in the United States who advanced a radical, anti-mimetic approach to

portraiture through the dissociation of the sitter from his or her likeness.[7]

The years 1912 and 1927 bracket the following study, although Chapter One

begins with an analysis of several unconventional portraits from the first decade of the

1900s (and by European artists at that). Nevertheless, the innovative idea of distancing

the portrait subject from a corresponding illusionistically believable transcription

indelibly pierced the consciousness of the American avant-garde when Stieglitz

published Stein's "post-impressionist" text portraits in August of 1912. This freshly

opened avenue of investigation, endorsed in *Camera Work* by Stein's texts as well as by

Matisse and Picasso's accompanying images, would occupy the avant-garde for the next

fifteen years as they labored intently to impress themselves, their peers, and the public

with their new discoveries. 1927 witnessed the completion of two of the most

sophisticated exempla created by American artists: Georgia O'Keeffe's *Radiator

Building—Night, New York* (fig. 6.4) and Charles Demuth's *My Egypt* (fig. 6.9). Soon

thereafter, due to a variety of social factors, the anti-mimetic portrait rapidly lost its

cultural currency—at least until the second half of the twentieth century when American

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[6] For more about the relationship of mimesis to portraiture, see, for example, Richard Brilliant, "Portraits: The Limitations of Likeness," *Art Journal* 46, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 171–172; "Physiognomy, Mimetic Idealism, and Social Change," in Harry Berger, Jr., *Fictions of the Pose: Rembrandt Against the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 118–135; and "Likeness and Type," in Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21–29.

[7] Though portraiture's relationship to physiognomic likeness has waxed and waned over the centuries, its strong association—especially within the popular imagination—to verisimilitude offered a ready target for modernists looking to break with academic aesthetic practices. Some artists after the turn of the twentieth century experimented with loosening the stranglehold that transcriptive realism held on portraiture, producing paintings, drawings, and sculpture that distilled, or abstracted, the visual relationship between the sitter and the resulting image. Others working at the time jettisoned this correlative altogether. This second group of artists, whose output forms the core subject of the dissertation at hand, employed innovative methods to proclaim an even more radical modernity. By deliberately working *against* the tradition of imitative replication (hence, "anti-mimetic"), these early American modernists produced remarkably original and extremely demanding images of their contemporaries.

artists actively engaged in identity politics reemployed this rich and important mode of expression.

My discussion of this intriguing visual material unfolds chronologically, grouped into three parts. At first glance, these overarching thematic sections—Appearance and Dis-appearance, Objects and Object-ification, and Presentation and Re-presentaition— may give the impression of being arbitrary, oppositional dichotomies. Rather than reductive binaries, however, the rubrics that I have employed are, I believe, open-ended and dialogic sites of negotiation. I hope that the reader will find upon perusal that in each pairing the first term enriches and informs the second, and vice versa, in a mutually enabling process of signification.

Part I: *Appearance* and *Dis-appearance*. Prior to the *fin de siècle*, portraiture had depended closely on the sitter's appearance (including costume, comportment, family resemblance, etc.) for its function and meaning. These conventions, epitomized by the oeuvre of Jean-August-Dominique Ingres and codified in the curricula of European fine arts academies, came under scrutiny on both sides of the Atlantic rim. In their own first anti-mimetic gambit, American painters followed Picasso's paradigm of disembodying the subject. (Between 1905–1906 the Spanish artist demanded that Gertrude Stein sit for her portrait over eighty times; he then scraped off the image in frustration and later painted her likeness in her absence.) Marsden Hartley, for example, depicted the dis-appearance of Stein's physical being in *One Portrait of One Woman*, c. 1916 (fig. 0.2), wherein the expatriate writer was imaged through her palpable non-presence. Similarly, Andrew Dasburg represented the transient aspect of contemporary life in *The Absence of Mabel Dodge*, 1914, which combined the style of synchromism with his own response to

the "sitter." As it has now been lost to history, this canvas literally performs the modern experience of disembodiment as it, too, has disappeared from view.

Part II: *Objects* and *Object-ification*. Beginning in the late 1910s, American artists began to explore a second anti-mimetic approach, where three-dimensional found objects replaced the imagined absence of the individual. The sitter rematerializes—though by proxy—in these assemblages and the perception of presence is enhanced by collapsing the distance between the artwork and the viewer. Indexical traces, like the handprint in Man Ray's *Self-Portrait*, 1916 (fig. 4.32), or concrete referents, such as the camera lens in Arthur Dove's *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz*, 1925 (fig. 3.24), constitute the aura of the individual in real time and space. Furthermore, during this aesthetic trend the anti-mimetic portrait itself became object-ified. As a result, artists regarded these witty additive artworks (many of which are no longer extant due to their extreme fragility) as appropriate subjects for contemporaneous "portrait photographs." In fact, it is only through such self-conscious documents as Charles Sheeler's platinum silver print of Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, c. 1920 (fig. 4.22), that we have a visual record of these original works at all.

Part III: *Presentation* and *Re-presentation*. Throughout the 1920s, a return to realism characterized the third anti-mimetic portrait strategy. Here artists abandoned the actual three-dimensional object in favor of semi-illusionistic images of items heavily invested with personal connotations pertinent to the portrait subject. Although the reemployment of "realistic" representational techniques signaled the logical limits of the anti-mimetic portrait project, artists maintained their refusal to depict the sitter directly, instead preferring explicit topographical references, for example, Georgia O'Keeffe's *My*

Shanty, 1922 (fig. 6.7), or more conceptual signifiers, like the phone number inscribed within Charles Sheeler's *Self-Portrait*, 1923 (fig. 0.3). Written names also appeared, e.g., "ALFRED STIEGLITZ" in Georgia O'Keeffe's *Radiator Building—Night, New York*, 1927 (fig. 6.4), as the function of these images evolved into "presentation," that is, intentional marketing tactics to legitimate and advance the status of the portrait subject, as well as the portrait artist, within the hierarchy of the American avant-garde and the imaginary of the general public. Charles Demuth exemplified this practice by exhibiting his first "poster portraits," such as *Poster Portrait: Dove*, 1924 (fig. 5.15), in the hallway outside Stieglitz's 291 gallery in March 1925, effectually advertising the art and artists to be seen inside.

The roots of this dissertation run long and deep. Indeed, I have almost from the very outset thought about it as a means to expand, contextualize, and showcase the premise of my 2004 master's thesis, "The Riddle of the Sphinx or 'It Must Be Said': Charles Demuth's *My Egypt* Reconsidered," which argued for an interpretation of Demuth's 1927 masterpiece as an understated and overlooked self-portrait. The project at hand entailed archival research in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, where I consulted letters, paintings, and other documents—and travel to the desert Southwest, where I read, wrote, and presented on the American modernists, especially Georgia O'Keeffe, Marsden Hartley, and Andrew Dasburg. That the exhibition *Inventing Marcel Duchamp: The Dynamics of Portraiture* took place at the National Portrait Gallery when I happened to be based, once again, in Washington, DC, encouraged me to rethink the French-born artist's contributions to the early twentieth-century avant-garde's discussion of anti-mimetic portraiture. A journey to Paris—and

then a pilgrimage to 27, rue de Fleurus—permitted me to think through the logistical

realities of the relationship between Pablo Picasso and Gertrude Stein.

These intertwined interests and experiences reveal themselves within the pages of

my dissertation, conceived as an interdisciplinary endeavor that employs several

methodologies to (re)consider the multi-dimensional meanings of the work of art.

Reflecting my prior experience with museum work and curatorial practice, I have

undertaken to examine as many as possible of the actual art objects that form the nucleus

of my research. Rather than being "merely images," I hope to demonstrate in the pages

ahead that the works under consideration comprise material qualities that are important

bearers of meaning. I also follow the useful example of American literature scholar

Wendy Steiner, who was the first to meaningfully employ the semiotic theory of

philosopher Charles S. Peirce to anti-mimetic portraiture; her work plays a foundational

role in my study of the complex relationship among artists, sitters, and their portrayals.

My sustained analysis builds on the research of art historians Wanda Corn, Sarah

Greenough, and Barbara Haskell, as it takes into account, as appropriate, iconographic

precedents, the biography and writings of each artist, and the larger socio-historical

context, including responses by period viewers and the contemporaneous verse of Elsa

von Freytag-Loringhoven, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and William Carlos Williams. All

these factors impinge upon the significance and function of the portraits in question.

Performance studies as an area of academic inquiry traces its origins to the 1970s

and the work of anthropologist Victor Turner and theater director Richard Schechner.

This (inter)discipline gained new momentum in the 1990s when scholars like Eve

Kosofsky Sedgwick and José Esteban Muñoz validated gender, race, and sexuality as

legitimate subjects of investigation under this larger umbrella. The intersection of

performance studies and American portraiture before 1945 has produced interesting past

work (especially about self-fashioning) and present scholars, such as Jennifer Roberts,

continue to explore this avenue of investigation with rich and productive results.[8] By

foregrounding the concerns of performance studies, this dissertation adds yet another

voice to this current trend within American art history.

Despite the fact that scholars have written extensively about the phenomenon of

modernism, very few have substantively treated the general topic of early twentieth-

century portraiture, as the bibliography published in conjunction with Paloma Alarcó and

Malcolm Warner's 2007 exhibition, *The Mask and the Mirror: Portraiture in the Age of

Picasso*, confirms.[9] Notable texts specifically on portraits of the early twentieth-century

United States are even fewer, with the exception of a small number of publications by

authors such as Wendy Wick Reaves, Robin Jaffee Frank, and Bruce Robertson.

Americanist scholars of modernism, however, have begun to turn their attention in this

direction. Additional doctoral theses on unconventional American portraiture of the

twentieth century—just completed or in progress—augment this tendency.[10] The recent

National Portrait Gallery show curated by Anne Collins Goodyear and Jim McManus on

visual representations of Marcel Duchamp and the upcoming exhibition organized by

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[8] Jennifer Roberts, "Copley's Cargo: Boy with a Squirrel and the Dilemma of Transit," *American Art* 21, no. 2 (summer 2007): 20–41.

[9] Paloma Alarcó, *The Mirror & the Mask: Portraiture in the Age of Picasso* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 327–333.

[10] Other dissertation projects on this topic include Kathleen Merrill Campagnolo, "Walter De Maria: Art and Homage, 1960–1972" (PhD thesis, London: Courtauld Institute of Art, 2009) and Kim Sels, "Assembling Identity: The Object-Portrait in American Art, 1917–1927" (PhD thesis, Rutgers: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey). Allison Blizzard, *Portraits of the 20th Century Self: An Interartistic Study of Gertrude Stein's Literary Portraits and Early Modernist Portraits by Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004) is another relevant resource that recently appeared.

Wanda Corn on portraits of Gertrude Stein provide both valuable foundations and intellectual context for my own project.[11]

The text at hand makes several contributions to the corpus of writing on portraiture. My initial research identified a critical mass—over fifty—American anti-mimetic portraits, recuperating several lesser known or forgotten objects from oblivion. This dissertation also untangles several knotty problems within the literature (e.g., note 72, page 63), announces important art historical discoveries (e.g., paragraph one, page 144), and provides new readings for several icons of American art (e.g., pages 205–214). Moreover, drawing upon a range of intellectuals—from Erving Goffman to Judith Butler—it argues that ordinary, daily life is a social construction established through extremely complex parallel strings of coincidental actions. In particular this dissertation re-imagines the portrait transaction as a series of events within a social nexus.[12] Finally, it aims to reaffirm the agency of the United States avant-garde in the 1910s and 1920s as its members sought to establish, and then maintain, their status on the American cultural scene specifically through the employment of unconventional portraiture.

Art history survey textbooks generally acknowledge a substantial body of anti-mimetic portraits by the early American modernists crisscrossing the ocean and orbiting around Alfred Stieglitz; in addition, a handful of scholarly articles and exhibition

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[11] *Inventing Marcel Duchamp: The Dynamics of Portraiture* was on view at the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC, March 27–August 9, 2009. *Gertrude Stein: Five Stories* will appear at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, May 12–September 6, 2011, and at the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC, October 14, 2011–January 22, 2012.

[12] Harry Berger, Jr.'s thesis that many Italian Renaissance portraits, as well as Rembrandt's self-portraits, are actually about posing (rather than about personality), certainly influenced my thinking about performance and portraiture. However, as the reader will discover in Chapter One, I take this line of thought to its logical conclusion, de-centering the genre from its basis on singular, isolated objects and re-envisioning it instead as a series of relationships enacted around an image. These performances, I posit, constitute the portrait as such. See Berger, Jr., *Fictions of the Pose*. For more about objects within complex social networks, see Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) and Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

catalogue essays explicate individual unconventional likenesses or series of such by

single artists. Synthesizing these materials, this dissertation attempts to survey and

account for the breadth and depth of anti-mimetic portraiture produced by the wide-

ranging cluster of painters, sculptors, and photographers who worked in the United States

in the second and third decades of the twentieth century. Through the contextualization

of particular objects, the consideration of period poetry, and the incorporation of newly

available archival sources (such as the O'Keeffe-Stieglitz correspondence at the

Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University), the research presented

here illuminates the complex intersections of modernity, representation, and subjectivity,

and charts the changes in a specific mode of cultural production during the fifteen-year

span of 1912–1927.

Just after this time period, that is, in 1928, when he was deeply immersed in his

own anti-mimetic portrait project, the American artist Charles Demuth took upon himself

to craft an essay on those he believed to be the most significant modern women visual

artists then working, including Georgia O'Keeffe and Florine Stettheimer. Having

composed the manuscript in fits and starts over the period of several years, Demuth

eventually found the time (and concentration) to pen the following lines about his third

subject, Peggy Bacon:

> In portraiture the likeness is only the start, with this start the painter must
> then in some way record his own times, his own response to them,—oh, a
> lot of things….likeness [is] a means not…an end.[13]

An account of the germination, development, and decline of the early twentieth-century

American avant-garde's engagement with anti-mimetic portraiture, this dissertation

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[13] Charles Demuth, Partial draft of "Three (Peggy Bacon)," 1928, Mss 85, Box 98, Folder 1977, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven (hereafter cited as "YCAL").

attempts to take Charles Demuth—and the other members of the Stieglitz circle and the *transatlantique* community—at face value.

CHAPTER ONE: APPEARANCE

Alfred Stieglitz and Stanton Macdonald-Wright's *Portrait*

In early February 1918, Alfred Stieglitz wrote to Georgia O'Keeffe, then living in the Texas panhandle, about some astonishing paintings he had viewed privately the previous day in New York City:

> Oh yes—yesterday [Stanton Macdonald-] Wright came around & carried me off to his joint—25th St. & Seventh Ave.—his new picture. And then the frame for the portrait—
> Well, the new picture takes one's breath away—I don't know whether it's as good—or better—than the Portrait.—It's different.—Yet a continuation.—In parts it's very wonderful….I'll have to see it at 291 before I come to any decision.—All I know is it is very remarkable & you'd have a "fit" over it—It's glowing with color—….[14]

From the author's enthusiastic, yet rather vague description, it is difficult now to determine which of several extant Macdonald-Wright canvases Stieglitz is extolling to O'Keeffe. The date of the letter, however, provides a *terminus ante quem* and, given the surviving works by the artist, a handful of possibilities emerge from among a small, stylistically cohesive group of paintings from the late 1910s, each based on the abstracted forms of the nude and each evocatively titled "*Synchromy*."

While Stieglitz's correspondence focuses on a recently completed work (Macdonald-Wright's "new picture"), I am much more interested here in the painting Stieglitz uses as a referential foil: "the Portrait." The ambiguity of Stieglitz's verbal

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[14] Alfred Stieglitz to Georgia O'Keeffe, 4 February 1918, Mss 85, Box 61, folder 1410, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archive, YCAL. In their letters both Stieglitz and O'Keeffe frequently used non-traditional punctuation, especially ellipses and long or multiple dashes. The majority of the correspondence between the two artists, as of this writing, remains unpublished, though Sarah Greenough is in the process of editing an abridged edition of this voluminous material (forthcoming). Any errors in transcription are my own responsibility.

sketch also makes an accurate present day attribution nearly impossible without more substantive evidence; nevertheless, upon examination of the painter's published oeuvre, a strong candidate rises to the surface: *Self-Portrait*, 1915 (fig. 1.1).[15]

This oil on canvas measures 29 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches and prefigures the *Synchromies* in several regards, a fact that links the portrait to the slightly later works conceptually even if they are, in fact, separated by the space of several years temporally. First, the painting demonstrates the modern style of "synchromism." Macdonald-Wright, with his colleague Morgan Russell, had formulated this distinctive visual vocabulary—a cubist skeletal structure combined with aestheticism's turn toward the non-objective and fauvism's bright palette—in Paris by 1913. Second, as abstract as the image may appear, vestiges of the human body form the basis of the fractured composition. In *Self-Portrait*, the artist presents himself frontally to the viewer, perched on an overstuffed armchair, head resting on the subject's proper right hand, in a melancholic mood. Third, high-keyed color plays a significant role, in producing movement (across the surface and into space) and in eliciting emotional responses.

The same year that he painted *Self-Portrait*, Macdonald-Wright returned to New York City from Paris, where he had been living and working, keeping abreast of current developments in modern art and ironing out the tenets of synchromism with Russell. In March of the following year at the Anderson Galleries he participated in the groundbreaking "Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters," showing alongside such painters as Ben Benn and Andrew Dasburg. From November 22 to December 20, Alfred Stieglitz included Macdonald-Wright's work in a prestigious group show at the

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[15] No catalogue raisonné of the work of Stanton Macdonald-Wright exists at present. Based on my picture research, the only published image that corresponds in date and subject matter to the work mentioned in Stieglitz's letter to O'Keeffe is Macdonald-Wright's *Self-Portrait*, 1915.

Little Galleries of the Photo Secession (nicknamed "291" for establishment's address on Fifth Avenue). Macdonald-Wright had arrived in Manhattan in dire financial straits though, and his situation did not significantly improve over the next months despite these auspicious beginnings in the art world of the United States. In desperation he screwed up his courage and asked the formidable Stieglitz for a solo show at 291. Favorably impressed, Stieglitz agreed to mount a monographic exhibition of eighteen works from March 20–31, 1917. The show was a financial success, netting more than $500.00, the majority of which came from an important New York modernist collector—lawyer John Quinn. Macdonald-Wright's exhibition proved to be the penultimate show at the Photo Secession Galleries. Stieglitz subsequently displayed recent work in a variety of media by Georgia O'Keeffe before closing the doors of 291 for good, for fiduciary reasons and other extenuating circumstances. All the same, Macdonald-Wright and Stieglitz maintained an ongoing relationship through correspondence (Yale's Beinecke Library conserves letters from Macdonald-Wright to Stieglitz from 1916 to 1945, a period of almost three decades), through art acquisition (Stieglitz later came to own *Aeroplane Synchromy in Yellow-Orange*, 1920, now in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), and through exhibition (Stieglitz sponsored another one-person show by Macdonald-Wright at his new venue, An American Place, in 1932).[16]

<u>Performing Appearance</u>

In terms of portraiture, the common sense denotation of the word "appearance" may refer to the visual characteristics of the subject of the artwork, that is, the way the

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[16] The finding aid to the Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archive documents the temporal range of the correspondence between Stieglitz and Macdonald-Wright. See http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.sok (accessed January 7, 2010). The 1932 event is listed in the exhaustive record "Exhibitions Presented by Stieglitz, 1905–1946," published in Sarah Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 550.

portrait sitter—the individual being observed by the artist—looks. Physical

characteristics, facial expression, bodily comportment, and sartorial display all fall under

the everyday language usage of this umbrella term. "Appearance" here means those

external, corporeal qualities that make an individual sitter (almost, but not always, a

person) unique and recognizable to others.

For millennia artists have attempted, through simile, to capture the likeness of the

world—including human beings—around them.[17] A portrait object necessarily implies

some sort of correspondence between the sitter and the created image, whether it is

always readily apparent to others or not. Ideational pictures, that is, those more

conceptual in nature, have existed just as long as ones more grounded in close

observation, and, as conventions developed through time, fashions for one kind of

portrait or another rose and fell.[18] The long-established, even pre-historic practice of

transcriptive replication, grounded in the desire for control over the depicted subject,

forms one vanishing point in any search for the origins of the complex relationship

between mimesis and images. By the early nineteenth century in the Western world a

particular kind of mimetic, or imitative, representation in portraiture, based on and

reinforced by academic painting standards, dominated the aesthetic discourse. As

exemplified by the portraits created by French artist Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (fig.

1.2), these paintings produced the effect that the viewer looks through a transparent

picture plane to a still, yet lifelike, three-dimensional world beyond the frame.

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[17] "Let us not forget that Aristotle understood the human being as a 'representational animal' who makes signs, or, those things that 'stand in for' or 'take the place of' something else.'" Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 120.

[18] Besides providing a cogent and succinct overview of many of the problematics of portraiture, Stephen Perkinson's article discusses the arbitrary relationship of the portrait subject to the portrait likeness. See Stephen Perkinson, "From 'Curious' to Canonical: *Jehan Roy de France* and the Origins of the French School," *The Art Bulletin* 87, no. 3 (September 2005): 507–532.

In the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, European artists in movements from impressionism to cubism began to create works that called into question the highly formalized customary principles of image making, especially the Albertian idea of "picture as illusionistic window." The conventions of portraiture, too, came under scrutiny. So intimately connected to concerns for "likeness" (i.e., a visual similarity between portrait and sitter), traditionally the genre has been the domain of the rich and powerful, those who are interested in maintaining the status quo and are therefore themselves likely to be conservative in nature (generally speaking). To fin de siècle avant-garde artists interested in conceptual originality and stylistic innovations, however, the marginal and moribund status of portraiture provided a kind of *carte blanche* for experimentation.[19]

As the artistic communities of Europe worked through various issues of modernism, American painters and sculptors remained relatively isolated from the resulting aesthetic developments and the (non-photographic) portraiture produced in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century remained fixated on realism. (Even the more progressive portraitists James McNeill Whistler and John Singer Sargent, later claimed for the canon of the art of the United States by American art historians, worked most of their careers on the Eastern side of the Atlantic Ocean.) Many of the artists to be

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[19] In the hierarchy of artistic genres, portraiture has—at least since the eighteenth century—traditionally ranked near the bottom, just above still life and landscape. Sir Joshua Reynolds, the President of the Royal Academy, proclaimed in 1770 that "In the same rank [as 'painters who have applied themselves more particularly to low and vulgar characters'], and, perhaps, of not so great merit, is the cold painter of portraits." See Reynolds, "Seven Discourses on Art," n.d., http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2176/2176-h/2176-h.htm (accessed January 7, 2010). For the European avant-garde's interrogation of conventional portraiture, see, *inter alia*, Gregory Galligan, "The Self Pictured: Manet, the Mirror, and the Occupation of Realist Painting," *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 1 (March 1998): 139–171; Roland Dorn et al., *Van Gogh Face to Face: The Portraits* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000); William Stanley Rubin, ed., *Picasso and Portraiture: Representation and Transformation* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996); John Klein, *Matisse Portraits* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Alarcó, *The Mirror & the Mask*; and Kenneth E. Silver, *Paris Portraits: Artists, Friends, and Lovers* (Greenwich, CT: Bruce Museum, 2008).

discussed further in the pages below initially received training as young adults in the transcriptive, academic style that was based on drawing first from plaster casts and then from the live model. This time-tested method of conceiving and executing images lent itself easily to the artist, as appropriate opportunities arose, for successive portrait projects, whether formal or informal. Hilda Belcher depicted her classmate Georgia O'Keefe in this highly accomplished yet little-known watercolor (fig. 1.3), which employs the illusionistic conventions under discussion here. Belcher and O'Keeffe received their training in mimetic art making practices at the Art Students League in New York, where the latter won a scholarship prize for her painting, *Dead Rabbit with Copper Pot*, 1908. Florine Stettheimer and Andrew Dasburg also attended classes at the Art Students League, as did Marsden Hartley, who sought additional instruction at the National Academy of Design. Katherine Dreier enrolled at the Pratt Institute and Charles Demuth graduated from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Arthur Dove, though he majored in pre-law at Cornell University, pursued employment for several years in the world of commercial illustration, a field, at the time, heavily based on realism and the human figure. These artists, who would later fledge into the first American avant-garde, not only were familiar with the reigning cultural norms but also received pedagogical training from East Coast art schools with traditional curricula. Thus, they could claim firsthand knowledge of portraiture's tightly knit relationship with the artifice of realism.

This initial cast of characters, which will continue to expand in subsequent chapters, brings us to the second meaning of "appearance." Here the term signifies not just the way something—or someone—looks, but also encompasses physical being, that is, "appearance" as emergence and persistence within a particular locus. A portrait

symbolically manifests the presence of a person who is generally otherwise absent; this status of proxy is one way to expand further our understanding of "appearance." But in addition I am interested here in "appearance" in the real world, how the sitter and artist related to each other, how the community of modernists in New York City in the second and third decades of the twentieth century interacted, how they "appeared" on the art scene and within each other's lives. This incipient curiosity naturally leads to such questions as "Who is appearing? And to whom?" and "How, where, and why are they performing appearance?"

What is a Portrait?

Such interesting and important problems demand attention, but first a more fundamental question requires consideration: what is a portrait, after all?[20] While the answer may seem obvious to any seasoned museumgoer, or, for that matter, to members of the general public, one of my dissertation's overarching goals is to decenter the concept of the single—and singular—image traditionally associated with the common sense definition of "portrait" and to place emphasis, instead, on the nexus of interactions around the object, now conceived as one of several performers within a web of relationships.

In the conventional view, here pithily articulated by the French art historian Jean-Marie Pontévia, a portrait is a "picture that is organized around a face."[21] I want to expand this rather limited—and limiting—definition to the more expansive proposition that "a portrait is a picture organized around a person,"—and further, to use the language

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[20] For more on the general topic of portraiture, see Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le regard du portrait* (Paris: Galilée, 2000); and West, *Portraiture*.

[21] Quoted in Nancy, *Le regard du portrait*, 13.

of a classic philosophical problem—"a portrait is a picture that is organized around another mind."[22] Once we start poking at the idea of portraiture, however, even the definition I have proposed quickly becomes inadequate; a portrait, in fact, is more than just "a picture that is organized around another mind," but also the performance of a series of relationships—a kind of intricately enacted social contract—that structures a word-image-object nexus existing in time and usually involving at least three persons. This illustrated diagram (fig. 1.4) provides a visual form for my reconceptualization of portraiture as performative.

A work of art, in order to be considered a portrait I will argue, must necessarily consist of the following five components: first, the Sitter, the subject of the portrait; second, the Artist, whose response to the sitter in some aesthetic mode constitutes the basis for the artwork—that is, the third component, the Object itself. Words, in the form of a Title, the fourth component, are attached to the artwork, in order to identify the sitter and to facilitate recognition in the Viewer, the fifth and final component. As in most relationships, the lines of force among these elements are constitutive bonds that may be strengthened, weakened, or broken, to varying effects. A brief exploration of these dynamic relationships follows.

Artist: The artist functions as the production manager in the complex relationship that I have begun to sketch. The artist is tasked with generating an object that bears some relation to the sitter; the basis for the resulting output is the artist's response to the sitter. Because—as talented as the artist may be in translating the physical characteristics of an embodied subject into the chosen medium—this response is inevitably subjective, the

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[22] I feel compelled to make the conceptual leap to the term "mind" because, as we shall see in the next chapter, many of the conceptual portraits produced in the United States of the early twentieth century depict neither face nor figure but something more intangible though still human.

artist's output may fall along a range of modes, from "mimetic" or "transcriptive" (i.e.,

more imitative) to "interpretative" (less imitative) and even "non-objective" (not

imitative at all—or at least not imitative of visual appearance).

The aesthetic choices that the artist makes in creating the object will, in the end,

reveal as much about the artist as about the sitter. Literature scholar Wendy Steiner

cogently writes about this ambiguity: "On the one hand, the work focuses on its

represented subject; on the other, it expresses the artist's conceiving of that subject and

hence the artist *per se*."[23] This idea is not endemic to the twentieth century, when an

artist's style became a marketable commodity. This concept was expressed at least as

early as the Renaissance in a commonplace now attributed to Cosimo de Medici: "Ogni

dipintore dipinge sè" or "Every artist paints himself."[24] In other words, "[t]out portrait est

un autoportrait…."[25]

Sitter: The sitter, the nominal focus of the picture, serves to inspire the artist, but

this subject position is necessarily neither a passive nor static role. Frequently the sitter

and artist collaborate on the comportment, costume, and expression to be depicted, an

endeavor that foregrounds the performative nature of posing (and of portraiture itself).[26]

The active subject position of sitter certainly influences the resulting artwork, but

the energy may just as easily flow in the opposite direction, where the final portrait may

ever afterwards affect the reception of the image's real life subject. Here I am thinking,

for example, of Pablo Picasso's 1906 "likeness" of Gertrude Stein (fig. 1.5). With the

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[23] Wendy Steiner, "Postmodernist Portraits," *Art Journal* 46, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 173.

[24] Harry Berger, Jr. meditates extensively on this aphorism, tracing its contemporary uses and subsequent historiography. See Berger, Jr., *Fictions of the Pose*, 79–94.

[25] Nancy, *Le regard du portrait*, 33.

[26] "The central aim of the discussions is to develop a methodological framework within which portraits may be approached as presentations of acts of self-presentation, or representations of acts of self-representation. More specifically, the act in question, the act the painting represents, the act I shall refer to as performing the fiction of the pose, is the act of sitting for one's portrait." Berger, Jr., *Fictions of the Pose*, 12.

benefit of hindsight, Stein in her book the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* points to this symbiotic dynamic by having Picasso remark about her own painted portrait that, "…everybody says that she does not look like it but that does not make any difference, she will…."[27]

This brings us to the Portrait object itself, which, paradoxically, can become synonymous with, while at the same time functioning independently of, the sitter. In fact, the term "likeness," which is frequently used interchangeably with "portrait," implies that exact replication or interchangeability is not entirely possible.[28] To recapitulate themes introduced above, the artwork, though autonomous from its maker, might come to overshadow its creator. Almost every American knows Gilbert Stuart's so-called "Athenaeum-style" portrayal of George Washington; the image has certainly overshadowed the artist (and perhaps even the sitter) in this particular case. Likewise, Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* is an even better known example of a portrait object that eclipses the sitter (though not the artist). What I am basically arguing here is that the portrait, as a very particular (even peculiar) kind of artwork, frequently becomes invested with its own subjectivity (i.e., attains its own subject position) and often enjoys a substantial (after)life of its own, independent of its maker.

Title: The title is an essential component of the portrait relationship. A verbal tag associated with the object, it names the sitter and confirms the identity of the artwork's subject.[29] When the title is just the name of the sitter, the image implicitly becomes

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[27] Gertrude Stein, *Writings, 1903–1932: Q.E.D., Three Lives, Portraits and Other Short Works, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 669.

[28] "Even the notion of likeness itself presupposes some degree of difference between the things compared, otherwise they would be identical and no question of likeness would arise." Brilliant, "Portraits," 171.

[29] Jacques Derrida views the self-portrait as particularly reliant on the title function: "[T]he status of the self-portrait of the self-portraitist…always depends on the juridical effect of the title, on this verbal event that does not belong to the inside of the work but only to its parergonal border." See Jacques Derrida,

tantamount to the portrait subject. However, in the instance where the title uses the formula "Portrait of So-and-So," the words draws our attention to the fact that the "likeness" with which we are presented is, in fact, an interpretation, foregrounding the artist's response, rather than an ostensibly transparent or uninflected picture of the sitter.

If the object in the portrait relationship represents the sitter to the image's beholder, then the title *presents* the portrait subject to the viewer.[30] Though titles most often are placed outside the realm of the picture plane, and added after the work is completed, instances do occur where the name-title manifests within the space of the composition, such as in Francis Picabia's 1915 image of Alfred Stieglitz (fig. 1.6), a drawing with collage intended for reproduction in the "little magazine" *291*. The cartellino glued to the top left of the drawing reads "ICI, C'EST ICI STIEGLITZ".[31] Here representation and presentation of the photographer exist conterminously in the same compositional field.

Sometimes the title—and thus the identity of the sitter—is lost over time; in these cases, the work may then come to be considered connoisseurially as just another example of a particular artist's style, as in *Portrait of a Man with an Arrow*, c. 1470/1475 (fig. 1.7)

Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 64. I thank Anne Goodyear for bringing this theoretical source to my attention.

[30] "Presence…is on the thither side of representation from presentation, even though the latter is sometimes misrepresented or misconstrued as presence because in presentation the content is identical with the referent: both are here, within the presentation. Where representation says, 'Here is a sign or image of something absent from my body (of print, paint, marble, etc.),' presentation says, 'Here it is, present before you, part of my body,' and the 'it' may itself be a representation, as when an actor presents to an audience his representation of a character." Berger, Jr., *Fictions of the Pose*, 18.

[31] By incorporating the title into the visual field of the composition proper, the artist exerts absolute control over the image's reception. "At the level of the literal message, the text replies—in a more or less direct, more or less partial manner—to the question: *what is it?* The text helps to identify purely and simply the elements of the scene and the scene itself…." Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 39.

by the Northern Renaissance master Hans Memling.[32] The highly individualized features and the personalized details, such as the Golden Fleece badge displayed on the man's hat, indicate that this image is, in fact, a portrait. But of whom? Any explicit identifying clues once linking sitter to picture have been dissociated from the object and art historians in the twenty-first century still have not yet positively identified the subject.[33]

Viewer: While a portrait's maker is *de facto* its first viewer, an additional audience is needed to set the portrait relationship in motion. One of the primary purposes of portraiture is to manifest for a viewer the presence of someone who is absent.[34] In the Western tradition this function is supported by myth, those products of the human imaginary that explain something whose origins are lost in the murky mists of time. In this instance, we have the story of the Corinthian maid, who created the world's first portrait by tracing the outline of her departing lover's silhouette on the wall while he slept (fig. 1.8).[35] A less entertaining though certainly more credible scholarly consensus has grown in the past decade to suggest that the progenitor of the Occidental portrait tradition is the Roman wax death mask, an indexical trace of the deceased created to

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[32] "[S]tudies of anonymous portraits rely on the assumption that these depictions resemble historical people, often without any way of ascertaining that they do." Soussloff, *The Subject in Art*, 6.

[33] If, as Vivien Green Fryd asserts, "Modern emblematic portraits evolved from…the eighteenth-century emblematic portrait," then secular Renaissance likenesses, such as Memling's *Portrait of a Man with an Arrow*, must be understood as even earlier visual precedents. Vivien Green Fryd, "Georgia O'Keeffe's *Radiator Building*: Gender, Sexuality, Modernism, and Urban Imagery," *Winterthur Portfolio* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 270. For a full account of the Memling panel, see John Oliver Hand and Martha Wolff, *Early Netherlandish Painting* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1986), 188–193.

[34] "In the centuries before photography, portraits were the only way of conveying the appearance of an absent or unknown person, and they were a method of preserving the physical appearance of someone that would remain after their death." West, *Portraiture*, 54.

[35] The narrative is first recounted in Pliny's *Natural History*, XXXV.15. For a study of later iconographical treatments, see Robert Rosenblum, "The Origin of Painting: A Problem in the Iconography of Romantic Classicism," *The Art Bulletin* 39, no. 4 (December 1957): 279–290. Anne Collins Goodyear has also addressed the trope in terms of the beginnings of photography; see Goodyear, "The Portrait, the Photograph, and the Index," in James Elkins, ed., *Photography Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 211–215.

perpetuate a physical presence among those left behind.[36] Both these rationales and practices implicate an observer, frequently distant in time and space from the sitter.

A second condition crucial to portrait-viewer function is recognition. Without this dynamic the work of art represents a sitter, another person, but only generically (the Hans Memling painting, *Portrait of a Man with an Arrow*, referenced above, functions in this manner to us modern beholders). Recognition, too, implicates a viewer, a third party, one who can visually confirm the identity of the sitter—or at least accept the truth-telling abilities of the artist (if the portrait is housed in a museum, for example). Depending on the viewer's distance from the sitter, the title (or other identity-revealing clues within the composition) may play a critical role in initiating the portrait relationship.

To recapitulate the argument of this definitional subsection: Portraiture is not centered wholly and exclusively within particular objects known in everyday language as "portraits"; rather, portraiture is, in fact, a cluster of embodied relationships enacted through time. This network of associations includes five key components: the sitter, the artist, the portrait object itself, its title, and the beholder. Suppressing any of these interconnected constituents compromises the ability of a party outside this nexus to identify any performance of appearance as a "portrait." All of these elements must be actively present in order for the operation to be successful and for recognition to occur.

Performing the Individual

The complex web of relationships described above is not the only way performance impinges on the genre of portraiture. Since at least the last quarter of the twentieth century artists and art historians have been exploring the idea that individual

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[36] "The Latin *imagines* refers specifically to the portrait masks of Romans, which were signifiers of the family's prominence and kinship…[as well as] the putative origins of the genre…." Soussloff, *The Subject in Art*, 19.

identity, the self, is a site of performativity. This trope has been explored most extensively in relation to photography, whose complicated relationship to indexicality and iconicity makes it a medium perfect for problematizing the series of interconnected relationships we understand in everyday language as a "portrait." One need only think of the bodies of work by such artists as Cindy Sherman, Jack Pierson, and Nikki Lee, all of whom have made sustained investigations into concerns with identity, to recognize that the naturalized, everyday performance of the self is part of the human condition.[37] These contemporary theories are easily applied to current art-making practices and products, but the intellectual community has also begun to fit them, retroactively, to the art of previous eras with interesting results.

Art historians have long noted the self-reinforcing role the portrait object plays in terms of the performance of status.[38] At a foundational level, the commission of a likeness alone signals the possession of enough wealth and social importance to merit such an extravagance (portrait objects, especially before the twentieth century, were most usually luxury items, though also frequently wise investments that could increase the subject's cultural capital).

Status, too, could be displayed within the depicted world of the portrait object. Certainly heirs to the identifying attributes of painted and sculpted saints, symbolic items, carried, worn, or otherwise flaunted by secular sitters, indicated class or station within the local social hierarchy. To return to Memling's *Portrait of a Man with an Arrow*: the (now) anonymous subject sports typical Burgundian clothing and a gold ring on one of

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[37] For a systematic theory on the performance of the quotidian, see Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990). See also Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[38] See, for example, "Power and Status" in West, *Portraiture*, 70–103.

his fingers. Art historians believe that the badge on his hat, a miniature of the Virgin and Child on a crescent moon, may indicate the sitter's membership in a devotional confraternity. The arrow that he gingerly fingers in his proper right hand (painted in several years after the portrait's original state of completion though still from the period) may indicate his coveted success at a difficult competition and his resulting status as chief of the archery guild for a year. The sitter's clean hand, smooth fingers, and pared nails reveal that he does not perform hard labor to make his living.

Such rich visual conventions still held currency in the United States of the eighteenth century when Charles Willson Peale completed his double portrait, *Benjamin and Eleanor Ridgely Laming*, 1788 (fig. 1.9). Several signifiers designate the wealthy and genteel status of the portrait sitters. They relax, seated or reclined, in an expansive landscape with the port city of Baltimore, Maryland, in the background, a reference to Laming's vocation as merchant. The married couple's tasteful dress indicates that business is good. The precious objects they hold—the telescope, the fruit—stand for futurity and abundance, indicators of an upper class position.

Gender performance, too, has been a richly mined vein of academic inquiry, especially since the rise of feminist art history in the 1970s and the groundbreaking theoretical work of such scholars as Judith Butler and Judith "Jack" Halberstam in the 1990s.[39] The sitter in Memling's *Portrait of a Man with an Arrow* displays many characteristics, however naturalized or unconscious, that support his performance of masculinity. His doublet and cap with upturned brim are proper fifteenth-century male attire. The arrow he holds denotes his participation in the sport of archery, with rare

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[39] For a convincing argument regarding the social construction of gender, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999). See also Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

exception, hardly a female pursuit at the time the portrait was painted. The subject wears his hair long and sports a small gold band on the first joint of his ring finger, which, though they might be considered more "feminizing" to our contemporary eyes, are completely apt masculine traits from the era in question. More subtle indicators, such as the faint traces of a beard (a secondary sex characteristic giveaway) or the erect arrow-as-phallus, reinforce the sitter's performance as a man.

Likewise, the Lamings perform their respective genders in Peale's careful depiction of them. It seems overly obvious, yet still relevant, to point out that both are dressed in gender-appropriate clothing: Charles sports breeches and a long coat; Eleanor wears a long, gauzy dress that is low cut to draw attention to her bosom. Charles's hair is cut short, which accentuates his receding hairline, while Eleanor's locks are long and flowing, interwoven with a strand of pearls. Mrs. Laming's pale skin and the food that she exhibits indicate her role as household manager, aligning her with the family's interior world, while her husband's compositional placement allies him with the far distant urban center, signifying his responsibility as breadwinner and contact with the exterior world. Physical objects in the painting, too, connote gender roles within the relationship. The lengthy telescope suggests Charles's "active" role, not only in seeing (literally and figuratively), but also within the sexual economy of the couple's coupling. The fruit and flowers associated with Eleanor denote her correlation to gardening and food preparation, in addition to connoting her function within the marriage as nurturer and child bearer.

Lastly, portraiture's unstated yet fundamental function to communicate the unique character of the sitter to the beholder means that the expression of individual

identity (at least in the Western world) features frequently and prominently in the genre, and attributes play an important role in conveying these meanings. In fifteenth-century Bruges, Hans Memling painted likenesses of a goodly number of male (and female) sitters; these images are easily distinguishable one from another through the differences exhibited by each of the subjects. Portraitists, since ancient times, have so often habitually focused their attention on the human visage exactly because the slightest, almost imperceptible change in the arrangement of facial features—eyes, nose, mouth, ears, cheekbones—seems to signify "another" person. The subject of *Portrait of a Man with an Arrow* exhibits an aquiline nose, distinct eyebrows (rather than a pair that meet in the middle), and hazel irises. Bodily choices over which he could have more or less exerted a degree of control include the length of his hair (it covers his ears and touches his collar) and his weight (the beginnings of a double chin are apparent). The subject's sartorial preferences for understated browns and blacks give the impression of a serious or somber personality. The confraternity badge pinned to the man's hat makes public his membership within a religious group and the ring on his right hand perhaps symbolizes a pledge made, whether to himself or to another. The projectile of the painting's title, as we have already noted, announces his skill with a bow, as well as conveys his status as head of the archery guild. Taken as a whole, all of these distinct signifiers add up to a particular person (whose identity, sadly, we no longer know).

Similarly, the Lamings exhibit genotypic traits alongside the observable results of personal life choices that reveal their individual characters. Charles possesses thinning gray hair and a widow's peak; Eleanor is obviously proud of her luxuriant, flowing brunette tresses. Both enjoy well-formed, patrician noses, but the husband has light blue

eyes while the wife's are dark brown. The telescope and fruit manifest the couple's

interests (shipping, gardening), respectively. The parrot next to Mr. Laming may hint at

the tropical location of his birth.[40] Peale the artist draws attention to the merchant's portly

stature through the (slightly awkward) recumbent pose—a fact that also reveals the

performative nature of not only the individual, but also of the portrait transaction.[41]

The tropes explored briefly above—status, gender, and individuality—are three

productive sites for investigating how symbols in the visual arts convey notions of

identity. But they are by no means the only possibilities worthy of investigation; while

they are beyond the scope of this brief introductory section, signifiers for race, religious

affiliation, family standing, educational experience, and sexual orientation may all

productively illuminate the subject position of portrait sitters. It should also be noted that,

although I have tried to differentiate three separate nodes above, for attributes in portrait

images much overlap may indeed exist among various signifiers, an inherent hazard of

visual analysis.

Performing Appearance in the Group Context

The above subsection established how the identity of the sitter can be performed

via portraiture, specifically through "appearance," or the employment of visual signifiers

to communicate a person's identity. The interpretation of two particular paintings, Hans

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[40] Ellen Miles and Leslie Reinhardt exhaustively discuss the painting's iconography in their jointly authored entry in Ellen Gross Miles et al., *American Paintings of the Eighteenth Century* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1995), 120–128.

[41] "A fusion of icon, index, and symbol, of centripetal and centrifugal reference, the portrait," as Wendy Steiner has noted, "is an extremely complex semiotic structure." On the one hand, an informed viewer is wise enough to know that a mimetic portrait cannot bear a complete one-to-one correspondence to the referent and that the artist and sitter both play a role in what is depicted. On the other hand, an informed viewer must suspend her disbelief at some point and on some level in order for the representational illusion of verisimilitude to work. For more about the paradoxical nature of the genre, see Steiner, "Postmodernist Portraits," 173.

Memling's *Portrait of a Man with an Arrow* and Charles Willson Peale's *Benjamin and Eleanor Ridgely Laming*, purposefully focused on individuals and how they "appeared."

That approach might be viewed as taking place on a micro level. Because part of my overarching project is to investigate how the early twentieth-century American avant-garde—the "Stieglitz circle"—constituted and maintained its identity, I wish to state here my sense that distinct groups, like individuals, utilize many of the same strategies within the genre of portrait to communicate about themselves. Thus, I would like to alert the reader here that I am also thinking about portraiture on the macro level of the coherent social unit. To employ an anatomical metaphor: several discrete organs comprise the human digestive system and this aspect of the body may be studied as distinct components or as the sum of many parts. In Chapters Two, Three, and Four, I will further articulate the Stieglitz circle's subversion of (mimetic) appearance on the micro level, through images of the individual, while in Chapters Five and Six I explore the circle's strategies for establishing the group's appearance internally (to themselves) and externally (to the outside world). Of course, as with the idea of appearance in general, the micro and macro levels are interrelated. Moving forward, the connections between these two strata will become more and more apparent.

Stanton Macdonald-Wright's *Portrait* Performs Appearance

At this juncture let us to return to Stanton Macdonald-Wright's colorful canvas of 1915 and to analyze it within the threefold framework of performance articulated above: the portrait relationship, the individual, and the group. In this way I hope to demonstrate, in light of the previous discussion, how the artist's *Self-Portrait* might "appear" differently to us now.

Stanton Macdonald-Wright's canvas belongs to a select sub-group of portraits: the self-portrait.[42] The normal performative portrait relationship bonds still apply here. However, the subject and artist—usually separate stations within the portrait relationship—ultimately merge, aided by the employment of a mirror, photograph, or memory. This unusual situation creates an even more concentrated rapport between these two positions and the portrait object. Instead of existing among the usually socially complex, triangulated negotiations of artist/object/sitter, the self-portrait need only please the artist, a fact that makes the self-portrait an excellent choice for execution in an advanced aesthetic style, conceivably little understood by the general public. Much hinges here on the title (a theme that will be developed more fully in the pages ahead); given the purposefully limited number of identifying traits in the visual image, the textual reference attached to the painting must make the subject matter clear. Viewers in the early part of the twentieth century who were personally acquainted with the artist may have apprehended compositional elements that could be interpreted as representing Macdonald-Wright (a tilt of the head? a familiar gesture?). A twenty-first century audience, though, is almost entirely reliant on the heavily burdened title to perform recognition and, as a result, to set the portrait relationship completely into action.[43]

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[42] For more about the subgenre of self-portraiture, see, for example, Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*; Galligan, "The Self Pictured"; James Smalls, "The African-American Self-Portrait: A Crisis in Identity and Modernity," *Art Criticism* 15, no. 1 (1999): 21–45; Anthony Bond et al., *Self Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2006); and Wendy Wick Reaves et al., *Reflections/Refractions: Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, Lanham, MD; in cooperation with Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

[43] For a discussion on similar dynamics in an earlier cubist portrait (Pablo Picasso's *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, 1910), see "Intentional Visual Interest: Picasso's *Portrait of Kahnweiler*" in Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 41–73; "Kahnweiler's Lesson" in Yve Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 65–100; and Marcia Pointin, "Picasso's Kahnweiler; Kahnweiler's Picasso," in Joanna Woodall, ed., *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 189–202.

Though it may not be obvious at first glance given the diminution of signs on the canvas, Macdonald-Wright still performs his individual identity within the compositional field. Any analysis under the rubric of "portrait," which the title insists upon, becomes more difficult in this instance, but interpretable visual vestiges remain nonetheless.

Patience reveals that the vertical canvas contains a three-quarter-length human figure, seated. The head occupies the top third of the composition. The subject's green forearm supports a hand with curled fingers, upon which Macdonald-Wright leans his proper right cheek. Traditionally this pose indicates a "thinking" subject, a trope that underscores the emphasis on the conceptual (rather than perceptual) nature of the image itself. The artist's left hand appears to hold a triangular prism, an optical device closely linked to Morgan Russell, Macdonald-Wright's colleague, and his earliest synchromist compositions. The sitter's face comprises the full chromatic spectrum of white light—in order: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet—indicating Macdonald-Wright's status as a whole being, possessed of the entire range of human thoughts and feelings. Artists frequently employ the special character of the self-portrait to work out particular formal problems or to herald a stylistic breakthrough. In this way *Self-Portrait* becomes elided with synchromist principles, serving as both an image of the artist as genius and as an aesthetic manifesto simultaneously. The paucity of signifiers, too, may actually be a meaningful fact in of itself: unlike the anonymous man in Hans Memling's portrait or the Lamings portrayed by Charles Willson Peale, Stanton Macdonald-Wright was living on a shoestring at the moment he created this work of art. Though the artist, perhaps, did not necessarily intend it, the painting, through its lack, performs the bohemian lifestyle, and concomitant lowly financial status, of its maker.

Performing appearance in the group setting involves imaging the self and others in the social unit as well as exhibiting these pieces of cultural production to the group and to the external world. These strategies strengthen bonds among members and provide a unified front to those outside. Stanton Macdonald-Wright's canvas successfully performs both of these functions.

By taking himself as the subject of a portrait, Macdonald-Wright performs, within the nexus of his modernist associates, his own self worth as an appropriate sitter. (Taken to the extreme, this action might be considered arrogant, even narcissistic, but establishing one's position within a hierarchy requires an enormous expenditure of ego energy.) In addition, there may be no better way to brand oneself (to use a marketing term) than to marry visually one's image to the formal innovation one wishes to promote. Macdonald-Wright successfully employs this strategy, literally making himself synonymous with the cutting-edge style of synchromism, in his *Self-Portrait*, 1915.

But establishment of social position—as an amazing colorist, as a technically accomplished painter, as the proponent of a new aesthetic, as a member of the avant-garde—would come to nothing without the "appearance" of the portrait object inside and outside the context of the group. Macdonald-Wright, as its creator, may *de facto* have been *Self-Portrait*'s first beholder, but in order to distinguish himself from others in growing American modernist faction who aligned themselves with 291, Macdonald-Wright needed a wider audience.

The painting's date of 1915 means that the canvas could have "appeared" in the monographic show that Alfred Stieglitz mounted of Stanton Macdonald-Wright's work at

291, March 20–31, 1917.[44] Phrases from Stieglitz's letter of almost a year later to

Georgia O'Keeffe, with which this chapter began, suggest the gallerist's prior familiarity

with *Self-Portrait* (in contrast to the "new picture"). The phrase "And then the frame for

the portrait—" implies that portrait already existed and that Macdonald-Wright either

wanted to consult with Stieglitz on the best way to display it or wished to show him a

newly acquired (or newly altered?) frame.

The next paragraph of the letter also underscores Stieglitz's previous knowledge

of Macdonald-Wright's abstract "likeness." Initially he compares the "new picture" to the

portrait, saying the former is equal or better in quality than the latter; then he links the

pair conceptually, by calling the second a "continuation" of the first. The statement "I'll

have to see it [the "new picture"] at 291 before I come to any decision" also implies that

Stieglitz had already seen the portrait at the gallery, as he felt no qualms in the letter in

judging *Self-Portrait*'s quality.

In asserting himself and cold calling Stieglitz for a one-person exhibition in 1917

after several difficult months in Manhattan, Stanton Macdonald-Wright could not have

devised a better strategy for "appearance" to establish himself within the burgeoning

modernist New York art world. As the person who had introduced European modern art

to the United States, Stieglitz—though his position was coming to be challenged by other

local gallerists who had begun to show the "new" art—was still acknowledged as the

unquestioned expert and leader of the American avant-garde. Access to this kingpin

permitted Macdonald-Wright to perform his "appearance" on the scene much more

successfully than he would have been able to do otherwise. As mentioned previously, the

1917 exhibition was an economic triumph, providing much needed income for the artist,

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[44] This hypothesis requires further archival research in order to be substantiated.

and a networking victory, drawing the much coveted attention of the enlightened and powerful patron John Quinn. Macdonald-Wright strengthened his connections inside the group, particularly with Stieglitz, through regular maintenance, evidenced here by his invitation to the gallery owner to visit his studio and see new work, ensuring his continuing "appearance" in Stieglitz's mind, correspondence, and gallery, as well as in the modernist art world of New York City and, ultimately, in the annals of history.

Performing Appearance in the 1910s

Alfred Stieglitz's undoubted accomplishment of educating a resistant United States public to the virtues of modernist developments in the visual arts and then establishing the reputations of many of its East Coast practitioners was not easy. How he realized such an undertaking, however, should be no mystery—the management of appearance, both individual and group, inside and outside the nascent American avant-garde. Stieglitz was a mastermind of controlling the discourse because he cunningly owned (or at least dominated) the means of production. Stieglitz freely expressed his opinion to anyone willing to listen; as a result of these repeated performances, he gradually came to create taste. His editorial direction of such notable, high-quality publications as *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work* meant that he controlled the discursive realm of text and what could be said about various issues (e.g., whether a photograph could have the same aesthetic value as a painting). These efforts complemented his exhibition programming, another savvy tactic to lead the discussion about modern art and its place in the United States. He mounted hundreds of exhibitions at three different galleries intermittently over the space of forty years and established and maintained the

reputations of an elite handful of artists who are well known today: Georgia O'Keeffe, John Marin, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, Paul Strand, and Charles Demuth.

Another of Stieglitz's weapons of choice was photography. Through this medium, which, by the teens, he had been practicing for over two decades, the photographer attempted to smother the competition in a visual deluge. Almost from the beginning, Stieglitz had frequently photographed himself and those around him (and specifically members of his immediate and extended family). When, in the 1910s, his new role as champion of the American avant-garde was becoming clearer, Stieglitz utilized photography to perform "appearance" of the individual artists he supported and the group—the "Stieglitz circle"—into which they would eventually gel.

In 1899 in Barcelona at the Sala Parés, the city's premier art gallery, the Spanish artist Ramon Casas exhibited over a hundred portrait drawings of prominent members of the local citizenry, thereby establishing himself as integral to this nexus of social relationships. Urged on by his comrades, Pablo Picasso, who was living in Barcelona at the time, took Casas's virtuosic gesture as a challenge. He responded in kind, producing numerous sheets of images of his friends and their bohemian cohorts (figs. 1.10–1.12). The drawings were tacked to the wall at the local bar, El Quatre Gats; the exhibition opened in February 1900 and attracted a modicum of press attention. The artist's colleague, the poet Jaime Sabartés, later wrote, "If Casas had a monopoly on the distinguished people of the city, Picasso could attend to the rejects: us, for example."[45]

While I do not mean to imply any direct, genealogical transference here, I see a similar performance of appearance by Alfred Stieglitz in New York City a decade or so

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[45] Sabartés, as quoted by Marilyn McCully, "To Fall 'Like a Fly Into the Trap of Picasso's Stare': Portraiture in the Early Work," in Rubin, *Picasso and Portraiture*, 237. McCully recounts the entire anecdote in pages 237–239.

later. The photographer captured the likeness of those around him on a regular basis. This project took on new urgency and meaning as Stieglitz's mission, through his journal *Camera Work* and via his gallery 291, gradually but steadily metamorphosed into the full-fledged promotion of modern art in America. A crucial component of this effort was to document the key players and to distribute their images widely.[46] For example, Stieglitz supplied images of his stable of artists for such celebrity photograph-hungry publications as *Vanity Fair*. As a substantive show of support for Paul Rosenfeld's compendium of literary portrait sketches of significant modernists of the United States, called *Port of New York* and published in 1924, Stieglitz provided over half of the photographic portraits, printed opposite the first text page of each literary portrait. Thus, through his prescient photographs Alfred Stieglitz performed appearance for the American avant-garde, by making images of individuals and circulating them, by determining those worthy of inclusion in the group, by establishing himself in the hierarchy of his fellow modernists, and by presenting an emerging "face" of the group to the curious public.

Stieglitz furthered these efforts by publishing or exhibiting the work of others with similar portrait projects, especially ones that furthered his goal of performing the appearance of/in the American avant-garde. The printing of Gertrude Stein's experimental text portraits in the August 1912 special issue of *Camera Work* stands as one such example. Stein, the expatriate writer living in Paris, was herself an important player in the avant-garde visual arts movements developing in France, as well as serving

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[46] For an overview of Stieglitz's promotional efforts through photography, see "Alfred Stieglitz and His Critics: An Aesthetics of Intimacy," in Marcia Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 72–93, and Sarah Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz, Facilitator, Financier, and Father, Presents Seven Americans," in Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America*, 276–339.

as a key contact to those Americans who were visiting Paris and who were curious about advanced painting styles. In addition to her groundbreaking contributions to modernist literature, Stein was an important early collector of both Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. Besides helping to establish their reputations through purchase of pivotal early works, Stein manifested her relationship to these two artists, as well as furthered their respective careers, by crafting "cubist" word portraits of each (see Appendix A).

Marius de Zayas is yet another cosmopolitan modernist who joined forces with Stieglitz in advancing the cause of modern art in the United States. Driven from his birth country of Mexico by political unrest, De Zayas settled—at least temporarily—in New York City in 1907. De Zayas subsequently, and serendipitously, met Stieglitz, the undisputed doyen of the Manhattan modernists, who invited the Mexican artist to exhibit at 291. The show proved groundbreaking, as Charles Brock has remarked, for its unique combination of human likenesses in the media of charcoal (by De Zayas) hung together with color photographs (by J. Nilsen Lauvrik), an exhibition strategy that encouraged the viewer to reflect upon the relationship of portraiture to mimesis.[47]

The exhibition also decisively insinuated De Zayas, a relative newcomer to the scene, into the inner circle through the strategic performance of appearance. De Zayas could do no better than demonstrating his close ties to Stiegltiz than by affectionately caricaturing the group leader (fig. 1.13). Through this action the Mexican artist not only reinforced Stieglitz's growing celebrity status but also asserted his own position within the avant-garde's hierarchy by demonstrating his familiarity with important names and

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[47] Charles Brock, "Marius de Zayas, 1909–1915: A Commerce of Ideas," in Ibid., 145. For a helpful discussion on the relationship of De Zayas to caricature and the artist's participation in the Stieglitz circle, see "Marius de Zayas: Spotlight on Personality," in Wendy Wick Reaves, *Celebrity Caricature in America* (New Haven: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, in association with Yale University Press, 1998), 72–101.

faces that he captured with quick strokes on charcoal and white chalk on paper. (This event stands as yet another unintentional but still noteworthy parallel to Picasso's wall of portraits at the El Quatre Gats bar.)

If he was something of a reluctant participant in the 1909 show, a little over a year later, in 1910, De Zayas made a confident step further into the spotlight with one of the most popular exhibitions ever staged—and I use the term advisedly—at 291. *Up and Down Fifth Avenue, A Social Satire* miniaturized the socialites and intellectuals of Manhattan, who appeared as small cardboard maquettes upon a temporary platform. In his description of the tableau, Charles Brock has noted that

> Stieglitz, identified primarily by his signature shock of hair, was placed
> near the center of the composition with his back turned to the viewer,
> carrying a portfolio and briefcase while the other participants strolled past
> in profile.[48]

In this scenario, as the artist in charge, De Zayas once again performed the appearance of individuals, especially of Stieglitz, his mentor and protector. The Mexican artist also performed the appearance, in the larger sense, of his strengthening ties to the avant-garde's leader and his own position within the nexus of modernist culture in New York.

De Zayas, ever emboldened by his past successes, raised the stakes even higher for the performance of appearance in his third, and final, exhibition at the Little Gallery of the Photo-Secession in 1913. With the tantalizing title of *An Exhibition of Caricatures, Absolute and Relative*, the show solidified De Zayas's status within the avant-garde. Not only did he represent such 291 regulars as Stieglitz (fig. 1.14) and Agnes Meyer (fig. 1.15), and others allied to the most groundbreaking advances in modern art, such as Paul

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[48] Brock, "Marius de Zayas, 1909–1915: A Commerce of Ideas," in Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America*, 146. Wendy Reaves also discusses the work in her chapter "Marius de Zayas: Spotlight on Personality" in Reaves, *Celebrity Caricature in America*, 93–95.

Burty Haviland and Francis Picabia, but he did so in innovative designs that perfectly married the aesthetic ambitions of the group with a formally challenging style. By means of such cutting edge likenesses, De Zayas firmly established himself as an integral member of the American avant-garde and an expert in the performance of appearance.

The multi-talented Man Ray (born Michael [Emmanuel] Radnitzky) serves as a final example. He received early training at the National Academy of Design and the Art Students League, but the restrictive atmosphere at these schools led the young artist to enroll at the Ferrer Center, whose curriculum centered on mastering figure drawing but in a more progressive way than the other tradition-bound programs he previously attended. It was at this time, in the early teens, that Man Ray began attending the exhibitions of European modern art that Stieglitz had begun to host at 291. The painter subsequently moved to an artist's colony in Ridgefield, New Jersey, where he honed his technical abilities, but he managed to maintain a lifeline to Stieglitz and his gallery across the river.

The *International Exhibition of Modern Art* (popularly known as "the Armory Show") opened in February 1913; it made such a deep impression on Man Ray that he stopped painting. The artist later told an interviewer, "I did nothing for six months. It took me that time to digest what I had seen."[49] When the artist did pick back up his pencil and paintbrush, the first work he created after the Armory Show remains a tour de force of the performance of appearance: the small, but powerful, oil on canvas *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz*, c. 1913 (fig. 1.16).

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[49] Man Ray in conversation with C. Lewis Hind, quoted in Francis M. Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism: The Early Work of Man Ray* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 44 and 239, note 19. For a recent, comprehensive overview of Man Ray's life and work, see Mason Klein et al., *Alias Man Ray: The Art of Reinvention* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Even without the title, almost a century later, the subject of the portrait is still easily identifiable. Several signifiers, scattered throughout a cubist grid from which Stieglitz's visage coalesces, facilitate the recognition of the sitter in the viewer. The dusky orbs in the top left and right corners reference the gold disc that was the symbol for the movement wherein Stieglitz's allegiance had previously resided: the Photo-Secession (fig. 1.17). A camera, identified by its schematic bellows and lens, points out of the bottom left corner toward the graphic characters "291," an obvious reference to the impresario's gallery on Fifth Avenue. Rooftop outlines frame the proper right side of Stieglitz's face. His signature glinting spectacles, bristle-brush mustache, and piercing eyes advance from the planar background. The gray, semi-cordate shape on the canvas's right edge depicts the silhouetted form of *Maiastra* by Constantin Brancusi (fig. 1.18). The form makes allusion to Stieglitz's role, not only in his pioneering promotion of modern European art in the United States, but to his significant patronage of the French-based Romanian sculptor.[50] Through these compositional elements Man Ray performs the appearance of Alfred Stieglitz.

The image served Man Ray in other functions, as well. As an homage, the painting linked the younger artist to the "elder statesman" of modernism, thereby performing Man Ray's own appearance within the emerging cultural hierarchy. The picture, too, performed Man Ray's proficiency with, or at least his initial understanding of cubism, the cutting edge compositional mode that came into focus with the Armory Show. The spectacular combination of the performance of appearance—Man Ray

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[50] Although Constantin Brancusi exhibited at the Armory Show in 1913, Stieglitz provided him with his first monographic show, not just in the United States, but anywhere, at 291 in 1914. A version of *Maiastra* was on view during the exhibition, a fact that leads me to question the 1913 date that Francis Naumann assigns to the Man Ray painting.

establishing his position through the depiction of the group's leader in the most advanced style of the moment—captures Alfred Stieglitz's "likeness" brilliantly and testifies to the artist's ambition for his own art and for his own career.

<u>Conclusion</u>

The members of the American avant-garde, whether in the United States or abroad, were familiar with past portrait conventions, ones that had long aligned the genre with verisimilitude. These painters and writers continued to employ portraiture, despite its traditionally marginalized status, to perform appearance in its double manifestations: individual identity and social position.

These cultural agents may have had the same goal—to perform appearance—but the work they produced ranged widely. Although Stieglitz was a firm believer, even proponent, of modernist aesthetic "progress," his portraits, in comparison to the work of Gertrude Stein, Marius de Zayas, and Man Ray, maintain the closest relationship to mimetic representation. They are photographs, of course, and the nature of the medium indexes the past presence of a real person before the camera lens. His technique of "straight" photography, with its sharp focus in even lighting, may seem almost banal today, but it was, at the time, a break from his previous pictorialist approach of soft focus coupled with manipulation of the negative or print (and sometimes both).

Marius de Zayas and Man Ray, in their visual portraits, retained a relationship to realism, with descriptive elements occurring throughout their portrait compositions, even if these works become increasingly abstract and are sometimes inscrutable. In her own writing, Gertrude Stein retained a tenuous relationship to her portrait subjects, but she gradually made a break with the past (literary) portrait convention of description.

Portraiture continued to function as the performance of appearance. But through the

developments that these modernists originated, portraiture's objective, which had long

served to make present someone who was absent, shifted yet again to become

performance of dis-appearance. This trend forms the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: DIS-APPEARANCE

Pablo Picasso and his (First) Portrait of Gertrude Stein

As I have argued, portraiture prior to 1900 closely depended for its function and meaning on the performance of appearance, a trend that Man Ray continued into the early twentieth century with his *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz*, c. 1913. Two sides of the same coin comprise the "performance of appearance" in the portrait relationship: the appearance of the individual sitter through dress, pose, physical characteristics, identifying attributes, etc.; and the appearance of the artist within the social context of the community.

As late as the July 1899 issue of Alfred Stieglitz's journal *Camera Notes*, art critic and 291 ally Sadakichi Hartmann explicated the traditional objective of the genre of portraiture, stating that "The aim of portrait painting is to produce a likeness—a likeness that reveals in one attitude as much of the sitter's individuality as is possible in a flat surface view."[51] Artists of the early twentieth-century American avant-garde, in their reconsideration of many previously unquestioned conventions, turned their back on these practices in order to follow Pablo Picasso's paradigm of disembodying the portrait subject: between 1905–1906 the Spanish painter, who was then living in Paris, demanded that his friend and patron Gertrude Stein sit for her portrait (fig. 1.5) over eighty times in succession; he then scraped off the image one day in frustration and only after a long-term hiatus proceeded to depict the writer's "likeness" without her corporeal presence in front of his easel.[52]

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[51] Sadakichi Hartmann, *The Valiant Knights of Daguerre: Selected Critical Essays on Photography and Profiles of Photographic Pioneers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 35.
[52] For fuller analyses, see, for example, Pierre Daix, "Portraiture in Picasso's Primitivism and Cubism," in Rubin, *Picasso and Portraiture*, 255–268; Robert S. Lubar, "Unmasking Pablo's Gertrude: Queer Desire

Stein recounted the lengthy process of the portrait's production in her later book,

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, first published in 1933. I take the liberty here of

quoting the relevant passages at length:

> Then there was the first time of the posing. The atelier of Picasso I have already described. In those days there was even more disorder, more coming and going, more red-hot fire in the stove, more cooking and more interruptions. There was a large broken armchair where Gertrude Stein posed. There was a couch where everybody sat and slept. There was a little kitchen chair upon which Picasso sat to paint, there was a large easel and there were many very large canvases. It was at the height of the end of the Harlequin period when the canvases were enormous, the figures also, and the groups.
> …
> Fernande was as always, very large, very beautiful and very gracious. She offered to read La Fontaine's stories aloud to amuse Gertrude Stein while Gertrude Stein posed. She took her pose, Picasso sat very tight on his chair and very close to his canvas and on a very small palette which was of a uniform brown grey colour, mixed some more brown grey and the painting began. This was the first of some eighty or ninety sittings.
> Toward the end of the afternoon Gertrude Stein's two brothers and her sister-in-law and Andrew Green came to see. They were all excited at the beauty of the sketch and Andrew Green begged and begged that it should be left as it was. But Picasso shook his head and said, non.
> It is too bad but in those days no one thought of taking a photograph of the picture as it was then and of course no one of the group that saw it then remembers at all what it looked like any more than do Picasso or Gertrude Stein.
> …
> Practically every afternoon Gertrude Stein went to Montmartre, posed and then later wandered down the hill usually walking across Paris to the rue de Fleurus. She then formed the habit which has never left her of walking around Paris, now accompanied by the dog, in those days alone. And Saturday evenings the Picassos walked home with her and dined and then there was Saturday evening.
> During these long poses and these long walks Gertrude Stein meditated and made sentences. She was then in the middle of her negro story Melanctha Herbert, the second story of Three Lives and the poignant incidents that she wove into the life of Melanctha were often these she noticed in walking down the hill from the rue Ravignan.

and the Subject of Portraiture," *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 1 (March 1997): 57–84; Lucy Belloli, "The Evolution of Picasso's Portrait of Gertrude Stein," *The Burlington Magazine* 141, no. 1150 (January 1999): 12–18; and Vincent Giroud, *Picasso and Gertrude Stein* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006).

…

  Spring was coming and the sittings were coming to an end. All of a sudden one day Picasso painted out the whole head. I can't see you any longer when I look, he said irritably. And so the picture was left like that.

  Nobody remembers being particularly disappointed or particularly annoyed at this ending to the long series of posings. There was the spring independent and then Gertrude Stein and her brother were going to Italy as was at that time their habit. Pablo and Fernande were going to Spain, she for the first time, and she had to buy a dress and a hat and perfumes and a cooking stove. All french women in those days when they went from one country to another took along a french oil stove to cook on. Perhaps they still do. No matter where they were going this had to be taken with them. They always paid a great deal of excess baggage, all french women who went travelling. And the Matisses were back and they had to meet the Picassos and to be enthusiastic about each other, but not to like each other very well. And in their wake, Derain met Picasso and with him came Braque.

…

  As I was saying the sittings were over, the vernissage of the independent was over and everybody went away.

…

  Gertrude Stein was working tremendously over the beginning of The Making of Americans and came back to Paris under the spell of the thing she was doing. It was at this time that working every night she often was caught by the dawn coming while she was working. She came back to a Paris fairly full of excitement. In the first place she came back to her finished portrait. The day he returned from Spain Picasso sat down and out of his head painted the head in without having seen Gertrude Stein again. And when she saw it he and she were content. It is very strange but neither can remember at all what the head looked like when he painted it out. There is another charming story of the portrait.

  Only a few years ago when Gertrude Stein had had her hair cut short, she had always up to that time worn it as a crown on top of her head as Picasso has painted it, when she had had her hair cut, a day or so later she happened to come into a room and Picasso was several rooms away. She had a hat on but he caught sight of her through two doorways and approaching her quickly called out, Gertrude, what is it, what is it. What is what, Pablo, she said. Let me see, he said. She let him see. And my portrait, he said sternly. Then his face softening, he added, mais quand meme, tout y est, all the same it is all there.[53]

 While based in reality (after all, we have the extant portrait object as a piece of

evidence), this highly self-conscious narrative has been exaggerated and embellished by

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[53] Stein, *Writings, 1903–1932*, 705, 706, 710, 713–714, and 717.

the overlapping personas of the author of the memoir and the sitter of the painted portrait.

Regardless of whether Picasso's utterance—"I can't see you any longer when I look"—

and his having depicted Stein without her presence before him are factual or apocryphal,

the recounting of the anecdote nonetheless foregrounds the interest of early twentieth-

century modernists to break with the Renaissance practice of mimetic representation, or

imitative verisimilitude. It also suggests how this questioning of longstanding

conventions created space for other artists and writers (including Stein herself who had

been exploring similar ideas in her writing) to investigate the relationship between the

observable world and its depiction. It should come as no surprise that *The Autobiography*

of Alice B. Toklas self-referentially explores this thematic: how is "truth" expressed in

the work of art and what is its relationship to reality?

Henri Matisse and his Portrait of Greta Moll

Pablo Picasso was not the only artist working in the first decades of the twentieth

century to close his eyes to the portrait sitter. According to Henri Matisse scholar John

Klein, a situation, similar to the Picasso anecdote recounted above, occurred early in the

French artist's career. It was to result in Matisse's first paid portrait commission: *Portrait*

of Greta Moll, 1908 (fig. 2.1).

With repeated urging and financial backing from the Stein family, Henri Matisse

opened an independent art school in 1908. Two of his first students were Oskar and

Greta Moll, émigrés from the neighboring country of Germany who would later become

important collectors of Matisse's work. Expressing dislike when shown the reproduction

of an impressionist-style portrait of Frau Moll by the established German master Lovis

Corinth, Matisse offered to paint his twenty-three-year-old pupil's likeness with the

proviso that if she and her husband did not like the results, the French artist would keep the canvas. Moll later recounted the beginning of the process: "For the portrait I sat ten times, three hours each.... He…told me that he was placing the canvas so that I could not watch him, since he wanted to show me the picture only at the end."[54]

After ten sessions, the artist apparently reached a crossroads in the creative process. Greta Moll remembered that

> Matisse was not satisfied. For consolation and to receive new inspiration he went to the Louvre and we had a few days' rest. There he found the Veronese portrait…[wherein] the lady had her arms in front of her the same way I did, though her arms were rather full and round. He took them over for my portrait so that as usual he had to change the entire picture.[55]

After visiting the museum, the artist rushed back to his studio, locked himself in, and took up his brushes. It seems appropriate here to allow Matisse to relate the rest of the story:

> Under the force of the revelation of the Veronese, I took up my portrait again. Throwing caution to the wind, I worked on it an hour, maybe two, then I felt that I had done my very best. The next day when Mme O. Moll came back to pose I told her that her portrait was finished [without her] and she was overwhelmed by the result and asked me if she could go get her husband. I saw them completely dumbfounded in front of the result of my work, which seemed to them a disaster. They missed all the blond curls and the varied colors of the portrait. After I reminded them of one of the conditions of our agreement I told them that they were not obligated to take it and I left them. Only the following day they told me…that they would take it. This portrait was later very much admired, even by them, and I said to myself once more that Bonnard was right to declare that a portrait always ends up being a likeness.[56]

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[54] Moll as quoted in Alfred Hamilton Barr, *Matisse, His Art and His Public* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1951), 51.

[55] Ibid. Moll is referring to Veronese's *Woman and Child with a Dog*, 1565–1570. See "Site officiel du musée du Louvre," n.d., http://cartelfr.louvre.fr/cartelfr/visite?srv=car_not_frame&idNotice=28432. (accessed November 9, 2009)

[56] Matisse as quoted in Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 157 and 267, note 20.

In a Word: Disappearance

In the previous chapter, I discussed the concept of "appearance," and at this juncture I take up the related idea of "dis-appearance." The negative prefix of "dis-" might seem to imply that "disappearance" is the exact opposite of "appearance," but, in fact, this is not necessarily true. In a common sense definition, "disappearance" means the sudden absence of someone or something. This denotation implies a third party, a viewer outside the artist-sitter dyad, otherwise how else would the absence be noted or meaningful? Beyond this everyday language usage of "disappearance" I wish, in this chapter, to expand the term's meaning in regards to portraiture. The next sub-sections consider the manifestation of lack in the portrait relationship through examination of, first, the absence, or "disappearance," of the sitter, and second, the rejection of likeness, truly a "dis-appearance" of such awesome magnitude that it would preoccupy the imagination of the Western art world for the remainder of the twentieth century.

The Disappearance of the Sitter

Both Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, as fledgling visual artists, obtained traditional educations in producing images that utilized the illusionistic techniques that result in mimetic representations of the natural world. As a child Picasso received lessons in copying casts and life drawing from his father, a competent studio art instructor. Recognizing his talent and technical facility, the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Barcelona admitted the brilliant juvenile to classes at the early age of fourteen. Later he attended Madrid's Academia Real de San Fernando, but only briefly, as the young man bristled at the oppressive rigidity of the in-class formal instruction. Matisse, though not as precocious as his Spanish counterpart, also studied long-established methods, first under

the painter William-Adolphe Bouguereau, and then at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. To augment his income at this time, Matisse painted over a dozen copies of Old Master paintings in the Louvre, which may be regarded as, if nothing else, an extended exercise in imitative transcription.

These two artists eventually came to question many of the givens that had been handed down to them, leading to a series of considered rejections made over time. One of these formerly unproblematized and timeworn tenets involved the social contract that defines portraiture, the concatenation of relationships that I described in Chapter One. William Rubin explains the previous reigning paradigm this way: "At the beginning of the twentieth century, the word "portrait" still presupposed a visual parallelism between a thing seen and its image. Viewers presumed that a painted portrait (or at least its preliminary studies) was made "from life."[57] This latter assumption, in regards to portraiture, was the weak link in the academic painting method that Picasso, and then Matisse, first targeted for their individual offensives.

Pablo Picasso (through Gertrude Stein's words in the *Autobiography*) used the excuse of ocular fatigue to express his disillusionment with the portrait contract: the expatriate writer quotes the Spanish artist as declaiming, "I can't see you any longer when I look."[58] This statement is ambiguous. Picasso's "blindness" could have had two possible sources: oversaturation, such that the number of sittings (over eighty!) produced a clouded inner vision resulting in hand-eye impotence; or understimulation, wherein Stein's face became so blank as to effect, on the part of the artist, a debilitating loss of intellectual interest in completing the picture. Picasso realized he needed a break, stopped

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[57] Rubin, *Picasso and Portraiture*, 13.
[58] Stein, *Writings, 1903–1932*, 713.

working on the picture, and went on vacation. We may note here that only upon his return from Spain—but with Stein's continued absence, that is, her disappearance—was Picasso able to realize at last the final state of the haunting portrait image.

Engaged upon creating the likeness of Frau Moll in 1908, Henri Matisse also experienced a mental block. John Klein sees this situation as the result of two conflicting ideals in the artist's mind: truth to nature and pictorial unity.[59] Here a much-needed respite occurred ("a few days' rest") wherein artist and sitter separated physically. (While Matisse did not scrape off the actual painted image he had limned to date, as Picasso had done, a caesura was nonetheless initiated.) During this pause to renew his vision and concentration, the solution to Matisse's dilemma emerged from that great French repository of visual imagery, the collections of the Musée du Louvre. Returning to the former convent he used as his studio, the artist, in a virtuosic mini-marathon, finished the portrait of Greta Moll with the assistance of his beloved Muse but without the attendance of his ostensible model.

Though both artists, during their respective portrait sessions, took a break, both from the model and from the painting process itself, their objectives in making such crucial pauses were quite different. Picasso had, essentially, given up on his portrait of Gertrude Stein, if not completely in fact than at least *in nomine*. His time apart from his work (and his subject matter) was meant as a true break, in order to clear his mental slate, so to speak. Matisse, too, took a much needed break. However, the French artist

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[59] "Greta Moll witnessed the central struggle Matisse faced in his portraiture, his effort to reconcile incompatible goals: at once to paint his sitter in a sympathetic way that expressed an inner truth; and to consider all parts of his painting in concert, so that nothing stood out. This required a solution outside the picture and outside his sitter, a solution he found in other art. Having appropriated something from Veronese, and from the forms and pose of the beautiful Venetian sitter, he then had to make these elements thoroughly his own." Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 154.

deliberately used his "time away" to seek insight elsewhere. That Picasso, without

intentionally seeking it out, ended up finding productive visual stimulation on his

vacation should not surprise us. Though each artist may have declared a moratorium on

modeling sessions for different reasons, they both returned to the studio with images

other than their individual sitters in mind. The turn away from the physical presence of

the portrait subject, in both transactions explicated above, allowed other visual sources,

whether implicit or explicit, to manifest themselves on the canvas.

Certainly much ink has been spilled about Picasso's 1906 summer vacation to the

town of Gósol in the Spanish Pyrenees and his contact with Iberian sculpture and Catalan

frescos. Many scholars see the residual effects of these visual references (and rightly so)

in the masklike face that the artist gave to Gertrude Stein upon his return to Paris in the

finalization of her portrait.[60] Matisse, on the other hand, looked to a more mainstream

source within the Western art historical tradition for help.[61] Appropriating the arms from

a sixteenth-century Italian picture allowed the modern French master to find his way out

of an aesthetic dead end and to finish his own portrait commission at hand.

In the anecdotes related at the beginning of this chapter, it should be more than

clear by now that within the space of two years both Picasso and Matisse began painted

portraits, abandoned the sitter, took a break, and returned to their respective canvases

with new awarenesses. Though structurally their processes outwardly look the same, in

fact, the artistic choices each painter made betray differing attitudes that merit brief

discussion here. The reader should note that Matisse was much more interested in direct

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[60] For accounts of the protracted and non-linear development of the image, see the essays cited in note 52.
[61] While the artist looked to non-Western sources to complete Stein's portrait, *Louis-François Bertin* (fig. 1.2) by Ingres had originally served as a visual point of departure for Picasso's composition, specifically the color palette and pose. I would like to thank Anne Goodyear for reminding me of this iconographic source.

visual appropriation by transferring the arms from a classic Renaissance portrait to his own depiction of Greta Moll, while Picasso allowed his "primitive" visual sources of Catalan wall painting and Iberian statues to ferment for a period of time before new ideas emerged, fully formed, from his fertile brain, which then arranged themselves into the portrait of Gertrude Stein. How each artist positioned himself in regards to the mainstream academic painting tradition—Matisse as an advocate for continuity, Picasso as a proponent for rupture—revealed itself only after each artist turned his back on the portrait subject. [62] Picasso and Matisse's penetrating searches for modern artistic methods that would correspond to their lived historical moment resulted in their questioning the received notion that a portrait must be based on empirical reality, must be painted "from life." Their portraits of Gertrude Stein and Greta Moll, each in their individual way, bear witness, ultimately, to the early twentieth-century disappearance of the sitter.

The Disappearance of Likeness

From the disappearance of the sitter it is only one short step of logic to the disappearance of likeness. The disappearance of the sitter subverts the conventional wisdom that the subject of the portrait must be physically in attendance so that the artist may transcribe real physiognomic traits into a corresponding illusionistic image. The disappearance of the sitter challenges the notion that the subject's presence is the visual referent for the portrait object, or at least that the sitter must be present for the work to be accomplished successfully. In this paradigm, which the modernists revived, bodily presence is considered optional.

Artists since at least the late nineteenth century had been searching for basic structures in the natural world, culminating in pictures that exemplified Cézanne's oft-

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[62] Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 158.

repeated mantra of "cube, cylinder, and cone." (The reader should note that, for the sake of clarity, I call this aesthetic strategy "abstraction," because it takes a given form and distills it down into simpler parts.) While painters and sculptors advanced attempts to find the essence behind visual exteriors, particularly in terms of landscape and still life, portraiture, with its more conservative functions and reputation, remained a genre apart. The innovative concept of the permissible disappearance of the sitter, however, added impetus to the efforts of those modern artists who had already turned to the portrait as a site of creative interrogation (the post-impressionist endeavors of Vincent van Gogh, for example). Though European expressionistic tendencies in the visual arts—such as ignoring the local color of facial features—had by the first decade of the twentieth century already called into question the necessity to replicate the exact physical characteristics of the portrait subject (i.e., superficial appearance), the artist's disregard of the sitter's presence (i.e., empirical appearance) accelerated the modernist effort to dissociate the portrait's subject from the portrait object within the overarching portrait relationship.

Gertrude Stein herself played a pivotal role in this development. While she innovated within the realm of poetry, her modern advances therein added impetus to similar developments in the visual arts. The genre of portraiture in poetry had traditionally relied heavily on the lengthy transcription into text of the portrait subject's physical appearance. Stein changed all that. In such works as "Henri Matisse" and "Pablo Picasso"—composed in the years following her own painted portrait by Picasso—no description occurs at all (the poems, instead, rely on the repetitive, almost nonsensical, narration of action). Neither, as a general principle, does a poet need to have the bodily

presence of the sitter at hand in order to generate a textual portrait (in fact, the idea of

composing a portrait poem "from life" seems almost comical!). Thus, by playing to the

strengths of the genre in poetry (i.e., composing apart from the sitter) and by abstaining

from the custom of description, Gertrude Stein made direct contributions to the

disappearance of the sitter and the disappearance of likeness, changes that would come to

significantly impact the visual portraits created by American artists working on both sides

of the Atlantic Ocean.

The reluctant Edwardian portraitist John Singer Sargent sardonically defined a

portrait as "a likeness in which there [is] something wrong about the mouth."[63] Behind

this acerbic witticism is the implication that the sitter—in Sargent's case most often the

same person who is paying for the painting—plays an important role in the portrait

transaction. That is, because of exigent social pressures (not to mention possible financial

repercussions), the portrait subject often monitored the artist's fidelity in illusionistic

transcription (the performance of appearance) and, we should not be surprised to learn,

alerted the artist when a deviation in this process ("something wrong about the mouth")

occurred. With the advent and growth of the trend towards abstraction, however, this

policing function of the sitter gradually fell away from the portrait relationship. The era

of the disappearance of likeness had begun.

The disappearance of likeness signaled a relational change of great consequence

within the nexus of the portrait transaction. The sitter, who once played an important,

even collaborative, role in the portrait relationship, now became more passive. Likeness,

especially the similarity of the created image to the portrait subject, mattered less. With

such a de-emphasized part to play in the image-making process, the sitter eventually

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[63] Evan Charteris, *John Sargent* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1927), 157.

turned into little more than a visual pretext for the artist to create a challenging work of art. Evidences of this change occur in the two examples we have already examined in-depth: Gertrude Stein, sitting, inactive, over eighty times without complaint while Fernande reads Fontaine's *Fables* to her and Greta Moll, so cowed into submission that, according to Matisse's account, when the final state of her portrait was unveiled, she was "overwhelmed by the result and asked me if she could go get her husband. I saw them completely dumbfounded in front of the result of my work, which seemed to them a disaster."[64]

The decline in the assertive quality of the role of the sitter in the portrait relationship heralded a concomitant rise, not unexpectedly, in the active, even dominating, nature of the role of the artist in the portrait transaction. Artists since the beginnings of portraiture had manifested their individual vision of the sitter (and were even celebrated for doing so), but at the turn of the twentieth century the power differential between artist and sitter changed dramatically to favor the creative agent behind the image's final outward appearance. In his 1908 manifesto "Notes of a Painter," Matisse codified in writing this shift in authority, declaiming that "I cannot copy nature in a servile way; I am forced to interpret nature and submit it to the spirit of the picture."[65]

This reallocation of aesthetic control within the portrait relationship grew to such an extent that, rather than being admired for the talent of accurately describing the physical appearance of the sitter, the artist became celebrated for conceptualizing a new look for the portrait subject. These fictions could be, at turns, both thrilling—and

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[64] Matisse as quoted in Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 157.
[65] Matisse, "Notes of a Painter," in Henri Matisse, *Matisse on Art*, ed. Jack D. Flam (New York: Phaidon, 1973), 37.

horrifying. We need only recall open-mouthed astonishment of Oskar and Greta Moll at what their teacher Matisse had imposed (including arms by Veronese!) on the "likeness" of Frau Moll. Matisse felt so confident in his own vision of the sitter that later in print he smugly recalled his fellow French artist Pierre Bonnard's dictum that "a portrait always ends up being a likeness."[66] Likewise, when the first viewers of Gertrude Stein's 1905–1906 portrait by Picasso assailed the artist for the discrepancies between the writer's facial features and the image's ultimate state (i.e., the disappearance of likeness) the Spanish painter easily deflected the criticism: to the allegation that the picture looked nothing like Stein, Picasso would respond, "that does not make any difference, she will."[67]

The Disappearance of the Body

The previous two subsections explicated the "disappearance of the sitter," or the artist's break with creating a portrait "from life." They also discussed the "disappearance of likeness," or the trend towards abstracting the physical features of the sitter, or even imposing the artist's vision upon the portrait subject's image. These two developments created space for artists to undermine yet another portrait convention. As we have seen in the examples of Pablo Picasso's *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* and Henri Matisse's *Greta Moll*, portraits became, to varying degrees, distortions or abstractions (that is, "distillations") of the figure. They were, however, still based, if more and more loosely, on the human body. All of that began to change by the mid-1910s and the agents of many

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[66] Matisse as quoted in Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 157.
[67] Stein, *Writings, 1903–1932*, 669. We should also note here the (perhaps ironic) coda to the story in the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, as well: that Picasso, many years later, upon espying Gertrude Stein who had cut her hair short, became extremely upset that the writer's physical appearance no longer corresponded to the look he had created for her on canvas in 1906. See Ibid., 717.

of these transformations belonged to that subgroup of modern cosmopolites dubbed "*le type transatlantique*."[68]

An essential factor in the early twentieth-century trend towards the complete disappearance of the body within the genre of portraiture was the rise of non-objective image making. While abstraction, as an aesthetic strategy, relied on the distortion or distillation of elements from a visual motif (and thus remained intellectually connected to mimetic transcription through preservation of the empirical referent), non-objective visual art looked for justification to non-referential forms of cultural production, usually music, that ostensibly existed for their own sake, without the burdensome need to replicate aspects of the natural world. Drawing on precedents from the Aesthetic and Symbolist movements in Europe, by the second decade of the twentieth century new painting styles, which shunned the description of nature in favor of "pure" formal visual experiments, became fashionable. Artists, such as Andrew Dasburg, who were liberated from the weighty past as well as from the pesky referent, created nonrepresentational images that, through their titles—"Composition," "Arrangement," "Harmony"—made their intellectual parallels to music explicit (fig. 2.2).[69]

A particular variety of these developments, though gestated in Paris, claimed American parentage and bore much fruit, both in the United States and abroad: synchromism.[70] The brainchild of expatriates Morgan Russell and Stanton Macdonald-

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[68] "*Transatlantiques*," as defined by Wanda Corn, were not expatriates but "migrant artists, moving back and forth across the Atlantic, carrying the ideas and values of one culture into the heart of another." See Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 91.

[69] For a succinct account of abstraction's introduction to and development in the early-twentieth century United States, see "Early American Modernism," in Barbara Haskell, *The American Century: Art & Culture, 1900–1950* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with W.W. Norton, 1999), 93–129.

[70] Gail Levin's early, synthetic treatment of this subject remains a standard reference; see Levin, *Synchromism and American Color Abstraction, 1910–1925*, 1st ed. (New York: G. Braziller, 1978).

Wright, this manner of painting advocated the use of advanced color theory, and though its originators initially employed tabletop sculpture and other still life objects as subject matter, they soon abandoned these real world concerns for unadulterated chromatic experiments. After reaching the logical conclusion of this line of thinking, however, Russell and Macdonald-Wright (and even Dasburg) eventually returned to the more familiar approach of employing a visual reference, if an extremely attenuated one, although their palette and other synchromist strategies such as the utilization of tightly juxtaposed complementary colors remained largely intact. Combining the vocabulary of synchromism with an abstracted image of the artist in reflection, Stanton Macdonald-Wright's *Self-Portrait* (fig. 1.1), with which I began Chapter One, hovers in this liminal conceptual space.

The concept of dis-appearance took on a new urgency after the commencement of World War I. While some artists, such as the adherents to the tenets of the *Neuesachlichkeit* in Germany, chose to depict the ravages on the human body in their figure paintings, other modernists, like Marsden Hartley, focused on the absence of the deceased or missing to forge a new means of expression in portraiture. During the second decade of the twentieth century, artists associated with the American avant-garde continued, in terms of portraiture, to work through the implications of the disappearance of the sitter and the disappearance of likeness. In addition to these building blocks, the introduction of a nonobjective visual arts vocabulary to the mix, Russell and Macdonald-Wright's innovation and lasting achievement, created intellectual room for the further development of unconventional portraiture in the United States. The stage had been set

and new tools were available. The Stieglitz circle would take full advantage of these circumstances to express its understanding of dis-appearance in portraiture.

The Mexican artist working in Manhattan, Marius de Zayas, exemplifies the process of working through these complex issues until he arrived at dis-appearance. As a caricaturist, De Zayas, from the start, was intimately familiar with the notion of the disappearance of the sitter. Caricature as a practice does not require the presence of the portrait subject; in fact, given the usually mocking tenor of the genre, the separation of artist and "sitter" is probably for the best. Like Gertrude Stein, who crafted portrait poems based on identifiable personages but certainly not in their presence, De Zayas also created recognizable caricatures, like those he exhibited at 291 in 1909 (fig. 1.13 and fig. 2.3), without requiring formal sittings. This fact is always assumed in the secondary literature on the Stieglitz circle, but the implicit disappearance of the sitter in De Zayas's caricatures—and the dissemination of these caricatures by Stieglitz through exhibition at 291 and by publication in *Camera Work*—remains one of De Zayas's major contributions to the American avant-garde's extended conversation about the nature of portrayal.

De Zayas's 1910 show at the Little Galleries of the Photo Secession, *Up and Down Fifth Avenue, A Social Satire*, demonstrated his understanding of the disappearance of likeness. Yes, the inches-tall maquettes of prominent Manhattanites retained some relation to the portrait subject, at least in terms of ascertainable physical characteristics. The scale of the images, however, betrayed De Zayas's advancement in thinking. Conventional portraiture, as we know, employed painstaking verisimilitude to conjure a sensation of real presence in the beholder. In the academic tradition, long-held customs dictated that, for the fullest trompe l'oeil effect, easel portraits depict a body at around

actual scale, although this depiction could range from a full-length figure to a synechdochal focus on the head or face of the subject. The academically trained artist's repertoire included the utilization of true-to-life scale to further enhance the illusion that the portrait subject actually appeared in the flesh before the viewer. By shrinking his subjects into miniaturized maquettes, De Zayas disclosed a power dynamic over his "sitters" not unlike the disappearance of likeness manifested in the respective portrait relationships of Picasso-Stein and Matisse-Moll discussed above.

The "absolute caricatures" that De Zayas created in around 1913 and displayed at 291 after the Armory Show established a high point in the American avant-garde's development of unconventional portraiture. Works such as *Alfred Stieglitz*, 1912–1913 (fig. 1.14), and *Agnes Meyer*, 1913 (fig. 1.15), demonstrated De Zayas's lack of concern for the physical body and its transcription and his simultaneous emphasis on the immaterial and its possible portrayal. Wendy Wick Reaves explicates the artist's intentions this way:

> [De Zayas] had concluded that the face and figure of a man reveal only his habits, not his psychological self…. Matter, he felt, cannot exist without the spirit, but the spirit cannot be represented as a material entity. By using algebraic signs as "abstract equivalents," however, the psychological or metaphysical can be represented.[71]

To create these daring, little understood works, De Zayas built on his knowledge of the disappearance of the sitter and the disappearance of likeness, as well as on the nature of his chosen sub-genre (caricaturists rarely, if ever, work "from life" and, as a rule, they impose their artistic vision on their subjects for satiric effect). As such, Marius de Zayas's 1913 exhibition at 291 remains an important milestone in the American avant-garde's

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[71] Reaves, *Celebrity Caricature in America*, 97.

demonstration—and diffusion—of the idea of dis-appearance in relation to the portrait relationship.

While in the 1910s in Manhattan the caricaturist Marius de Zayas was working through the various problems in portraiture, the Maine-born painter Marsden Hartley was grappling with same issues in Berlin. Hartley had been an early regular at 291 and displayed his work there in one group and two solo shows before his departure for Europe in 1912. Although he missed the Armory Show in 1913 (and how its effects focused and sharpened the resolve of the American avant-garde on the west side of the Atlantic), Hartley, as a member of Stieglitz's inner circle, would have known De Zayas's 1909 and 1910 caricature exhibitions firsthand. In Paris, his first Continental destination, Hartley visited Gertrude Stein *chez elle* at 27 rue de Fleurus, the American epicenter of contemporary intellectual developments in France. There the pair had the opportunity to discuss Stein's important modern European art collection and her experimental writing projects, including the manuscripts of "Pablo Picasso" and "Henri Matisse" that she had undoubtedly already sent to Stieglitz for publication in *Camera Work*.[72] (Stein would

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[72] In her article "*One Portrait of One Woman*: The Influence of Gertrude Stein on Marsden Hartley's Approach to the Object Portrait Genre," Christal Hensley claims that "Months before their publication in *Camera Work*, Stein's literary word portraits of Picasso and Matisse were displayed in manuscript form at Stieglitz's gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue. [Susan] Ryan suggests that Hartley would have seen the manuscripts before he left American for Europe in the spring of 1912." The footnote trail leads to "Marsden Hartley: Practicing the 'Eyes' in Autobiography," Susan Ryan's introduction to *Somehow a Past: The Autobiography of Marsden Hartley*, wherein the author states in note 11 that "Of course, months before their publication in *Camera Work* in August 1912 (at which time Hartley was already in Europe)[,] Gertrude Stein's non-descriptive verbal 'portraits' of Picasso, Matisse, Mabel Dodge, and others were present at Stieglitz's gallery in manuscript—Hartley would have seen them before he left." Both excerpts are problematic. Based on the second quotation, it seems that Hensley misread or overinterpreted Ryan's assertion that the manuscripts "were present" at 291, asserting instead that Stein's text poems were *exhibited*. Ryan's contention that "Hartley would have seen them before he left" is possible but not proved by the written record. See Christal Hensley, "*One Portrait of One Woman*: The Influence of Gertrude Stein on Marsden Hartley's Approach to the Object Portrait Genre," *Athanor* 22 (2004): 85–93 and Susan Elizabeth Ryan, "Marsden Hartley: Practicing the 'Eyes' in Autobiography," in Marsden Hartley, *Somehow a Past: The Autobiography of Marsden Hartley*, ed. Ryan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 1–41 and 211, note 11.

later create a text portrait of Hartley that Stieglitz published in the January 1914 issue of

Camera Work in conjunction with the artist's simultaneous show at 291.)

As an initial foray into the most advanced contemporary developments in the

visual arts, in Paris Hartley created several allover compositions with musical titles, such

as *Oriental Symphony* and *Bach Préludes et Fugues*, as well as the enigmatic *Portrait*

Arrangement No. 2, 1912–1913 (fig. 2.4), demonstrating his openness to finding

inspiration from the imagination rather than painting "from life." Many unconventional

portraits, an exceedingly important component of his output from this first European

sojourn, would follow; these paintings function as a set of signposts on Hartley's voyage

towards understanding the concept of dis-appearance for himself.[73]

Gertrude Stein's writing (probably her text portraits specifically) and the interest

of both expatriates in the work of William James led Hartley to create the portrait of a

word, *Raptus* (fig. 2.5), in 1913.[74] The same year, in the German capital, the artist

updated the European tradition of the "city portrait" by painting *Portrait of Berlin* (fig.

2.6).[75] Avoiding the expected municipal skyline or bird's eye view of the urban center,

Hartley's painting reveals the artist's nascent understanding of cubist collage structure

and expressionist color use. Both these art objects also make obvious the painter's

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[73] "Portraiture is a formative idea for Hartley, and applies not only to his approach to painting but also to his writing and, ultimately, to his autobiography." Susan Elizabeth Ryan, "Marsden Hartley: Practicing the 'Eyes' in Autobiography," in Ibid., 9.

[74] "Hartley later referred to this painting as a portrait of a word, as if the picture were less a record of a real mystical experience, and more an illustration of a psychological phenomenon described by writing." Jonathan Weinberg, "Marsden Hartley: Writing on Painting," in Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, ed., *Marsden Hartley* (Hartford: Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002), 128. Weinberg cites a letter from Hartley to Adelaide Kuntz, 17 February 1933, Hartley Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, as his source.

[75] "Often, large city paintings of the sixteenth century were intended not just—or even primarily—as topographical documentation, but literally as portraits of an urban community, designed to underscore its identity and demonstrate its civic pride: to itself, the reigning sovereign, and rival cities. In this respect they are indeed comparable to portraits of persons." Boudewijn Bakker, "'Portraits' and 'Perspectives': Townscape Painting in Seventeenth-Century Holland," in Ariane van Suchtelen and Arthur K. Wheelock, eds., *Dutch Cityscapes of the Golden Age* (The Hague: Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, 2008), 36.

willingness to conceive of portraits with non-human subjects (a word, a city),

underscoring the disappearance of the body in his early oeuvre.

The exuberance and excitement manifested in these images would not last, as

Hartley came to encounter a series of losses in Berlin, the most devastating of which was

the death of his friend and beloved, Karl von Freyburg, a twenty-four-year-old cavalry

officer.[76] The young man's untimely death provided Hartley, however, the perfect

opportunity to pay homage in paint, appealing to portraiture's traditional function of

making the absent present. Dis-appearance would subsequently become major theme in

Hartley's work for the remainder of his residency in Germany.

Thus, the disappearance of the sitter, of likeness, and of the body—as well as

Hartley's understanding of these concepts—all culminated in the artist's Berlin-period

masterpiece, *Portrait of a German Officer*, 1914 (fig. 2.7). Although Von Freyburg's

premature demise galvanized Hartley into action, it also meant that the model no longer

existed, making his physical presence before the painter uncategorically impossible.

Certainly symbolic references to Von Freyburg occur in the animated composition: the

young man's initials ("K v. F") and his age at death ("24"), as well as period military

accoutrements such as epaulettes and lances. But in this particular portrait relationship

the *a priori* disappearance of the sitter meant that concerns about likeness and the body

no longer pertained, freeing Hartley to imagine novel solutions to what could have been a

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[76] The exact nature of the relationship between Karl von Freyburg and Marsden Hartley is unknown. There is no doubt that Hartley was infatuated with Freyburg, but whether the German soldier returned the artist's affection or whether the pair were physically intimate remains clouded in mystery. Until researchers discover additional substantive evidence, I prefer the term "beloved" to describe this ambiguous situation. On Hartley's relationship with Freyburg, see also Jonathan Weinberg, *Speaking for Vice: Homosexuality in the Art of Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, and the First American Avante-Garde* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Kornhauser, *Marsden Hartley*; and Marsden Hartley and Alfred Stieglitz, *My Dear Stieglitz: Letters of Marsden Hartley and Alfred Stieglitz, 1912–1915*, ed. James Timothy Voorhies (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002).

maudlin endeavor. Just as "[t]he Stein portrait stands as a crucial shift from observation

to conceptualization in Picasso's practice," so does *Portrait of a German Officer*

announce Hartley's position at the very forefront of the American avant-garde in the

1910s.[77] Unpredictably enough, a literal disappearance in the painter's personal life

effected his full expression of dis-appearance on canvas, an epiphany-based achievement

that would mark Marsden Hartley's career ever after.

Pablo Picasso Makes Gertrude Stein Dis-Appear (Again)

Though her actual physical body was across the ocean, Gertrude Stein's

"disembodied voice" inhabited Alfred Stieglitz's workroom at the Little Galleries of the

Photo Secession through her word portrait manuscripts. Before Marsden Hartley arrived

in Europe, Pablo Picasso took advantage of yet another occasion to map the boundaries

of appearance and disappearance, again with Gertrude Stein as a focal point, in his

canvas *The Architect's Table*, 1912 (fig. 2.8). According to Robert Rosenblum, the story

goes something like this:

> [I]n spring 1912, Picasso translated the fact of a friend's visit into a
> pictorial fiction. According to Gertrude Stein, she and Alice B. Toklas
> visited Picasso in his new studio on the rue Ravignan; but finding him not
> at home, she left her calling card there, only to discover a few days later
> that Picasso was working on a painting which included the card on the
> lower right-hand corner of a table. This hand-painted illusion of a calling
> card, inscribed by Picasso MIS [sic] GERTRUDE STEIN, was to be
> transformed, two year later, into a real calling card in a still life of 1914
> [*Still Life with Calling Card*, 1914, fig. 0.1]. This time the story is even
> more complicated, at least according to Miss Toklas, who recounted that
> she and Gertrude Stein, again finding Picasso not at home, left a dog-eared
> calling card to signify their visit. [A dog-eared card suggests, according to
> the traditional rules of etiquette, that the owner of the card has paid a
> personal visit, but unfortunately has found no one at home.] Picasso then
> stripped off the real folded corner, and, replacing it with a *trompe l'oeil*
> fold, included it in a still life of a die and a package of cigarettes. To

[77] Melissa McQuillan, "Picasso, Pablo," *Grove Art Online*. (accessed July 5, 2009)

compound the irony, so prophetic of the switched identities that later
would characterize Miss Stein's Cubist idea of writing her own
autobiography in the guise of Miss Toklas's autobiography, Picasso then
left the still life for Miss Stein and Miss Toklas at 27 rue de Fleurus as a
kind of Cubist calling card in which the identity of the original owners had
been completely absorbed, as it were, by the identity of Picasso and his
art.[78]

Without a doubt this anecdote about two different art objects establishes Pablo Picasso's

profound understanding of portraiture's time-honored purpose of making the absent

present; only someone so familiar with the conventions in question could subvert and

extend them so playfully. Similarly, with its dizzying array of near misses and

substitutions—AWOL sitters, which in turn empowered the artist to impose his particular

vision on the portrait subject(s), subsequently transforming them into non-human

objects—this narrative demonstrates Picasso's intellectual and formal mastery of the

concept of dis-appearance within the portrait relationship.[79]

Needless to say, these lessons—manifested as mischievously as they had been—

were not lost on Marsden Hartley. In an undated letter from July 1912, now conserved at

the Beinecke Library, the artist wrote Alfred Stieglitz his longest epistle since landing in

Paris. These pages related to the gallery director much of what the painter had done and

seen since his arrival in the City of Lights and, towards the end of his missive, Hartley

waxes eloquent about Pablo Picasso:

This place has a freshness with the new Picassos, but his imitator Georges
Braque—I can't see why exactly that a man should so deliberately follow
another. Picasso's new things are not as interesting I think but one accords
him his own right to variations—just now he is doing things that have
running over and across these network designs—names of people and

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[78] Robert Rosenblum, "Picasso and the Typography of Cubism" in Roland Penrose and John Golding, eds., *Picasso, 1881–1973* (London: Elek, 1973), 68.

[79] Given Picasso's propensity for verbal/visual puns, perhaps he intended the word "Mis" [sic] painted on the calling card in *The Architect's Table* to emphasize the writer's absence. The missing second "s" (Picasso painted "Mis" not "Miss") only underscores this point.

words like jolie or bien and numbers like 75. [Here Hartley drew a sketch from memory of *The Architect's Table*; see fig. 2.9] …. This is the new Picasso effect.[80]

Based on the drawing in the middle of the letter, especially with its specific identifying details of corresponding numerals and overall oval composition, Gail Levin concludes that when the American artist visited 27 rue de Fleurus he saw firsthand *The Architect's Table*, which Gertrude Stein had purchased only months before. The occasion would have also provided the opportunity to view Picasso's 1906 *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, frequently hung in a prominent wall position, as well. In the company of two such unconventional—and innovative—depictions of herself, undoubtedly the expatriate writer would have regaled Hartley with the unusual circumstances of their respective origins. In this way, as witness to the actual presence of Gertrude Stein and to the performance of her dis-appearance in two (soon to be three) images, Marsden Hartley came to a new understanding of the portrait relationship. A new conceptual link, connecting the concept of dis-appearance from Picasso to the American avant-garde via Gertrude Stein and Marsden Hartley, had been forged.

Andrew Dasburg and the Dis-Appearance of Mabel Dodge

These intellectual associations and heady circumstances, particularly the flirtatious "calling card" exchanges between Pablo Picasso and Gertrude Stein, most likely inspired the American painter Andrew Dasburg to similar heights of artistic scalawaggery, even to the extent of using the identical motif. As a young man Dasburg studied at the Art Students League; at the school's summer classes in Woodstock he met and boarded with Morgan Russell (who would later found synchromism with Stanton Macdonald-Wright). Dasburg travelled to Europe in 1909, eventually making his way to

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[80] Hartley and Stieglitz, *My Dear Stieglitz*, 20.

Paris by 1910. There he reconnected with Russell, who shared Dasburg's love of

sculpture, and the pair visited the studio of Henri Matisse together. According to Sheldon

Reich, Dasburg met Picasso at 27 rue de Fleurus.[81] There the American artist would also

have encountered the master's formidable *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*. (In addition,

Dasburg was also favorably impressed by the Stein family's collection of works from the

hand of Paul Cézanne, to the extent of arranging to borrow Leo Stein's still life of apples

to copy—at least twice—as an artistic etude.) Dasburg returned to the United States, eyes

full but pockets empty, in August 1910.

Once back on the west side of the Atlantic Ocean, Dasburg settled in Woodstock,

New York. There he and his coterie of artist friends met regularly to talk about current

developments and new books. Florence Ballin Cramer recorded in her daily journal that

she and her Woodstock artist friends, including Dasburg, read aloud and then afterwards

discussed Gertrude Stein's text portraits "Pablo Picasso" and "Henri Matisse" from the

August 1912 issue of *Camera Work*.[82]

In early 1913, Dasburg and Manhattan socialite and salonista Mabel Dodge both

participated in the Armory Show: Dasburg as an exhibiting artist (three paintings in

addition to the sculpture *Lucifer*) and Dodge as a financial backer and general promoter.

Dodge's article, "Speculations, or Post-Impressionism in Prose," appeared in *Arts &

Decoration* in March and the magazine, copies of which were sold at the infamous

exhibition, introduced Gertrude Stein and her experimental writing style to the American

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[81] Sheldon Reich, *Andrew Dasburg: His Life and Art* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 27.

[82] "On August 31, 1912, Florence [Ballin Cramer] recorded in her diary that she and Konrad [Cramer, her husband] got together in their [Woodstock] attic with Andrew Dasburg, Grace Mott Johnson, and Henry Lee McFee and 'looked over books and read aloud—Gertrude Stein's article…on Matisse and Picasso' which appeared in the *Camera Work* Special Number just published that month." Gail Levin, "Konrad Cramer: Link from the German to the American Avant-Garde," in Tom Wolf et al., *Konrad Cramer: A Retrospective* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Bard College, 1981), 7.

general public. The two women, in fact, were quite close in the 1910s, visiting each other

in Europe during the summers. In 1911 Stein honored her friend by composing one of

her earliest text portraits, "Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia." Dodge later

had this work published privately in a deluxe edition that she circulated among her

companions and associates.

Given their ever-narrowing social circle, it was inevitable that Mabel Dodge and

Andrew Dasburg should meet at some point, but neither modernist could have predicted

the circumstances, nor the outcome. Though both parties much anticipated meeting in

person, their first face-to-face contact was, in fact, to be postponed indefinitely. As

Patricia Everett relates,

> Andrew Dasburg's first invitation to Mabel Dodge's salons came in 1913
> from John Reed, the radical writer for the leftist publication *The Masses*
> who was then living with Mabel Dodge. Dasburg met Reed…at the
> MacDowell Club in November 1913, and Reed suggested that Dasburg
> come one of the celebrated evenings. Around December of that year
> Dasburg arrived at 23 Fifth Avenue to find neither Dodge nor Reed. Mabel
> Dodge had left New York for Texas to join Reed before he travelled to
> Mexico to meet the revolutionary Pancho Villa.[83]

Dasburg, hoping to encounter a modernist comrade-at-arms with whom he had

much in common (travel in Europe, meeting Gertrude Stein, participating in the Armory

Show), was all but crushed. A short while later, Marsden Hartley, in a gossipy letter,

wrote to John Reed an eye-witness account of Andrew Dasburg's intense emotional

reaction:

> I could see D. was troubled & asked me secretly where M.D. was. I
> replied "in Texas"—D. was evidently wholly amazed inside—evidently
> disappointed with her absence—so much so that he threatened to go
> home. I insisted that he remain and stick the evening out which he

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[83] Patricia R. Everett, "Andrew Dasburg's 'Abstract Portraits': Homages to Mabel Dodge and Carl Van
Vechten," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 79.

consented to do—and did—but evidently it gave him one of those inner shocks.[84]

As the story goes, at the end of the evening Andrew Dasburg quit Dodge's apartments with his acquaintance Robert Edmond Jones. Knowing how disappointed Dasburg was to have missed being introduced to the salon hostess, Jones waggishly suggested that one of Dasburg's recent nonobjective color experiments in the synchromist style be retitled "The Absence of Mabel Dodge." They would then arrange to have it hung at 23 Fifth Avenue while the mistress of the house was still away. No doubt, at this juncture, Dasburg recalled his encounter with Gertrude Stein and her Picasso painting *The Architect's Table*; thus, to Jones's playful proposition, Dasburg quickly—and mischievously—agreed. Upon her return *chez elle* in January 1914, Mabel Dodge found a mysterious picture hanging in her house. Sadly, the painting is no longer extant, but Marsden Hartley described it thus:

> It is full of the lightning of disappointment. It is a pictured sensation of
> spiritual outrage—disappointment carried away beyond mediocre despair.
> It is a fiery lamentation of something lost in a moment—a moment of joy
> with the joy sucked out of it—leaving the flames of the sensation to
> consume themselves.[85]

In terms of the framework I have been elaborating in the preceding pages, Andrew Dasburg's action is significant for two reasons. First, by imitating Gertrude Stein and Pablo Picasso's lighthearted 1912 calling card exchange, Dasburg performed one of his most important early "appearances" on the American avant-garde scene. By "appearance" here, of course, I mean my second definition of the term: emergence and persistence of an individual within a particular locus. Inevitably, Dasburg's stunt drew

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[84] Marsden Hartley, undated, c. 1914, YCAL. Quoted in Everett, "Andrew Dasburg's 'Abstract Portraits,'" 79–80. The letter is also transcribed in Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Movers and Shakers* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), 250.

[85] Marsden Hartley to John Reed, undated letter. Quoted in Ibid.

attention to himself and to his work, a wise strategy for an up-and-coming artist competing for recognition on the Manhattan stage of modernism.

Second, in Mabel Dodge's view, Dasburg could not have better announced his growing infatuation with her. The artist's witty and timely gesture not only announced to the other members of American avant-garde his familiarity with Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso, and the concept of dis-appearance, but it also put him squarely on Dodge's romantic radar screen. The two soon became intimate, though the salonista eventually encouraged Dasburg to direct his *eros* and complicated emotions into further paintings. (Dasburg showed two additional works inspired by the socialite in the 1914 National Arts Club exhibition entitled *Contemporary Art*. Both are now lost, yet from descriptions they are presumed to be comparable to *Co-Ordinated Explosion: Portrait of Carl van Vechten*.[86]) Mabel Dodge remained unrepentant of her physical disappearance. In addition she became quite proud of the pictorial dis-appearance that it inspired and the unconventional romance that this picture signified. In her memoir, *Movers and Shakers*, she later would expound, "Andrew, who before this [incident] had painted rather sensitively realistic things, had suddenly burst open on canvas. … I hung the picture up on my wall and there it burned in front of everyone."[87]

The Utility of Dis-Appearance: On the Importance of Being Silent

Mabel Dodge's attitude towards her "likeness" by Andrew Dasburg is telling. In this picture the artist employed a non-objective style, that is, one that dissociated the created, pictorial fiction on the canvas from an easily "readable" transcription of the real

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[86] Everett makes a case, though a confused one, that one of Dasburg's Mabel Dodge paintings lies physically beneath the Van Vechten portrait. Before such a claim can be substantiated, however, I believe further examination, particularly by conservators, is warranted. See Everett, "Andrew Dasburg's 'Abstract Portraits,'" 84.

[87] Luhan, *Movers and Shakers*, 249 and 250.

world. An additional disconnection also took place within the space of the picture frame: the dis-appearance of the sitter. By calling a pre-painted image "The Absence of Mabel Dodge," Dasburg foregrounded the arbitrary link between signifier and signified in the portrait relationship. Dasburg's prank widened this conceptual path, empowering artists of the American avant-garde further to create portrait images in an as yet unintelligible language (unintelligible, at least, to most viewers), one that would permit visual artists to articulate things in public that could not otherwise be uttered. Though the backstory to Mabel Dodge's portrait might be fodder for the gossip mill, the salon hostess could still hang the canvas brazenly for all her guests to see exactly because its innovative composition style and its turn away from the portrait subject concealed otherwise latent meanings.

In his essay "The Silent Camp: Queer Resistance and the Rise of Pop Art," Jonathan D. Katz explicates several social performances of silence in the American avant-garde of the 1950s.[88] While Katz makes his argument specifically in regard to mid-century practitioners John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns, I think his theorization of silence pertains to the Stieglitz circle as well. Silence implies an absence of sound. Our usual understanding is that silence, because of its association with lack, inherently holds a negative value.[89] Silence, however, as Katz makes explicit, can have a positive valence; it can be culturally productive. The American avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s used silence in just such a fashion. They employed unfamiliar formal stylistic languages to instill silence in the beholder. And they used the silence of dis-appearance

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[88] "Jonathan Katz," n.d., http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/KatzPages/KatzCamp.html. (accessed November 9, 2009)
[89] In mathematical terms, silence, rather than being designated a zero [0], corresponds more closely to the empty set [ ].

within the portrait relationship to make daring (even contradictory or potentially scandalous) statements about the "sitter." Contemporary author—and Stieglitz circle favorite—Sherwood Anderson would capture the essence of this trend in his short story, entitled "Loneliness," about the New York City-based artist Enoch Robinson:

> When a picture he had painted was under discussion, he wanted to burst out with something like this: "You don't get the point," he wanted to explain; "the picture you see doesn't consist of the things you see and say words about. *There is something else, something you don't see at all, something you aren't intended to see*."[90]

As I hope to demonstrate, within the realm of early twentieth-century unconventional portraiture, productive silences opened up wide, psychological spaces for the visual artist, allowing the expression—in plastic form, at least—of thoughts, feelings, and attitudes that could not be otherwise enunciated.

Alfred Stieglitz, Francis Picabia, and Silence

The Franco-Cuban artist Francis Picabia advanced the American avant-garde's conversation around portraiture in the mechanomorphic line drawings he produced in New York in 1915. Though his hard edge style announced a break with such movements as synchromism and especially cubism, Picabia's chief weapon in this small series was silence. The artist had visited New York two years earlier to attend the Armory Show and Stieglitz was so charmed by the Frenchman and his art that the gallery director mounted a show of Picabia's most recent work at 291 from March 17–April 5, 1913. The photographer and the painter formed a strong bond such that, upon Picabia's departure for Europe, Alfred Stieglitz wrote to the modernist Arthur B. Carles that "All at '291'

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[90] Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 153. Emphasis mine.

will miss him. He and his wife were about the cleanest propositions I ever met in my whole career."[91]

By the time Picabia, on one of several trips back to Manhattan, returned in 1915, the state of affairs with Stieglitz was quite different—though the French artist intuited, and rightly so, that it was in his best interest to maintain a façade of affection for the older impresario. A few months earlier, in March, Agnes Meyer and Paul Haviland, along with Marius de Zayas, noted with disappointment that the mission of the Little Galleries of the Photo Secession seemed to be faltering. With Alfred Stieglitz's provisional blessing they founded the publication *291*, which aimed at rejuvenating the energy around aesthetic innovation in the United States. The trio's ideals would lead them, eventually, to found the Modern Gallery, an exhibition space based on the spirit of 291 but with one key difference: its aims were overtly commercial, an idea anathema to Stieglitz.

When Picabia arrived in New York in June, Meyer, Haviland, and De Zayas immediately enlisted him in their revitalization efforts. By this time *291* had been published three times and the tensions between Stieglitz and the more zealous faction must have been becoming more palpable. According to Pepe Karmel, the austere *portraits mécaniques* that Picabia produced on demand for the proto-dadaist periodical "inaugurate[d] the most original and productive phase of Picabia's career, extending

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[91] Alfred Stieglitz, n.d., YCAL, quoted by William Innes Homer, "Picabia's *Jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité* and Her Friends," *The Art Bulletin* 57, no. 1 (March 1975): 110.
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from 1915 until roughly 1920."[92] The silence these bold graphic works employed—and elicited—was deafening.

Picabia's most devastating—and most commented upon—machine portrait is his masterpiece, *Ici, C'est Ici Stieglitz*, 1915 (fig. 1.6), reproduced in the combined July–August issue of *291*. For a portrait that purportedly performs the "silent treatment" on its subject, the work is awfully "noisy." Text dots the page: the artist's byline; the word "IDEAL," in romantic Germanic script, at the top; and, in the printed version, "291." In the drawing Picabia demonstrates his thorough understanding of the most advanced nuances of modernist portraiture by creating the work in solitude (disappearance of the sitter), by imposing his unique artistic vision on the portrait subject (disappearance of likeness), and by transforming Stieglitz's corporeal presence into a hybrid camera-car automaton (disappearance of the body).

What a compliment to be depicted in the most sophisticated portrait style within the pages of a cutting-edge "little magazine"—talk about the assertion of appearance within the American avant-garde! The superficial benevolence in Picabia's image, however, belies a more sinister message. The main figure on the page combines an open and extended camera body in black with the gear box and parking brake of a motor vehicle in red. Period viewers would have easily understood the conflation of Stieglitz, an American photography pioneer, with a camera. The devil is in the details, though, as many art historians have noted.[93] Agnes Meyer, Paul Haviland, and Marius de Zayas had

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[92] Karmel, "Francis Picabia, 1915: The Sex of a New Machine," in Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America*, 217.

[93] Picabia's compelling portrait of Stieglitz is the object of much discussion in the secondary literature. See, for example, Karmel in Ibid., 216–217; Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 23–24; Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory*, 44–47; and Homer, "Picabia's *Jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité* and Her Friends," 111.

convinced Picabia that Stieglitz had lost his gumption in the fight for modern art, that the gallery director was, in effect, only "spinning his wheels," a fact visually represented in the image by the engaged brake and the clutch in neutral. The camera has its "head in the clouds," reaching for the Ideal; through its strained efforts, however, the bellows have been stretched to breaking point, in the end rendering the apparatus useless.

After his June 1915 arrival in New York Picabia found himself on the horns of a dilemma. Stieglitz had treated the French artist well in the past, yet Picabia understood from his newly formed allies that Stieglitz, politically speaking, had become passé. Competing allegiances vied for Picabia's attention. To express his complicated emotions about Stieglitz without completely breaking ties with the photographer, the French artist employed an innovative—and thus not yet widely understood—graphic style, to deflect any incisive decipherment. In addition, Picabia purposefully scrambled the signal between signifier and signified on the sheet, adding further distracting static to the equation. In this way Picabia created the visual equivalent of silence in *Ici C'est Ici Stieglitz*. That Picabia succeeded in obfuscating his true feelings about Stieglitz was underscored by cultural critic Paul Rosenfeld who saw the portrait as flattering: "Faith and love, love for art, faith in its divine power to reveal life, to spur action, to excite the creative impulse, those are the dominant characteristics of Alfred Stieglitz."[94]

An ironic coda to the story exists: it seems that Stieglitz was so flattered by the image (or at least none the wiser to Picabia's derisive intentions) that the drawing eventually became part of his extensive personal collection. (It now resides at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, as part of the photographer's bequest.) Though Picabia achieved a remarkable balancing act in his mechanomorphic portrait of Stieglitz,

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[94] Rosenfeld as quoted in Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 23.

in subsequent months the tensions between the photographer and the proprietors of the

Modern Gallery turned into a rift. "Although he returned [to New York again] for several

months in 1917," Pepe Karmel relates, "his close bond with Stieglitz was never

reestablished."[95]

Georgia O'Keeffe, Paul Strand, and Saying What Cannot Otherwise Be Said

Francis Picabia was not by any means the only artist of the American avant-garde

to realize the implications of dis-appearance in portraiture. Georgia O'Keeffe, at several

junctures in her oeuvre, employed this strategy with successful results. Though the

aesthetic ends that Picabia and O'Keeffe reached may visually vary, conceptually their

means were quite similar. Silence, over their unconventional portraits, reigns supreme.

In April 1917 Alfred Stieglitz mounted the first solo exhibition of Georgia

O'Keeffe, his most recent female artist protégée. The painter had finally met the gallerist

the year before at 291 and a voluminous correspondence developed over time between

the two of them. When O'Keeffe moved to Canyon, Texas, to take up a secondary school

teaching position in the autumn of 1916, Stieglitz continued his barrage of mail, even

dispatching issues of *Camera Work*. In December that year, O'Keeffe wrote to the

photographer about her perusal of the publication: "Gertrude Stein interests me—again I

wonder. I seem to get as definite a picture from her jumble of words as I ever get from

any kind…."[96] Perhaps Stein's word portraits—Stieglitz had published the writer's

textual "likenesses" of Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Marsden Hartley—appealed to

O'Keeffe because they confirmed an idea that she had been mulling over for some time,

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[95] Karmel, in Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America*, 217.
[96] Georgia O'Keeffe, n.d., Mss 85, Box 81, Folder 1665, YCAL.

one that she at last articulated to Stieglitz the following summer: "Some folks make me see shapes that I have to make—other folks don't…."[97]

After the school year ended in May 1917, O'Keeffe took her savings and bought a train ticket to New York City where she spent ten days. Though her monographic show had been taken down—Stieglitz was, sadly, preparing to close up 291 for good—the gallery director rehung the entire exhibition for the benefit of his surprise visitor. It was during this trip that O'Keeffe first developed amorous feelings for the modernist photographer Paul Strand (whom Stieglitz had encouraged in this regard), though at the time, unbeknown to both photographers, she was cultivating several romantic interests simultaneously, carefully weighing the pros and cons of each relationship in her mind.

Flushed with success O'Keeffe returned to the Texas plains. In early June she decided to put on paper what had been swirling around in her head since her trip back east. To help her make sense of her mixed-up feelings she turned to the concept of dis-appearance in portraiture. On June 5 she wrote to Stieglitz about a series of three nonobjective watercolor portraits of Paul Strand (figs. 2.10–2.12) that she had recently completed:

> [My] sister [Claudia] just came in—and what I had painted last night—standing in a row on my bed. 'Why they look just like people—real people—different ones—no—all the same—naked people.'
>
> It made me feel uncanny, sort of crawly way down to the end of my fingers—for they were people—and it seemed so real to her—I guess they are Strand—anyway—it's something I got from him—I wanted to paint longer—do it again and others—but it was too dark and it's queer—I rather enjoy having it still in my head yet—.[98]

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[97] O'Keeffe to Stieglitz, 22 June 1917, YCAL.
[98] O'Keeffe, n.d., 5 June 1917, YCAL.

In creating these sheets O'Keeffe was able to state "out loud" something she did not feel comfortable saying in public, both because her thoughts about a potential romantic relationship with Strand were as yet unformed and because to admit such feelings could have had potentially embarrassing implications. O'Keeffe's bodily reaction ("It made me feel uncanny….") when her sister Claudia recognized the images as portraits ("Why they look just like people") betrays the silence embedded in the drawings. Keeping such powerful representations "in [her own] head" was one solution. Expressive silence in the form of the stylistically innovative (and therefore initially puzzling) dis-appearance of the portrait subject, offered the artist another, much more satisfying, alternative. The same week that she created the images depicting Paul Strand, O'Keeffe also completed another series of anti-mimetic portraits watercolors, whose subject was Watson, an auto mechanic.[99]

These powerful expressions of silence through unconventional portraiture must have helped O'Keeffe work through her various infatuations; indeed, months later she would take up permanently with Stieglitz (eventually marrying him in December 1924). A year after both sets of watercolors were painted, however, the artist *still* had not gotten over Gertrude Stein. In another letter to Stieglitz, this one dated January 25, 1918, O'Keeffe expressed her admiration for the expatriate writer:

> Queer that the only thing I've read in the *Camera Work*s happened to be that story of C[a]ffin's and why I happened to read that particular one— except—Gertrude Stein. You know those things of hers read much better sense to me than supposed-to-be intelligent combination of words. They make ordinary prose seem so stupid.[100]

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[99] "Watson was a mechanic and friend of O'Keeffe, when she lived in Canyon, Texas, fall 1916 to late February 1918…." Barbara Buhler Lynes, *Georgia O'Keeffe, Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 113. Lynes identifies the title's source as the *Abiquiu Notebook*, an early catalogue raisonné that O'Keeffe maintained herself.
[100] O'Keeffe, n.d., 25 January 1918, YCAL.

Anti-mimetic portraits, such as *Portrait-Black*, 1918 (fig. 2.13) and *Lake George, Coat, and Red*, 1919 (fig. 2.14), would continue to dot O'Keeffe's early career. In them she combined her teacher Arthur Wesley Dow's mantra to "fill a space in a beautiful way" with Gertrude Stein's separation of the portrait "sitter" from descriptive likeness. Through them she demonstrated her grasp of the concept of dis-appearance within the portrait relationship and thereby expressed—perhaps counter-intuitively—a profound and beautiful silence.

Conclusion

Members of the modernist avant-garde, whether in the United States or Europe, whether visual artists or writers, continued in the 1910s to interrogate—and deconstruct—the academically-based conventions of the portrait relationship. Building on their understanding of appearance, they persisted in pushing boundaries of conventional portraiture, discovering the logical limits of dis-appearance along the way.

Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso pioneered the way in Europe. Through boldly experimental works like *Greta Moll* and *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, respectively, they articulated for posterity their groundbreaking visions for the new portrait. By demonstrating so masterfully the various aspects of disappearance—of the sitter, of likeness, and of the body altogether—they provided a foundation for other artists to build upon aesthetically.

The American avant-garde did not disappoint in this regard. Taking advantage of the intellectual space cleared by Picasso and Matisse, modernists working in the United States expertly explored the implications of dis-appearance within the portrait relationship. Acknowledging portraiture's customary function of making the absent

individual present while simultaneously capitalizing on European advances in the genre, artists like Francis Picabia and Georgia O'Keeffe utilized new formal languages to articulate ambivalent, even negative, feelings toward the portrait subject (and unbeknown to the sitter). In this way visual silence became a productive aesthetic strategy for saying what otherwise could not be said in the portrait relationship. The transformation of disappearance—and its concomitant silences—from the second to the third dimension is the focus of the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: OBJECTS

Katherine Dreier and her *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*

At this juncture it may be an understatement to assert that portraiture, a subset of images under the umbrella of the visual arts that has been so naturalized—and marginalized—as to seem banal to our twenty-first-century eyes, is actually quite a complicated proposition. Thus far I have demonstrated that a portrait is actually more than a single object, that it is in fact a series of relationships and performances held in tension around an image-nucleus. In addition, before the twentieth century, portraiture relied heavily on appearance—that is, the artist's ability to faithfully transcribe the sitter's physical features for a work of art. The resulting object also frequently figured in the performance of "appearance" that the maker acted out within the context of the local arts community. Soon after the turn of the century, European modernists—particularly Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso—problematized the portrait relationship and moved the axis of meaning within it from appearance to disappearance by deemphasizing the sitter, likeness, and the body. This shift, one of the most important outcomes of the modernist reconceptualization of the genre, allowed artists to articulate thoughts and feelings— sometimes ambivalent, even negative—about the "sitter" through the silence that resulted from portraiture's dis-appearance.

These latter hallmarks of modernism—dis-appearance and silence—manifested themselves in a forceful, nonobjective painting from 1918 by Katherine Dreier, *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* (fig. 3.1). Born into a family of German immigrants in Brooklyn, where she spent her early years, Dreier received private painting lessons as a

child and eventually attended the academically-based painting classes at the Pratt

Institute. As a young adult, her training, talent, and inquisitiveness prepared her to work

rapidly through the basic tenets of the late nineteenth-century styles of Aestheticism and

post-impressionism. Dreier's encounters with modern developments abroad, particularly

in Germany and France, also played an important role in educating her eye. A visit to the

Stein family collection in Paris, where she would have seen challenging works by Paul

Cézanne and Henri Matisse as well as Pablo Picasso's 1906 *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*,

left her overwhelmed and stunned, however.[101]

Nonetheless, Dreier continued to persist in her endeavors to comprehend the most

advanced developments in modern art. Her intellectual curiosity led to a complete

fixation on Vincent van Gogh's biography and technique—and to the purchase of one of

the Dutch artist's portraits. At the request of Armory Show organizer Arthur B. Davies,

Dreier lent the Van Gogh painting, as well as two of her own canvases, to the landmark

exhibition. Dreier's involvement in the event may have effected her introductions to

Andrew Dasburg and Mabel Dodge, with both of whom she shared social ties and

aesthetic connections to Gertrude Stein. The Armory Show, and the New York art critics'

subsequent focus on Marcel Duchamp and his notorious *Nude Descending a Staircase*,

must have planted several seeds in Dreier's mind, but ones that would take more than

three years to sprout and grow. At the invitation of John Covert, a painter himself and a

cousin of the important modern art collector Walter Arensberg, Dreier became a member

of the Society of Independent Artists in late 1916.[102] During the group's meetings Dreier

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[101] Francis M. Naumann, *New York Dada, 1915–23* (New York: Abrams, 1994), 156.

[102] For more about the intriguing artist John Covert, see Michael Klein, *John Covert, 1882–1960* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976) and Leo G. Mazow, *John Covert Rediscovered* (University Park, PA: Palmer Museum of Art, Pennsylvania State University, 2003).

undoubtedly had more personal contact and longer interactions with Marcel Duchamp, who had also joined, and served on the Board of Directors with Dreier. He would soon become the new focus of Dreier's obsessive attention.

Two years after joining the Society of Independent Artists, Katherine Dreier completed her *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*. This oil on canvas measures 18 x 32 inches.[103] Upon first glance, two salient features of the image command the viewer's attention: colors high in saturation across the surface and the fracture of the picture plane into layered geometric shapes. In the center, a gold disk hovers ambiguously between foreground and background. From left to right, three polygons—a gray isosceles triangle, a beige acute triangle, and a (truncated) brown right triangle—skim across the surface. The visual thrust of the image's many lines and forms created an animated, almost vertiginous, composition.

Dreier's fascination with the French artist must have been intense in 1918. That same year she also completed *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp (Triangles)*, a more traditional, academically-based portrait of the artist (the order of execution of the two works in question remains unknown). Unfortunately, this second work is no longer extant, though we know of its previous existence through a preparatory pencil sketch (fig. 3.2), presumably made from life, and a photograph of the completed canvas (fig. 3.3). The pair of paintings, a sort of yin/yang of portrayal, express complementary—even competing—aspects of the sitter: calm and cerebral, on the one hand (*Triangles*); intense

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[103] The object is a horizontally-oriented rectangle whose dimensions approximate, but do not match, the proportions of the golden ratio. A canvas true to this size scheme would measure 18 x 29 inches. "*La section d'or*," much utilized in the Renaissance, received renewed attention from artists in the early twentieth century. Though the secondary literature frequently notes that Dreier held Theosophist beliefs (and thus would have been attracted to the golden mean especially in regards to Duchamp, whom she believed to have special spiritual insight), the measurements of the canvas in question seem to be arbitrary, rather than meaningful.

and passionate, on the other (*Abstract*). Though Anne Goodyear follows Francis Naumann's suggestion in perceiving the remnants of recognizable forms—a pipe, the letter "D"—in *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, I disagree with this aspect of their interpretations, preferring instead to see "pure painting" only.[104]

While Dreier's education and class status permitted her to travel, her family background, language abilities, and nationalist leanings predisposed her to voyage specifically to Germany (for example, she travelled to Cologne in 1912). Like Marsden Hartley (who ended up hating French art), Dreier made early contact with the German avant-garde and championed their methods, even before Wassily Kandinsky's Blaue Reiter *The Garden of Love (Improvisation Number 27)*, 1912 (fig. 3.4), hung in the Armory Show. In addition, Kandinsky and Dreier were both adherents to the religious beliefs of Theosophy, another fact that probably influenced Dreier's wholesale adoption of the Eastern European artist's aesthetic philosophy. The following statement about her *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, printed in 1923 in a publication entitled *Western Art and the New Era*, makes it clear that Dreier had (figuratively) taken a page directly from Kandinsky's own book, in applying his aesthetic principles to portraiture:

> Instead of painting the sitter as seen ordinarily in life, the modern artist tries to express the character as represented through abstract form and color…. [T]hrough the balances of curves, angles, and squares, through broken or straight lines, or harmoniously flowing ones, through color harmony or discord, through vibrant or subdued tones, cold or warm, *there arises a representation of the character which suggests clearly the person in question*, and brings more pleasure to those who understand, than would an ordinary portrait representing only the figure and face. …

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[104] See Anne Collins Goodyear, "*Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*" (catalogue no. 10) in Anne Collins Goodyear and James W. McManus, eds., *Inventing Marcel Duchamp: The Dynamics of Portraiture* (Washington, DC: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2009), 140–141, and Francis Naumann, "The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost: Depictions of Marcel Duchamp by His Contemporaries and Ours," in Ibid., 25–26.

The new form…gives chance for the different sides of a character, as well as a greater range of emotion to be portrayed."[105]

Furthermore, as Francis Naumann has noted, Kandinsky, in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, places great theosophical weight on the form of the triangle and its connection to mystical enlightenment.[106] This fact may suggest the reason for Dreier's utilization of the three-sided polygon repeatedly in her nonobjective likeness of Duchamp—and why she employed the term "triangles" in the more realistic portrayal of the French artist. Given the riches of theosophical beliefs, Kandinsky's text, and Dreier's understanding of both, no literal references to the material world—identifying or otherwise—are necessary in her *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*.

Regardless of interpretation, however, this "odd couple" of portraits of the same subject by the same painter certainly demonstrates Dreier's facility with differing stylistic approaches to portraiture: the transcriptive nature of *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp (Triangles)* betrays the artist's academic training while the nonobjective character of *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* manifests Dreier's exposure to avant-garde ideas. In many ways the two complementary works exemplify the push-pull of appearance and dis-appearance in portraiture.[107] *Triangles* relies on physical characteristics (auburn hair, jawline) and other identifying signifiers (pipe, stool) to "illustrate" the sitter for the

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[105] Emphasis mine. Katherine Sophie Dreier, *Western Art and the New Era; an Introduction to Modern Art* (New York: Brentano's, 1923), 112. Dreier, who was a committed Germanophile and fluent in the language, could have read the original text in German when it first came out in late 1911. Alfred Stieglitz subsequently published excerpts in English in the July 1912 issue of *Camera Work*. A second version of the essay appeared in a full English translation in 1914.

[106] Naumann, *New York Dada, 1915–23*, 157–158.

[107] "[I]t is my belief, that in time both forms [i.e., mimetic and anti-mimetic] of portraiture will be sought, to render a more complete representation than was possible when only the one means of expression was in existence." Dreier, *Western Art and the New Era; an Introduction to Modern Art*, 112. It is possible that Dreier originally conceived of *Abstract Portrait* and *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp (Triangles)* as an exercise to capitalize upon this theoretical point. By 1927 when Brentano's published *Western Art*, however, *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* appeared on page 110 and the facing page (111) reproduced a transcriptive silverpoint profile of Duchamp by modernist Joseph Stella.

viewer. The presence of shadows on the back wall, cast by strong light, confirms the appearance of the subject before the beholder (or at least the artist). Dis-appearance, on the other hand, reveals itself in Dreier's *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*. While *Triangles* was painted "from life," Dreier was under no obligation to follow this rubric of academic painting for her nonobjective portrayal of Duchamp. Most probably created in the absence of the portrait subject, Dreier's work also eschews reliance on physiognomic likeness, attempting instead to image the sitter's inner being. The body depicted in *Triangles* has completely disappeared in the nonobjective portrait. Through the utilization of such advanced portrayal strategies, Dreier displayed her thorough understanding not only of appearance, but of dis-appearance too.

These two images were more than just artistic exercises; I believe they were intended as tools to break through to the French artist's consciousness, to make Katherine Dreier appear within the imaginary of Marcel Duchamp. *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* and *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp (Triangles)* served as Dreier's responses to the clarion call of Duchamp's *Fountain*. Though solid demonstrations of the comprehension of avant-garde portrait practices, Dreier's performances were, ultimately, insufficient: Duchamp already had rewritten the rules of the game a year earlier. A *résumé* of the French artist's own earth shaking performance follows.

Marcel Duchamp and *Fountain*

When in the autumn of 1916 Katherine Dreier and Marcel Duchamp enrolled as members of the newly formed Society of Independent Artists (a non-profit, anti-academy arts organization based on a similar French model), one of the fledgling association's first matters of business was to plan, organize, and implement a non-juried exhibition, open to

all comers who paid the modest five-dollar entrance fee. The project's managers

scheduled the show to open in early April of 1917. As active members of the Board of

Directors, Dreier volunteered to manage the event's refreshment room, while Duchamp

agreed to decorate this space and also to serve as chair of the exhibition's hanging

committee.

Duchamp, perhaps unbeknown to many if not all of the Society's board members,

harbored a psychological wound. Only a few years earlier—1912—in France he had

submitted his recently completed canvas *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* to the

Salon des Indépendents, only to have the jury request alterations to the picture (because

its cubism wasn't "pure" enough).[108] Disappointed and hurt, perhaps even more so

because of the role of his two older brothers in the fiasco, Marcel Duchamp refused the

proposed changes, withdrew the painting from the exhibition, and renounced his

membership in the organization. In Duchamp's mind then, based on his past experience

with an "independent" artist's organization in Paris, the potential for a similar debacle

existed again, this time in the United States. In order to assess the American group's

sincerity in its claims to display any work submitted with proper payment of the requisite

entrance charge, Duchamp hatched a nefarious plot—and, I will argue, it involved a

urinal *as portrait object*.

The conditions, including date and location, under which Marcel Duchamp

purchased the porcelain bathroom fixture that he would designate *Fountain*, 1917 (fig.

3.5), remain clouded in mystery to this day.[109] Later in life Duchamp recounted to Arturo

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[108] James W. McManus, "Not Seen and/or Less Seen: Hiding in Front of the Camera," in Goodyear and McManus, *Inventing Marcel Duchamp*, 65.

[109] William Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain* (Houston, TX: Houston Fine Art Press, 1989), remains the definitive art historical analysis of the French artist's best known readymade. Other helpful treatments

Schwarz that the scheme had been hatched in conversation with his fellow artist Joseph

Stella and his patron Walter Arensberg, whereupon the three of them went out

immediately to procure the soon-to-be readymade; photographic evidence, however,

suggests the possibility that Duchamp had already acquired the article and experimented

with its disjunctive intentions by displaying it in an elevated, off-kilter position on one of

his apartment's doorjambs (fig. 3.6). Regardless of the circumstances of *Fountain*'s

origins, though, its tangible appearance before the Independent's exhibition jury members

would have great consequence, for the show, for Duchamp's career, and for the history of

Western visual art.

The temporal element of surprise worked—perhaps to the artist's chagrin—

together with the unexpected nature of the submission to disqualify the object from

display. The exhibition preview was to take place on April 9, 1917, with the general

opening the following day. According to the version recounted by Beatrice Wood—

Society member, exhibition preparator, and intimate of Duchamp—in her later

autobiography, two days before the show was to open and during actual installation, the

matter came to a head.[110]

The submission polarized the jury members in attendance into two factions:

conservatives and progressives, with George Bellows and Walter Arensberg leading each

bloc, respectively. The justification for excluding the readymade from the exhibition was

twofold: that the object was appropriated (i.e., not original art) and that the urinal was

include Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 42–89; Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Ghent: Ludion Press, 1999), 72–75; Pepe Karmel, "Marcel Duchamp, 1917: The Not So Innocent Eye," in Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America*, 220–227; and Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 221–247. There is even some speculation that Duchamp did not purchase nor submit the fixture himself; see Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, 29–30.
[110] William Camfield quotes Wood's account at length in Ibid., 25.

indecent (i.e., not fit for general consumption). Although the entire Board of Directors

was not in attendance for the vote and although it was pointed out that artist "R. Mutt"

had fulfilled the nominal condition of submitting a work with the required five dollars, a

majority decision ruled to block *Fountain*'s inclusion in the exhibition. For a nascent

organization concerned about its image, the final decision, perhaps, is understandable.

Needless to say, Duchamp immediately resigned from the organization and rescinded his

offer to assist with the show and its official programming. The offending work—which

would prove to be the exhibition's invisible *succès de scandale*—remained off view and

unknown by the public until an image of it appeared in the second (and final) issue of *The

Blindman* in May 1917.

A day after the show finally opened to the general public, Duchamp wrote a

cursory letter to Dreier, explaining his adamant refusal to participate in any of the

activities associated with the exhibition. Dreier pulled out all the stops when she

responded, loquaciously but persuasively, to the French artist on April 13:

> Rumors of your resignation had reached me prior to your letter of
> April eleventh. As a Director of the Society of Independent Artists, I must
> use my influence to see whether you cannot reconsider your
> resignation…. As I was saying to Arensberg, I felt it was of much more
> vital importance to have you connected with our Society than to have the
> piece of plumbing[,] which was surreptitiously stolen, remain. When I
> voted "No," I voted on the question of originality—I did not see anything
> pertaining to originality in it; that does not mean that if my attention had
> been drawn to what was original by those who could see it, that I could
> not also have seen it. To me, no other question came up; it was simply a
> question of whether a person has a right to buy a readymade object and
> show it with their name attached at an exhibition? Arensberg tells me that
> that was in accord with you [sic] "Readymades," and I told him that was a
> new thought to me as the only "readymades" I saw were groups which
> were extremely original in their handling. I did not know that you had
> conceived of single objects.
> I felt that it was most unfortunate that a meeting was not called
> and the matter discussed and passed upon by the Board of Directors; but I

> do feel that you have sufficient supporters with you to make it a very
> decided question whether it is right for you to withdraw. I hope, therefore,
> that you will seriously reconsider it, so that at our next Directors' meeting
> I may have the right to bring forth the refusal of the acceptance of your
> resignation.[111]

Though in her correspondence Katherine Dreier may have put on a brave face as a

performance for the benefit of Marcel Duchamp, when we compare the length and tone

of the French artist's missive to that of the American's, it becomes more and more

evident that something else is going on.

Fountain as Portrait: Part One

What does a porcelain urinal, tipped on its side and signed and dated, and

seemingly selected with complete "aesthetic indifference," have anything to do with

portraiture? The answer may at first not be apparent. Only when we realize that in

Fountain Marcel Duchamp employed the strategies of appearance and disappearance to

create a portrait object without a referential sitter does the matter—as well as another

reason for the exhibition jury's initial bafflement—become clear.

In terms of appearance, the readymade shares several formal characteristics with

human images, a fact that readily struck some of the object's period viewers. Indeed,

soon after the urinal's banishment from public scrutiny, music critic and novelist Carl

Van Vechten wrote about the object's anthropomorphic qualities in a letter to his friend

Gertrude Stein:

> This porcelain tribute was bought cold in some plumber shop (where it
> awaited the call to join some bath room trinity) and sent in…. When it was
> rejected Marcel Duchamp at once resigned from the board. Stieglitz is
> exhibiting the object at "291" and he has made some wonderful

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[111] This excerpt from the letter is quoted in Ibid., 30–31.

photographs of it. The photographs make it look like anything from a Madonna to a Buddha.[112]

Recent art historians have built without qualm upon these period observations: in the urinal Wanda Corn sees both a "sexualized body" and a "meditative, hooded figure"; Barbara Zabel unquestioningly designates the readymade a portrait.[113] National Portrait Gallery curator Anne Goodyear has also perspicaciously noted the readymade's understated double entendre on the expression "head," a word, in terms of portraiture, closely linked to the Western conception of physical appearance.[114]

Dis-appearance, however, overwhelmingly plays the lead role in the object's creation and reception. In a breathtaking move that seemingly defies logic (and, thus, one that is very Duchampian), the artist in *Fountain* created a highly paradoxical instantiation of the disappearance of the sitter by making a portrait object that has no sitter-as-referent. Indeed, another implicit Duchampian play on words reinforces the status of *Fountain* as a portrait object: Unlike toilet commodes, urinals have been designed exclusively for men to stand in order to eliminate. This fact means that, in effect, *Fountain* references "no sitter." What *Fountain* manifests implicitly through form alone, however, the Francis Picabia drawing *Fille née sans mère* (fig. 3.7), created for the June 1915 issue of the periodical *291*, makes explicit through its title: the possibility of portrait image making without the benefit of genealogical forebear, whether biological or visual. The fact that no sitter exists, and thus no policing of transcriptive accuracy, freed Duchamp to

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[112] Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, 1913–1946*, ed. Edward Burns (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 58–59. See also Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, 34–35. The reference to a Buddha would not have been lost on Stein, whose 1906 portrait by Picasso viewers have often compared to images of the Enlightened One.
[113] Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 76, and Barbara Beth Zabel, *Assembling Art: The Machine and the American Avant-Garde* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 101–102.
[114] Anne Collins Goodyear, "Constructing a 'Made-Up History': Self-Portrayal and the Legacy of Marcel Duchamp," in Goodyear and McManus, *Inventing Marcel Duchamp*, 85.

embrace the disappearance of likeness, even to the extent that he could create this unconventional portrait with complete "aesthetic indifference."[115] Furthermore, as an object *Fountain* absolutely exudes silence—frequently an indicator of dis-appearance— and this inherent negative power led to the further silence of censorship. Duchamp may have intuitively employed the stratagem of silence to keep his plans secret when he pseudonymously submitted the urinal for consideration, but this maneuver and its effects reveal the artist's profound understanding of the most advanced modernist portrait strategies.

Though I do not mean to establish a direct conceptual link between the two artists and their works, in terms of the disappearance of the body, Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* shares a theoretical approach with Marsden Hartley's *Portrait of a German Officer*. In his oil on canvas Hartley used a collage-like conglomeration of symbolic objects to evoke the presence of the absent portrait subject, Karl von Freyburg. Similarly, Marcel Duchamp suggested the presence of a non-existent sitter through a singular, solitary object: an ordinary urinal. The main difference between the two works is that Hartley's objects are painted—"merely" images—while Duchamp's *Fountain* resides in the real world as an actual material thing. This development—the performative turn to the three-dimensional—was Marcel Duchamp's major contribution to the discourse surrounding modernist portraiture. The artists of the Stieglitz circle, as well as other members of the American avant-garde, took note and Duchamp's controversial, groundbreaking

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[115] Given the suppression of the sitter within a normative portrait relationship and the extension of dis-appearance to its breaking point, it should not surprise us that in *Fountain* Duchamp disables the "presentation" function of the title as well (see Chapter One, note 30). Dadaists (and later the surrealists) frequently employed this disjunctive strategy to disorient the viewer and/or to foster non-logical thinking. In other words, the divorce of the portrait subject from a faithful, mimetic transcription paved the way for artists to split titles away from their usual descriptive function as well. Other readymades by Duchamp with anomalous, non-explanatory monikers include *Pharmacy*, 1914 (a printed reproduction of a painting of trees and flowers, with additions by Duchamp) and *Pulled at Four Pins*, 1915 (a metal chimney ventilator).

gesture—yet another disruption in the traditional portrait relationship—would bear fruit almost immediately afterwards.

Katherine Dreier's (Double) Failed Apology in Paint

There is no doubt that Marcel Duchamp's submission of *Fountain* to the April 1917 Society of Independent Artists exhibition caused more than a hiccup in the hanging of the show and its ancillary activities. Though the French artist had been designating objects as readymades for a few years prior to 1917, Duchamp's action dramatically brought the readymade as an aesthetic strategy to the immediate attention of the American art world. This audacious, calculated act had ramifications for the New York art scene and beyond. Its ripple effect also impacted the personal relationship between Duchamp and Katherine Dreier.

From her letter to Duchamp after the *Fountain* fiasco—"When I voted 'No,' I voted on the question of originality"—we know that Dreier found herself in the majority of board members who elected to bar the readymade from the Independents exhibition. In her missive, Dreier attempts more than to convince Duchamp to rejoin the organization, more than to explain his puzzling work to her. Behind her conciliatory words and plaintive tone there is also the anxiety of loss: fear of losing her interpersonal connection to Duchamp and the devastating loss of cultural capital that this would mean.

Seen in this context—the debacle of *Fountain* and Dreier's written appeal to Duchamp—the American artist's portraits of the French artist, particularly her *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, take on new significance. Both were completed in 1918, that is, in the months after the exhibition controversy.[116] Through the initiation of a

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[116] I am grateful to Anne Goodyear for reminding me that in 1918 Dreier commissioned—and Duchamp completed—the painting *Tu m'*, a transaction fraught with heavy personal investments on each side.

portrait relationship, Dreier intended to mend the social links that had begun to dissolve after her participation in the vote that banned *Fountain* from public view. That Dreier felt doubly anxious about the situation is manifested—literally—in the fact that she produced two painted "likenesses" of the French artist.

In a performance worthy of the seventeenth-century Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens, Katherine Dreier employed portraiture for diplomatic ends. In terms of appearance, circumstantial evidence around the painting *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp (Triangles)* suggests the image—or at least the preparatory drawing—was painted "from life." The flattery of being asked to have his portrait taken provided Dreier an entrée to initiate reconciliation with Duchamp. In addition, painting "from life," as a baseline, means that the sitter and the artist must interact, at least on a minimal level. Undoubtedly Dreier took advantage of the situation to stroke the French artist's ego, to hear his side of the story, to have him explain his single-object readymades to her. The end result in *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp (Triangles)* demonstrated Dreier's facility and understanding of physical appearance in portraiture (i.e., the artist transcribed a faithful physiognomic likeness on canvas); her sagacious decision to paint Duchamp "from life" facilitated a reconciliation, which in turn successfully reestablished her own appearance within Duchamp's imaginary. Noting Dreier's competent yet retardataire academic style in the work, Duchamp seized the moment to stretch the painter's thinking. As a comment on the origins of portraiture and as a marker of his own artistic investigations at the time, on the right back wall in Dreier's image he traced his own silhouette within a painted frame and signed his name below.[117]

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[117] On the painting's creation, see Francis Naumann, "The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost: Depictions of Marcel Duchamp by His Contemporaries and Ours," in Goodyear and McManus, *Inventing Marcel*

Duchamp's intervention within the fictive space of Dreier's painting brings us to dis-appearance, as the shadow is an archetypal manifestation of this concept. Although through the process of painting Duchamp's portrait "from life" Dreier had been able to subtly manipulate the French artist towards her desired outcome of resolution and understanding, she must have recognized (especially after Duchamp's addition to her canvas) that portraiture had moved beyond its academic-style basis in appearance. Her 1917 letter to Duchamp confirms her openness to new ways of thinking: "if my attention had been drawn to what was original by those who could see it,…I could…also have seen it." A mimetic likeness of the man who had singlehandedly changed the course of history by designating a found object as a work of art would not do; it seemed already outmoded as soon as it was completed. To retain Marcel Duchamp's attention and to demonstrate her forward thinking, Katherine Dreier realized she needed something more: dis-appearance. The *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, I hypothesize, was the result. In it, Dreier established her comprehension of the avant-garde's innovative precepts of portraiture. Through it, she displayed to her subject that she was no longer the ignorant socialite who voted to dismiss *Fountain* out of hand.

The painting remains a valiant—if a bit awkward—attempt to express the dis-appearance of Marcel Duchamp. The circumstances of the work's creation are unknown, but given the nonobjective nature of the image, "life studies" were certainly not necessary. Dreier most likely painted the shapes and colors that comprise the portrait without the corporeal presence of the French artist in front of her; thus she enacted the

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Duchamp, 25. Duchamp frequently used shadows, including his own silhouette, throughout his career. Here the shadow probably refers as much to the French artist and his working process as it does to the origins of philosophy (Plato's cave) and the origins of painting (the Corinthian maid). Duchamp's "last painting," *Tu m'*, 1918, also relies heavily on themes of shadows and self-inscription; I am indebted to Anne Goodyear for prompting me to consider the formal and conceptual connections to *Tu m'*.

disappearance of the sitter. The probable physical absence of Duchamp—whose assertive

nature had already intervened on the surface of *Triangles*—worked in Dreier's favor for

the disappearance of likeness. Without the French artist's enforcement of transcriptive

mimesis, Dreier was free to assert her own vision on the canvas. Taking cues from the

schools of synchromism and especially Der Blaue Reiter in her abstract portrait of

Duchamp, Dreier attenuated the body (until it disappeared) in favor of depicting

intangible personality traits. The dynamic composition successfully expressed her

personal visualization of Marcel Duchamp "as represented through abstract form and

color."[118]

Duchamp's response to these two portrayals by Dreier remains unknown. That

the American artist achieved her goal to convince Duchamp of her sincere regard for the

avant-garde and her perceptible comprehension of its tenets is a matter of record: among

their many collaborations together, in 1920 Katherine Dreier and Marcel Duchamp

(along with Man Ray) founded the Sociéte Anonyme, which would become an important

institutional champion of modern art in the United States.[119] Her painted portraits of

Duchamp, however, might be considered too little, too late: although *Portrait of Marcel

Duchamp (Triangles)* and *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* function as competent

exemplars of appearance and dis-appearance in portraiture, the French artist had thrown

down the gauntlet with *Fountain*, announcing the arrival of the portrait object. While

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[118] According to Francis Naumann, "Dreier was the first to reproduce this portrait and the first to explain how its abstract components convey the subject…." See Naumann, "The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost: Depictions of Marcel Duchamp by His Contemporaries and Ours," in Ibid., 26.

[119] For more on Katherine Dreier and the Sociéte Anonyme, see Ruth L. Bohan, "The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition, 1926–1927: Katherine Sophie Dreier and the Promotion of Modern Art in America" (PhD thesis, College Park: University of Maryland, 1980); Yale University, *The Société Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest at Yale University: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); and Jennifer R. Gross et al., *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America*, 1st ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

Dreier continued on occasion to experiment with unconventional portraiture, her preoccupation with the Société Anonyme's programming prevented her from attaining the same "advanced" artistic status—and renown—as Duchamp. The pair, however, remained friends and colleagues—despite the "failure" of Katherine Dreier's two painted portraits of Duchamp—for the rest of their lives.

Performing the Turn toward the Object

With the bursting of *Fountain* onto the scene, Marcel Duchamp uncategorically announced the new trend in portraiture: the turn toward the object. (This fact explains why Katherine Dreier's nonobjective "likeness" of the French artist was already passé before she even completed it.) Duchamp's unique contribution to the American avant-garde's conversation around what constituted a portrait lay in his combination of dis-appearance (and its accompanying silence) with the stylistic tendency towards the third dimension. Within the context of the 1910s, Duchamp's creation of *Fountain* crystallized many hotly contested aesthetic concerns in one masterful performance. For many, many years prior, portraits and objects had already enjoyed a long and intimate history together, however, and the elevation in status of the object within the visual arts of the twentieth century had begun to crest. In his inscrutable portrait object *Fountain*, Duchamp astutely capitalized on both long-term and more recent trends.

For centuries artists have created portraits of sitters who hold, or are otherwise visually linked to, objects. The idea here is that objects help illuminate the character of the subject to the viewer through mental association. In Charles Willson Peale's double portrait of the Lamings, for example, the husband in the picture hold a telescope while the wife holds fruit in her lap. Not only does the image of the telescope depict a prized

possession of Mr. Laming, it suggests his power (especially visual power) over others, for example. The produce cradled by Mrs. Laming signifies a certain material prosperity, while at the same time alluding to her nurturing skills. Likewise, the sitter in Hans Memling's *Portrait of a Man with an Arrow* grasps the eponymous projectile in his fingers. The object denotes the subject's expertise in wielding a bow and alerts the viewer to his status as chief of the archery guild.

With the internalized understanding of attributes, over time it became conceptually possible, due to the associative nature of objects, to portray someone symbolically, that is, strictly through material possessions or other non-human signifiers in the absence of the sitter (a forerunner to dis-appearance, to be sure). This phenomenon reached an early apex in the seventeenth century, the golden age of still life painting, in works like *Trompe l'Oeil Letter Rack*, 1666/1678 (fig. 3.8). According to Celeste Brusati, this illusion's creator, Samuel van Hoogstraten,

> effected [a] curious identification with his art…by replacing his likeness with an array of self-referential objects. In the *Trompe l'oeil Letter Rack*, these include a gold imperial medallion and chain that he received at court, a letter sealed with his initials, a document sealed with his family coat of arms, a play that he wrote and published, plus writing implements, combs, and brushes.[120]

The historical seeds of such notional portraits found fertile ground in the imagination of American artists such as Samuel Lewis and William Harnett, who at either end of the nineteenth century created ingenious rack paintings, such as *A Deception*, c. 1805–1809 (fig. 3.9), and *The Artist's Letter Rack*, 1879 (fig. 3.10), respectively. These images

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[120] Celeste Brusati, "Honorable Deceptions and Dubious Distinctions: Self-Imagery in Trompe-l'Oeil," in Olaf Koester et al., *Illusions: Gijsbrechts, Royal Master of Deception* (Copenhagen: Statens Museum for Kunst, 1999), 52.

reveal as much about their creators as about the objects depicted.[121] In *Still Life with Orange and Book*, 1815 (fig. 3.11), Raphaelle Peale added an additional layer of intellectual complexity to this trope through compositional emphasis on the exotic fruit's unfurling peel, thus visually and verbally punning on his own last name—and, by extension, his signature.

In the early twentieth century, the pioneers of cubism, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, followed Paul Cézanne in turning to the bottom of the hierarchy of genres in the visual arts—that is, landscape and still life—in their investigations into the essential building blocks of painting. Still life in particular offered the benefits of things close at hand that remained in place after the artist arranged them. Because of their non-sentient status, objects as the subjects of pictures in experimental styles seemed a natural choice for artists; unlike human sitters anxious for a flattering likeness, objects took the exaggeration of their respective painted images lying down. Picasso and Braque took advantage of this power differential through an extended series of visual exercises wherein they questioned the conventions of painting that had reigned supreme since the Renaissance and that academic art schools had promulgated for centuries. The ascent of still life's star heralded a new attentiveness to physical reality, to the material object. In stunning works like *Still Life with Calling Card*, the cubists eventually reunited the still life with the portrait tradition to create new, modernist versions of the object portrait in two dimensions.

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[121] For more about late nineteenth-century trompe l'oeil still lifes in the United States and their relationship to portraiture, see Johanna Drucker, "Harnett, Haberle, and Peto: Visuality and Artifice among the Proto-Modern Americans," *The Art Bulletin* 74, no. 1 (March 1992): 37–50. Robin Jaffee Franck cites Philadelphian rack paintings as a probable source for Charles Demuth's "poster portraits"; see Frank, *Charles Demuth: Poster Portraits, 1923–1929* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1994), 9–10. For a fascinating treatment of Samuel Lewis's *A Deception*, see William H. Gerdts, "A Deception Unmasked; An Artist Uncovered," *American Art Journal* 18, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 5–23.

These developments were not lost on the American expatriate writer Gertrude Stein, one of the absent subjects of *Still Life with Calling Card* (fig. 0.1). As an early supporter of Picasso, even before his cubist phases, she watched—and abetted—the development of modern art in Paris. Her own disjunctive writing style would come to be called, by some, "cubist." Indeed, Mabel Dodge later effused about the poet's experiments that "Gertrude Stein is doing with words what Picasso is doing with paint."[122] It should not surprise us then that one of Stein's major projects in the 1910s— that is, simultaneous to the rise of the object—included an extended investigation into still life in her book *Tender Buttons*.

The Industrial Revolution of the second half of the nineteenth century produced, by the turn of the twentieth century, an unprecedented number and variety of consumable goods available for purchase by the rising middle class. Artists, particularly ones who wanted to perform their modernity, happily included these new commodities in their imagery, inundated, as they were, with choices (other than the traditional fruit and flowers) of things that were "close at hand." Pablo Picasso's *Still Life with Calling Card* (fig. 0.1) with its centrally placed packet of twenty pre-rolled cigarettes, is just one salient example of the stylistic turn towards (new) tabletop items. Indeed, the cubists— particularly Picasso and Braque—were highly influential in calling attention to modern quotidian objects, such as newspapers, commercially printed wallpaper, and machine-made musical instruments. Their efforts only accelerated the interest of other artists—on both sides of the Atlantic—to incorporate the "new object" into their work.

Painters in the United States, the capitalist country par excellence in terms of commodity culture, readily participated in this tendency. With one eye on the cubists and

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[122] Mabel Dodge, "Speculations, or Post-Impressionism in Prose," *Arts & Decoration*, March 1913, 172.

one eye on America's distinctive conspicuous consumption, Stuart Davis is just one American artist who, after a producing a consistent body of work that previously focused heavily on the figure and landscape, made the stylistic turn towards the object in the 1920s. In tightly focused works like *Edison Mazda*, 1924 (fig. 3.12), and *Odol*, 1924 (fig. 3.13), he brought up-to-date concerns like electrification and advertising (respectively) to the rejuvenated genre of still life. Some art historians have even called these images of solitary objects "portraits."[123]

Likewise, in France, the *transatlantique* artist Gerald Murphy continued this trend in a very small but accomplished oeuvre of hard-edged renderings of high-end personal effects, such as *Watch* (fig. 3.14), 1925. Murphy, the second son of the man who had purchased the Mark Cross luxury goods company and then fashioned it into an extremely profitable enterprise, depicted items even closer than "at hand" (if that is possible). For example, the fountain pen in *Razor*, 1924 (fig. 3.15), holds profound personal significance, as it was a product developed and marketed by the family business.[124] Such a strategy signals Murphy's Jazz Age updating of the presence/absence motif in portraiture. Indeed, because of Murphy's intricate associations with the trio of articles depicted and because of the image's deafening silence, scholars have interpreted the painting as a self-portrait.[125] Construed in this manner, the apparent lack of sitter, likeness, and body, announces emphatically the picture's status as a masterpiece of modernist dis-appearance.

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[123] See Karen Wilkin, "Stuart Davis in His Own Time," *The New Criterion* 6, no. 5 (January 1988): 53 and Lowery Stokes Sims, "Egg Beater, 1923" and "The Saw, 1923" (entry for both catalogue nos. 50 and 51) in Sims et al., *Stuart Davis: American Painter* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), 167–168.

[124] Deborah Rothschild, "Masters of the Art of Living," in Rothschild, ed., *Making It New: The Art and Style of Sara and Gerald Murphy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 61.

[125] In this regard Deborah Rothschild makes particular use of a brilliant interpretation of the painting by art historian Christopher Swan. See Ibid., 61 and 83, note 131.

Fountain's Significance as "Portrait Object"

It is important to note here how far Americans lagged behind their Continental counterparts in depicting modern consumer goods in a highly developed modernist painting style. Though Europeans like Juan Gris and Fernand Leger kept the post-cubist still life agenda moving forward in the late 1910s, it would take non-academic artists of the United States a bit longer to find the aesthetic benefits of focusing on objects. Needless to say, Marcel Duchamp's submission of an upended and signed (but otherwise unadulterated) porcelain urinal to the Society of Independent Artists exhibition in 1917, in effect, threw down the gauntlet decisively to the American avant-garde (and in more ways than one). Duchamp, once again, performed his artistic prescience—but to little immediate effect. With few exceptions, in the United States the modernist painted object portrait, let alone the three-dimensional "portrait object," would not be fully explored until the mid-1920s.

Nevertheless, Duchamp's *Fountain* marks an important philosophical shift toward materiality, what Barbara Haskell has called "the national mania for the literal."[126] Alfred Stieglitz, deeply marked by late Romantic ideas, in the early 1910s implicitly promoted more spiritual concerns through the exhibition of visionary paintings and drawings by such artists as John Marin, Oscar Bluemner, and Georgia O'Keeffe.[127] The anti-metaphysical discourse in which *Fountain* participates stands in marked contrast to these exhibitions yet it builds on ideas encoded in other works familiar to the

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[126] Barbara Haskell, *Arthur Dove* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1974), 49.

[127] Stieglitz's anti-materialist stance even overflowed into his "business philosophy," as such. Though he certainly made money from behind-the-scene sales in his galleries, Stieglitz arguably ran these establishments as not-for-profit ventures. During his career the gallerist quarreled—and later broke—with several associates over the role of commercial gain within cultural production. For more about the ethereal turn that Stieglitz's exhibition programming took in the 1910s, see Charles Eldredge, "Nature Symbolized: American Painting from Ryder to Hartley," in Maurice Tuchman et al., *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 112–129.

American avant-garde. Constantin Brancusi's elemental sculptures appealed to Stieglitz's mystical side, but the eight abstractions displayed at 291 in 1914—including the pale marble *Mademoiselle Pogany*, 1912 (fig. 3.16)—drew the attention of the gallery director and his circle to the more here-and-now, material concerns of plastic form. Furthermore, Francis Picabia's 1915 mechanomorphic drawings for the publication *291*, in their brazen, even snarky, concentration on saleable goods limned in a deadpan style, offered one of the first direct visual challenges to Stieglitz's late Romantic leanings. Marcel Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder (No. 2)*, 1914 (fig. 3.17), served as an important precedent, not only regarding subject matter, but also in terms of its utilization of string to break through to the "real" third dimension.

The urinal that became *Fountain* originally existed as a commercial product available to be purchased by the artist. The controversial readymade participated in the pre-war commodity culture of the United States and presaged the merchandise markets that would later burgeon in the Roaring Twenties.[128] Combining the ultracool renderings of machine parts by Picabia with the thing-ness of Brancusi sculpture, Duchamp's 1917 sculpture proclaimed—in a very real and tangible way—that the found object would soon take on new significance.

And *Fountain*'s most important meaning—at least within the context of this dissertation—is how it specifically opened up new possibilities for the formerly

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[128] For an intelligent analysis of the rise of American consumer culture and Marcel Duchamp's critique of—and participation in—this trend, see Helen Molesworth, "Rrose Sélavy Goes Shopping" in Leah Dickerman and Matthew S. Witkovsky, eds., *The Dada Seminars* (Washington, DC: Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art, in association with D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2005), 172–189. Additionally, Molesworth makes explicit the connection between shopping and the construction of persona, a point germane to any discussion of object portraits: "But what makes choosing and shopping so arduous? The complexity of these activities is that deciding what one likes, establishing one's preferences, cobbling them together over a period of trial and error into one's tastes, is in many ways synonymous with the creation and presentation of the self." Molesworth, "Rrose Sélavy Goes Shopping," in Ibid., 175.

hidebound genre of portraiture. Again, echoes of Brancusi and Picabia emanate from

Fountain—but Duchamp ultimately transcended these sources in his subversive

readymade as portrait object. From Brancusi, Duchamp "appropriated" the reductive

form of works like *Mademoiselle Pogany*, 1912 (fig. 3.16) (again, based on the real life

model of Margit Pogany), as well as sculpture's materiality, including, in this case, the

qualities associated with smooth, white marble. Regarding Picabia, Duchamp built on his

French compatriot's gleefully overintellectualized imagery of machines *qua* individuals

published only months beforehand. The works by Brancusi and Picabia mentioned here

rely on known referents (i.e., personal subjects), a strategy that by 1917 Duchamp had

long abandoned. While Brancusi's elegant *Mademoiselle Pogany* and Picabia's cerebral

caricatures participate in the dynamics of dis-appearance, especially through their

respective disempowering of the portrait subjects, in *Fountain* Duchamp bests their

efforts by creating a portrait with no sitter at all. The fact that he inventively literalized

the "portrait object"—that is, through the creation of a "likeness" in three dimensions

employing found items—would eventually inspire others in the American avant-garde to

explore similar territory. It would also become one of his lasting legacies. Development

of *Fountain*'s performance as a portrait object—as well as further thoughts on the

sculpture's afterlife and impact—appear in Chapter Four.

Arthur Dove and (Portrait) Objects

After Marcel Duchamp's big splash with *Fountain* at the Society of Independent

Artists exhibition in 1917, it would take almost a decade for an American-born artist to

address the concerns raised by the French provocateur in an equally sophisticated

manner. Though he never gave up painting completely, between approximately 1924 and

1930 Stieglitz circle member Arthur Dove produced an almost anomalous array of assemblages, thereby demonstrably performing his own stylistic turn towards the object. When asked the rationale for such a striking change in materials, the artist's fellow modernist and good friend Georgia O'Keeffe responded that Dove probably "worked with collage because it was cheaper than painting and also it amused him—once he was started on it one thing after another came to him very easily with any material he found at hand."[129] In addition to his more usual application of pigment to stretched canvas, Dove produced just over two dozen of these three-dimensional "side projects," whose subjects range from still life to landscape. Of this relatively small subset of the artist's entire oeuvre, nearly one third may be classified as portrait objects, including *The Intellectual*, 1925 (fig. 3.18), *Reds*, c. 1925 (fig. 3.19) and *Untitled (Portrait of Rebecca and Paul Strand)*, c. 1925 (fig. 3.20).[130]

In 1922 Arthur Dove began living on the forty-two-foot yawl *Mona* with Helen "Reds" Torr off the northern coast of Long Island. The demands of daily existence

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[129] Dorothy Rylander Johnson, *Arthur Dove: The Years of Collage* (College Park, MD: J. Millard Tawes Fine Arts Center, 1967), 13.

[130] According to Emily Todd, "Dove produced a total of twenty-seven collages from 1924 to 1931: eight of which can be conclusively called portraits." Emily Lincoln Todd, "'Pieces of Experience Literally Seized': Arthur Dove's Symbolic Portraits in Collage, 1924–25" (MA thesis, Houston: Rice University, 1988), 114. Regarding *Untitled (Portrait of Rebecca and Paul Strand)*, neither Emily Todd nor Dorothy Johnson treat the work at all. Barbara Haskell reproduces it (albeit with a different spatial orientation) in her 1974 exhibition catalogue, indexing the assemblage as *Untitled*, c. 1924–30. The Philadelphia Museum of Art Web site currently catalogues the piece as *Untitled (Portrait of Rebecca and Paul Strand)*, c. 1925. When queried as to when and why the title had changed, the museum's curatorial staff could not provide any justificatory documents (email to the author, 11 June 2009). I would like to thank Jennifer Ginsberg, the administrative assistant for the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art for her assistance with this matter. See "Philadelphia Museum of Art - Collections Object : Untitled (Portrait of Rebecca and Paul Strand)," n.d., http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/69294.html?mulR=28125 (accessed January 28, 2009); Johnson, *Arthur Dove*, 48–49; and Haskell, *Arthur Dove*, 58. Based upon the list of works that Dove displayed in the 1925 exhibition *Seven Americans*, it is possible that catalogue no. 7, *Painted Forms, Friends*, corresponds to the Philadelphia assemblage. However, because the piece is not illustrated, without further substantiating evidence it is difficult to say with any certainty. See also Alfred Stieglitz, ed., *Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans: 159 Paintings, Photographs & Things Recent & Never Before Publicly Shown, by Arthur G. Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Charles Demuth, Paul Strand, Georgia O'Keeffe, Alfred Stieglitz* (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1925), 8.

onboard ship meant that little time for artmaking was left over at the end of the day; these circumstances, however, provided the opportunity for Dove to rethink his creative priorities. Crafting constructions from readily available found objects and previously purchased trinkets (while completely avoiding the noxious fumes and tiresome cleanup connected with the use of oil paints) offered a promising, possible solution.

After two years of rumination (and possibly some experiments that no longer survive), Dove produced the forceful portrait *Ralph Dusenberry*, 1924 (fig. 3.21), a "likeness" of his neighbor. Measuring 22 x 18 inches, the rectilinear assemblage consists of two weathered pieces of wood affixed to a canvas embellished with allusions to a verdant landscape and to a non-standard American flag.[131] A page from a hymnal, glued to the bottom center of the support fabric, peeks over the edge of the picture's frame, composed of a bright yellow carpenter's rule.

In this early work Dove evokes his subject's appearance through the compilation of objects associated with the sitter. Frederick S. Wight, in the catalogue essay for Dove's 1958 retrospective exhibition, quotes the artist as explicating his selection of articles:

> [T]he Dusenberrys lived on a boat near us in Lloyd's Harbor. He could dive like a Kingfish and swim like a fish…. His father was a minister. He and his brother were architects in Port Washington…. He came home to his boat one day with two bottles, making his wife so mad that she threw them overboard. He dived in right after them and came up with one in each hand. When tight he always sang "Shall we gather at the river."[132]

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[131] Former curator at the National Museum of American History, Dr. Lonn Taylor confirmed for me that Dove derived his design from a yacht ensign, whose blue field features thirteen stars encircling an anchor. Taylor to the author, February 2, 2010. The motif resonates with the portrait's implicit subject of water and swimming.

[132] Frederick Stallknecht Wight, *Arthur G. Dove* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 51. Wight provides no reference for this passage. The Oxford English Dictionary's second definition of "kingfish" reads as follows: "A leader, chief, boss; freq. used as a nickname for a particular person, notably for Huey Long (1893–1935), Governor and Senator from Louisiana. *U.S. slang*." The same source defines "kingfisher" as "A small European bird (*Alcedo ispida*) with a long cleft beak and brilliant plumage,

Based on Dove's anecdotal justification, we may interpret the upper section of wood, precariously poised on the point of the lower section, as suggestive of diving, while the measuring device and collaged songsheet refer more literally to aspects of the portrait subject: his profession and a memorized tune, respectively.[133]

Ralph Dusenberry also reveals Dove's own particular understanding of the portrait concept of dis-appearance (i.e., disappearance of the sitter, of likeness, and of the body), which was a matter of established record by 1924. Following in the footsteps of caricaturists like Marius de Zayas and other modern unconventional portraitists, Dove most certainly fabricated the construction without the presence of the "sitter" before him. Lacking any supervisory controls in regards to verisimilitude (or flattery), the artist modeled the portrait subject after his own inner vision, even incorporating the potentially embarrassing detail of a melody that Dusenberry crooned when inebriated. It is, however, with the notion of the deliberate omission of the body where Dove deviates most from the most advanced avant-garde practices of dis-appearance. True, a mimetic image of the architect's corporeal presence is not present in the picture, but other residual clues persist: a vertical composition, implicit bilateral symmetry, a rudimentary eye painted at the pointed end of the uppermost slat of wood. In hindsight, we might judge *Ralph*

feeding on fish and aquatic animals which it captures by diving. Hence, extended to other birds of the family Alcedinidæ or Halcyonidæ, esp. the Belted Kingfisher of N. America (*Ceryle alcyon*), and the Laughing Jackass of Australia (*Dacelo gigas*). Various superstitions have been associated with the Common Kingfisher, some of which it shares with the HALCYON (which has been generally identified with it), esp. the belief that a dried specimen hung up indicated by its position the direction in which the wind was blowing." "Oxford English Dictionary king-fish," n.d., http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/cgi/entry/50126798?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=kingfish&first=1&max_to_show=10. (accessed January 26, 2010). To my eye, the angular piece of wood in Dove's assemblage has always rhymed with the crest of a kingfisher, a diving bird.

[133] Wight, *Arthur G. Dove*, 52, and "Arthur Dove: Portrait of Ralph Dusenberry (49.70.36) | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History | The Metropolitan Museum of Art," n.d., http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dove/ho_49.70.36.htm. (accessed November 9, 2009)

Dusenberry as a premature attempt to engage the most radical of portrait practices of the time, but Dove continued his experiments, producing two of his most accomplished "likenesses" the following year.

The Critic (Royal Cortissoz), 1925 (fig. 3.22), demonstrates Arthur Dove's aesthetic deepening, both in the assemblage's physical density and conceptual complexity. The artwork measures 19 3/4 x 13 1/2 x 3 5/8 inches, which is approximately the same size as *Ralph Dusenberry*; however, we should note the additional third dimension, an innovation indicative of Dove's desire to emphasize the work's materiality, fully appropriate to his considered performative stylistic turn towards the object. Two columns of art gallery announcements, excised from a contemporary periodical, bracket the subject's "body," also composed of newspaper clippings, specifically an exhibition review. A photographic reproduction of *Mahonoy City* by George Luks comprises the figure's torso. The "sitter" sports a scarlet top hat on his (empty) head, a drawn (not real) monocle on a thread around his neck, and carefully cut out roller skates on his feet. He pushes an Energex vacuum cleaner across a red woven textile floor-covering. Vermillion threads—or wires—hang from the interior upper corners of the shallow shadow box only to pierce the backing support at seemingly random locations.[134]

Emily Todd's 1988 master's thesis, the most recent extensive treatment solely focused on Arthur Dove's portrait assemblages, identifies Dorothy Rylander Johnson's 1967 University of Maryland master's thesis as the source for the attribution of *The*

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[134] The wires may indicate the possible previous presence of a small light bulb where there is now only a hole. See Todd, "'Pieces of Experience Literally Seized,'" 64, note 104. Todd also details the exact references in the collaged pieces of newspaper, that is, their real life sources.

Critic's subject as early twentieth-century American art critic Royal Cortissoz.[135] Though

Alfred Stieglitz and Royal Cortissoz agreed to disagree about the significance of

modernism to the art of the United States, the art critic became increasingly more

antagonistic towards the New York avant-garde in the 1920s. Statements in print, such as

the following excerpt from his review of the Stieglitz circle's 1925 exhibition *Seven*

Americans, articulated Cortissoz's reactionary nostalgia for more "accessible" visual art

based on mimetic transcription and demonstrable artifice:

> Stieglitz is a courageous, resourceful man. We wish he would undertake
> the organization of an exhibition such as has never been held by an
> modernist. Let him supply each one of his friends with canvases divided
> in the middle by a straight line. Let them paint to the left of the line
> pictures after their own hearts, expressing themselves in their own way.
> And to the right let them paint the same subjects according to Hoyle
> which is to say, with all the elements of perspective, texture, light and
> shade, form, color, handled with competence. This might show whether
> the modernist really knows how to paint or if the fearful and wonderful
> expedients he adopts make the refuge of inadequacy. If he needed
> inspiration he could easily get it from Stieglitz. Look at the latter's
> photographs of cloud forms and trees. How beautiful they are! Because,
> for one thing, they are well done.[136]

Dove exhibited five or six portrait objects within the context of *Seven Americans*, but

The Critic was not one of them. Without any evidence to the contrary, the current art

historical consensus has maintained not only Dorothy Rylander Johnson's identification

of *The Critic* with Royal Cortissoz, but also the fact that Dove created the assemblage in

response to the journalist's negative review of the exhibition in question.[137]

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[135] "The March 1925 *Seven Americans* exhibition at The Intimate Gallery…included *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz* and *Miss Woolworth*. The critical response ranged from praise to tolerant curiosity to bellicose depreciation—Dove's *Critic* was aimed at the arch-conservative Cortissoz who loudly and consistently proclaimed his distaste for modernism, typifying the unsympathetic commentators who have for centuries plagued artists." Johnson, *Arthur Dove*, 15.

[136] Cortissoz, quoted in Todd, "'Pieces of Experience Literally Seized,'" 66.

[137] Although Johnson provides no evidence to substantiate her claim that *The Critic*'s portrait subject is Royal Cortissoz, other Dove scholars continue to follow this ascription. See, for example, Debra Bricker

In *The Critic (Royal Cortissoz)* Arthur Dove once again calls to mind the portrait subject's appearance through the juxtaposition of correlative objects of varying dimensionalities. A newspaper review of an exhibition containing work by the "well-digested" referentially-based portraitists Thomas Eakins, George Luks, and John Singer Sargent composes Cortissoz's abdomen and limbs. In a clever pun, the text and image about these "important figures" literally em-bodies the corpus of the art critic. Cortissoz does not have his feet firmly planted on the ground (or rooted in the soil, for that matter); instead he wears unsteady roller skates. The vacuum cleaner references the critic's indiscriminate sucking up of anything in his path—and may allude, through a double entendre on "hoover," to the assertive, even domineering, nature of Herbert Hoover, who was the Secretary of Commerce at the time, and whose notoriety frequently upstaged that of the President of the United States. Unlike the actual optical device in *The Intellectual* (a real magnifying glass), Cortissoz's "monocle" is drawn onto the backing sheet; this fact underscores the critic's inability to "see" anything but art based in verisimilitude, a thematic particularly ironized by its presence within a three-dimensional portrait object.

Circumstances, both situational and psychological, underlie Dove's masterful demonstration of dis-appearance in the assemblage. Given *The Critic*'s status as a non-transcriptive portrayal, there was no need for Royal Cortissoz to sit for his portrait. Even if it had been necessary, the cramped quarters of the *Mona* would have made it difficult, if not unpleasant. Dove took advantage of the benefits afforded by the disappearance of the sitter (and the concomitant disappearance of likeness) not just to assert his own inner

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Balken et al., *Arthur Dove: A Retrospective* (Andover, MA: Addison Gallery of American Art, 1997), 32. Emily Todd leaves the question open; see Todd, "'Pieces of Experience Literally Seized,'" 65–68.

vision in the art critic's representation, but also to express his negative views of the subject. *The Critic* drips with sarcasm.

This implicit mockery may inform Arthur Dove's deviation from the unwritten rubric regarding the disappearance of the body within most anti-mimetic portrayals of the time. In the handful of portrait objects created by Dove, the artist treats the majority of the "sitters" with a benevolent, or neutral, tone (depending, of course, on the artist's relationship to the portrait subject). Only two—*The Critic* and *Miss Woolworth*, 1925 (fig. 3.23), now lost—tend toward the cynicism of dada. And both these works comprise body parts—arms and legs, heads and feet—to conjure the portrait subject. As this strange "pendant pair" each constitutes a kind of conservative personality (aesthetic, on the one hand, and financial, on the other), it is only fitting that the artist should eschew the avant-garde disappearance of the body in favor of the more conventional portrait practice of depicting corporeal presence. The appearance of Royal Cortissoz's "body" in *The Critic* manifests the real life journalist's unadventurous character.

The artist's *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz*, 1925 (fig. 3.24), stands in great contrast to *The Critic*, both in facture and in tone, though it surpasses the "likeness" of the art critic in how it further stretches portrait conventions. To create this unassuming masterpiece, Arthur Dove affixed a rectangular metal photographic plate to a 16 1/2 x 12 1/2-inch piece of oiled cardboard. Like *The Critic*, *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz* is framed in such a way as to accommodate the found objects that protrude from the artwork's surface. Above the once reflective metal plate, which is now tarnished with age, floats a centrally located camera lens with a cloudy occlusion. On November 25, 1924, Helen Torr recorded in her daybook that she had "helped Arthur with Stieglitz portrait—held taper to

make smoke on lens."[138] A small solitary watch spring draws the viewer's attention to the center of the topmost eighth of the plate; in the quadrilateral's bottom half the artist adhered an uncoiled watch spring and a length of stretched-out steel wool. The vitreous and metallic nature of the assembled articles contributes to an overall feeling of solidity and coolness.

To induce the viewer's recognition of appearance in *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz*, Arthur Dove collated items—the camera lens, the photographic plate—related to the portrait subject's avocation (the same strategy that the artist later employed in *The Critic*). Beyond these literal associations, however, the lens refers to vision—something Stieglitz possessed in abundance—and the article's placement at the apex of the composition confirms the loftiness of the impresario's visual ideals. Additionally, a lens focuses light rays into coherent images. Figuratively, Stieglitz administered a similar process on the human plane: he took disparate artists and forged them into a unified American avant-garde, a fact he announced to the world in the March 1925 exhibition *Seven Americans*. The photographic plate acts as a support. On a literal level it "presents" to the beholder a piece of steel wool and a clock spring, symbols of refinement and energy, respectively. On a metaphorical level the plate presages how photography would become not only the "backbone" of Stieglitz's reputation, but also of American visual culture.

The silence of the unspoken also emanates from *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz*. In June 1925, that is, after the gallerist hosted *Seven Americans* and subsequently mounted a

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[138] "Arthur and Helen Torr Dove papers, Diaries - Collections Online - Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution," n.d., frame 8, http://www.aaa.si.edu/collectionsonline/dovearth/container196276.htm. (accessed January 23, 2010)

monographic exhibition of Dove's work from January 11 to February 7, the younger

artist wrote to his friend:

> You always do such wonderful things that thanking you seems
> superfluous. The only way is with work even though it be "sticks and
> stones." I seem to get on with them better than "words."[139]

In light of this letter, Dorothy Johnson declared succinctly: "It appears that this portrait

was a thank you."[140] Emily Todd follows this interpretation, noting that "*Portrait of*

Alfred Stieglitz is generally considered a gift of thanks from Dove to Stieglitz. The work

remained, in fact, in Stieglitz's collection until his death in 1946."[141] Sasha Newman

argues that the work not only "commemorate[d] Stieglitz's renewed photographic

activities" but also functioned as "a thank-you for Stieglitz's efforts on Dove's

behalf."[142] Tongue-tied by overwhelming debts to his mentor, the painter remained

unable to express—in words—his deep gratitude for the exhibition opportunities,

financial assistance, and emotional support that Stieglitz provided. The language of anti-

mimetic portraiture offered a way out of this conundrum, in effect enabling the

"thanking" of Stieglitz through material objects (but not "words"). Though both men

gained cultural (and emotional) capital from the gift transaction, Dove's profound

feelings for the impresario remained otherwise unvoiced.

In terms of dis-appearance, *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz* remains the zenith of

Dove's comprehension—and employment—of the most advanced of contemporaneous

portrait practices. Though such literal-minded thinking borders on logical absurdity, still

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[139] Arthur Dove to Alfred Stieglitz, n.d. [June 1925]. Arthur Garfield Dove and Alfred Stieglitz, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, ed. Ann Lee Morgan (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), 114.

[140] Johnson, *Arthur Dove*, 15.

[141] Todd, "'Pieces of Experience Literally Seized,'" 44.

[142] Sasha M. Newman, *Arthur Dove and Duncan Phillips: Artist and Patron* (Washington, DC: Phillips Collection, 1981), 37.

we know from the gallery director's surprised and gleeful reaction when he first saw the

Portrait that the subject did not sit for the artist.[143] Stieglitz's physical absence from the

portrait relationship freed Dove from any residual responsibilities towards mimetic

representation, allowing him to depict the subject in a way that might—to the

uninitiated—appear "unreal" but nevertheless would prove to be somehow "more true."

Though scholars have persisted in linking specific items in the assemblage to particular

body parts (e.g., "lens" equals "eye" or "head"), and though the work exhibits a vestigial

bilateral axis, when compared to the figures in *The Critic* and in *Miss Woolworth*, the

body in *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz* has disappeared.[144] As the "sticks and stones"

receptacle of an unverbalized gratitude, the assemblage also radiates that recurrent

companion to dis-appearance: silence. In this understated work then, the artist's

proficient display of the mechanics of dis-appearance met, toe to toe, the conceptual

challenges issued by *Fountain*. This fact was remarked upon by the photographer *qua*

gallery director himself when he first glimpsed the portrait object; as Arthur Dove

recorded on December 4, 1924 in his diary:

> Stieglitz thinks portrait "one of finest things he's ever seen—way beyond
> everything he had expected." "This settles our taking the gallery." "The
> one work that was needed." "Wait until Duchamp sees [this]."[145]

Conclusion

In the mid-1910s and the early 1920s avant-garde artists working in the United

States persisted in their explorations of the logical limits of the portrait relationship. In

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[143] For Dove's account of Stieglitz's enthusiastic response, see note 145 below.

[144] "Although too specific an interpretation of objects and motifs in the portraits diminishes [sic] them, certain interpretations suggest themselves. The head, or perhaps the eye, is a single lens floating above a photographic-plate 'body.'" Johnson, *Arthur Dove*, 14.

[145] "Arthur and Helen Torr Dove papers, Log of the Mona - Collections Online - Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution," n.d., frame 56, http://www.aaa.si.edu/collectionsonline/dovearth/container196275.htm. (accessed January 27, 2010)

competent works such as *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, painters like Katherine

Dreier displayed their thorough-going knowledge of the most progressive views on dis-

appearance (the intentional absence of the sitter, of likeness, and of the body) and its

related valence of silence. Although by the mid-1920s these ideas had become part of

"standard practice" in the conception and execution of non-objective "likenesses" by the

avant-garde, several artists continued to question—and further undermine—traditional

portrait conventions.

With his portrait object *Fountain*, Marcel Duchamp created more than a

disruption to the installation of the 1917 Society of Independent Artists exhibition.

Though American-born painters, like Stuart Davis and Gerald Murphy, eventually got

around to participating in the "rage for the literal" (though only in two-dimensions, not in

three!), Duchamp decisively announced the advent of the era of the thing with his

readymades. *Fountain* famously drew the attention of the Manhattan art scene to objects,

and not just flat representations of objects, but to actual things that occupied real space

and real time. Regarding the stylistic turn toward the object, this was Duchamp's first

contribution. His second was to merge these concerns with the genre of portraiture.

Fountain, the original portrait object, served as an intervention to open fresh avenues of

investigation for the portrait relationship and as a dare for American artists to explore

these new paths.

Arthur Dove—almost a decade later—took up the challenge. In portrait objects of

great originality, wit, and charm, he captured the "likeness" of those around him (e.g.,

Helen "Reds" Torr and Ralph Dusenberry). His mental deftness with the concepts

underlying dis-appearance in unconventional portraiture even produced imaginative

deviations, such as in *The Critic*, from the usual notion of the absence of the body *per se*.
It is true that a modicum of silence emanates from Dove's assemblages, but the artist
capitalized on this fact, especially in *The Critic*, as well as *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz*, to
"express what otherwise could not be said": that is, a disparaging appraisal of the subject
in the former and a long-in-coming gesture of gratitude in the latter. For the 1925
exhibition *Seven Americans* in which *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz* was to initially appear,
Arthur Dove solidified the performance of his stylistic turn toward the object in an
artist's statement in verse, entitled "A Way to Look at Things":

> We have not yet made shoes that fit like sand
> Nor clothes that fit like water
> Nor thoughts that fit like air.
> There is much to be done—
> Works of nature are abstract.
> They do not lean on other things for meaning.
> The seagull is not like the sea
> Nor the sun like the moon.
> The sun draws water from the sea.
> The clouds are not like either one—
> They do not keep one form forever.
> That the mountainside looks like a face is accidental.[146]

These lines, with their emphasis on the commonplace and the immediate, manifest
Dove's own "rage for the literal," a zeitgeist that American modernist writer and Stieglitz
circle associate William Carlos Williams would later famously recapitulate in his oft-
quoted dictum: "No ideas but in things."[147] The afterlife of "things"—and their inherent
"ideas"—forms the intellectual focus of the next chapter.

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[146] Dove, "A Way to Look at Things" in Stieglitz, *Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans*, 4.
[147] William Carlos Williams, "A Sort of a Song," in William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems*, ed. Charles Tomlinson (New York: New Directions, 1985), 145.

CHAPTER FOUR: OBJECT-IFICATION

<u>Charles Demuth, William Carlos Williams, and the Photographic Reproduction</u>

In early 1921 modernist painter Charles Demuth was diagnosed with adult onset

diabetes. The artist spent many months over the next three years at a sanatorium in

Morristown, New Jersey, where he was among the very first wave of fortunate patients to

be treated with a newly discovered "miracle drug": insulin. In late April 1923, during a

moment when he was responding well to the serum, was gaining weight, and was feeling

well enough to travel, Demuth made the relatively short trip to Manhattan. There his

friend and mentor, the gallerist and impresario Alfred Stieglitz, photographed him several

times (figs. 4.1–4.3) and subsequently sent a set of prints from the impromptu session to

the convalescing painter once he had returned to the health care facility in the suburbs.

Demuth was more than just favorably impressed with the results upon receiving

the photographs. On May 2 he wrote to Stieglitz, not only to acknowledge receipt of the

package, but also to express his overwhelming delight at its contents:

> Dear Stieglitz:—
> You have me in a fix: shall I remain ill, retaining that look, die,
> considering that moment, the climax of my "looks," or live and change. I
> think the head [shot] is one of the most beautiful things that I have ever
> known in the world of art. A strange way to write about one's own
> portrait, but—well, I'm a perhaps frank person. I sent it this morning to
> my mother.
> The hands, too,—Stieglitz, how do you do it? The texture in this
> one <u>is</u>—simply is![148]

By 1923, when he was undergoing treatment for his chronic condition, Demuth

and William Carlos Williams had been longtime acquaintances, having first met each

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[148] Charles Demuth, *Letters of Charles Demuth, American Artist, 1883–1935*, ed. Bruce Kellner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 55. The artist was so taken with the image of his hands that he included a sketch of the photograph in his letter.

other as student occupants of a certain Mrs. Chain's Locust Street boardinghouse in

Philadelphia.[149] At the same time that his painter colleague was convalescing in

Morristown, New Jersey, the Rutherford-based physician and poet conceived, wrote, and

published *Spring and All*, an extended and meandering mishmash of prose and verse that

he dedicated to Demuth, his dear friend and fellow modernist. Part manual, part

confessional, and part experiment, the slim volume, only three hundred copies of which

were printed, marked a turning point in Williams's practice as an avant-garde writer.

Literary anthologist Webster Schott describes the book as

> a beautiful, misshapen box that contains, among other things, William
> Carlos Williams's most impassioned pleas on behalf of the imagination,
> several of his greatest short poems [including the late Imagist classic "The
> Red Wheelbarrow"], various indictments of contemporary civilization…,
> and several manifestoes for modern poetry.[150]

About the project, Williams himself penned that:

> Nobody ever saw it—it had no circulation at all—but I had a lot of fun
> with it. It consists of poems interspersed with prose…. It was written
> when all the world was going crazy about typographical form and is really
> a travesty on the idea. Chapter headings are printed upside down on
> purpose, the chapters are numbered all out of order…. The prose is a
> mixture of philosophy and nonsense. It made sense to me, at least to my
> disturbed mind—because it *was* disturbed at the time—but I doubt if it
> made any sense to anyone else.[151]

In a move reminiscent of the Renaissance artist's desire to exchange a poorly regarded

reputation as artisanal craftsperson for the more prestigious role of liberal arts-grounded

intellectual and inventor, through the thematics of *Spring and All* Williams promotes the

abandonment of what he considered the moribund, tradition-bound forms of poetry in

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[149] Emily Farnham, *Charles Demuth: Behind a Laughing Mask* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 47.

[150] William Carlos Williams, *Imaginations*, ed. Webster Schott (New York: New Directions Pub. Corp., 1970), 85.

[151] Williams, as quoted by Webster Schott, "Introduction: *Spring and All*," in Ibid.

favor of a fresh artistic vision. About two-thirds of the way through the entire text he

announces this paradigm shift as "The jump between fact and the imaginative reality."[152]

Although written at almost exactly the same moment by associates who admired

each other's significant contributions to the American avant-garde, these two texts—

Charles Demuth's letter to Alfred Stieglitz and William Carlos Williams's volume

Spring and All—manifest differing assumptions about the role of mimesis within an

image. The painter's pronouncement about Stieglitz's photograph of his hands, that the

texture in the print "is—simply is," betrays a willing suspension of disbelief on the part

of the beholder regarding the seemingly neutral, transcriptive function of the

photographic image.[153] In his declaration Demuth seems to echo modernist Paul Strand,

whose own categorical statement about the nature of photography Stieglitz had published

in the final issue of the journal *Camera Work* in 1917:

> Photography…finds its raison d'être, like all media, in a complete
> uniqueness of means. This is an absolute unqualified objectivity. Unlike
> the other arts which are really anti-photographic, this objectivity is of the
> very essence of photography, its contribution and at the same time its
> limitation.[154]

In Demuth's view, the photograph's mimetic function transcends the image's artificiality,

collapsing any possible sense of *a priori* staging or otherwise distracting craft into a real,

tangible presence: "the texture…is—simply is!"

While not necessarily mutually exclusive, nevertheless, William Carlos

Williams's position in *Spring and All* stands in contradistinction to Demuth's

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[152] Williams, *Spring and All*, in Ibid., 135.

[153] Perhaps Demuth's willing "suspension of disbelief" is understandable, given that he himself is the portrait subject in this particular instance. This fact may also help explain the painter's emotional reaction to the prints as well.

[154] Paul Strand, "Photography," in Alfred Stieglitz, ed., *Camera Work; a Photographic Quarterly*, vol. 49 (New York: A. Stieglitz, 1917), 3.

unquestioning acceptance of a transcriptive image's ostensible transparency. In a prose

portion of the text, the poet goes so far as to state that "The only realism in art is of the

imagination. It is only thus that the work escapes plagiarism after nature and becomes a

creation."[155] The issue boils down to: what is the function (and thus the purpose) of

image making? Demuth expresses his blithe comfortability with mimetic replication (at

least in terms of "straight photography") while Williams advocates for more than mere

imagistic reportage or description—he demands radical transformation! The poet would

later, in his *Autobiography*, frame the matter this way:

> Almost no one seems to realize that this movement [from "realism" to
> "abstraction" in modern art] is straight from the *Poetics* [of Aristotle],
> misinterpreted for over two thousand years and more. The objective [of art
> and poetry] is not to copy nature and never was, but to imitate nature,
> which involve[s] active invention, the active work of the imagination….[156]

Williams's poem "The rose is obsolete" (see Appendix A) appears about a third

of the way into *Spring and All*. Strangely enough, though the author gave sequential

Roman numerals to all of the other twenty-seven verses peppered throughout the entire

text, "The rose is obsolete" remains undenominated, a fact indicative of the importance

the poet placed on its meaning. In the initial clause of the prose paragraph just preceding

the poem ("But such a picture as that of Juan Gris, though I have not seen it in color, is

[155] Williams, *Spring and All*, in Williams, *Imaginations*, 111.

[156] William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random House, 1951), 241. This issue was already the subject of much debate in the United States in the 1910s and the Armory Show in 1913 brought the matter to a head. Several years after the notorious exhibition, the painter Andrew Dasburg, defending his non-objective imagery in a formal declaration, encapsulated the question thus: "I differentiate the aesthetic reality from the illustrative reality. In the latter it is necessary to represent nature as a series of recognizable objects. But in the former, we need only have the *sense* or *emotion* of objectivity. That is why I eliminate the recognizable object. When the spectator sees in a picture a familiar form, he has associative ideas concerning that form which may be at variance with the *actual* relation of the form in the picture: it becomes a barrier, or point of fixation, standing between the spectator and the meaning of the work of art. Therefore, in order to obtain a pure aesthetic emotion, based alone on rhythm and form, I eliminated all those factors which might detract the eye and interest from the fundamental intention of the picture." Andrew Dasburg, untitled artist's statement, in Anderson Galleries, Inc., *The Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters, 1916*, Reprint ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1968), unpaginated.

important…."), Williams admits—albeit obliquely—that these lines of verse serve as the ekphrastic response to his viewing of an image of the Spanish modernist Juan Gris's painting-collage *Roses*, 1914 (fig. 4.4).[157] (It should also be noted here that the work of art in question originally belonged to Gertrude Stein, a provenance that may have particularly attracted Williams's attention, as the medical doctor regarded very highly the expatriate writer's innovative modernist poetry.) In and through the poem Williams demonstrates his irrepressible belief that such allegedly tired out subjects as "bouquets" and "romance" can be reinvigorated by the creative re-envisioning of visual artists and poets. In this way, Schott argues, "[Williams] makes over the reality traditional literature lost as it adopted a fixed form and official subject matter."[158]

A significant component of "The rose is obsolete" is how Williams in the poem channels his admiration for Gris, specifically the artist's work *Roses*. In this mixed media on canvas the Spanish painter has taken a banal, even overlooked, art historical subject— the floral still life—and brought it up to date (made it "modern"). Gris accomplishes this by using several photographic reproductions of roses—cut out carefully and pasted to the top third of the canvas—as the cornerstone of the entire composition.[159] Noting this

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[157] At least that is how some scholars have interpreted this portion of the text, in combination with the imagery of the poem that shares the same page. See, for example, Bram Dijkstra, *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech: Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 173–176. The original line of text appears in *Spring and All*; see Williams, *Imaginations*, 107.

[158] Schott, "Introduction: *Spring and All*," in Ibid., 87. In the same passage he states: "Gone from Williams's poems are the reflex-action rhetoric and symbols of the nineteenth century. He shows us (especially in "The Rose Is Obsolete") that some of the old symbols may have the means of making new associations—with the junkyards of the United States or the universe itself, depending on the imagination. The language is all ordinary. The rhythms are spoken. The familiar world, utterly anti-poetic and beyond the grasp of the rituals of literature, is rediscovered and infused with newness through the powers of the imagination."

[159] Gris's stylistic technique (and its implicit philosophical implications) in *Roses* built upon previous aesthetic advances made by Pablo Picasso. As Claudia Bohn-Spector summarizes: "Picasso helped set in motion a trend that carried classical trompe l'oeil to its logical extreme. In 1912 he pasted a factory-made oilcloth onto a small painted composition, *Still Life with Chair-Caning*. It was his first collage and an early

ingenious strategy, Williams makes his poem-response the lynchpin of the entire volume

of *Spring and All*. By situating "The rose is obsolete" so centrally within his own text,

Williams performs his endorsement—even advocacy—of Gris's own jump between

"fact"—the indexical trace of petals that inheres in the photographic reproductions—and

the highly accomplished collage that resulted, or "the imaginative reality."

It bears reiteration that when Williams wrote "The rose is obsolete" he had not

actually observed Gris's *original* work of art in person ("though I have not seen it in

color"), but an image of the painting-collage in a book, magazine, or photograph.[160]

Knowing the general circumstances of the poet's viewing of the image helps explain his

conflation of the "real" roses in the vase with the floral motif on the plate tipped up, in

cubist fashion, behind the blooms: "figured in majolica— / the broken plate / glazed with

a rose." The straightforwardness with which Williams accepts the ubiquity of the early

twentieth-century photographic reproduction I find remarkable. The poet even goes to the

extent of considering such a (multi-layered) subject appropriate for verse, indicative of a

willingness to practice what he preached in his own jump "between fact and the

imaginative reality."

The values that Charles Demuth revealed in his correspondence to Alfred

Stieglitz and those that William Carlos Williams sanctioned in *Spring and All* may serve

as two poles that delimit a range of attitudes in the visual culture produced by the artists

who knew Stieglitz, subscribed to his journals, and frequented his succession of galleries

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example of cubist play with the boundary between illusion and reality. It was also the first appearance of trompe l'oeil in Picasso's work, one used not to illusionistic ends but rather as an evocative, self-reflexive statement about the artifice of representation." See Bohn-Spector, "Pablo Picasso, *Bottle of Bass, Glass, Tobacco Packet, and Visiting Card*, 1914," (catalogue no. 96) in Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe L'oeil Painting* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2002), 326.

[160] The reproduction that inspired Williams's ekphrasis remains untraced.

in Manhattan in the first quarter of the twentieth century. While they did not find themselves at the absolute center of the Stieglitz circle, nonetheless Williams and Demuth travelled easily among its members. (Both men also counted Walter Arensberg, another key arbiter of American modernist taste at the time, among their friends.) As "facilitator, financier, and father," Alfred Stieglitz had played a pivotal part in the sharpening and focusing of the points of view that the statements by Demuth and Williams regarding the role of mimesis within visual images exemplify.[161]

Alfred Stieglitz as "Facilitator" of the Unconventional Portrait

Though perhaps best known today for his understated streetscapes of Manhattan or images of the natural environment around his family's vacation home in Lake George, New York, the impresario, publisher, and photographer Alfred Stieglitz had a deep and longstanding investment in portraiture and the issues pertaining to it. In his voluminous correspondence and his technically brilliant photographs, Stieglitz often recorded the presence of those in orbit around him, including family members and co-workers, the writers and critics he knew and supported, and the visual artists he represented in his galleries. A large portion of this body of work forms a virtual "who's who" of American modernism, with images (sometimes several) of such by now familiar names as Francis Picabia, Marius de Zayas, Andrew Dasburg, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Marsden Hartley, among others (figs. 4.5–4.9). In this subset of his entire extant oeuvre, Stieglitz frequently posed the portrait subject in front of an art object hanging on the posterior wall, such as in *Charles Demuth*, 1915 (fig. 4.10), where the modernist painter's body partially obstructs the view of the cubist charcoal drawing by Pablo Picasso behind him.

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[161] The descriptive phrase comes from the title of Sarah Greenough's essay "Alfred Stieglitz, Facilitator, Financier, and Father, Presents Seven Americans" in Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America*, 277.

As the director of several exhibition spaces (namely, The Little Galleries of the

Photo Secession (1905–1917), The Intimate Gallery (1925–1929), and, finally, An

American Place (1929–1946)), Stieglitz frequently found himself in a privileged position

to demonstrate his active engagement with the portrait genre. Over time—through entire

shows or sometimes single works of art—he broadened the definition of what a portrait

could be and could do, particularly by promoting more "conceptual" (as opposed to just

"descriptive") likenesses. Paul Cézanne's *Portrait of the Artist's Wife with Hydrangeas*

(fig. 4.11) serves as a case in point. Painted in the 1880s and displayed at 291 in the 1911

Exhibition of Water-Colors by Cézanne, this tender image hinges on a visual

juxtaposition—"Hortense" (woman) and "hortensias" (flowers)—to create an unexpected

play on words.[162]

This Cézanne watercolor serves, in a synechdochal capacity, as just one example

of Stieglitz's full-fledged support for unconventional portraiture. Among other

initiatives, he devoted three entire monographic shows to the contemporary caricaturist

and provocateur Marius de Zayas in 1909, 1910, and 1913; the last included the

Mexican's innovative "absolute" (non-objective) caricatures, such as *Alfred Stieglitz*,

1912–1913 (fig. 1.14). From April 4–May 22, 1916, the gallery director showed forty oil

paintings by Marsden Hartley, mostly from his Berlin sojourn, including *Portrait of a

German Soldier*, 1914 (fig. 2.7). A year later, as part of the final show to be held ever at

The Little Galleries of the Photo Secession, Stieglitz mounted Georgia O'Keeffe's

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[162] Regarding anti-mimetic portraiture, this type of visual/verbal pun presaged the shift from "physical" to "intellectual" painting that Marcel Duchamp, in particular, would come to champion. "I was…interested in recreating ideas in painting. For me the title was very important. I was interested in making painting serve my purposes, and in getting away from the physicality of painting. … I was interested in ideas—not merely in visual products. I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind." Duchamp, as quoted in James Johnson Sweeney, ed., "Eleven Europeans in America," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 13, no. 4 (1946): 20.

abstract portrayals of Paul Strand (figs. 2.10–2.12). This support and encouragement of the unconventional likeness would culminate in the 1925 exhibition *Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans* at the Anderson Galleries, wherein Arthur Dove introduced his assemblage "portrait objects" and Charles Demuth debuted his painted "poster portraits."

Not satisfied only to cheer from the sidelines, Stieglitz, in his own visual production in the form of photographs, elaborated upon these issues. By the early 1920s he had turned his attention to capturing the image of two different subjects obsessively: clouds—and the school teacher-turned-professional artist Georgia O'Keeffe, whom he married in 1924. Stieglitz literally and figuratively expanded period ideas about portraiture with the realization, over many years, of what he called a "composite portrait," that is, repeated photographic documentation of a single human subject during an extended and open-ended period of time. In order to realize this novel undertaking, Stieglitz focused the camera on his new wife; all told, his "portrait" of O'Keeffe comprises over three hundred images (figs. 4.12–4.13).

Interestingly enough, Alfred Stieglitz eventually conflated his simultaneous interests—his significant other and existing atmospheric conditions—in a prescient, thought-provoking work: a tri-partite "likeness" made up of a straightforward image of the painter's head, *Portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe, no. 1*, 1923 (fig. 4.14), accompanied by a pair of cloud prints, *Portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe, no. 2*, 1923 (fig. 4.15) and *Portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe, no. 3*, 1923 (fig. 4.16). (A related portrayal—and one that emanates silence—of the artist Katherine Rhoades, comprised of six photographs depicting the

tops of windswept poplar trees and the sky behind them, dates to the same year.[163])

Stieglitz's extraordinary triptych *Portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe, nos. 1–3*, 1923, embraces

the two modes of portrayal discussed above: the "is—simply is" approach articulated by

Charles Demuth and the "imaginative reality" method advocated by William Carlos

Williams. Refusing to see these impulses as mutually exclusive competing dualities,

Stieglitz reveals his adeptness at both aesthetic positions, which he manifests directly in

and through the work, with its single conventional likeness coupled with two evocative

cloud images.

These and the photographer's other cloud photographs, which Rosalind Krauss

has noted in her brief but brilliant article "Stieglitz/*Equivalents*," function in the same

manner as Marcel Duchamp's readymades. Krauss cogently states,

> Just as a readymade stakes everything that it might signify on the single
> gesture of its recontextualization and placement, so these images [the
> cloud photographs], which come to us as unanalyzable wholes, stake
> everything on the single act of cutting something out—the gesture that
> makes them by cutting."[164]

In the very next section of the essay, Krauss then argues that the similarity between

Marcel Duchamp's readymades and Alfred Stieglitz's *Equivalents* does not stop at

cropping (that is, selection); in both instances the art object is "completed" by dis/re-

location. Just as Duchamp decided (with "aesthetic indifference") on a urinal and then

submitted it to an art exhibition, Stieglitz framed cloud formations ("resistan[t] to

internal arrangement" in Krauss's words) with his viewfinder and then hung the resulting

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[163] For an intelligent, extended discussion about Alfred Stieglitz's complex relationship with Katherine Rhoades (and why I believe this series of six photographs contains the dis-appearance related trope of silence), see Kathleen A. Pyne, *Modernism and the Feminine Voice: O'Keeffe and the Women of the Stieglitz Circle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), particularly the chapter "The Feminine Voice and the Woman-Child: Katharine Nash Rhoades and Georgia O'Keeffe," 114–189.
[164] Rosalind Krauss, "Stieglitz/*Equivalents*," *October* 11 (Winter 1979): 135.

images perpendicular to the wall (not overhead).[165] I believe these seemingly

coincidental underlying commonalities are, in truth, no accident. The fact that Stieglitz

used cloud imagery within the context of portraiture betrays the conceptual origin of the

trope: Marcel Duchamp's portrait object *Fountain*, 1917.

Fountain as Portrait: Part Two

It is, nowadays, a well known fact that Alfred Stieglitz served as a sort of

unsuspecting facilitator of *Fountain*'s "second life." Indeed, it is thanks to the modernist

photographer that we have an image of the first version of the work as portrait object at

all: *Marcel Duchamp, Fountain*, 1917 (fig. 3.5). The original readymade is sadly no

longer extant, having been lost sometime after its removal from the Grand Central Palace

galleries, its relocation to 291, and its appearance before Stieglitz's camera lens.[166]

To recapitulate briefly: When in 1917 Marcel Duchamp submitted a porcelain

urinal to the Society of Independent Artists exhibition to open in early April that year, a

majority of the association's board, despite a proudly proclaimed imperative to display all

work submitted for exhibition, declined to show the sculpture publicly, citing indecency

as the official reason. This was exactly the kind of closed-mindedness whose presence

Duchamp had wished to test through his confrontational performance in the first place.

Stieglitz, whom the organizers had named an honorary member of the exhibition

committee, played a significant role in the subsequent brouhaha.

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[165] Ibid., 134.
[166] With the scant remaining evidence, William Camfield makes a valiant effort to account for *Fountain*'s existence after its removal from the *Independents Exhibition* and the sculpture's subsequent loss. The readymade's last mention in the written record seems to occur in letters from Alfred Stieglitz to Henry McBride and Georgia O'Keeffe, respectively, on April 19, 1917. See Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, 32–35.

As part of the discursive apparatus around the Independents Exhibition—and in the tradition of the prevalent cartoons that satirized the yearly French Salons—a sixteen-page proto-dadaist journal called "The Blind Man" appeared around April 10, hastily put together by Duchamp and his co-conspirators Pierre Roché and Beatrice Wood.[167] The periodical's second (and final) installment, published in May, focused attention specifically on the *Fountain* controversy. A curious public that had only heard about, but not actually seen, the sculpture demanded a visualization of the offending artwork. Thus, Duchamp the publicity monger pressed Stieglitz the photographer into service. Beatrice Wood later recorded in her daybook that

> At Marcel's request, [Stieglitz] agreed to photograph the *Fountain* for the frontispiece of the magazine. He was greatly amused, but also felt it was important to fight bigotry in America. He took great pains with the lighting, and did it with such skill that a shadow fell across the urinal suggesting a veil. The piece was renamed: "Madonna of the Bathroom."[168]

The editors of *The Blind Man* did in fact place Stieglitz's staged photograph of *Fountain* prominently on page four of the publication (fig. 4.17), where it anchored a three-page feature spread on the Independents Exhibition contretemps, entitled "The Richard Mutt Case." The image found itself in good company, too. A photographic reproduction of Duchamp's *Broyeuse de Chocolat, no. 2*, 1914, graced the periodical's cover, calling further attention to *Fountain*'s machine aesthetic, readymade status, and three-dimensionality.[169] And the story's second page of text shared a layout with Clara

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[167] For a treatment on the French sense of humor and the culture of caricaturing Salon artworks, see Jorgelina Orfila, "*Blague*, Nationalism, and Incohérence," in June Ellen Hargrove and Neil McWilliam, eds., *Nationalism and French Visual Culture, 1870–1914* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 172–193.

[168] Wood, unpublished diary entry, 13 April 1917, as quoted in Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, 33. It should be documented that the image was not used as the frontispiece. See following note below.

[169] *Chocolate Grinder, No. 2* includes actual thread on its surface, a detail that announces Duchamp's literal and figurative artistic "breakthrough" to more conceptual, rather than transcriptive, objects. The "no. 2" of

Tice's ink drawing *Edgar Varèse en Composition*, an unconventional "likeness" of the modernist composer-as-musical note that accentuates *Fountain*'s significance as portrait object.[170]

The magazine's context of double entendre—for example, the specific verb ("refused") employed in *Fountain*'s picture caption alludes to elimination: of the actual readymade from the exhibition as well as to waste products from the body—emphasizes the status of Stieglitz's photograph as a "head shot."[171] That period viewers—including Carl Van Vechten, Beatrice Wood, and Alfred Stieglitz, among others—anthropomorphized the bathroom fixture I have already noted.[172] The blurring of boundaries between visual artist and work—or, to put it another way, the attribution of separate, but equal, subject positions to each party—manifests in Alfred Stieglitz's title, *Marcel Duchamp, Fountain*, wherein the two entities are separated only by the (*inframince*) space of a comma.[173] The late twentieth-century artist Jonathan Santlofer makes this proposition explicit in his relief sculpture *Portrait of Richard Mutt*, 1996–1998 (fig. 4.18).

The level to which Marcel Duchamp participated in *Fountain*'s "sitting" remains unknown. Regardless of this historical detail, the self-conscious effort with which Alfred

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the journal's cover productively stands for both the second autograph version of the depicted work of art and the second issue of the magazine in question.

[170] The drawing's title, *Edgar Varèse en Composition*, puns on the musical and visual meanings of the word "composition"—and the joke works in both French and English.

[171] Anne Collins Goodyear, "Constructing a 'Made-Up History': Self-Portrayal and the Legacy of Marcel Duchamp," in Goodyear and McManus, *Inventing Marcel Duchamp*, 85.

[172] Camfield documents the responses of these three viewers in Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, 33–36. He also provides evidence for similar reactions by Louise Norton and Guillaume Apollinaire; see Ibid., 40–41.

[173] Anne Goodyear and James McManus explicate that "According to Duchamp, the elusive concept of "infra-thin" could not be directly described, only illustrated through example. … [T]he infra-thin concern[s] the nearly imperceptible barriers between things, or the liminal space between them, a concept that fascinated Duchamp." See Goodyear and McManus, "Inventing Marcel Duchamp: The Dynamics of Portraiture," in Goodyear and McManus, *Inventing Marcel Duchamp*, 21, note 19.

Stieglitz constructed the circumstances of the photography session elicited—and enhanced—the readymade's portrait qualities. The resulting image attests that the proprietor of 291 carefully positioned the sculpture atop a wooden block, a choice that shrewdly referenced Constantin Brancusi's own rough-hewn pedestals for sculpture.[174] Illumination, which activates the final scene as if it were a Baroque tenebrist altarpiece, plays an important part in the scenario. In her April 13 journal entry, we may recall, Beatrice Wood confirmed that, "[Stieglitz] took great pains with the lighting, and did it with such skill that a shadow fell across the urinal suggesting a veil."[175] The object's careful—even contrived—placement and handling evokes the hierarchical centering and artful poses found in many portraits of the Western tradition.

Alfred Stieglitz's aesthetic treatment of *Fountain* confirms that the photographer invested the sculpture with subjectivity. Ever since Francis Naumann first recognized the Marsden Hartley painting behind the sculpture, scholars have frequently associated *The Warriors*, 1913 (fig. 4.19) with the readymade in question.[176] William Camfield has perceptively noted two sets of correspondences in the photograph: between the sculpture's shape and the canvas's formal composition and between the painting's connotations of battle and Duchamp's declaration of war on the Society of Independent Artists.[177] Other art historians, such as Anne Goodyear (with whom I agree

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[174] Pepe Karmel argues that Duchamp always intended the piece to sit atop a pedestal. See Karmel, "Marcel Duchamp, 1917: The Not So Innocent Eye," Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America*, 224.

[175] Wood, as quoted in Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, 33.

[176] According to William Camfield, Naumann was the first art historian to identify the Marsden Hartley painting correctly (and only in 1989, at that); see Ibid., 35. Sarah Greenough included the painting in the National Gallery exhibition *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, January 28–April 22, 2001.

[177] Ibid.

wholeheartedly), see the "improvised" backdrop as a signifier: for "portrait."[178] In prints

such as *Charles Demuth*, 1915 (fig. 4.10), we have already noted Stieglitz's proclivity to

pose his human subjects in front of artworks on hand at 291. The photographer readily

employed this tactic in his conception of *Marcel Duchamp, Fountain*, evidence that

definitively clinches *Fountain*'s identification as a portrait object. This unusual, yet

extremely fruitful, collaboration between Marcel Duchamp and Alfred Stieglitz

culminated in the American avant-garde's first, if not best known, "portrait photograph."

Performing Object-ification

By 1917, when Stieglitz captured the likeness of *Fountain*, photographically-

based imagery, which had been associated with portraiture almost from its inception, was

showing up everywhere: in books and magazines, in advertising, in art galleries. "Just as

it is apparent today that computers and digital technology will dominate not only our

lives but also our thinking in this century," the National Gallery of Art's online

biography of Stieglitz relates, "so too did Stieglitz realize, long before many of his

contemporaries, that photography would be a major cultural force in the twentieth

century."[179] The entry continues:

> Fascinated with what he called 'the idea of photography,' Stieglitz
> foresaw that it would revolutionize all aspects of the way we learn and
> communicate and that it would profoundly alter all of the arts." [180]

This ongoing revolution especially affected the genre of portraiture. Indeed Stieglitz

himself, seizing upon opportunities created by the painters Pablo Picasso and Henri

Matisse and abetted by their development of dis-appearance (the disappearance of the

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[178] Anne Collins Goodyear, "Constructing a 'Made-Up History': Self-Portrayal and the Legacy of Marcel Duchamp," in Goodyear and McManus, *Inventing Marcel Duchamp*, 85.

[179] "Alfred Stieglitz - Biography," n.d., http://www.nga.gov/cgi-bin/tbio?tperson=5477. (accessed August 15, 2009)

[180] Ibid.

sitter, of likeness, and of the body), could claim responsibility for several modernist

innovations in portraiture, though within the realm of photography: the composite

portrait and the anti-mimetic photographic portrait. Another "profound alteration" in

which Stieglitz played a pivotal role occurred when Duchamp brought his readymade

Fountain to 291. This intersection of the process of photography with a specific portrait

object resulted in what I am calling "object-ification."

This course of action—"object-ification"—involves the addition of deliberately

self-conscious photographic praxis to aesthetic equations that include portrait objects—

whether assemblages or readymades—in order to yield extraordinary photographs of

these portrait objects, that is, "portrait photographs." Under these circumstances lighting,

composition, backdrops, accessories, various viewpoints, and multiple exposures all reify

the subject position of the "sitter." The highly staged and self-referential makeover of the

portrait object evokes—and heightens—the subjectivity already invested in the original

"likenesses" in sculpture.

Because of the amplification of the photographer's role within the (generic)

portrait relationship, the three known examples—Alfred Stieglitz's *Marcel Duchamp,*

Fountain, 1917 (fig. 4.20); Morton Schamberg's *God*, c. 1917 (fig. 4.21); and Charles

Sheeler's *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp by Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*, c. 1920 (fig.

4.22)—of this small, but significant, subset of the American avant-garde's production

each transcend their categorization as "neutral" facts (i.e., documentary evidence of a

particular portrait object's existence). Through a process that highlighted artistic

intention rather than "mere" descriptive recording, the photographers in question

transformed three-dimensional portrait objects into two-dimensional portrait

photographs. In this way they performed their participation in—and understanding of—the process of "object-ification."

To return—briefly—to Alfred Stieglitz's "portrait photograph": if *Fountain*, a sculpture that radiates silence, embodies dis-appearance (through its logic-defying condition as portrait-without-referent), then *Marcel Duchamp, Fountain* pictures it. Photography as a process relies, by nature, upon indexical trace. By employing his medium of choice to capture the image of *Fountain*, Stieglitz seemingly subverted the dynamics of dis-appearance; after all, in *Marcel Duchamp, Fountain*, a "body" appears, one that corresponds with great likeness to the "sitter." The photographer accents the performance of posing through the employment of a dramatic lighting scheme, a stagey backdrop, and a hieratic composition.[181]

Yet, rather than a retardataire step backward from the forefront of the avant-garde, Stieglitz in this elegant silver gelatin print parsed out yet another permutation of the anti-mimetic portrait. Just as dis-appearance (and its attendant silence) stressed—or broke—links within the traditional portrait relationship, "object-ification" provided a further outlet for creative expression. Alfred Stieglitz's *Marcel Duchamp, Fountain*, as the first portrait photograph of a portrait object, heralded this shift in a new visual direction.

The Object-ification of *God*

Alfred Stieglitz's dramatic "head shot" was not the only considered artistic response to Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*. In the secondary literature, art historians frequently associate the readymade to another dada icon, believed to have been created

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[181] "[T]heatricality, posing, as a paradigm of normative behavior becomes more central—becomes a thesis and a problem—when people are coopted to resort to new technologies to perform or represent themselves." Berger, Jr., *Fictions of the Pose*, 183.

around the same time: Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's *God*, c. 1917 (fig.

4.23).[182] The exact circumstances of the assemblage's origins are unknown, though a

descendent of Philadelphia modernist Morton Schamberg has testified that the Baroness

removed the constituent length of pipe from "a vacant house on Chestnut Street in the

early 1900s."[183] Whether Freytag-Loringhoven constructed the work in reaction to the

portrait object by Duchamp, or to the portrait photograph by Stieglitz that was

reproduced in the second issue of *The Blind Man*, also remains unclear. (Another non-

representational image of the Creator, *Dieu* (fig. 4.24), may have inspired the Baroness

as well. Jean Crotti exhibited the painting, along with the controversial sculpture *Portrait

de Marcel Duchamp sur mésure*, 1915 (fig. 4.25), at the Montross Gallery, April 4–22,

1916.[184])

What *can* be said for certain, however, is that *God* participates in the modernist

discourse of unconventional likeness. American literature professor Wendy Steiner may

have been the first scholar to designate Freytag-Loringhoven's sculpture a portrait, and

though this identification has yet to gain much currency in the art world, evidence exists

to support her claim.[185] As a portrait object, *God* builds on the conceptual precedent

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[182] See, for example, Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, 58–59.

[183] Amelia Jones, *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 258–259.

[184] William A. Camfield and Jean-Hubert Martin, eds., *Tabu Dada: Jean Crotti & Suzanne Duchamp, 1915–1922* (Bern: Die Kunsthalle, 1983), 129–130.

[185] Immersed more and more in the zeitgeist of the early twentieth century as this dissertation progressed, I gradually came to the realization for myself that Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's *God* functions as a portrait object. I was gratified then to discover in my reading for this project that, while scholars rarely if ever acknowledge this aspect of the work in question, Wendy Steiner, as early as 1977, had already staked such a claim, thereby confirming my intuition: "Under the stimulus of [Gertrude] Stein's portraiture and the avant-garde painting of the period, Picabia, De Zayas, Marsden Hartley, and a number of other artists of the Stieglitz and Arensberg circles attempted a reversal of the norms of painted portraiture parallel to that by Stein in writing. Picabia represented Stieglitz as 'a malfunctioning camera with the word 'Idea' inscribed about it in heavy Germanic type.' Morton Schamberg [sic] sculpted God out of a plumber's joint, and Marsden Hartley painted an abstract *Portrait of an Officer* with the initials of the subject as the only representational element in the painting. All these works, though dependent on the iconic properties of their

established by *Fountain*. Both works partake in the "rage for the literal," the stylistic turn towards three dimensions that gained momentum within the American avant-garde during the 1910s. And both "in your face" sculptures trade on offensive behavior: Duchamp's readymade makes a scatological joke, while the Baroness's assemblage exemplifies a blasphemous one.[186]

Beneath these superficial similarities lie deeper connections. In terms of dis-appearance, *Fountain* disregards common sense to portray, in point of fact, no one. In a similar act of defiance, *God* depicts the Supreme Being—alternately understood to be in heaven, everywhere, dead, or impossible to represent—without the benefit of a portrait sitting, a condition that ensured that the Baroness's inner vision triumphed over any possible semblance of external similitude. In their plumbing fixtures *qua* sculptures, both Duchamp and Freytag-Loringhoven conflate the silence that often accompanies dis-appearance with the (unspeakable) offstage performance of ablutions. Furthermore, *God*'s prominently featured lead sink trap, originally intended to prevent the escape of offensive odors from underground pipes, not only captures the "likeness" of God, it captured the stunned silence of the viewer.[187]

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medium—as Stein was at last dependent on the symbolic properties of language—function primarily as symbols of a more or less conventional sort. They are symbolic indices, as Stein's…portraits are iconic indices." Wendy Steiner, "The Semiotics of a Genre: Portraiture in Literature and Painting," *Semiotica* 21, no. 1 (1977): 117.

[186] William Camfield goes so far as to associate—albeit tentatively—the miter box, a tool for woodworking, with the Biblical carpenter of Nazareth. See Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, 59.

[187] In this respect, *God* resonates with an earlier anti-mimetic portrait, Marius de Zayas's *Alfred Stieglitz*, c. 1913. "[S]tudying the ethnographical collection at the British Museum, I was impressed by an object invented by an artist from Pukapuka or Danger Island in the Pacific. It consisted of a wooden stick to which a few circles made of some vegetal material were fixed by pairs right and left to the stick. It impressed me particularly because it reminded me of the physical appearance of Stieglitz. I say 'physical' because the resemblance was also spiritual. The object, said the catalogue, was built as a trap for catching souls. The portrait was complete, and it caught my soul, because from it I developed a theory of abstract caricature, theory which I exposed together with a few caricatures called 'abstract' together with a few others which were of the 'concrete' style. Some of the critics took my theory of abstract caricatures seriously; others

This silence surrounded *God* to such an extent that the artwork's ascription has remained clouded for much of its almost century-long existence, circumstances intimately linked to the sculpture's object-ification. Francis Naumann documents that when the Arensberg collection was catalogued in the 1950s, the assemblage was attributed to Philadelphia modernist painter and photographer Morton Schamberg, with a reference to the Baroness's participation in the construction of the sculpture.[188] Although the Philadelphia Museum of Art published this dual authorship in the catalogue that accompanied the 1954 exhibition of the Arensberg collection, art historians into the subsequent decades identified Schamberg as the work's sole creator.[189] The feminist impulse of the 1970s led to the later recuperation of many women artists from oblivion, including Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, but not until the late 1980s, at the insistence of Francis Naumann, did scholars begin to reconsider *God*'s attribution. The Philadelphia Museum of Art Web site currently lists Morton Schamberg and Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven as co-creators of the work.[190]

Recent archival research and critical analysis by Naumann and Amelia Jones among others, however, argues that the Baroness conceived of the assemblage *God* on her own, an assertion I endorse. Based on extant examples from the oeuvres of the two artists under discussion, *God* sits more comfortably with found object works like

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didn't." Marius de Zayas, "Stieglitz," in Marius de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, ed. Francis M. Naumann (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 80.

[188] Naumann, *New York Dada, 1915–23*, 234.

[189] Ibid.

[190] "Philadelphia Museum of Art - Collections Object : God," n.d., http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51106.html?mulR=23974. (accessed August 17, 2009). For more about the Baroness, see Rudolf E. Kuenzli, "Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and New York Dada," in Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, ed., *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 442–475; Irene Gammel, *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity: A Cultural Biography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); and Jones, *Irrational Modernism.*

Freytag-Loringhoven's *Cathedral*, c. 1918 (fig. 4.26), rather than with Schamberg's

refined oils on canvas, such as *Machine*, 1916 (fig. 4.27), or his elegant photographs,

such as *Self-Portrait*, c. 1912 (fig. 4.28). Indeed, a Schamberg photograph caused the

confusion of the portrait object's maker in the first place: the existence of a gelatin silver

print of *God* (fig. 4.29), signed and dated "Schamberg // 1917," seemed to indicate to

early cataloguers that Schamberg constructed the sculpture himself. Nevertheless, the

Web site of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the current owner of the photograph in

question, rectifies the situation: "Recent scholarship suggests, however, that this piece

was primarily the creation of Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven...."[191]

  God's particular resonances with *Fountain* did not stop with dis-appearance.

After joining the sink trap to a miter box, the Baroness, romantically infatuated with

Duchamp and determined to meet any and all of his aesthetic challenges, followed

directly in his (figurative) footsteps: she took *God* to the studio of Morton Schamberg

who immediately arranged a "sitting" for the sculpture. At least three finished prints,

wherein the photographer transformed the three-dimensional portrait object into two-

dimensional portrait photographs, resulted.[192] Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven proved (at

least to herself) that she was the intellectual equal of Marcel Duchamp.

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[191] "'God' by Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and Morton Schamberg | Morton Schamberg | All | Photographs | Collection Database | Works of Art | The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York," n.d., http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/photographs/god_by_baroness_elsa_von_freytag_loringhoven_and_morton_schamberg/objectview.aspx?collID=19&OID=190012751.
(accessed August 17, 2009). Michael R. Taylor, the Muriel and Philip Berman Curator of Modern Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, however, disagrees with this assessment and has recently made the case for joint authorship. See Michael R. Taylor, "New York," in Leah Dickerman et al., *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art in association with D.A.P./ Distributed Art Publishers, New York, 2005), 289.

[192] "'God' by Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and Morton Schamberg | Morton Schamberg | All | Photographs | Collection Database | Works of Art | The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York."

The extent to which the Baroness contributed to the actual photography session of *God* is unknown. Schamberg, who had trained as a painter at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, eventually became a portrait photographer to remain financially solvent; he was thus thoroughly prepared professionally when the Baroness finally turned up on his doorstep. The time and thought that this unlikely team put into their collaborative venture reveals to what extent they regarded the portrait object *God* as possessing a subject position.

A comparison of two of Schamberg's portrait photographs of the assemblage (fig. 4.21 and fig. 4.29) demonstrates this treatment. Lighting in each print falls fully and evenly upon the subject, which casts its shadow on each respective background. The sculpture occupies the central focus of the composition, much the same as many conventional painted portraits in the Western tradition. Both prints reveal slightly different camera angles that enhance their individuality; in the Metropolitan Museum version, the photographer greatly reduced the depth of field to create a "close-up" of the sink trap. The number of known different exposures—at least three—implies that the modicum of time involved to style the "sitter" and its surroundings was not insubstantial. While the plain white board that serves as backdrop in the Houston Museum image heightens the contrast between it and the dark pipes, the painting (fig. 4.27) behind the sculpture in the Metropolitan Museum's print plays up the assemblage's mechanomorphic connotations.[193] Although it is uncertain in which order this pair of images were constructed, in posing the subject in front of another artwork (just as Alfred

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[193] Schamberg's work in question is *Painting*, 1916, formerly in the collections of the Sociéte Anonyme and now owned by the Yale University Art Gallery. See "Yale University Art Gallery - eCatalogue - Painting (formerly Machine)," n.d., http://ecatalogue.art.yale.edu/detail.htm?objectId=44176. (accessed January 23, 2010)

Stieglitz had done in the photograph published in *The Blind Man*), Schamberg strengthened the assemblage's potential later reception, through its reification in a "celebrity" portrait photograph. Through conscientious poses, chiaroscuro, and camera treatment, Morton Schamberg skillfully realized the object-ification of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's *God*.

Object-ifying *Marcel Duchamp*

The Baroness's fixation with Marcel Duchamp did not end with her spoofing of *Fountain*.[194] This libidinous proto-performance artist harbored a not-so-secret infatuation—both intellectual and romantic—for the French-born dadaist and chess master. She expressed her unrequited affection in two portrayals of Duchamp, one of which especially contributed to the ongoing discussion among the American avant-garde around the unconventional likeness. As it was later lost or destroyed, the original assemblage is now known only through a pair of images from the lens of Morton Schamberg's onetime housemate Charles Sheeler, which document the original object's existence (fig. 4.22 and fig. 4.30).

Despite the fact that the circumstances of *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*'s origins remain shadowy, some of the Baroness's objectives in crafting the piece seem more apparent.[195] The assemblage consists of dusty detritus, cobbled together, and overflowing

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[194] Michael R. Taylor suggests the intriguing possibility that the Baroness and Morton Schamberg knew about the Independents Exhibition brouhaha in Manhattan and were planning their own public assault on good taste with *God* and its portrait photographs. See Taylor, "New York," in Dickerman et al., *Dada*, 290.
[195] Francis Naumann claims that "When William Carlos Williams saw the Baroness's object-portrait of Duchamp in the offices of *The Little Review*, he inquired about its creator…." Naumann, *New York Dada, 1915–23*, 173. Williams's autobiography, however, reads: "At their apartment [the apartment of Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, editors of *The Little Review*] I also saw for the first time, under a glass bell, a piece of sculpture that appeared to be chicken guts, possibly imitated in wax. It caught my eye. I was told it was the work of a titled German woman, Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven…." Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*, 164. Given the discrepancies in Williams's visual description ("wax," "under a

its goblet base. Michael Taylor suggests that the found object sculpture was meant to "pin down" the provocateur's essential nature (his persona vacillated between a normative "Marcel Duchamp" and the more subversive "Rrose Sélavy" at this particular moment).[196] By capturing the artist's "likeness" the Baroness aspired to possess his heart as well.[197] This impulse is borne out by the work's heavy reliance on a variety of feathers (employed by their original avian owners to attract a mate) and the upright end of a fishing rod complete with lure (in hopes of "reeling him in"). Acting out her passion through this unique "loving cup," the Baroness apparently planned to award the piece to Duchamp for his achievements to date as "The Most Inventive Artist of the Year."[198]

As a masterpiece of New York dada, Freytag-Loringhoven's *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* establishes by the early 1920s that the artist was completely conversant with the theory of dis-appearance within the genre of portraiture. Though the Baroness and Duchamp were on speaking terms, Freytag-Loringhoven's peripatetic nature and unwelcome advances made it unlikely—even unnecessary—for the object of her affection to be present during the composition of his portrait. This disappearance of the sitter freed the artist from any expectation for a superficially corresponding likeness, empowering her instead to produce the vision she saw in her mind's eye. While the *Portrait*'s verticality and central axis indirectly references the human figure, in the final

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glass bell") and the nature of the objects in the Baroness's *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, I believe it is a question of two entirely different works altogether.

[196] "New York," Michael R. Taylor, in Dickerman et al., *Dada*, 291.

[197] "[T]he important point about what I call the magic of mimesis is the same—namely that 'in some way or another' the making and existence of the artifact that portrays something gives one power over that which is portrayed." Michael T. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 13.

[198] Naumann, *New York Dada, 1915–23*, 171, and Taylor, "New York," in Dickerman et al., *Dada*, 291.

work Duchamp's body has disappeared entirely, replaced by found objects, such as the wineglass, that evoke his mischievous spirit.[199]

Silence, the conceptual sidekick of dis-appearance, imbues Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*. Frustrated in her attempts to communicate her affection physically, the Baroness sublimated her yearnings into art. Words—and she used plenty of them—at this juncture were not enough.[200] In her desire to attract—and hopefully keep—Duchamp's undivided attention, the Baroness availed herself of common, everyday objects to create her most ambitious, complex, and fully realized three-dimensional work. The creation of *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* allowed her to express what otherwise could not be expressed. Despite the Baroness's best efforts, however, Duchamp never met her ardor with equal abandon. The silence in *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* would remain unbroken.

At some point after its creation, it occurred to Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, the women behind *The Little Review*, to reproduce an image of the sculpture in their journal. The editors regularly featured the Baroness's verse among the magazine's pages; illustrating one of her three-dimensional works extended their patronage in a further direction. Indeed, the winter 1922 issue featured Freytag-Loringhoven in a two page spread, with a poem (see Appendix A) on the left and a photograph of *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* on the right (fig. 4.31). According to the picture's credit line, Charles Sheeler received the honor of photographing the assemblage for posterity.

[199] Jennifer Quick follows Michael Taylor's view that the vitreous chalice references Duchamp's *Large Glass*. See Quick, "Baroness Elsa's *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*," (catalogue no. 13), in Goodyear and McManus, *Inventing Marcel Duchamp*, 144, and Taylor, "New York," in Dickerman et al., *Dada*, 291.
[200] "Several of the Baroness's poems published in *The Little Review* are about Duchamp—or M'ars, as she called him—whom she initially greatly admired and passionately loved." Rudolf E. Kuenzli, "Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and New York Dada," in Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, 448. See also "Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven Digital Library," n.d., http://www.lib.umd.edu/dcr/collections/EvFL-class/index.html. (accessed January 29, 2010)

Once again we do not know the level to which the Baroness participated in the

shooting of one of her sculptures. Numerous past publications on dada link the print of

Sheeler's photograph (fig. 4.22), which is now owned by the Bluff Collection, with the

winter 1922 issue of *The Little Review*. My recent research at the National Gallery of Art

Library, however, refutes this association, as the reproduction in the magazine is

obviously a different picture of the same subject (fig. 4.30). The existence of at least two

negatives from the "portrait sitting" in question substantiates that the assignment was no

whim or passing fancy, but was approached by Sheeler as an aesthetic "problem" with

thoughtfulness and sincerity.

The plate upon which the chalice rests in the "Little Review" variant functions as

a tell-tale sign that the photographer brought a high degree of self-conscious design to the

photo shoot.[201] The hieratic focus on the solitary subject in both images echoes the

format established in portraits of dignitaries during the individual-focused era of the high

Renaissance. Blank backgrounds in both of Sheeler's images also appropriately direct the

beholder's attention to the portrait subject. Lighting, which is significantly different in

both prints, causes dramatic contrasts and dark shadows, adding a theatrical flair to each

photograph. Distinct viewpoints of the assemblage—from the "right" and "left"

profiles—translate the three-dimensional "loving cup" into two-dimensional "mug

shots."

Destined for dissemination in *The Little Review*, the photograph of *Portrait of

Marcel Duchamp* attested to the variety of solutions that artists working in the United

States found to the "conventional portrait problem." In their joint venture, Elsa von

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[201] The addition of the platter to the setup lends itself to an interpretation of the image as a re-staging of the beheading of John the Baptist, with Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven as an offstage Salomé. The frustration of Herodias in the biblical story maps easily onto the feelings experienced by the modern day Baroness.

Freytag-Loringhoven and Charles Sheeler ensured that dis-appearance and silence remained vital topics of philosophical debate into the 1920s. Building on the recent tradition launched by Alfred Stieglitz and furthered by Morton Schamberg, Sheeler and the Baroness asserted their own native intelligence and visual acuity through the object-ification of Marcel Duchamp, one of the modernist period's key theorists.

Man Ray's Flirtation with Object-ification

Man Ray, the modernist painter turned photographer, worked alongside Marcel Duchamp and attended the salons held chez Walter and Louise Arensberg. In addition, he made interesting contributions to the ongoing dialogue about the "unconventional likeness" in the United States of the early twentieth century, though perhaps he did not push these issues as far as some of the other members of the American avant-garde. His experiments with object-ification, while perhaps not as fully realized as his other projects, function as notable exceptions that prove the rules of the sub-genre.

A year before *Fountain* ever exploded onto the scene, Man Ray put the finishing touches on an intriguing portrait object, which, unfortunately, is no longer extant: *Self-Portrait*, 1916 (fig. 4.32). Transgressing the boundaries between painting and sculpture, the original work of art is now known only from a vintage photograph and from several replicas (fig. 4.33 and fig. 4.34). Like Francis Picabia's *Ici, C'est Ici Stieglitz* (fig. 1.6) with its broken camera, and like Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's *God* (fig. 4.23) with its useless sink trap, Man Ray's *Self-Portrait* revels in the iconography of the industrially manufactured but functionally inoperative machine. Created for the artist's second one-person show at the Charles Daniel Gallery in New York, the piece featured a doorbell mounted on the panel's bottom center that was meant to entice viewers to overcome their

"don't touch" inhibitions.[202] Man Ray intentionally did not wire the device for sound,

however—yet another example of silence following from dis-appearance—leaving

curious visitors puzzled and frustrated, the unsuspecting dupes of an inside joke. This

proto-dadaist spirit carried over into an additional layer of the mixed media work as well:

the assemblage's handprint and sgraffiti not only evince the artist's past presence before

the picture plane, but also wittily pun on his name: "Man Ray" sounds like *main + raye*

in French, words which in turn mean "hand" and "scratch," respectively.[203]

The classification of the gelatin silver print *Self-Portrait* as a "documentary

photograph" throws the three "portrait photographs" discussed above—Alfred Stieglitz's

Marcel Duchamp, Fountain; Morton Schamberg's *God*; and Charles Sheeler's *Portrait

of Marcel Duchamp by the Baroness*—into conceptual relief. In the 1910s Man Ray

asked Alfred Stieglitz for some photography lessons so that the junior artist could make

and keep a file on each of the works of art that he created.[204] The provenance of the Getty

Museum's photograph indicates that the print in question came from the Man Ray's

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[202] "One of the portraits has some sort of a bell, a real bell, attached to the panel, and below it is fastened a real bell button. All the people who were in the gallery at the time of my visit betrayed, each in his turn, a strong desire to touch the bell button. I felt it myself, but knowing the respect due to serious art, successfully resisted the temptation." Henry McBride, as quoted in Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism*, 171–172.

[203] Regarding Man Ray's *Painting with Hand Imprint*, 1916, Francis Naumann has hypothesized a similar strategy: "*Painting with Hand Imprint*…includes the impression of a hand dipped into fresh paint and applied to the surface of the canvas. … [T]he hand might also…represent the artist's signature…. For Man Ray, this method of assigning authorship would have seemed especially appropriate, for, even with his limited knowledge of foreign languages, his Belgian-born wife would have made him aware of the fact that in French his first name was phonetically equivalent to the word for hand: *main* = man." See Ibid., 168.

[204] "During the summer of 1915, Man Ray was busy preparing for his first one-man show at the Daniel Gallery. He wanted to take pictures of his paintings, so that he could provide potential reviewers and critics with illustrations of his work. To this end, he sought the advice of Alfred Stieglitz, the photographer, whose gallery he had visited on many earlier occasions to view the various exhibitions of modern art that were held there. This time, however, he wanted to know the type of camera and filters Stieglitz recommended for translating the colors of his paintings into accurate black and white prints." Naumann, *New York Dada, 1915–23*, 76. See also Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism*, 228.

personal production files.[205] The photographer recorded each of his artworks in as

"neutral" a manner as possible, with even lighting and straightforward camera angles.

Abstaining from the apparent stylized manipulation of illumination and poses, the

photographer intended to communicate "transparent fact" rather than "imaginative

reality." Though it is technically a photograph of a portrait object, in the end *Self-Portrait*

downplays, even resists, the metamorphosing performativity that accompanies the

process of object-ification.

Man Ray would, nonetheless, grapple more fully with this issue a few years later

when, for the first time ever, Gertrude Stein permitted herself to be professionally

photographed in order to give her growing readership an idea of her physical

appearance.[206] Man Ray approached the assignment with verve and originality,

producing many images of Stein (including some with her partner Alice B. Toklas) at 27,

rue de Fleurus, among her renowned collection of modernist paintings (fig. 4.35 and fig.

4.36). One of the most striking, and conceptually rich, images from the session is his

Gertrude Stein with Picasso's Portrait of Gertrude Stein, 1922 (fig. 4.37).[207]

Because it was the "first time" Gertrude Stein had posed for her reading public, a

profound sense of self-presentation pervades what must have been the endeavor of at

least several hours, involving different locations within the home, with a multiplicity of

poses, viewpoints, and exposures. Man Ray's singular photograph *Gertrude Stein with*

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[205] "Self-Portrait Assemblage (Getty Museum)," n.d.,
http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=61252. (accessed August 20, 2009)
[206] "My portraits of Gertrude Stein were the first to appear in print, to give her small circle of readers at the time an idea of how she looked." Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), 181–182.
[207] According to Katherine Ware, a few years later Stein turned the tables and "made a portrait of Man Ray in her own medium: 'Sometime Man Ray sometime. Sometime Man Ray sometime. Sometime Man Ray sometime. Sometime sometime.' (1924 unpublished manuscript)." See "*Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein*, 1922 (plate 7)" in Katherine Ware et al., *Man Ray: Photographs from the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1998), 22.

Picasso's <u>*Portrait of Gertrude Stein*</u> functions as the pinnacle of this decidedly staged

performance. Employing what Paul Strand named as the medium's strength

("objectivity," i.e., neutrality), the photograph holds appearance (Stein's physical

presence) in tension with dis-appearance (Picasso's painting). By positioning Stein

adjacent to a prominent artwork, Man Ray alluded to one of Alfred Stieglitz's

longstanding portrait practices (fig. 4.10), a trope that had also found its way into

photographs of Stieglitz's photograph of *Fountain* (fig. 4.20) and Morton Schamberg's

photograph of *God* (fig. 4.29). The image strikes at the heart of the debate over the role

of mimesis within the genre of portraiture. The photograph documents Pablo Picasso's

own "object-ification" of Gertrude Stein while at the same time providing Stein's readers

the opportunity to compare the writer's visage with Picasso's "likeness."[208] In capturing

the likeness of a "likeness" and its human referent, Man Ray demonstrates the

photographic medium's mastery over both. Through his equalization of a flat

representation invested with subjectivity and a living, breathing individual, in true dada

fashion Man Ray extended—and subverted—the process of object-ification.

The same year he printed the negatives from Gertrude Stein's portrait sitting, the

photographer furthered his subversive exploration of object-ification in the construction

of *Object to Be Destroyed*, 1922/1936 (fig. 4.38). The first version of the assemblage,

which a group of rowdy students did, in fact, later obliterate in an act of iconoclasm,

consisted of a photographic cut-out of an "anonymous" organ of sight attached to the arm

of a store bought metronome. The artist would later, in 1936, strengthen the work's

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[208] About Picasso's transformation of Stein from flesh and blood to non-sentient façade, Robert Lubar
writes, "As Pablo tried in vain to secure his subject, Gertrude returned his gaze and deflected it inward.
What alternative did Picasso have, then, but to stop mid-stream, to decapitate Gertrude and replace her head
with a mask? A mask that is a sign of erasure, a violent effacement whose function is to contain and
neutralize a perceived threat." Lubar, "Unmasking Pablo's Gertrude," 59.

connections to the portrait object tradition by substituting the initial image of a "generic"

eye with that of his former studio assistant and lover, Lee Miller.[209] Embodying the

(unspeakable) grief Man Ray experienced after the departure of his muse, this

instantiation of dis-appearance, not unsurprisingly, enacted a superlative performance of

silence.

Object-ification as an aesthetic approach involves the subjugation of the portrait

object through performative photography. Alfred Stieglitz's *Marcel Duchamp, Fountain*,

Morton Schamberg's *God*, and Charles Sheeler's *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp by the*

Baroness all evidence this image-making strategy. Man Ray, however, inverted this

relationship in *Object to Be Destroyed*. Here the photograph—further minoritized by the

fact that it is "cut out" from a larger whole—plays a subsidiary (though still important)

role within the constellation of articles that comprise the entire portrait object. Instead of

capturing the likeness of the portrait object, within the compositional relationships of

Man Ray's assemblage it is the portrait object that has "captured" the photograph.

Nevertheless, much of *Object*'s power resides in the image of the eye. It is the

ever-watchful presence of the lover's organ of sight, in fact, that simultaneously insists

upon the lover's present absence, a trope that hearkens back to portraiture's origins. An

angry mob would subsequently literalize this implicit lack in the work through their

(unscripted) staging of the sculpture's title—*Object to Be Destroyed*—verbatim.

The Disappearance of Portrait Objects

The metonymic purpose of portraiture—evoking by proxy the presence of a

subject position who is absent—plays a foundational role within the dynamics of object-

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[209] Janine Mileaf, "Between You and Me: Man Ray's *Object to Be Destroyed*," *Art Journal* 63, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 6.

ification. As this function of the genre pertains in a very peculiar way to the majority of the portrait objects inventoried in this chapter, it bears brief mention in a coda here.

A quick survey of the readymades and assemblages discussed at length above reveals that—with the exclusion of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's *God*—the other four portrait objects—Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*; Freytag-Loringhoven's *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*; Man Ray's *Self-Portrait*; and Man Ray's *Objet à détruire*—have all literally disappeared in the vagaries of time. Of these, *Fountain*, *Self-Portrait*, and *Objet à détruire* nevertheless have enjoyed long afterlives. The autograph replicas (*Fountain*: figs. 3.5 and 4.39; *Self-Portrait*: figs. 4.33 and 4.34; and *Objet à détruire*: figs. 4.38, 4.40, and 4.41) that their respective artists authorized or fabricated themselves "stand in" for the lost originals while at the same time raising thorny issues around aura, capital, and reproducibility.[210] Indeed, as David Joselit has pointed out, "the only way of maintaining meaning in a readymade after its initial moment of shock was to keep it mobile as a signifier, and this entailed multiple reiterations and framings."[211]

Except for object-ification, the disappearance of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* or Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* would be unremarkable occurrences—after all, works of art (unfortunately) are destroyed or go missing everyday. But to overstate the obvious: we twenty-first-century beholders know how the original versions of these portrait objects initially appeared exactly because they underwent portrait "sittings." Indeed, Alfred Stieglitz's 1917 photograph, for example, remains the primary visual interpretative tool for scholars working on Marcel Duchamp's

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[210] For an exhaustive catalogue of the autograph replicas of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* see Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, 162–165. See also "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 1st ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 219–253.

[211] David Joselit, "Dada's Diagrams," in Dickerman and Witkovsky, *The Dada Seminars*, 227.

juggernaut, *Fountain*. Though it accents the contrived nature of the portrait relationship, the translation process from three-dimensional portrait object to two-dimensional portrait photograph relies on the medium's incidental (pre)occupation with the indexical trace. Artifice and document become inseparable. Object-ification—thankfully—holds in tension what Paul Strand called photography's "objectivity" with what William Carlos Williams termed "the imaginative reality" in order to preserve a (highly idiosyncratic) record of early twentieth-century portrait objects that are, sadly, no longer extant.

Conclusion

The rise and spread of photography at the turn of the twentieth century did more than undermine the primacy of the media of painting and sculpture for the genre of portraiture—it changed the way artists, both visual and verbal, saw and thought. Imagining the world through a viewfinder became a modern way to "make it new."[212] The ubiquity of the photographically-based picture even inspired the poet William Carlos Williams to appropriate the reproduction of a painting into his writing. Alfred Stieglitz, himself a photographer, nurtured the American avant-garde's development of the anti-mimetic portrait through the exhibition of key examples in his galleries and through his own experimental portrait prints.

Marcel Duchamp's "invention" of the portrait object provoked, among other responses, the concomitant innovation of the "portrait photograph." Envisioning these specialized readymades and assemblages as invested with their own personalities, and therefore as appropriate subjects for photography, Alfred Stieglitz, as well as Morton Schamberg and Charles Sheeler, trained their lenses on these complex works of art

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[212] "LIII," from Cantos LII–LXXI, in Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1948), 11.

during elaborately planned-out "sittings." Transforming three-dimensional portrait objects into two-dimensional portrait photographs, these visual stylists performed their avant-garde status through the practice of object-ification, a further permutation of the unconventional likeness.

The majority of these prints—of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, of Man Ray's *Self-Portrait*, and possibly of Freytag-Loringhoven's *God*—were intended as illustrations within contemporary print publications. Such tangible evidence underscores the importance of the photographic reproduction for the dissemination of the explicit imagery of—and implicit theory behind—the non-traditional portrait in the United States of the early twentieth century. This situation coincided with a rising positive perception of the avant-garde artist, a trend that reflected the bourgeoning American celebrity culture of the 1920s. How Stieglitz and his circle employed the unconventional likeness to establish and advance their status within the New York art world—and wider, within the narrative of Western art history—structures the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION

Jean Crotti, Marcel Duchamp, and the "Profil Perdu"

Consider this pair of drawings, both inscribed "1915," by Jean Crotti, which depict the artist's friend and colleague Marcel Duchamp (fig. 5.1–5.2). A recent exhibition brought the sheets together for the first time in decades, perhaps since their creation, and, after their physical examination by a team of paper conservators and art historians, a consensus began to form that the works in question are actually drawings made after a photograph of a portrait object. That is, following the category I established in the previous chapter on object-ification, these drawings, scholars now hypothesize, are not preparatory sketches for the metal and glass sculpture that is their subject (Crotti's *Portrait de Marcel Duchamp sur mésure*, 1915), but images made *after* a photograph of the portrait sculpture (fig. 4.25).[213]

In 1914 Swiss artist Jean Crotti travelled to the United States to visit his brother André in Ohio; by the following year he established himself—if temporarily—in New York City, where he renewed his acquaintance with Marcel Duchamp.[214] The two shared

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[213] The question of whether a photograph operates, on the one hand, as a "neutral" indexical documentary record or, on the other, as an aesthetic statement (or as both at the same time) is a matter of interpretation open to debate. Given its commercial origins and lack of self-conscious performativity, however, I do not find enough evidence to claim that Peter Juley's image functions as a modernist "portrait photograph." I am beholden to the groundbreaking research of Anne Collins Goodyear, which enabled me to make the insights I explicate here. Besides deriving great benefit from the exhibition, *Inventing Marcel Duchamp: The Dynamics of Portraiture*, that she co-curated with James W. McManus and from the catalogue that accompanied it, I was also privileged to attend the day-long symposium held on 27 March 2009, in conjunction with the show, and to participate in an earlier object-based study session wherein curators and conservators from the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the National Portrait Gallery, examined the two drawings by Jean Crotti in depth. All of these activities influenced my thinking about anti-mimetic portraiture, particularly about the sheets under discussion. See also Goodyear, "*Marcel Duchamp*" and "*Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*" (catalogue nos. 4 and 5, respectively) in Goodyear and McManus, *Inventing Marcel Duchamp*, 132–135.

[214] William Camfield and Jean-Hubert Martin suggest the possibility that Crotti and Duchamp knew each other previously in Europe, as both participated in the Dîners des Artistes de Passy in 1913. Other

a working studio for several months in the fall and winter of 1915. Indeed, during this moment, Duchamp was engaged upon *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915–1923, whose materials comprised glass and lead wire. Crotti produced two known Dadaist assemblages during this period, *The Clown* (fig. 5.3), now in the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, and the *Portrait de Marcel Duchamp sur mésure*, no longer extant. The predominating materials of glass and lead wire in both these pieces betray strong working and conceptual links to Duchamp's own process and production at the very same time.

Because this second work unfortunately no longer exists, scholars have only been cognizant of the opus through the written record and through photographic reproductions. The primary piece of documentary evidence remains the silver gelatin photograph mentioned above (fig. 4.25). Scholars previously attributed it to Man Ray, but Anne Goodyear has recently proposed assigning the work to Peter A. Juley, a commercial photographer based in New York whose firm specialized in documenting works of art and exhibition installations.[215]

Based on the textual record we know that Crotti crafted his portrait sculpture of Duchamp from lead, wire, and vitreous orbs; the Juley photograph substantiates these facts. The phrase "sur mésure," which scholars have understood as "made to measure," indicate at least two or three indexical relationships captured in the three-dimensional work. The most obvious is the sculpture's prominent forehead, quite probably molded directly from the sitter's body (the material softness of lead would have facilitated this

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participants included Albert Gleizes, Guillaume Apollinaire, and Francis Picabia. See "Chronology" in Camfield and Martin, *Tabu Dada*, 129.

[215] See Goodyear, "Jean Crotti's *Portrait de Marcel Duchamp sur mésure*" (catalogue no. 3) in Goodyear and McManus, *Inventing Marcel Duchamp*, 130–131.

process). Art historians have not made such a direct connection with the two main wires

that delineate the jawline and profile, though I believe their linearity and the phrase "sur

mésure" indicate a very hands-on working process.[216] Duchamp's frequent use of thread

and string, especially in his *3 Stoppages Etalon*, 1913–1914, a motif which he reprised in

The Large Glass, seem a relevant reference here, too. Most of all the sculpture's two

chief elements—the prominent forehead capped by a mat of effulgent wire "hair,"

juxtaposed with the glass eyes—embody in a very real way Duchamp's concomitant

aesthetic goals: "I was interested [at the time] in ideas—not merely in visual products. I

wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind."[217]

According to Anne Goodyear's recent research, Walter and Louise Arensberg

acquired the original sculpture for their burgeoning collection of important modern art,

but then they returned the work to Crotti at some future juncture.[218] Learning of the

work's possible availability, competing collector and arts patron Katherine Dreier

requested the piece from Crotti for the Sociéte Anonyme collection in 1949; however,

Crotti responded that the work no longer existed at that time, providing a *terminus post*

quem for the lifespan of the original sculpture.[219]

Thanks to behind-the-scenes preparation for the exhibition *Inventing Marcel*

Duchamp: The Dynamics of Portraiture, conservators and art historians have looked

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[216] Much of the novelty and humor of *Marcel Duchamp sur mésure* results from the literalization of the "made to measure" phrase of the title. Crotti fashioned the sculpture's forehead and scalp by molding a soft lead sheet directly to the sitter's skull, a process similar to creating a death mask. Much in the way a tailor uses a tape to calculate a customer's waistline, here the artist bent pliable wire along the contours of Duchamp's jawline and profile to capture his "likeness." Duchamp would return to cast body parts—and the implicit questions that they raise about reproducibility and aura—later in his career.

[217] Duchamp, as quoted in Sweeney, "Eleven Europeans in America," 20.

[218] No reason has, of yet, been determined, though perhaps the collectors asked the artist to repair the work, as lead is soft and friable and easily damaged.

[219] See Goodyear, "Jean Crotti's *Portrait de Marcel Duchamp*," in Goodyear and McManus, *Inventing Marcel Duchamp*, 130, note 1.

afresh at the Peter Juley photograph of Crotti's sculpture and Crotti's pair of drawings that depict the same opus. The three works on paper share more than subject matter. The drawing, now owned by The Museum of Modern Art, bears the following inscription in the lower right-hand corner: "Premier projet pour / le portrait sur mésure / de Marcel Duchamp / 1915 / J. Crotti". Scholars in the past have taken this short text to mean that the two drawings predated the sculpture, functioning as preparatory sketches. However, convened in the summer of 2006, a group of curators and conservators—including Scott Gerson, Anne Collins Goodyear, James McManus, and Adrian Sudhalter—were the first to recognize the similarity in composition of the two images and to consider that the MOMA graphite drawing might, in fact, post-date the photograph. Additional physical evidence, including proportional clues and drawing marks, have led to a consensus that this hypothesis does indeed seem to be true. Furthermore, this reconsideration of artistic process and historical record has led to the formulation of a new theory of the relationship of the graphite drawings to each other and to the Juley photograph and why Crotti created the sheets in the first place.[220]

Given that Jean Crotti very consciously used the photograph as a basis for the drawings, certain chronological circumstances now take on new significance. We know that around 1952 Marcel Duchamp was organizing a survey show of dada objects to be

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[220] Participants in an object-based colloquium hosted by the National Portrait Gallery on 28 January 2009 examined the two related drawings by Crotti and discussed them and theories of their genesis in great detail; I am grateful to Anne Goodyear for the invitation to partake in this illuminating study session. Those present, from the Museum of Modern Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Smithsonian Institution, included Rosemary Fallon, Maya Foo, Scott Gerson, Anne Goodyear, Julie Heath, Scott Homolka, Shelley Langdale, Kate Maynor, James McManus, Jennifer Quick, Wendy Reaves, and myself. (Michael R. Taylor, who was invited but unfortunately was unable to attend this colloquy, subsequently made substantive contributions to the conversation.) This collaborative research will be published in an essay, "Jean Crotti's *Portrait sur Mésure de Marcel Duchamp*: On Artistic Originality and Ambition" by Scott Gerson, Anne Collins Goodyear, Scott Homolka, Shelley Langdale, James McManus, Adrian Sudhalter, and Michael Taylor in *Of or By Marcel Duchamp and Rrose Sélavy: Meditations on the Identities of an Artist*, co-edited by Anne Collins Goodyear and James McManus and forthcoming from Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, in conjunction with Rowman and Littlefield.

held at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York and asked Crotti, now his brother-in-law, to send *The Clown* as a representative piece of work from the time the two spent in New York in the 1910s. Because the Philadelphia Museum of Art's sheet—the more highly finished of the two drawings—bears physical evidence of appropriate exhibition history, art historians now surmise that Crotti created the drawing as an additional submission to the exhibition, a referent to the original lead sculpture of *Portrait sur mésure* that had been lost or destroyed after the Arensbergs deaccessioned it. In other words, it is believed that Duchamp requested *The Clown* for the 1952 gallery exhibition, which in turn elicited Crotti's desire to include *Portrait sur mésure*. However, as that work no longer existed, the artist turned to a photographic document in his files to create a surrogate that he could send as a proxy. Employing carefully proportioned hatch marks and a compass, Crotti roughed out The Museum of Modern Art's drawing on one half of an oversized piece of paper. Folding the sheet in two, with a blank surface now on top of the sketch, Crotti traced the image and then worked it up as a finished drawing, including charcoal in the final version for more graphic punch. The inscription on the companion piece—"Premier projet pour / le portrait sur mésure / de Marcel Duchamp / 1915 / J. Crotti"—now reveals itself to be describing, in retrospect, a replicated work of art, rather than documenting and dating any preliminary sketches.

Now that the particular pressures weighing on Crotti have been recuperated, the why and the wherefore for the genesis of the pair of sheets in question seem much clearer. In her entry for these twinned drawings in the catalogue that accompanies *Inventing Marcel Duchamp*, Anne Goodyear notes that Jean Crotti was eager to be not only represented by his best work for the Sidney Janis Gallery show, such that he self-

consciously "recreated" one of his most famous sculptures for that exhibition, but also that he wished fervently to demonstrate his close artistic association with Marcel Duchamp, an artist "who had [had] a great influence on his thinking."[221] The importance of such interpersonal relationships and their physical manifestation within artworks form the thematic basis for this chapter, a meditation on internal group bonds within the American avant-garde, that is, "presentation."

Presenting Presentation

This anecdotal explication of Jean Crotti's drawings of Marcel Duchamp serves to introduce the complex web of performances—the "presentation" of my title—that I will discuss in the pages that follow. On the first level, Crotti performs his own identity as an artist through his process and through his production: working in Duchamp's studio, having his sculpture photographed, replicating a lost original through drawing. This first level concerns the individual and involves both interior rhetoric and exterior display. "C'est en forgeant qu'on devient forgeron."[222]

On the second level, all of Crotti's versions of the *Portrait sur mésure de Marcel Duchamp* perform within the nexus of interconnected bonds that I described in Chapter 1. To recapitulate, I argue that a portrait is not a single, fixed object, but a series of relations and that the functioning of these relations constitutes the portrait as such. The various Crotti images under discussion all operate within this complex relational field, comprised of object, sitter, artist, title, and beholder.

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[221] Goodyear's catalogue entries for "*Marcel Duchamp*" and "*Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*" more fully explicate the entire scenario. See Goodyear and McManus, *Inventing Marcel Duchamp*, 132–135. The quote is from Goodyear's translation of a chronology crafted by Crotti during the 1950s; for the original French, see Ibid., 134, note 11.

[222] This French proverb is usually translated as "Practice makes perfect," but literally it means "It is through smithing that one becomes a blacksmith." This maxim betrays an (intuitive) cultural understanding of the relationship between performance and identity, issues that I will unpack further in the present chapter.

On the third level, Crotti participated within an avant-garde; that is, he moved within a larger network of interpersonal relationships, constantly performing his status within an emerging, dynamic hierarchy. Certainly, these acts—the daily habits and routines of living as a working artist who makes portraits—incorporate the first and second levels (performance of the self, performance within the portrait nexus) just mentioned. But the existence of any avant-garde group also implies a rhetorical stance "above and beyond" a particular culture's normative way of thinking. Artists found at the forefront must continually demonstrate their oppositional point of view to society, as well as their complicated relationships to others in the hierarchy of the avant-garde. How the artists of the Stieglitz Circle utilized portraiture within these multi-layered and intersecting performances, specifically how they as a confederation performed their avant-garde status, their "group-ness," to each other is what interests me here.[223]

Scrutinizing all these performances and relationships is difficult work; their complexity and ubiquity most usually elide them with "the natural" in everyday life. However, the concept of "presentation," as manifested in the example of Jean Crotti described above and as further elaborated in the pages that follow, yields insight into how the idea of portraiture continued to change within the American avant-garde of the 1920s.

In her highly regarded and greatly influential 1999 book *Gender Trouble*, philosopher and theorist Judith Butler states that gender

> ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*.[224]

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[223] "Seeing similar types of portraits in each others' homes helps the community of sitters persuade and reassure themselves that they are affiliated, given a corporate identity, set apart from others, by a distinctive and visible set of norms." Berger, Jr., *Fictions of the Pose*, 263.

[224] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 33 (emphasis mine).

Butler's hypothesis acts to destabilize the notion of essential being and proposes to replace it with a self always in flux. Indeed, extrapolating from Butler's pithy proposition, I have come to believe that all facets of identity, even reality itself, are "tenuously constituted in time…through a stylized repetition of acts." Obviously this hypothesis puts pressure on previous understandings of "the self"—and, by extension, the portrait relationship (as constitutive of several subject positions through time). But this model of being-in-the-world also has several important implications for the third level of performance articulated above: the self-reflexive instantiation of the avant-garde.

Butler's model asserts that the individual is in a state of continual fluctuation, relentlessly building, unbuilding, and rebuilding itself. In my proposed third level of performance I posit that subgroups within cultures behave analogously to the individual self; that is, the subgroups have no fixed identity and they incessantly assert themselves, forge links, break them, and so on. And, similarly to the dynamics of an individual subject position, these constitutive actions performed by the group occur among its members, reinforcing internal relations—this is what I mean by "presentation." The tangible outcomes of these performances may manifest in various physical traces: books and journals, artworks and exhibitions, concerts and theatrical performances. Before I begin to use this lens to observe the "presentation" strategies of the Stieglitz circle, two other models—one theoretical, one historical—merit attention, as they further articulate the dynamics of group formation as I will apply it to the avant-garde working in the United States of the early twentieth century.

Presentation Models

Benedict Anderson's elegant and inspired book, *Imagined Communities*, first published in 1983, has become a standard reference in the field regarding the theorization of nationalism in the modern era. In the text Anderson convincingly outlines key developments within human history that contributed to the individual's growing sense of belonging to a socio-political entity larger than the local community. Anderson first identifies three "fundamental cultural conceptions" that informed the classical world's understanding of reality: the primacy of an ontologically-based script-language, the organization of civilization around monarchical centers, and the assumption of a cosmologico-historical temporal continuum.[225] The "slow, uneven decline" of these core beliefs, Anderson goes on to explicate, "first in Western Europe, later elsewhere, under the impact of economic change, 'discoveries' (social and scientific), and the development of increasingly rapid communications" occasioned the deep-seated desire for a "new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together."[226]

The "imagined community" arose to meet this need. No longer the unconscious, naturalized subject of sovereign, religion, and language, the individual nonetheless aspired to identify with a group larger than the self. Anderson hypothesizes that "the convergence of capitalism and print technology…created the possibility of [this] new form of imagined community…."[227] Print-capitalism, particularly through such widespread ephemeral media as newspapers, "creat[ed] that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations."[228]

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[225] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 36.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Ibid., 46.
[228] Ibid., 36.

The modernists on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, as individuals living at the turn of the twentieth century by which time these world-making tactics existed in full force, both resisted and employed these strategies of social construction to their own ends. On the one hand, membership in the avant-garde could, at times, trump state loyalties, as adherents pursued lofty humanistic goals that transcended geo-political boundaries. Stieglitz and his allies welcomed dialogue with Marius de Zayas (a Mexican), Francis Picabia (of Cuban-French parentage), and Constantin Brancusi (from Romania), just to name a few of this coalescing transnational group. Similarly, Americans travelled to distant shores to explore modernist principles elsewhere: Gertrude Stein, for example, developed her experimental writing method in France and Italy, while Charles Demuth and Marsden Hartley worked out cubist formal strategies in Bermuda and Germany. These cosmopolites, or "*transatlantiques*" as defined by Wanda Corn, were "migrant artists, moving back and forth across the Atlantic, carrying the ideas and values of one culture into the heart of another."[229] "Even when they stayed abroad for a number of years," she further remarks, "they continued to fashion themselves as *non-nationals*…."[230]

On the other hand, the transatlantiques consciously utilized print-capitalism, though, in hindsight, to purposes very different from its seemingly inherent nationalistic intent. Despite print-capitalism's integral role in solidifying vernacular languages and homeland sentiments, the modernist avant-garde employed these means to other ends: the imagination and maintenance of a world that transcended state politics and geographical boundaries. One need only think of the proliferation of the so-called "small magazines"

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[229] Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 91.
[230] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

and the exploitation of the postal system by the global dada collective during the mid-1910s and 1920s to see this seditious impulse at play.[231] Alfred Stieglitz's activities preceded these subsequent efforts by over a decade. Paul Rosenfeld would later recognize the gallerist-photographer's determining role in the "imagined community" of the American avant-garde by observing in *Port of New York* that, "Photography, *Camera Work*, Photo-Secession, 291 Fifth Avenue, each of [Stieglitz's] forms of action has been life creating out of economy its proper unprecedented form…."[232]

Like Benedict Anderson's analysis, Jill Lepore's book *A is for American* offers insight into the "presentation" strategies of the early twentieth-century modernists (although her own research and argument concern the early Republic). Each of her seven chapters forms the individual portrait of a different "man of letters": Noah Webster, William Thornton, Sequoyah, Thomas Gallaudet, Abd al-Rahman Ibrahima, Samuel Morse, and Alexander Graham Bell. "What binds the[se] characters," Lepore explains, is "the idea that letters and other characters—alphabets, syllabaries, signs, and codes—hold nations together…."[233] Within the context of the Federal period, Lepore implicitly builds on Anderson's tenet that "print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars."[234] Lepore's fascinating character studies point up the fact that those who control language and its dissemination also command important capabilities for world-making.

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[231] For a cogent overview of this phenomenon see Matthew S. Witkovsky, "Pen Pals," in Dickerman and Witkovsky, *The Dada Seminars*, 268–293.

[232] Paul Rosenfeld, *Port of New York; Essays on Fourteen American Moderns* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1924), 242.

[233] Jill Lepore, *A Is for American: Letters and Other Characters in the Newly United States* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 11.

[234] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 45.

Because of its larger-than-life subject, Lepore's initial portrait sketch—featuring Noah Webster—may be her most fascinating. Cantankerous and outspoken, Webster in his time advocated more than political organization as a way for the break-away colonies to distinguish themselves from Great Britain: with prophetic voice he promoted the standardized spelling of English to unify the cacophonous European residents of the shores of North America. Webster realized—though his rhetoric could come across as heavy-handed—that a common spoken and written word (and not the proposed Constitution) would be what united thirteen disparate settlements into the melting pot of a truly "imagined community." Webster's *American Spelling Book* would go on to sell over ten million copies by 1829.[235]

The parallels in traits and accomplishments between Noah Webster and Alfred Stieglitz are striking, as if the two were cut from the same cloth, only over one hundred years apart. Weathering administration changes, war, and personal reversals of fortune, each lightning rod nonetheless hardly missed an opportunity to express himself—and loudly. With large, imposing visions matched only by their inflated egos, both men expounded on their respective versions of a proposed American nativist language: a textual/verbal one for Webster and an aesthetic/ideal one for Stieglitz. Each realized over time that controlling the means of language production—for Webster, through publication of his spelling book; for Stieglitz, through distribution of *Camera Work*—raised his own status exponentially, unified those around him, and consolidated power through community (though in Stieglitz's case it was much more "imagined" than usual). Importantly, if the number of their likenesses is any indication, both men—like so many

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[235] Lepore, *A Is for American*, 6. For more on Webster, see the prologue and first chapter of Ibid., 1–41.

past influential leaders, from the pharaohs to the royal courts of Europe—also understood the influence of self-fashioning and the power of portraiture.

Richard Boix's 1921 ink drawing *Da-Da* (fig. 5.4) can function, within the context of this sub-section, as a convenient illustration of the performance of presentation, indeed a kind of "presentation model."[236] Boix's image demonstrates that the "New York Dada Group" had begun to coalesce, in the words of Judith Butler, through a "stylized repetition of acts" (formal meetings, gab sessions, exhibitions, etc.). Through such constitutive events as the 1913 Armory Show and the 1917 Independents Exhibition and organs such as *Camera Work* and *The Blind Man*, the transatlantiques who are pictured—Katherine Dreier, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Marsden Hartley, Joseph Stella—have imagined themselves into a (non-geographical) community. According to Francis Naumann, the drawing, created after the fact, depicts an actual event, organized by the Sociéte Anonyme and held on April 1, 1921: Marsden Hartley's lecture on "What is Dadaism?."[237] Rather than permit an unsympathetic outsider visually to document the events (which, in true dada spirit, promised to spin out of control at particular moments), the group (probably at the behest of Dreier) authorized Boix to craft a likeness. By taking control of their portrayal, the group took another step towards presumed internal cohesion while at the same time manifesting an external unified front. Boix executed the image in an easily readable graphic style in black and white, a compositional choice that suggests the drawing was destined for reproduction in one dada

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[236] I am commandeering here the usual understanding of "presentation model" (i.e., a maquette crafted by an artist or architect shown to the overall project's patron for approval) for my own purposes, though the traditional denotation and my new usage overlap in their relation to world-making potentiality.

[237] Naumann, *New York Dada, 1915–23*, 211.

journal or other.[238] The artist's employment of caricature—a mode of portrayal that liberated the subject from actual sittings—betrays his knowledge of contemporary anti-mimetic portrait practices. Even more significantly, through his mirroring, or presentation, of this "imagined community" to itself, Boix effected his own relational bonds to the group, a maneuver that has kept his name from disappearing into art historical oblivion.

Alfred Stieglitz Takes the Reins

To say that gallery director Alfred Stieglitz galvanized the New York City art world in the first quarter of the twentieth century should, by this point in my text, be recognized as a significant understatement. A champion first for a fixed and undisputed place for photography within the pantheon of the fine arts and then a major advocate for the modernist aesthetic revolution in the arts of the United States, Stieglitz early on perspicaciously realized that controlling these discourses and their methods of dissemination entailed possession of contemporaneous meanings and his circle's historical legacy, over time making him a wealthy man, if not financially, at least in terms of cultural capital. A seemingly indefatigable dynamo who worked ceaselessly to promote the artistic vision he espoused, Stieglitz "performed presentation" through a variety of channels, including numerous editorial projects, his voluminous personal correspondence, the many exhibitions he organized, and his own photography.

Stieglitz cut his editorial teeth on *Camera Notes* (1897–1902), the newly conceived organ of The Camera Club of New York (a merger of two previously separate local groups: the Society of Amateur Photographers and the New York Camera Club).

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[238] The drawing, to the best of my knowledge, was never reproduced in a contemporary journal, however, and the original sheet eventually found its way to the Museum of Modern Art as part of the Katherine Dreier bequest, first as part of the institution's "study collection" and now as a full-fledged "work of art."

After the original issue, which basically reported straightforward business proceedings, the journal soon evolved to realize Stieglitz's full-blown vision, with articles on the burgeoning amateur photography movement that were less practical and descriptive than they were theoretical and prescriptive. Though meant as a reflection of the group's practice as a whole, Stieglitz nevertheless did not refrain from reproducing examples of his own photography in the journal whenever he felt the situation warranted such.

After stepping down from directing *Camera Notes* in 1902, Stieglitz made the decision to publish his own journal of photography, thus ensuring his point of view would dominate the discourse (and without all the in-fighting that he left behind at The Camera Club). Although since early in its five-year run *Camera Notes* had contained essays on arts topics other than just strictly photography, *Camera Work* (1903–1917) built systematically upon this foundation to campaign for photography as a fine art in and of itself. Lovingly—even obsessively—compiled and hand assembled by Stieglitz himself (and a few others he trusted), the journal travelled across the country and over the Atlantic Ocean, spreading the gospel of photography's newfound legitimacy as an aesthetic mode on equal footing with painting and sculpture. While circulation of the magazine may seem small in comparison to those of monthlies produced by today's publishing behemoths, the influence of *Camera Work* was enormous.

The deceptively simple yet highly effective *modus operandi* of publishing a periodical was integral to Stieglitz's rise to power, a performative move that also enabled the constituting of his immediate circle and, wider, of a modernist consciousness among those receptive to his ideas around the world.

Alfred Stieglitz and the Beginnings of Presentation Performance

At the same time he was locking down his hold on the genesis and distribution of modernist discourse through his publications and exhibitions, Alfred Stieglitz was also consolidating a self-reflexive performance of presentation of the American avant-garde through his own photographic imagery. In his book on portraits by Henri Matisse, art historian John Klein traces a trajectory of gaze from inner to outer world, that is, from likenesses of family to patrons to neutral third-party models, and in Stieglitz's own expansive oeuvre a similar shift in portrait subject can be observed, from household members to friends and acquaintances.[239] Although Stieglitz's portraits of 291 regulars may have originally served as casual snapshots or visual records of the gallery's supporters, these images, over time, reified the adherents, mirroring to each other who belonged and how they appeared, all through a modernist means (photography) and an up-to-the-minute language (anti-pictorialist).

Appearance precedes presentation. Stieglitz's role in a formation of a sense of self-awareness for the American avant-garde manifested itself in the creation of individual portraits. Although he did not ever completely eschew group likenesses, his focus on single members of his circle, an aesthetic choice that echoed his passion for dialogic verbal debate, created a virtual directory of the New York arts world's "in-crowd." (Here it is germane to remember that Pablo Picasso and Marius de Zayas had each respectively employed similar strategies in documenting their fellow *modernistas* through discrete charcoal caricatures.) By capturing individual likenesses, Stieglitz imparted a sense of belonging to something larger to the sitters while concomitantly

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[239] For the transition in Matisse's personal and professional lives, see Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, particularly Chapter 5, "Negotiating Identity," 144–191. For Stieglitz these choices may have had just as much to do with his souring marriage (something he shared with Matisse) as with his reconsideration of his modernist friends as intimates and "family."

documenting his own constitution of such. That most—if not all—of these photographs

function as sophisticated aesthetic objects (as well as anthropological records) only

confirms Alfred Stieglitz's immense talent and masterful vision.

The photographer's portrait *Arthur G. Dove*, 1911 (fig. 5.5), is an example from

early in what would become one of his greatest achievements: documenting the

emergence of the American avant-garde. The motif of "emergence" pertains particularly

to this platinum print: in a stroke of brilliance, Stieglitz manipulates Dove's visage such

that it materializes, hauntingly, from the velvety background, perhaps alluding to the

sudden appearance of the painter on the Manhattan art scene after Stieglitz included him

in the show *Younger American Painters* the previous year. Dove's pose, leaning forward

as if to stand imminently, adds a sense of urgency and impetuousness to the scene,

casting the painter (if only implicitly) as an upstart. The photographer may have had

Pablo Picasso's 1906 *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* (fig. 1.5) in mind during the sitting, as

the compositional strategies in both works function similarly and the allusion to the

expatriate experimental writer would have added legitimacy to the presumed modernity

of the photograph's sitter. The near tenebrism of the image hearkens back to Stieglitz's

artistic roots in Symbolism and Pictorialism, but the sharp focus and frank pose signal his

shift in allegiance to "straight" photography.

Stieglitz raised the stakes in subsequent images, such as his platinum print

Charles Demuth, 1915 (fig. 4.10). The circumstances of the pose—here the

Pennsylvania-born artist stands in front of Pablo Picasso's 1912 charcoal *Head of a Man*

(fig. 5.6)—betray the location of the shooting: the impresario's gallery, 291. Shot in

bright, even light with the illusion of complete objectivity, the picture embraces

Stieglitz's evolving direct approach, a fitting choice for a subject known for clean lines, both in his sartorial display and his aesthetic output. The line of Demuth's neatly parted hair and the planes of his splayed collar rhyme well with Picasso's cubo-minimalist drawing. Again the Spanish master's absent-presence (though more explicit than the passing reference to his *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* in the Arthur Dove likeness) lends an air of authenticity to Demuth's modernity, though by carefully positioning the painter before the drawing, as if to obstruct the anterior work from view, Stieglitz betrays his own growing predisposition towards native artists working in the United States.

In many ways, the numerous images of Georgia O'Keeffe that Stieglitz would begin taking in 1918, elaborated and expanded upon these previous concerns. In pictures such as *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait—Head*, 1918 (fig. 5.7), Stieglitz recorded not only the appearance of his new female protégée but also provided a glimpse of her own painting, which serves here as a dramatic backdrop, providing a halo for the artist's upturned face. O'Keeffe's black coat contrasts starkly with her dramatically tensed hands. Overall the photograph emphasizes the sitter's eyes and hands—the loci of creativity—and blurs the distinction between creator and created (in an implicit riff on Cosimo de Medici's platitude "Ogni dipintore depinge sé"). This photograph of Georgia O'Keeffe is one of over three hundred total that comprises what Stieglitz denominated a "composite portrait." The images of O'Keeffe, captured over almost two decades, expanded the definition of an individual's portrait while at the same time performing the avant-garde's presentation to itself (such was the power of Stieglitz's lens). Intersecting in number and conception, the formal O'Keeffe investigation and the more informal avant-garde presentation project gave tangible form to the flourishing "imagined

community" of modernists working in the United States in the early twentieth century. Taken as wholes, the O'Keeffe "composite portrait" and Stieglitz's stockpile of pictures of individual members provided impetus for a growing sense of solidarity among the group, whose coalescence spurred a natural outgrowth: the group portrait.[240]

Florine Stettenheimer and the "Group Picture"

Presentation succeeds appearance. Following Judith Butler's logic that identity comes into being from a "repetition of stylized acts," then given enough self-reflexive reinforcement of appearance an "imagined community" starts to cohere. To say it another way: once a critical mass is achieved through repeated viewing of individual portraits, the atomized members begin to believe in a larger whole. Creating pictures of the group— that is, making visually manifest what heretofore was only "imaginary"—is one possible logical outcome of this complex world-making process.

The "outsider" modernist Florine Stettheimer excelled at just such a venture. Born in Rochester, New York, in 1871, she and her two youngest sisters (Carrie and Ettie) would spend much of their early lives residing with their mother (Rosetta) in various locations throughout Western and Central Europe. Florine asserted her artistic bent as a youth, matriculating for three years at the Art Students League before continuing her studies in the German urban centers of Munich, Berlin, and Stuttgart. The onset of World War I in 1914 forced the "ménage à quatre" to return to the United States where the four women eventually took up residence on West 76th Street in New York

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[240] Marcia Brennan and Sarah Greenough also discuss Alfred Stieglitz's photographic portraits of Georgia O'Keeffe at length and within the larger context of the Stieglitz circle. See, respectively, "Alfred Stieglitz and His Critics: An Aesthetics of Intimacy," in Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory*, 72–93, and "Alfred Stieglitz, Facilitator, Financier, and Father, Presents Seven Americans," in Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America*, 276–339.

City.[241] Stettheimer's tight-knit family unit undoubtedly predisposed her to think communally.

In 1916 the prestigious Knoedler Gallery mounted Stettheimer's first monographic exhibition. Devastated that nothing sold, the artist vowed never to show at a commercial gallery ever again (the subsequent pestering of supportive friends, including Alfred Stieglitz, would fall on deaf ears). That same year Florine became acquainted with Marcel Duchamp and the Frenchman quickly insinuated himself in the lives of the Stettheimer women (the family would support the émigré financially for a time in exchange for French lessons; meanwhile, Duchamp became infatuated with Ettie, the "intellectual"). In 1917 Florine submitted paintings to the Society of Independent Artists exhibition, from which the jury famously disqualified Duchamp's portrait object *Fountain*. Florine's own portrait innovations, which reveal the artist's scrutiny of European painting during her previous travels, also date from this year. They include what Florine termed "sentimental histories" (a sitter surrounded by attributes and accoutrements, in high Renaissance fashion) and what Duchamp called "*multiplication virtuelle*" (the same subject appearing several times within a narrative across a continuous landscape such as those found in the late medieval panel paintings of Duccio, for example).[242]

An important subset of Stettheimer's oeuvre—what Marcel Duchamp would later baptize "group pictures"—document the developing consciousness among the American

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[241] For a helpful chronology of Florine Stettheimer's life, see Elisabeth Sussman et al., *Florine Stettheimer: Manhattan Fantastica* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995), 118–131. Scholarly interest in Stettheimer has dramatically increased since her "rediscovery" in the 1990s. Sussman's exhibition catalogue and Barbara J. Bloemink's cultural biography, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), have quickly become standard references on the artist.

[242] Sussman et al., *Florine Stettheimer*, 49–50 and 123.

avant-garde.[243] These images combine individual likenesses to picture a nascent "imagined community." Frequently the canvases record highly stylized interpretations of real life episodes, events that strengthened bonds between members and contributed to a sense of cooperative spirit. The paintings also function as Stettheimer's own claim to membership, while at the same time recording her important role in the group's integration and self-awareness.

La Fête à Duchamp, 1917 (fig. 5.8), is one of Florine Stettheimer's earliest—and best known—attempts in this subgenre. The title, a transmogrified reference to Edouard Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, puns on "Duchamp"as both a reference to the artist and to the outdoor setting of the gathering. The image chronicles an actual event: the July 28, 1917 celebration of the French artist's thirtieth birthday in Tarrytown, New York. The cast of characters reads like a contemporary ship registry of transatlantiques: Carrie, Ettie, and Florine Stettheimer, Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Albert and Juliette Gleizes, Fania Marinoff and Carl Van Vechten, Henri-Pierre Roché, Leo Stein, Elizabeth Duncan, the Marquis de Buenavista, and Avery Hopwood. The events unfold in counterclockwise fashion from the top left corner: Duchamp and Picabia arrive in a dashing red sports car; the two artists announce their presence at the garden's entrance; the entire party enjoys refreshments and conversation on the bright yellow lawn; the nocturnal dinner commences with Ettie's encomium to Duchamp. It should be noted that within months of each other, Stettheimer and Duchamp had suffered artistic setbacks that wounded them deeply (Florine's Knoedler Gallery show and Duchamp's *Fountain*

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[243] "'Group' is an excellent designation for the type of paintings that you have made." Duchamp to the Stettheimer sisters, 3 May 1919, Stettheimer papers, YCAL, as quoted by Barbara Bloemink, "Visualizing Sight: Florine Stettheimer and Temporal Modernism," in Ibid., 84.

debacle). *La Fête à Duchamp*—both the actual event and the subsequent painting—functioned to reinscribe Marcel Duchamp at the forefront of United States modernism.

Stettheimer continued her efforts to constitute visually the transatlantique avant-garde through such canvases as *Soirée/Studio Party*, 1917–1919 (fig. 5.9). Unlike *La Fête à Duchamp*, the painting does not document an actual occasion, but functions, as Barbara Bloemink argues, as a fantastical "conversation piece," that is, a picture that combines elements of genre and portrait painting.[244] As far its truth-telling goes, the oil does document Stettheimer's practice of revealing new paintings to friends and acquaintances through carefully orchestrated events. And ten of eleven figures depicted correspond to recorded guests at the Stettheimer soirées: (from bottom left, clockwise) Albert Gleizes, Gaston Lachaise, Ettie Stettheimer, Maurice Sterne, Isabelle Lachaise, Avery Hopwood, Leo Stein, the Hindu poet Sankar, Juliette Gleizes, and Florine Stettheimer. The visible costume of the headless personage at bottom right identifies him as Harlequin, a figure from the *Commedia dell'Arte* tradition that, by the early twentieth century, had become associated with the misunderstood and dispossessed avant-garde artist.

Stettheimer subtly reifies her own position within this hierarchy of this "imagined community" by (literally) inscribing herself within the image, twice. Her conversation with Harlequin associates her with such progressive painters as Pablo Picasso (think Rose Period saltimbanques) while their placement at the very edge of the picture confirms their position as modern day *flâneurs*; indeed, based on period evidence, Bloemink documents that "At most social occasions Stettheimer assumed the role of silent observer."[245] Additionally, Stettheimer's *Nude Self-Portrait*—a painting she never exposed publicly

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[244] Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 263–264, note 21.
[245] Ibid., 96.

during her lifetime—graces the back wall of the fictive salon. The thumbnail's reference

to Edouard Manet's *Olympia* associates the Manhattan artist with the avant-garde's

custom of provocation. The theme of *Soirée/Studio Party*, the unveiling of a recently

completed canvas to other art world movers and shakers, evidences—and solidifies—

Stettheimer's own performance-as-artist and her desire to be taken seriously.

Stettheimer's self-perception as a tastemaker—and its real world manifestation

through portraiture—took a decided move forward in the 1920s. In a project similar to

Alfred Stieglitz's extensive compendium of images of members of his circle, Stettheimer

set herself the assignment to craft single presentation portraits of individuals from the

modernist "imagined community." In a nod to Stieglitz's "composite portrait" of Georgia

O'Keeffe and building on her own previous employment of the canvas's disposition

towards fiction, Stettheimer commenced an extended series of likenesses that would grow

to include portrayals of her sisters Ettie and Carrie, Marcel Duchamp, Alfred Stieglitz,

the photographer Baron de Meyer, and the art critic Henry McBride. According to

Bloemink:

> Stettheimer's portraits rely on sitters' experiences over time and on
> specific details and events which, in turn, imply a temporal unfolding. The
> portraits should be read as visual texts which, although lacking a story
> line, nonetheless reveal themselves through the accumulation and
> interaction of details.[246]

This significant picture cycle did much to reflect the image of the American avant-garde

back to itself, while simultaneously confirming Stettheimer's constitutive role in the

process.

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[246] Ibid., 120.

Carl Van Vechten, 1922 (fig. 5.10) is one of Stettheimer's most resolved and best known images from this series. Seated daintily on a chair in the center of the large room, the author clutches a copy of his latest novel: *Peter Whiffle*.[247] The painting contains several references to the *roman à clef* (in which particular members of the American avant-garde make cameo appearances, including Stettheimer), such as the green circular carpet and the central vignette in the background. The piano keyboard signifies Van Vechten's former employment as a music critic and the shrine to "FANIA" alludes to the writer's marriage to Fania Marinoff, whose name also appears on the Belasco Theater's marquee outside the window. Stettheimer alludes to Van Vechten's own constitution of a modernist contingent through art by making the typewriter keys spell out her signature.[248] In the end, the portrait not only commemorates the fruitful Van Vechten-Stettheimer friendship (the pair engaged in several artistic exchanges), but it also exemplifies art's power to unify the "imagined community."

Astute readers will have mentally observed at this juncture our (brief) detour through the territory of mimetic figuration for the ends of collective portrayal. Alfred Stieglitz's steadfast commitment to photography meant that the medium's inherent indexicality disposed him towards naturalistic representation, though the photographer pushed the envelope (so to speak) with his innovation of the "composite portrait." Florine Stettheimer's pictures, too, employed imitative signifiers; however, the painter's employment of "*multiplication virtuelle*" in her "group pictures" and her use of personal "attributes" in her individual likenesses moved the presentation portrait in a more

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[247] Patricia R. Everett also draws a connection from the novel *Peter Whiffle* to Andrew Dasburg's *Carl Van Vechten/Coordinated Explosion, A Cubist Portrait*. See Everett, "Andrew Dasburg's 'Abstract Portraits,'" 83–84.

[248] Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 122.

conceptual direction. Carl Van Vechten observed Stettheimer's practice—reminiscent of

caricature—of intentionally creating the work of art without the benefit of real time

sittings:

> Miss Stettheimer does not ask her models to pose for her. Rather, in her
> own mind she creates a synthetic portrait, built up from the life of the
> person she is painting. Then the portrait gradually emerges in the secrecy
> of her studio.[249]

Modernist Charles Demuth capitalized upon these intellectual investments and aesthetic

developments in an extended series of works intended to venerate the American avant-

garde and to substantiate his attachment to it: his so-called "poster portraits."

Charles Demuth's Painted Object Portraits as Symbolic Snapshots

In the early 1920s, the Lancaster, Pennsylvania-based artist Charles Demuth

commenced a new avenue of investigation within his oeuvre: a coherent corpus of

painted object portraits depicting comrades-in-arms in the struggle to develop modernism

in the United States and an authentic American art. Conceived *a priori* as a consistent

formal cycle (rather than created haphazardly and designated a series after the fact), this

body of work arose to meet multiple needs. Planned as a meaningful cluster of individual

homages to great twentieth-century American writers and visual artists, the sequence as a

whole meant to codify an "imagined community," which, suffering from a popular and

critical backlash, was undergoing something of an identity crisis at the time. In his desire

to exhibit the panels all together *en masse*, Demuth intended to counteract the Stieglitz

circle's flagging self-confidence. Battling acute diabetes and faced with his own

mortality, the artist also determined—before his seemingly imminent death—to canonize

his colleagues and to demonstrate his affection for them in portrayals that exploited the

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[249] Carl Van Vechten, unpublished manuscript, as quoted in Ibid., 126.

most advanced understandings of likeness. Demuth wisely realized that the inscription of status flowed in both directions: by imaging the achievements of his friends, he all but guaranteed the preservation of his own legacy as well.

At the end of the previous decade Demuth had explored a more fleeting version of this impulse with a handful of figurative watercolors. Demuth and Florine Stettheimer were by that time running in the same social circles and the fact that both of them took up occasional portraits in the late 1910s suggests, at the very least, a commemorative urge was in the air, if not a mutual knowledge of—and regard for—each other's work. Demuth's *Cabaret Interior with Carl Van Vechten*, c. 1918 (fig. 5.11), depicts the lounge and dance floor of a bustling and dimly lit uptown speakeasy. The presence of the champion of the African American community, leaning on his proper left arm and identified by his shock of effulgent blond hair, foregrounds the fact that Demuth and Stettheimer shared Van Vechten's mutual acquaintance.

Similarly, *At the Golden Swan*, 1919 (fig. 5.12), combines the dynamics of genre painting with specific portraits to create something close to another "occasional" picture. The image of the eponymous gilded barnyard fowl in the upper left identifies the saloon at the corner of Fourth and Sixth Avenues, which was alternately—and affectionately— known as the "Hell-Hole." Patrons carouse and converse while a waiter in a blue necktie delivers a fresh round of drinks. Marcel Duchamp, in three-quarter view and chomping a cigar, has ensconced himself at the small round table in the lower left center of the sheet. Next to him, Demuth—easily distinguishable from his bristle-brush mustache and short-cropped hair—appears in profile, turned to the right. So that the viewer cannot mistake the identity of this self-portrait, the artist penciled his name and the date on the back of

the bentwood chair, alluding to his physical witness of the scene in question. This signature, however, is not the work's only inscription: by painting his own likeness in proximity to Duchamp's, the artist not only has captured an aspect of the American avant-garde, but he has successfully inscribed himself within this coalescing group.

In this pair of sheets—along with a handful of others, such as *The Purple Pup*, 1918—Demuth looked back to nineteenth-century (and even earlier) group portrait conventions while simultaneously giving a sidelong glance to Florine Stettheimer's contemporary "group pictures." Demuth's poster portraits, begun a few years later, stand in contrast to these earlier watercolors, as they operate under completely different—and up-to-the-minute—aesthetic principles. Perhaps most obviously the poster portraits each focus on a distinct individual from the American avant-garde. Additionally, in the series Demuth performed his understanding of dis-appearance by creating the portraits in the absence of their respective sitters, by denying a correlation between the subject's physical features and the picture's final form, and by eschewing imagery based on the human figure. Taking cues from nineteenth-century trompe l'oeil still lifes, Arthur Dove's portrait objects, and Alfred Stieglitz's portrait photographs, Demuth synthesized these prior developments in his poster portraits. Demuth's innovation combined personalized still life and graphic design elements to evoke the individual portrait subject. The image cycle also intended to fix the rising stars within the emerging constellation of the American avant-garde.

At different junctures between 1922 and 1923 Charles Demuth spent several extended periods at a sanatorium in New Jersey where he received insulin injections for adult onset diabetes. After the near-death experiences of acute hypoglycemia and the

ensuing starvation diet, the artist returned to a semblance of a routine in late 1923 with a

renewed sense of purpose, and an undercurrent of appreciation threads its way through

the entire sequence of anti-mimetic portraits. It is significant that Demuth selected

Georgia O'Keeffe as the initial subject of his new series, *Poster Portrait: O'Keeffe*,

1923–1924 (fig. 5.13). Alfred Stieglitz had been particularly supportive of the

Lancastrian while he was hospitalized, and Demuth, who had missed O'Keeffe's first

exhibition in over five years at the Anderson Galleries in January 1923, conceived the

work to perform a double duty: as an outright expression of admiration for O'Keeffe and

as an indirect demonstration of gratitude towards Stieglitz. The presence of garden

produce—a brace of Bosc pears, a green apple, and a striped yellow gourd—underscore

the thematic of care and husbandry, alluding to Stieglitz's nurturing of the modernists

around him, particularly the female painter who soon would become his wife. The strong,

abundant, and upright dark green foliage allegorizes O'Keeffe's inner vitality while the

text of her family name in complementary red capital letters—to be read from bottom to

top—hints at the painter's contrarian nature and how she often found herself at odds with

"the men" of the Stieglitz circle. The terracotta container, in color wheel-adjacent roses

and pinks, emphasizes the artist's rootedness in a particular—specifically American—

soil.

The motif of potted plant also occurs in Demuth's *Study for Poster Portrait:*

Marsden Hartley (fig. 5.14), dated by Yale University Art Gallery staff to around the

same time as the O'Keeffe "likeness," 1923–1924.[250] In this homage to his friend, known

as "the painter from Maine," Demuth once again employs semi-illusionistic images of

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[250] "Yale University Art Gallery - eCatalogue - Study for Poster Portrait: Marsden Hartley," n.d., http://ecatalogue.art.yale.edu/detail.htm?objectId=31491. (accessed October 14, 2009)

assembled objects to evoke Hartley's present absence. The first syllable of the

transatlantique artist's name—"HART"—puns on the scarlet cordate spathe of the

anthurium in the cachepot. Demuth quotes two of Hartley's compositional strategies

within his own watercolor sketch: the snow-covered mountainous background alludes to

the neo-impressionist landscapes of Maine that first brought Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz's

attention and the windowsill still life recalls the similar paintings Hartley created in

Bermuda circa 1917 (both artists visited the island at the same time that year). Hartley

frequently claimed the camellia as his favorite flower, a fact that explains its appearance

here. The curtain, as a home furnishing that both reveals and conceals, may reference

Hartley's status as a closeted gay man, an identity the two modernists also shared. In

order to reinforce visually his close relationship with Hartley, Demuth inserted himself

synecdochically within the picture in the form of a walking stick, an accessory closely

associated with the dapper Lancastrian. To prevent any oversight of his nearness to

Hartley, Demuth initialed the top of the cane, not only making his mark, once again,

within the fictive space of the picture, but also inscribing himself within the imagined

community of modernists then working in the United States.[251]

In the ensuing months, Demuth's vision and persistence paid off in the

completion of a second, fully realized homage, *Poster Portrait: Dove*, 1924 (fig. 5.15).

The white letters that spell the artist's family name hover, appropriately bird-like, in the

limitless azure of the panel's top register. An alternate pronunciation of this word

reminds the viewer that the portrait's subject was among the first artists in the United

States who "dove" into abstraction. Likewise the sickle alludes to Dove's propensity for

aesthetic pathclearing and the carmine ribbon around the tool's tang brings to mind

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[251] For unknown reasons, however, Demuth never worked the sketch for *Hartley* into a panel painting.

"Reds," the nickname for Dove's partner, Helen Torr. In the image Demuth continues his understated insistence on American soil through his depiction of a farm implement and fruits of the harvest within an expansive landscape. The grapes and hops, key ingredients in alcoholic beverages, may reference Dove's homegrown skill at brewing, but more likely also associate the artist, on a symbolic level, with the transformative process of fermentation.[252]

From extant documents twenty-first century viewers can catch a glimpse of Charles Demuth's grandiose vision for his poster portrait series. Completed panels included the homages to Georgia O'Keeffe and Arthur Dove, discussed in the preceding pages, as well as to the artist and writer Charles Duncan, the esteemed painter John Marin, and the physician-poet William Carlos Williams. Demuth planned additions to this visual pantheon, sketching out studies in graphite and watercolor for the artist and writer Marsden Hartley (treated briefly above), the poet Wallace Stevens, and the playwright Eugene O'Neill. That the Lancastrian planned a tribute to the enigmatic Marcel Duchamp is documented in a letter from Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz and in the publication of such a title in the catalogue the accompanied the 1925 exhibition *Seven Americans*; no poster portrait of Duchamp, however, is known to exist. Demuth also created other visually compelling, though oblique, compositions that, over time, have come to be allied with other modernist movers and shakers—*Calla Lilies* [Bert Savoy], *Longhi on Broadway* [Eugene O'Neill], and *Love, Love, Love* [Gertrude Stein]—but

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[252] The classification of the vegetal structure next to the cluster of grapes has been a matter of much discussion in the secondary literature on the poster portraits. Robin Jaffee Frank finally and definitively, I believe, has identified the form as "hops, a collection of cone-like seeds used to brew beer." See Robin Jaffee Frank, "'Something Beyond Sex': Demuth's Drawings in the Hill Collection at Yale," *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (2003): 81.

whether these images belong under the formal designation of "poster portrait" remains a matter of scholarly debate.[253]

In the end, contingencies—such as health concerns and negative criticism—plagued the artist so that he eventually abandoned the poster portraits and directed his energies elsewhere. Nevertheless, the extant series coupled the most advanced understandings of the new portrait conventions of dis-appearance and object-ification with a desire to mirror the look of the avant-garde back to the group. By capturing the "likeness" of individual contributors to American modernist culture, Demuth accomplished two aspirations concurrently. First, he facilitated the transformation of the avant-garde from a loose confederation of individualized members into an imagined community with a unified front. And finally, like Jean Crotti who realized in retrospect that associating himself more fully with Marcel Duchamp would only increase his own cultural capital, Charles Demuth also grasped that recording the "appearance" of his fellow modernists in the most up-to-the-minute style in an ambitious, overarching programmatic painting cycle assured him a place in the (art) history books.

<u>Conclusion</u>

By the late 1920s the American avant-garde had an inkling of its own importance, both within the context of the arts of the United States and the culture of transatlantique modernism. To institute, or even improve, their status within these fluctuating hierarchies, individual artists exploited the worldmaking possibilities of portraiture.

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[253] For example, in 1929 Alfred Stieglitz originally exhibited the painting now called *Love, Love, Love, (Homage to Gertrude Stein)* under the moniker *Design for a Broadway Poster.* The association of the image to Stein occurred during the ensuing years, crystallizing in the mid-1950s when Edith Halpert sold the work under its current title. For more about the panel's provenance and ambiguous status as a "poster portrait," see "Love, Love, Love," in Frank, *Charles Demuth*, 101–106 and Demuth, *Letters of Charles Demuth, American Artist, 1883–1935*, 126, note 1.

Capturing the "likeness" of each other provided artists the chance to put into practice experimental techniques while at the same time it afforded sitters the opportunity to establish their presence within the group and to brand themselves. Once the avant-garde attained a critical mass of recognizability to each other, their individual "appearances" began to morph into a more consistent and unified whole.

This strategy of presentation, that is, reflexive visualization, accelerated the amalgamation of the avant-garde through, in Judith Butler's phrase, "a stylized repetition of acts." Indeed, the stylized and repeated act of portrayal enabled the American avant-garde to conceive of themselves as an imagined community. By consciously dominating the powerful discourse of portraiture, as well as by seizing control of the production and distribution of print-capitalism, the modernists working in the United States were able to constitute in very real and tangible ways an embodied avant-garde.

Alfred Stieglitz laid the groundwork for this mission through his individual headshots of early adherents as well as his cutting edge composite portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe. Florine Stettheimer's whimsical group pictures documented not only important events (such as Marcel Duchamp's birthday party) but the significant individuals who attended them, too. Building on these achievements, Charles Demuth formulated a series of poster portraits that captured individual "likenesses," advanced his own interests, and constituted a modernist pantheon. How Stieglitz, among others in the group, turned these internal organizational efforts into external marketing strategies forms the basis of the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: RE-PRESENTATION

Alfred Stieglitz, Charles Demuth, and *Seven Americans*

On Monday, March 9, 1925, the American avant-garde reached a tipping point.

On that fateful day Alfred Stieglitz opened the greatly anticipated showcase *Seven*

Americans, which featured the object portraits by Arthur Dove discussed in Chapter

Three and the poster portraits by Charles Demuth surveyed in Chapter Five. The stakes

were high and, since the beginning of the decade, Stieglitz had succeeded in raising them

higher and higher through a series of publicity stunts of ever increasing intensity: a

"memorial sale" for Marsden Hartley (though the artist was alive and well); an

exhibition/auction the following year, billed as a "derby" (i.e., sporting event); and

Georgia O'Keeffe's latest paintings displayed alongside his own nude photographs of

her.[254]

By the 1920s cutting edge cultural production had at last succeed in piercing the

consciousness of the general populace. In contrast to the financially depressed years of

World War I, the immediate post-bellum period signaled a rebound in both interest and

sales. The triumvirate of Katherine Dreier, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray founded the

Sociéte Anonyme at the beginning of the decade for the purpose of displaying and

explicating modern art to a growing audience. The number of Manhattan museums and

galleries exhibiting contemporary paintings and sculpture mushroomed, seemingly

overnight. Art critics, though they still could prove resistant to up-to-the-minute aesthetic

advancements, had begun to develop a language to describe and analyze the new art,

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[254] For a complete and cogent analysis of Alfred Stieglitz's activities in the 1920s, see Sarah Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz, Facilitator, Financier, and Father, Presents Seven Americans," in Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America*, 277–339.

thanks, in large part, to the educational efforts that Stieglitz had led and fostered since the early part of the century.

Seven Americans served simultaneously as a kind of report card and litmus test. On the one hand, Stieglitz planned the show as the twentieth anniversary celebration of his edgy, often controversial, display practices. As such, the exhibition recalled and authenticated Stieglitz's previous efforts. On the other hand, the gallerist intended the group show—in terms of the number of works on view, one of the largest Stieglitz had ever mounted to date—to point towards the future. The majority of the work that the impresario included had been completed recently, within the past twelve months or so, and, though Stieglitz had shown the work of foreign-born artists previously, the exhibition in question announced his latest objective: to focus solely on American art. Coincidentally enough, perhaps ironically, this commemorative event marked the end of Alfred Stieglitz's lease of The Anderson Galleries (he would go on to rent and open a much smaller space, The Intimate Gallery, within the same building later that year).

The catalogue produced to accompany the exhibition paralleled and underscored Stieglitz's objectives. Many of the shows the gallerist had organized previously merited only a short printed checklist or even just an announcement card, but with *Seven Americans* Stieglitz was determined to manifest the import of the show by publishing a relatively lavish pamphlet.[255] The editor divided the sixteen-page brochure into five sections. "ALFRED STIEGLITZ / PRESENTS / SEVEN AMERICANS / 159 PAINTINGS PHOTOGRAPHS & THINGS / RECENT & NEVER BEFORE PUBLICLY SHOWN" proclaimed the title page emphatically. There followed four

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[255] I am grateful to Yuri Long, library assistant for rare books, for his help with accessing the National Gallery of Art's copy of this catalogue, including scanning the short volume as a PDF for my benefit.

evocative statements by, respectively, Stieglitz, the author Sherwood Anderson, the German sculptor Arnold Rönnebeck (offering the perspective of not only a European, but also of an artist who worked primarily in three dimension), and Arthur Dove (whose poem "A Way to Look at Things" concluded Chapter Three). Four black and white reproductions of exhibited works—one each for Arthur Dove, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Marsden Hartley—interrupted the alternately specific (Dove, Marin, O'Keeffe, and Demuth) and generalized (Hartley, Strand, Stieglitz) checklists. The gallerist dedicated the three final pages to an abbreviated history of his exhibition activities, a list of the "outstanding public demonstrations at that laboratory [i.e., 291]."[256] This booklet, the result of much effort and expense, revealed Stieglitz's belief that these artists and their output merited special, focused attention. The publication not only documented the absolute forefront of the avant-garde in 1925, it also solidified the status of these artists. It also reinstated and bolstered Stieglitz's reputation as the undisputed leader of the modernist movement in the United States.

The exhibition comprised the aesthetic efforts—as the gallery director's pithy title so boldly proclaimed—of seven American-born artists: the painters Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Charles Demuth, and Georgia O'Keeffe and the photographer Paul Strand as well as Stieglitz himself. The impresario's relationship to each varied somewhat in length and intensity (by 1925 Stieglitz had probably known Marin the longest, while the gallerist's professional relationship with Dove, by contrast, had only come into sharper focus a few months before) but their respective inclusion in the *Seven Americans* exhibition signaled a renewed commitment on Stieglitz's part to the prospects of each. In his poetic catalogue statement, Sherwood Anderson described the

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[256] Stieglitz, *Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans*, 4.

overall installation as "the distillation of the clean emotional life of seven real American artists."[257]

Stieglitz enhanced this purity of feeling in the way he chose to hang the show. Visitors to The Anderson Galleries first encountered a representative sampling of work by the painters (only) in the vestibule just outside the exhibition space proper. Inside the main display room, however, objects filled individual walls, segregated by artist. According to the catalogue, John Marin displayed primarily abstractions of Maine (a state with which he was frequently connected), Marsden Hartley showed a range of landscapes and still lifes, and Paul Strand exhibited photographs under three rubrics: "New York," "Leaves," and "Machine." Alfred Stieglitz exposed over two dozen *Equivalents* (images of clouds), stating in the catalogue that "These photographs continue the search for my Truth—Photography."[258]

Anti-mimetic portraiture featured prominently in this landmark exhibition. Georgia O'Keeffe contributed to the conversation by displaying three separate paintings under the umbrella title *Portrait of a Day*. Of the twenty-five pieces listed under Arthur Dove in the catalogue, almost half comprised his experimental assemblages and of these, *Portrait of Ralph Dusenberry* (fig. 3.21), *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz* (fig. 3.24), and *Painted Forms, Friends* (probably the small object now owned by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, fig. 3.20) figured prominently. The brochure also documents Charles Demuth's audacious intention simply to show six pieces—poster portraits of Marcel Duchamp, Charles Duncan, Georgia O'Keeffe, John Marin, Marsden Hartley, and Arthur Dove—though he unfortunately ran out of time and, in the end, only the completed

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[257] Sherwood Anderson, "Seven Alive," in Ibid., 3.
[258] Stieglitz, Ibid., 14.

"likenesses" of O'Keeffe, Duncan, and Dove were hung. Sarah Greenough has suggested

that Alfred Stieglitz's "cloud portraits" of Katherine Rhoades and Georgia O'Keeffe

(figs. 4.15–4.16), shot and printed in 1923 and exhibited in 1924, may have inspired

O'Keeffe, Dove, and Demuth to commence their own aesthetic investigations along

similar lines, the results of which Stieglitz curated into *Seven Americans*.[259]

In Charles Demuth's poster portraits Alfred Stieglitz recognized a means to an

end. As painted still lifes of recognizable (non-human) objects meant to be construed as

portraits, the series revealed their contemporaneity through their participation in the

stylistic "return to order" that many avant-garde artists, especially in Europe, called for

after World War I. At the same time the trio of pictures built upon the most advanced

understandings of "likeness" and "character" that had been percolating since Stieglitz

first published Gertrude Stein's texts "Henri Matisse" and "Pablo Picasso" in 1912.

Stieglitz recognized how Demuth's images captured the spirit of the exhibition and how

they embodied the fresh direction in which the impresario planned to take his gallery

programming. As radical departures from his usual almost airless watercolors, Demuth's

poster portraits also embraced a newfound spirit of experiment and adventure. In an act

that demonstrated the importance he attached to these qualities, Stieglitz very deliberately

installed all three of Demuth's portraits at the entrance to the exhibition space,

guaranteeing that they were the first works visitors saw upon entering the show. As such

they formed the viewer's first impressions, consequently influencing the beholder's

thoughts and feelings about the exhibition as a whole.

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[259] Sarah Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz, Facilitator, Financier, and Father, Presents Seven Americans," in Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America*, 517, note 81.

As a coda: Demuth's poster portraits, Bruce Kellner has noted, "inspired frustration and resistance among the art critics who reviewed them."[260] Confirmed in his convictions by these negative assessments, the Lancastrian wrote to Stieglitz in early July (i.e., four months after the show had come down):

> I want to finish the posters, too. Almost everyone has told me what a great mistake I made showing them without explaining that they were made for my own amusement! I'll do three, or more, more and show them all next winter. I'll make them look at them until they see that they are, so called pictures.[261]

Although Demuth would make good on his promise of completing a few more panels to augment the series, the poster portraits were never exhibited all together during the artist's lifetime and none ever sold.[262] Their symbolic function as early exemplars of the dynamics of "re-presentation," however, paved the way for further advancements in portraiture along this conceptual route.

Performing Re-Presentation

On the cusp of the quarter mark of the twentieth century, Stieglitz and his adherents found themselves at a crossroads. Artistic practices and social patterns that formerly made sense now no longer seemed relevant. With *Seven Americans* Alfred Stieglitz presciently announced these paradigm shifts while at the same time crystallizing the dynamics of this cultural moment. The *Seven Americans* exhibition and catalogue more than recorded the "state of the avant-garde" in 1925; it also marked the occasion of one of the first significant performances of "re-presentation" in the United States.

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[260] Bruce Kellner, in Demuth, *Letters of Charles Demuth, American Artist, 1883–1935*, 69, note 3.
[261] Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz, c. 5 July 1925, in Ibid., 69.
[262] For a comprehensive survey of the poster portraits, their context, and reception, see Frank, *Charles Demuth*; see also "Poster Portraits 1923–1929" in Barbara Haskell, *Charles Demuth* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with H. N. Abrams, 1987), 172–191.

The aesthetic move towards "re-presentation" manifested itself in at least three different, yet interconnected, ways. The first emerged as a stylistic (re)turn towards mimesis that characterized the "*rappel à l'ordre*" instigated by European painters and sculptors devastated by World War I. This is not to say that artists after the global conflict completely abandoned the methodological achievements of cubism and its other concomitant "isms." Instead it meant that artists employed these visual effects more subtly in concert with recognizable subject matter and naturalistic colors, such as in Pablo Picasso's reimagination of neo-classicism. For portraiture, this circling back to "representational" imagery (in contradistinction to the unpopular non-objective art of, say, synchromism or suprematism) empowered painters to create Jazz Age likeness that featured faces and figures in crisp detail. Those modernists who refused to concede dis-appearance (i.e., the disappearance of the sitter, of likeness, of the body) as a mode of portrait production accommodated the prevailing fashion of mimesis through the realistic depiction of objects and buildings that functioned as proxy for the "sitter."

This return to mimetic styles in the 1920s occurred at the same time as the second articulation of "re-presentation" for Alfred Stieglitz and his circle: the re-imagination of their individual lives. Stieglitz signaled his professional allegiance to Georgia O'Keeffe by initiating in 1923 an annual exhibition of the painter's recent work and his personal commitment to the artist by marrying her a year later. Katherine Dreier reallocated her creative energy from the studio to the Sociéte Anonyme, which she-cofounded in 1920. Florine Stettheimer commenced her intensive investigation of the individual portrait in earnest. Charles Demuth received treatment for diabetes and then ensconced himself in his Pennsylvania hometown. In 1921, Arthur Dove set up household on a boat with Helen

Torr and, in 1922, Paul Strand wed Rebecca Salsbury. Marsden Hartley, and then Marcel

Duchamp, departed Manhattan to resettle in Europe; Gerald Murphy followed suit,

dropping his landscape architecture studies to take up the paintbrush. While I do not

mean to draw any profound, overarching conclusions from these biographical

coincidences, I would like to point out that many of the American modernists

individually underwent serious internal reorientations that resulted in corresponding

externalizations in their respective life circumstances. Great changes were afoot and the

modernists' reinvention of themselves paralleled a simultaneous reinvention of the Self—

and its depiction in freshly imagined anti-mimetic manner.

The third expression of "re-presentation" is perhaps the most germane to the

intersection of the American modernists with portraiture. We have already noted how the

genre-scene group portraits of Charles Demuth and Florine Stettheimer of the 1910s gave

way to the much more philosophically complex individual likenesses produced by

Demuth, Stettheimer, and Arthur Dove in the 1920s. The American avant-garde's

maturing self-awareness greatly influenced how individual members, particularly Alfred

Stieglitz, thought about—and employed—these new pictures.

To recapitulate: in the early 1910s the modernists in the United States had not yet

coalesced into an "imagined community." One of the first steps towards this future stage

of development involved documentation of affiliates in visual form, such that the

constituency could identify each other. Alfred Stieglitz's individual head shots,

frequently captured when members visited his 291 gallery, rose to meet this need, as did

one-off works of art like Charles Demuth's casual portrayal of Edward Fisk, 1912 (fig.

6.1). The dynamics of "appearance" recorded the physical and psychological

characteristics of member, as well as their personal emergence on the *transatlantique* art scene.

As the American avant-garde reached a critical mass, the process of "presentation" began to supersede "appearance" as the dominant worldmaking tendency of the group. At this time members of the modernist set literally pictured each other, often in group portraits. This activity strengthened the bonds between artists and sitters as well as enacted the inclusion of both within the larger whole of the modernist community. Francis Picabia's 1915 mechanomorphic portrayals of Agnes Meyer and Marius de Zayas (figs. 6.2–6.3) for the periodical *291* not only reaffirmed the membership status of these avant-garde associates but also added legitimacy to their new business venture, The Modern Gallery (whose commercial orientation Stieglitz tacitly opposed). "Presentation" functioned as an internal strategy of social construction to reflect the image of the group to individuals of the active membership.

These rhetorical performances, wherein the group persistently demonstrated its standing within—and in opposition to—the dominant culture, defined the trend of "re-presentation." As the self-awareness of the American band of modernists matured and finally gelled, the issue of greatest importance was no longer who belonged (these questions had now been more or less settled), but how to present a unified front to the external world. Charles Demuth's poster portraits exemplified one highly calculated plan to meet this fresh need of the cooperative. Though Demuth conceived of the "likenesses" in this series as discrete units, he intended to portray a quorum of the community's prominent members and display the cycle as a cohesive group. Embodying the strategy of "re-presentation," Demuth's poster portraits announced several significant achievements

for the modernists working in the United States: that the avant-garde had solidified, at last, as an "imagined community"; that this group, taken as a whole, projected a personality and a "face"; and that portraiture could play a significant role in promoting the group and its worldview to those outside its periphery.

The coalescence of the Stieglitz circle meant that the group at last could redirect its energy, from matters of internal organization to external marketing strategies. "Stieglitz liked the idea of a group," Georgia O'Keeffe would later recall. "He wanted something to come out of America—something really important—and he felt you couldn't do that alone."[263] The unification of the modernist "imagined community" aided and abetted their cause—obviously it is much easier to promote an organized band with an allied front than a loose confederation with even looser conceptual ties. Sarah Greenough has written that

> By 1925 the idea of a close-knit group, with the reciprocal support that members offered one another, was almost as important to Stieglitz as the individuals. During the years when he had been without a gallery [mid-1917 to 1921], he had become increasingly convinced of the necessity and efficacy of group action.[264]

Stieglitz capitalized on this paradigm shift in the 1925 display of *Seven Americans* wherein "The work exhibited [was] shown for the first time."[265] It followed from this selection strategy, then, that the gallery director was also "re-presenting" his stable of artists to the general populace as if for the first time, as one of the "THINGS / RECENT & NEVER BEFORE PUBLICLY SHOWN" that the catalogue promised: as a

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[263] O'Keeffe, quoted in Calvin Tomkins, "Profiles: The Rose in the Eye Looked Pretty Fine," *The New Yorker*, March 4, 1974, 44.

[264] Sarah Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz, Facilitator, Financier, and Father, Presents Seven Americans," in Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America*, 303.

[265] Alfred Stieglitz, untitled exhibition statement, in Stieglitz, *Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans*, 2.

community, no longer solely "imagined" but embodied—and united.[266] "Through the title

for the show, the essays in the catalogue, and the careful installation," Greenough has

suggested, "Stieglitz sought to orchestrate the perception that these seven individuals

[Dove, Hartley, Marin, Demuth, Strand, O'Keeffe, and Stieglitz himself] were bound

together in a collective voice and expressed a shared vision."[267] "To emphasize this idea,"

she further notes, "visitors entering the gallery first encountered three of Demuth's

portrait posters…."[268] Portraits, both individual and collective, would go on to figure

prominently in how the *transatlantiques* presented themselves—and their agenda—to the

man and woman on the street.

Paul Rosenfeld and the American Profile

By the late 1910s in the United States the avant-garde's conception of itself had

begun to grow and shift. World War I and its devastating effects only clinched in the

mind of the American modernists that Europe and its values were bankrupt. A sense of

connection to the *transatlantique* "imagined community" still existed, but Alfred Stieglitz

and those around him began an inward turn, eschewing European influences in their

search for a truly innovative—and truly American—art.

Writers (not visual artists) were the powerhouses behind this new impulse. Their

ranks included Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Paul Rosenfeld, authors and critics

who would found the short-lived journal *The Seven Arts* in 1916, infiltrate the Stieglitz

circle, and inspire the gallerist's narrowing of focus solely to American art. Though they

believed in the concept of individual artistic genius, this cluster of writers viewed culture

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[266] Alfred Stieglitz, Ibid., 1.
[267] Sarah Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz, Facilitator, Financier, and Father, Presents Seven Americans," in Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America*, 303 and 306.
[268] Ibid., 306.

production in salvific terms—and salvation, the believed and proclaimed, would come through the group. "With an almost blind faith, they insisted that a close community of artists," Sarah Greenough affirms, "had the power to regenerate both society and culture."[269] Paraphrasing Brooks, Greenough goes on to state that "No new society would emerge, no social revolution would be possible…until a community of artists…[brought] Americans 'face to face with our own experience.'"[270] Probably Paul Rosenfeld's best-known work, the literary portrait anthology *Port of New York* embodied these individual/nationalistic ideals. It also crystallized the notion of a cohesive cooperative of artists for Stieglitz, who would go on to organize and mount *Seven Americans* only months after Rosenfeld's book—which incorporated texts on, among others, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Arthur Dove, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Stieglitz himself—appeared in 1924.

Born to a German-Jewish family in New York City in 1890, Paul Rosenfeld graduated from Yale University in 1912.[271] After receiving a degree from the Columbia School of Journalism, he spent six months working as a reporter before travelling to Europe, where he witnessed the onset of World War I. He worked as editor for *The Seven Arts* until the magazine folded for financial reasons in 1917. Drawing on his childhood training and adult predilections, he served as music critic for the modernist periodical *Dial* from 1920 to 1927. Rosenfeld's insinuation into the lives of the visual artist of the avant-garde—and his considerable presence in their minds—reveals itself in the group's

[269] Ibid., 291.

[270] Ibid., 293.

[271] A brief biography of Rosenfeld appears at the beginning of the Beinecke Library's finding aid to the writer's papers; see Bruce P. Stark, "Guide to the Paul Rosenfeld Papers," text, January 1998, http://drs.library.yale.edu:8083/saxon/SaxonServlet?style=http://drs.library.yale.edu:8083/saxon/EAD/yul.e ad2002.xhtml.xsl&source=http://drs.library.yale.edu:8083/fedora/get/beinecke:rosenfel/EAD. (accessed October 27, 2009). See also "Spiritual America," in Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 4–11.

correspondence, particularly the published letters between Dove and Stieglitz, where the writer is mentioned over two dozen times.[272] In addition, the impresario displayed his high regard for Rosenfeld by hosting him at the Stieglitz family homestead in Lake George, New York, and by photographing the cultural critic on several occasions in the early 1920s.[273]

The firm of Harcourt, Brace, and Company published *Port of New York: Essays on Fourteen American Moderns* in 1924 and Rosenfeld's work both fulfilled and complicated the efforts of the United States modernists to organize and unify. The anthology built on the success of the author's previous book, *Musical Portraits: Interpretations of Twenty Modern Composers*, from 1920, maintaining the same format of literary portrait anthology while shifting focus to exclusively American intellectuals. The author selected his fourteen human subjects from the varied arenas of education, poetry and prose, cultural criticism, and the visual arts.[274] Stieglitz dominated the visual discourse of the volume, providing five photographic portraits (for Marin, Hartley, Dove, O'Keeffe, and Sherwood Anderson) to accompany Rosenfeld's corresponding texts. In terms of style, Rosenfeld employed a seemingly retardataire form of syrupy and overwrought description to convey the character of his "sitters." As a matter of fact, as Wanda Corn has noted, "his involuted sentences and his predilection for romantic metaphor made his prose so densely imagistic that even in his own day he was condemned for his excesses."[275]

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[272] See Dove and Stieglitz, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, 529.

[273] Alfred Stieglitz's "Key Set" of photographs, owned by the National Gallery of Art, documents six prints of Rosenfeld, alone or in small groups, from the 1920s, a fact indicative of the writer's importance to the photographer at the time.

[274] It can be argued that in the book's fifteenth essay, Rosenfeld draws on the long European tradition of "city portraits" in his evocative description of New York City. See Chapter Two, note 75.

[275] "Spiritual America," Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 6.

The experimental "cubist" wordsmithing of Gertrude Stein contrasts sharply with the holdover Victorian purple prose of Paul Rosenfeld. This fact can be easily demonstrated by comparing the first two sentences of Stein's "Pablo Picasso" ("One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were certainly following was one who was charming."[276]) with the first two sentences of Rosenfeld's "Alfred Stieglitz" ("Alfred Stieglitz is of the company of the great affirmers of life. There is no matter in all the world so homely, trite, and humble that through it this man of the black box and chemical bath cannot express himself entire."[277]). Stieglitz and his associates, however, overlooked (or looked past) the gauzy, Symbolist trappings of Rosenfeld's writing style, as it was certainly in their best interests so to do. In the spirit of intertextual competition, Charles Demuth perused Rosenfeld's essay on Arthur Dove in the midst of crafting his own poster portrait of the painter and assemblage artist. On July 7, 1924, Demuth wrote to Stieglitz:

> Must read the book [*Port of New York*],—but I don't want to until I've gotten all the "posters" out. I opened the book at Dove, and it was surprising the way the essay & poster for Dove ran along side by side. It will be fun to see if they—the essays & my posters—all agree.[278]

Demuth's letter indicates the Stieglitz circle's tacit approbation of the anthology, regardless of Rosenfeld's stylings.

More importantly, though, as a contribution to the ongoing conversation among the modernists regarding portraiture, *Port of New York* accomplished three objectives in one fell swoop. First, the book is one of the first postwar endeavors that documents the avant-garde's move from "presentation" to "re-presentation." Having achieved a

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[276] "Picasso," Stein, *Writings, 1903–1932*, 282.

[277] Rosenfeld, *Port of New York; Essays on Fourteen American Moderns*, 237.

[278] Demuth to Stieglitz, 7 July 1924, in Demuth, *Letters of Charles Demuth, American Artist, 1883–1935*, 64.

modicum of self-awareness as a coherent group, the modernists turned their efforts from

internal organization to external education and promotion—and *Port of New York*, as a

commercially published book intended for a wide readership—signals this change.

Stieglitz acknowledged his support of Rosenfeld's "re-presentation" project in his July

18, 1923 letter to Arthur Dove:

> —I heard from Rosenfeld yesterday. In the letter he tells me that he has
> finally started the chapter on you. … And I feel it as most important that
> you finally appear in properly in print.—It's time. And you deserve that
> "people" know more about you….[279]

Second, whereas in *Musical Portraits* Rosenfeld had compiled a semi-haphazard

clutch of previous articles about contemporary composers, in *Port of New York* he

purposefully gathered—and, on several occasions, intentionally composed (as indicated

by Stieglitz's letter above)—essays on over two dozen individuals whom he believed

shared similar forward-thinking principles. In so doing he deliberately created a profile

(i.e., a Gestalt portrait) of the American avant-garde. Thus, *Port of New York* provided

the general public one of its first glimpses of the emerging, discernible "face" of the

newly unified modernists.

Ultimately, *Port of New York* provided the polymath Alfred Stieglitz, privy to the

volume's conception and execution, a model of "re-presentation." As a first foray, the

book not only laid important groundwork for the avant-garde's campaign to raise

consciousness but it also created the time and space for Stieglitz to weigh public reaction

to Rosenfeld's anthology and to strategize his own endeavors accordingly. The shrewd

gallery director took Rosenfeld's idea and sharpened and focused it to meet his own

needs and those of his newly pared down stable of artists. *Seven Americans*—a "re-

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[279] Alfred Stieglitz to Arthur Dove, 18 July 1923, in Dove and Stieglitz, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, 89.

presentation" of the modernist avant-garde that self-reflexively foregrounded the importance of anti-mimetic portraiture to its constituency—would be the result.

Re-Presenting Alfred Stieglitz: Georgia O'Keeffe's *Radiator Building*

Paul Rosenfeld's self-consciously outer-directed portraits in *Port of New York* inspired a range of concrete reactions among the members of the United States avant-garde. Alfred Stieglitz drew on Rosenfeld's focus on the collective and on American-born practitioners in formulating his Intimate Gallery's focus of mission and in planning the touchstone exhibition *Seven Americans*. Others took cues from Rosenfeld's external orientation, too. While the group portrait *per se* had gone out of fashion (at least in the medium of oil on canvas), the group's painters created highly developed individual portraits intended to market the avant-garde to a wide and deep general audience, at turns curious and skeptical. Georgia O'Keeffe's masterpiece, *Radiator Building—Night, New York*, 1927 (fig. 6.4), stands as one such response.

When in the mid-1920s Stieglitz directed his photographic attention elsewhere, O'Keeffe productively took up the theme of the Manhattan skyline (the couple's interpersonal relationship seemed to function better when they did not work on the same subject matter at the same time). *New York with Moon*, 1925 (fig. 6.5), became the first poetic streetscape in an extended exploration that would yield almost two dozen completed pictures over the next five years. O'Keeffe's paintings answered the rhetorical question of "Who will paint New York?" that had been on the lips of critics for almost a decade.[280] The series also met other discursive needs, ones that Paul Rosenfeld had first foregrounded in his 1924 anthology. By limning a subject that sprang directly from the

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[280] See Anna C. Chave, "'Who Will Paint New York?': 'The World's New Art Center' and the Skyscraper Paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe," *American Art* 5, no. 1 (Winter–Spring 1991): 86–107.

soil of the United States, O'Keeffe demonstrated her disregard for Europe in topical focus; this move aligned her with the avant-garde's fresh concentration on wholly American subjects. In painting the series, O'Keeffe also took a page, so to speak, from Rosenfeld's *Port of New York*, whose eponymous fifteenth essay mystically envisioned the Manhattan harbor as synecdochically consonant with a new America, capital "A."[281] O'Keeffe's work at the time eschewed the technical "isms" born on the Continent (cubism, synchromism, etc.) in addition to answering the post-bellum "call to order" with a simplified mimetic style.

Yet at the same time O'Keeffe's *Radiator Building—Night, New York* extended and expanded the anti-mimetic portrait conventions that visual artists had been developing for over a decade.[282] In his contemporaneous poster portraits Charles Demuth conveyed character through realistically depicted clusters of symbolic objects and O'Keeffe employed a similar strategy, exchanging tabletop items for architecture, in this understated yet complex canvas, a portrait of Alfred Stieglitz. In real life the Radiator Building, recently constructed in mid-town, sported idiosyncratic dark exterior tiles. O'Keeffe emphasized this fact in her image in order to evoke Stieglitz's own distinctive sartorial display, which included, among other items, a full-length black cape (fig. 6.6). The prominence of illumination—glowing windows, streaming searchlights, and sputtering streetlamps—alludes to the gallerist's preoccupation with photography (a word whose etymology denotes "writing with light"), while the schematic cityscape's nocturnal setting may refer to the time that Stieglitz spent in the darkroom. In *Radiator*

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[281] "Spiritual America," Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 7.

[282] In her thought-provoking article, Vivian Green Fryd first interpreted O'Keeffe's *Radiator Building* as a full-blown yet unrecognized portrait of Alfred Stieglitz, an interpretation I assume and build upon here. See Fryd, "Georgia O'Keeffe's *Radiator Building*."

Building, O'Keeffe, with a brilliant stroke of imagination, visually conflates all the "masculine" energy in her life—Stieglitz, phallus, skyscraper, New York, United States—in one fell swoop. To clear up any possible doubt as to the identification of the portrait "sitter," the artist boldly emblazoned his name in bright red capital letters at the center left edge of the canvas: "ALFRED STIEGLITZ."

Allegorizing a living, breathing human being as an architectural structure may seem somewhat novel today, but it was nothing new to O'Keeffe in 1927: she had previously utilized this *modus operandi* in 1922 when she painted *My Shanty* (fig. 6.7). The 20 x 27-inch painting depicts an abandoned one-room dancehall at Lake George that O'Keeffe had repurposed for her own private workspace. The artist would later recount that the canvas started as something of a personal in-joke:

> [O]ne day as I looked at the brown burned wood of the Shanty I thought, "I can paint one of those dismal-colored paintings like the men. I think just for fun I will try—all low-toned and dreary with the tree beside the door."[283]

But as the picture neared completion, the image of the rehabilitated structure (a space so closely associated in real life with O'Keeffe) became more than a tongue-in-cheek aping of the efforts of "the men"; it became conflated with the artist herself.[284] O'Keeffe steered her future viewers more firmly in this interpretive direction through deliberate aesthetic choices. In terms of composition, the open doors that block visual access bring to mind the painter's own guarded personality (especially in the presence of "the men" of the Stieglitz circle). And for the title, O'Keeffe eschewed the definite article in "The

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[283] Text accompanying image of *My Shanty*, in Georgia O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), unpaginated.

[284] See "Georgia O'Keeffe - My Shanty, Lake George," n.d., http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american_art/artwork/OKeeffe-My_Shanty.htm. (accessed October 29, 2009)

Shanty" in favor of the possessive pronoun "My Shanty," further underscoring her intense identification with the outbuilding that functioned as her summer studio. An incidental editorial decision further encouraged period viewers in their mental association of the flesh-and-blood O'Keeffe with the image of her workspace: Art critic Alexander Brooks reviewed O'Keeffe's 1923 show (entitled *Alfred Stieglitz Presents One-Hundred Pictures, Oils, Water-colors, Pastels, Drawings by Georgia O'Keeffe, American*) in the February issue of *ARTS* and the article's layout featured a reproduction of the anti-mimetic self-portrait *My Shanty* with Marion H. Beckett's mimetic likeness *Portrait of Georgia O'Keefe* [sic] on the opposing page (fig. 6.8).[285]

O'Keeffe's awareness of these two modes of representing personality make the artist's decision to paint her romantic and business partner in the guise of the Radiator Building (i.e., in the more unconventional and challenging of the two styles) all the more significant. By choosing the disjunctive, anti-mimetic strategy, O'Keeffe demonstrated her facility with the most intellectually sophisticated understandings of portraiture at the time. Undoubtedly painted without the benefit of actual sittings, *Radiator Building—Night, New York* exemplifies dis-appearance in the material absence of the human interest (Alfred Stieglitz), the denial of his right to corrective agency, and the refusal to depict the portrait subject's physical body. Further, O'Keeffe embedded a stunning silence into the image, sublimating her complex feelings about her complicated relationship with the man

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[285] "In 1922 [O'Keeffe] was interviewed by a writer for the daily *New York Sun* for a profile—her first illustrated "spread" in a daily paper. O'Keeffe's disdain for the contemporaneous interpretation of her work was growing, and she certainly hoped the *Sun* interview, by allowing her to speak for herself, would curb the florid imagery, allusions to the essence of womanhood, and erotic undercurrents written by the critics. In support of this effort, the illustration of the artist reproduced in the feature story was not a Stieglitz photograph from the sensational and shocking 1921 exhibition of his images of her, but rather a painted portrait by Marion Beckett showing a straightforward woman surrounded by her favorite plants." Marion M. Goethals, "Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), *Skunk Cabbage (Cos Cob)*, 1922," in Nancy Mowll Mathews, ed., *American Dreams: American Art to 1950 in the Williams College Museum of Art* (New York: Hudson Hills Press in association with the Williams College Museum of Art, 2001), 136 and 138.

who was her chief proponent, lover, and gallerist.[286] In her choices of architectural

subject matter and photographically-influenced facture, O'Keeffe revealed her

sophisticated understanding of portrait objects and their object-ification. In contrast to

Charles Demuth's poster portraits, which utilized table top items to evoke the "sitter,"

O'Keeffe in her own identifiable unconventional "likenesses" seems to have preferred

natural and urban landscape elements. Her selection—and aesthetic

decontextualization—of the Radiator Building recalls Marcel Duchamp's desire to

designate the earlier constructed Woolworth Building as a readymade.[287] O'Keeffe here

also echoed the transformation of three-dimensional portrait objects into two-dimensional

"portrait photographs" by translating such effects as halation and compressed depth of

field into paint.[288]

By 1927, when O'Keeffe completed *Radiator Building—Night, New York*, the

formation and internal organization of the American avant-garde had already occurred

and therefore the issue of "presentation," in terms of her unlikely "likeness" of Stieglitz,

was moot. The painting makes plain, however, O'Keeffe's ambitions for herself, her

husband-to-be, and their associates. Wanda Corn has astutely noted the modernists' turn

toward full-on collective self-promotion, a dynamic in which *Radiator Building* overtly

participates:

> Though [the artists of the Stieglitz circle] prided themselves on their
> superior talents and on their detachment from marketplace vulgarities,
> they used many of the aggressive and hard-nosed techniques of the

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[286] The 1922 feature on O'Keeffe in the *New York Sun* that also included Marion Beckett's *Portrait of O'Keeffe* was entitled "I Can't Sing, So I Paint!", further evidence of the artist's frequent repudiation of the verbal in favor of the visual. See note 285 above.

[287] Chave, "Who Will Paint New York?," 90.

[288] Regarding the photographic effects of halation, lens flare, and flattening in O'Keeffe's skyscraper pictures, see Fryd, "Georgia O'Keeffe's *Radiator Building*," 281.

commercial world as it moved from the soft techniques of selling to the more calculated ones of marketing.[289]

Indeed, Vivien Green Fryd hypothesizes that O'Keeffe specifically chose the Radiator Building as proxy for Stieglitz because of the purpose-built promotional design of the structure, whose "unique nighttime illumination, functioned, according to its architect, 'as a billboard to advertise itself.'"[290] O'Keeffe underscored this blatant function of the image by inscribing—and in high-keyed vermillion majuscules—the Stieglitz brand name so that viewers absolutely could not miss it. Seen in this light, the canvas epitomizes the up-to-the-minute dynamics of re-presentation, that twinning of superficial realism and premeditated promotion, which had come to preoccupy the American avant-garde as the 1920s wound down.

Charles Demuth and the Inversion of Re-Presentation

The same year—1927—that Georgia O'Keeffe created her painting *Radiator Building—Night, New York*, Charles Demuth began and completed a similarly ambitious work: *My Egypt* (fig. 6.9). This pair of images bears several striking similarities. Both feature iconic architectural structures, hieratically composed with cool, crisp lines. Light plays an active role in each. To focus the viewer's attention solely on the buildings, the artists eliminated distracting human figures. Following the dictates of Paul Rosenfeld et alia—and thereby augmenting their paintings' cultural currency—O'Keeffe and Demuth each respectively depicted distinctive American ("homegrown") landmarks with deep personal resonance. Most significantly, *Radiator Building* and *My Egypt* function as highly conceptualized images that brought the avant-garde's unconventional portrait practices up to date. And both canvases traffic in re-presentation—though in *Radiator*

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[289] "Spiritual America," Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 39.
[290] Fryd, "Georgia O'Keeffe's *Radiator Building*," 277.

Building O'Keeffe performed these dynamics much more explicitly than Demuth, who with *My Egypt* announced the final permutation of anti-mimetic portraiture in the United States, as we shall see.

In 1915 Demuth had commenced a line of aesthetic inquiry that would occupy him over the next four years: that of literary illustration (fig. 6.10). During this period the artist completed over three dozen watercolors inspired by the works of such writers as Balzac, Henry James, Emile Zola, and Edgar Allan Poe. From English author Walter Pater's collection of fictionalized biographies, published in 1887 and entitled *Imaginary Portraits*, Demuth derived one of his final literary illustrations, *A Prince of Court Painters (after Watteau)*, 1918. According to Barbara Haskell, the work is "[t]he most clearly self-referential of all Demuth's literary illustrations"…because

> Pater's Watteau was a mirror image of Demuth. The pictorial styles of
> both artists shared delicacy, nuance, and a facile, refined technique.
> Psychologically, their works evoked the fleeting nature of happiness and
> the intertwined character of theater and real life.[291]

Demuth's watercolor of Watteau pointed toward yet another sustained avenue of investigation that he began several years later: the succession of emblematic likenesses of contemporary American artists and writers that the artist called his "poster portraits." This group of images, including *Poster Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 1923–1924 (fig. 5.13), shares with the Watteau watercolor the intent to venerate the Creative Genius, but the similarity ends there. Instead, with his poster portraits, Demuth plunged headfirst into that most productive of visual dialogues *au courant* within the Stieglitz circle: how to capture an individual's likeness without mimetic representation. Indeed the photographer's wife— and Demuth's good friend—O'Keeffe would eventually make substantial contributions to

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[291] Haskell, *Charles Demuth*, 110.

this discussion, generating several abstract watercolor portraits of the photographer Paul

Strand in 1917 (figs. 2.10–2.12), one of her brother Alexis in 1928, and two likenesses of

her husband, *Lake George, Coat and Red*, 1919 (fig. 2.14), and *Radiator Building: Night,*

New York, 1927 (fig. 6.4). Nonetheless, Demuth would become the most prolific of all

the American modernists within this genre, creating around a dozen examples between

1923 and 1929.

When Stieglitz exhibited the first three of Demuth's poster portraits—among

them, images of O'Keeffe (fig. 5.13), Arthur Dove (fig. 5.15), and Charles Duncan—in

the March 1925 exhibition *Seven Americans*, viewer response was underwhelming. For

the most part, newspaper critics wrote mixed reviews of Demuth's experimental, new

direction, but public reaction was decidedly negative. The placement of the works—

crowded at the gallery's entrance—and the artist's seemingly abrupt change in style and

subject matter may have inspired such open hostility. The images' inscrutability most

certainly played an important role in their unsympathetic reception as well.

The practice of oblique reference to a specific individual in Demuth's poster

portraits operates as a figurative veiling or masking of the sitter. And literal images of

masks are an undeniably persistent motif in the artist's output, appearing in at least ten

pictures, most of which cluster from 1925 to 1928. They include *Longhi on Broadway*,

1927 (fig. 6.11), and *Love, Love, Love (Homage to Gertrude Stein)*, 1928 (fig. 6.12).

Emily Farnham, Demuth's biographer, considered the mask, and the related leitmotifs of

disguises, deception, and camouflage, as the organizing principle in the artist's life. The

title of her book, *Charles Demuth: Behind a Laughing Mask,* encapsulates Farnham's

overarching argument that "Demuth possessed a complex, enigmatic personality, which,

like his art, was replete with contradictions and subterranean subtleties."[292] Farnham

weaves the warp of perversion and the weft of marginalization throughout her 1971

biography of the artist, strands she enumerates as "all of Demuth's burdens (lameness,

tuberculosis, diabetes, homosexuality, and social disapproval)."[293] It is for these reasons,

she intimates, that Demuth led something of a double existence, of which the mask is

signifier *par excellence*.[294]

     Demuth's personal circumstances—as the clandestine gay scion and only child of

an upper-middle-class family in small-town, semi-rural Pennsylvania at the turn of the

twentieth century—help elucidate the artist's persistent attraction to the iconography of

disguise. According to Jonathan Weinberg, "to be a homosexual in America before

World War II was to be intensely aware of different modes of presenting the self."[295]

More habituated to the anonymity of the closet than to the center of attention, Demuth, in

a letter to Alfred Stieglitz, communicated his conflicted unease at being recognized when

his fifteen minutes of fame finally arrived at the 1926 World's Fair:

> Dear Stieglitz:—
>   I must write you & tell you the news. I don't think it is, as yet,
> given to the public. The Susqui[centennial] Exhibition gave me a silver
> medal on my branch of plums [(fig. 6.13)], that water-colour you had last
> winter in my show. It seems funnier to be noticed than not to be.
> <div align="right">Love,
Demuth[296]</div>

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[292] Farnham, *Charles Demuth: Behind a Laughing Mask*, 9.

[293] Ibid., 21.

[294] For a pioneering psychoanalytic essay on the mask as signifier for double existence, see Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as Masquerade," in Victor Burgin and James Donald, eds., *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Methuen, 1986), 35–44. Jonathan Weinberg employs Edward Stevenson's concept of the "Mask" to analyze Marsden Hartley's Berlin military paintings in Weinberg, *Speaking for Vice*, 157–158. Other, more recent treatments of this aspect of portraiture include Lubar, "Unmasking Pablo's Gertrude"; "Masks and Roles," in West, *Portraiture*, 206–210; Alarcó, *The Mirror & the Mask*; and Ortrud Westheider et al., *Matisse: People, Masks, Models* (München: Hirmer, 2008).

[295] Weinberg, *Speaking for Vice*, 55.

[296] Demuth to Stieglitz, 12 October 1926, in Demuth, *Letters of Charles Demuth, American Artist, 1883–1935*, 87.

To his dealer-mentor, the artist had also expressed a similar sentiment a few weeks

earlier, plaintively stating, "I wish we could go around, on some of our visits, masked, as

in 18th century Venice."[297]

Although no evidence exists to confirm Demuth's performance of this particular

public act, within months of articulating such a fantasy to Stieglitz the artist sublimated

the force and essence of this desire within the composition of his masterpiece, *My Egypt*.

Therefore I would like to expose Demuth's painting as a masked self-portrait within his

"poster portrait" series and to argue, as elaborated below, that *My Egypt* manifests, to an

unusual extent, references to the artist and his physical body.[298]

At 36 x 30 inches *My Egypt* (fig. 6.9) is one of the largest works in Charles

Demuth's oeuvre. The oil on composition board depicts, with a palette of black, blue,

brown, red and white, the abstracted structures of the newly-built Eshelman grain

elevator from the artist's hometown of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The painting shares the

same time frame, virtually the same dimensions, the same materials and physical support,

and the same conceptual complexity and degree of finish as *The Figure 5 in Gold*, 1928

(fig. 6.14), Demuth's immediately subsequent "poster portrait" of his friend, the

modernist poet William Carlos Williams.[299]

With the exception of *The Figure 5 in Gold*, the scale of *My Egypt* is unique in

Demuth's output from the 1920s. Throughout this decade the artist had been struggling

with debilitating diabetes—and creating large works in oil was an activity that he often

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[297] Demuth to Stieglitz, 19 September 1926, in Ibid., 85.

[298] I first made a similar argument in my master's thesis. See Jonathan Frederick Walz, "The Riddle of the Sphinx or 'It Must Be Said': Charles Demuth's *My Egypt* Reconsidered" (MA thesis, College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 2004).

[299] Williams's poem, "The Great Figure," served as the point of departure for Demuth's "poster portrait" of his friend. See Appendix A.

did not have the stamina to accomplish. "*My Egypt* of 1927 assumes fresh meaning in this context," observes Karal Ann Marling "[because] it is painted in oil, it is nearly a yard in height, and it is possessed of a ponderous presence unmatched in Demuth's corpus of work."[300] The "ponderous presence" that Marling discerns is, in fact, the physicality of the painting and the implicated body of Demuth himself. It is noteworthy that the artist conceived and executed his series of poster portraits during a period when he was hyper-conscious of his own physicality from drastically fluctuating weight loss and gain (figs. 4.1–4.3). Demuth's personal investment in *My Egypt* and his steadfastness in completing it only strengthen the relationship between the image and the traces of his material presence.

When we compare *My Egypt* to *The Figure 5 in Gold* or the urbanscapes from the end of the artist's career—for example, *After All*, 1933 (fig. 6.15)—*My Egypt* appears, in contrast, to be balanced, stable, quiet. Instead of a dynamic composition meant to lead the viewer's eye throughout the painting, *My Egypt* hinges on a central axis, with carefully positioned minor differences on either side. The rays of light and lines of force that triangulate the image serve as a foil to the emphatic equilibrium of the architectural forms, adding a bit of variety to the otherwise sober visual organization.

The bilateral symmetry of *My Egypt* bolsters an interpretation of the grain elevator as Demuth's "body double." The understated yet profound alteration from the study for *My Egypt* (fig. 6.16) to the finished painting suggests that Demuth consciously chose to emphasize the balance of the final composition. The evenly proportioned forms, frontal viewpoint, powerful geometries, and shafts of light result in a sort of grain

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[300] Karal Ann Marling, "*My Egypt*: The Irony of the American Dream," *Winterthur Portfolio* 15, no. 1 (1980): 6.

elevator as Vitruvian man. By conflating human body and industrial building, Demuth constructed his own deeply personal version of that early twentieth-century object of anxiety: the mechanomorph. Stieglitz had unconsciously expressed this Dadaist trope in relation to Demuth as well, capturing the artist's cool, fastidious, and mechanistic side by mounting a portrait of him on the recto of a board that features a photograph of glinting machinery attributed to Paul Strand on the verso (figs. 6.17–6.18).

While *My Egypt* does not mimetically portray Demuth's physical traits, its composition recapitulates important aspects of his character. The symmetry of the painting resonates powerfully with other extant photographs of the artist, especially Alfred Stieglitz's 1915 portrait (fig. 4.10). Here Demuth intently stares out at us, chin lowered slightly to emphasize his penetrating eyes. Both Stieglitz's photograph and *My Egypt* are studies of impenetrable façades with minor variations on either side of a vertical division to create a dynamic balance.

And balance was not an insignificant issue for Charles Demuth. It manifested itself in the artist's life in a number of ways, of which three merit consideration:

First: Demuth walked with a limp due to a childhood incident which damaged his hip. After treatment, the artist wore corrective shoes and carried a walking stick. Later in life he assimilated this cane within the ethos of a dandy, unabashedly appearing with the accessory in photographs (fig. 6.19). The cane in Florine Stettheimer's 1928 full-length *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz* (fig. 6.20) functions synecdochically for the Lancaster artist, shown entering from the left. In *My Egypt*, the smokestack buttressing the right side of the image rhymes exceedingly well with a cane, both in symbolic form and compositional function.

A second link connects body to picture as well. The poet William Carlos Williams, in an interview with Emily Farnham, asserted that "due to [Demuth's] being cross-eyed, one eye sometimes looked at his nose, and he never looked right at you."[301] Indeed a few period photographs record the asymmetry of the artist's gaze, a condition known as divergent strabismus (fig. 6.17). Every day, Demuth's lazy eye and "ambling gait" reminded him that he was physically off-balance, literally out-of-step with the rest of the world.

Third: Demuth lived the adult years of his life in the first quarter of the twentieth century, when the majority opinion held that homosexuality was aberrant behavior rooted in illness. Given that the artist lived a divided life between permissive New York City and conservative Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Demuth had to continually walk a tightrope between those who knew about his sexual proclivities and those who did not. A sort of public/private axis is encoded in *My Egypt*'s insistent symmetry, arguably the image's most salient attribute. The artist's daily, performative balancing act brings us full circle to Watteau, to Walter Pater, and to Demuth's illustration of the rococo master.

In the bottom right-hand corner of the watercolor *A Prince of Court Painters (after Watteau)* (fig. 6.10), whose palette of red, blue, brown, black, and white is virtually the same as *My Egypt*'s, Demuth copied the last sentence from Pater's own "imaginary portrait" of the eighteenth-century painter: "He was always a seeker after something in the world that is there in no satisfying measure, or not at all." This carefully transcribed quotation divulges Demuth's own identification with Pater's Watteau as someone who, in the words of Barbara Haskell:

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[301] Farnham, *Charles Demuth: Behind a Laughing Mask*, 9.

was hungry for life yet unable to fully participate in it or give himself over to the expression of passion. Outwardly amused by society and its frivolities, he was actually an introvert who suffered deep-seated feelings of isolation and melancholy.[302]

In his illustration, Demuth emphasized the detachment and dejection of Pater's Watteau by including on the easel at center right the rococo artist's image of *Pierrot* (fig. 6.21). Now at the Louvre, the actual canvas, which has been described as "a painting in the buffoon genre," is not, in Pierre Rosenberg's estimation,

> [a] self-portrait of [Watteau]. [T]here is in the work, [however], an obvious feeling that concerns us just as it concerns the painter. Cut off from the world surrounding him, without movement, isolated and alone, Watteau's poignant and awkward image of *Pierrot* remains unique in the history of art.[303]

Demuth, as shown in this undated snapshot, further demonstrated his empathy with the melancholic Pierrot by adopting the character's persona and costume for a period Black and White Ball (fig. 6.22).

To return to *My Egypt*, the correspondences between Demuth's picture and Antoine Watteau's *Pierrot* are striking. Both images feature white, centrally concentrated, vertical forms with double-cylindrical bases, viewed from below and silhouetted against the sky. Secondary planes which occupy the bottom of each painting create something of an awkward spatial arrangement in relation to the primary figure. *My Egypt* shares with most of Demuth's other poster portraits the straightforward pictorial language of advertising, what Wanda Corn calls the artist's "billboard poetics"; Watteau's canvas, believes Rosenberg, was *literally* some sort of outdoor signboard, as evidenced by the vertical structural damage visible in enlarged photographs of the

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[302] Haskell, *Charles Demuth*, 110.

[303] Pierre Rosenberg, "*Pierrot*" (catalogue no. 69) in Margaret Morgan Grasselli and Pierre Rosenberg, *Watteau, 1684–1721* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1984), 434.

painting (fig. 6.23).[304] The undeniable iconicity of both images has assured their impact,

memorability, and important position in each artist's oeuvre.

In his masterpiece, *My Egypt*, Charles Demuth performed a self-portrait *qua*

modern "Pierrot"— to reiterate Pierre Rosenberg: "Cut off from the world surrounding

him, without movement, isolated and alone."[305] Demuth had first depicted a literal

representation of Pierrot in his watercolor illustration, *A Prince of Court Painters (after*

Watteau) (fig. 6.10), a work that I have demonstrated held close, personal associations for

the Lancaster artist. In the opinion of Barbara Haskell,

> Although it is too much to claim that Demuth's illustration [of Watteau] is
> a self-portrait, there is no doubt that Demuth saw in Pater's description of
> Watteau a likeness of himself which the vehicle of literature allowed him
> to reveal.[306]

Nine years later, by encoding his bodily investment, physical equivalents, and

phenomenological understanding of balance in *My Egypt* (fig. 6.9), Charles Demuth hid a

portrait of himself in the best place possible—in plain sight. He had always felt, after all,

that it was "funnier to be noticed than not to be."[307]

Demuth's *My Egypt*, then, with its underlying conflict of how much to reveal and

how much to conceal, forms a conceptual *pendant* to O'Keeffe's contemporaneous

Radiator Building. At a foundational level, the contradiction inherent in both paintings

lies in the coupling of re-presentation—a marketing effort reliant on viewer legibility—

with anti-mimetic portraiture—a disjunctive strategy that trades on illegibility. But both

paintings in question place the accent on different points along this continuum. In

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[304] Wanda M. Corn, *In the American Grain: The Billboard Poetics of Charles Demuth* (Poughkeepsie, NY: Vassar College, 1991); Pierre Rosenberg, "*Pierrot*" (catalogue no. 69) in Grasselli and Rosenberg, *Watteau, 1684–1721*, 430.

[305] Pierre Rosenberg, "*Pierrot*" (catalogue no. 69) in Ibid., 434.

[306] Haskell, *Charles Demuth*, 111.

[307] Demuth to Stieglitz, 12 October 1926, in Demuth, *Letters of Charles Demuth, American Artist, 1883–1935*, 87.

Radiator Building Georgia O'Keeffe knowingly tipped her hand to the beholder, inscribing the surface of the canvas with crimson characters that spelled out the name of her portrait subject: her companion and manager, Alfred Stieglitz. Charles Demuth, on the other hand, refused such easy, revelatory signifiers, instead playing up obfuscation and playing down decipherability in *My Egypt*. This idiosyncratic strategy of oblique and understated self-promotion reflected the logical limits of re-presentation for the modernist avant-garde. And, ultimately, it marked the acme of anti-mimetic portraiture in the early twentieth-century United States.

Conclusion

By the mid-1920s, the modernists had come to consciousness about their identity as a unified group and their potential influence on American culture. This self-awareness occurred hand in hand with a reorientation of their aesthetic objectives, with less emphasis on the imported and universal and more emphasis on the indigenous and specific. The writers whom Alfred Stieglitz had permitted access to his circle spearheaded this nativist groundswell and Paul Rosenfeld, with the publication of his collective portrait *Port of New York* in 1924, at last succeeded in creating a coherent profile—the "new face"—of the avant-garde. This book marked one of the group's first significant performances of "re-presentation," that is, externally directed promotional efforts in a superficially descriptive style. Capturing and encapsulating the era's zeitgeist, *Port of New York* catalyzed Stieglitz's reimagination of his gallery's mission. The 1925 exhibition *Seven Americans* "re-presented" John Marin, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth, Georgia O'Keeffe, Paul Strand, and Stieglitz himself to the general public as if for the first time. With its focus on localized imagery by artists of the United

States, the show characterized the first fruits of the thematic program that Stieglitz would explore for the rest of his career.

As concrete manifestations of the desire for the avant-garde's acceptance and advancement, Georgia O'Keeffe's *Radiator Building—Night, New York* and Charles Demuth's *My Egypt* exemplify the further development of re-presentation, albeit in overlapping, yet divergent, modes. In their respective pictures both artists carried on the custom of unconventional likeness, wherein the final image bears no resemblance to the portrait's ostensible human subject. Eager to associate herself openly with the man who reputedly brought modern art to the United States, O'Keeffe identified her "sitter" in writing to promote the impresario who had done so much to promote her as a painter. Demuth, on the other hand, owing to social constraints and other contingencies, drew a transparent veil of silence across the surface of his own canvas, a self-portrait that announced his physical presence while at the same time nearly preventing its detection. With this pair of paintings the American modernists finally parsed many, if not most, of the logical permutations of the anti-mimetic portrait. Thus, the *transatlantique* conversation that had occupied the avant-garde for over fifteen years simultaneously reached its climax and its denouement.

AFTERWORD/AFTERWARD: 1928

Although the 1927 paintings *Radiator Building—Night, New York* (fig. 6.4) by Georgia O'Keeffe and *My Egypt* (fig. 6.9) by Charles Demuth established the highwater mark of anti-mimetic portraiture, the impetus for unconventional likenesses did not dissipate immediately. To be sure, the following year witnessed the completion of two equally complex and significant specimens of the sub-genre, mentioned only in passing in Chapter Six: Demuth's *The Figure 5 in Gold* (fig. 6.14) and Florine Stettheimer's *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz* (fig. 6.20). 1928 also saw the creation of *Portrait* (fig. 7.1), a work by Gerald Murphy that recapitulates and extends many of the avant-garde's concerns about verisimilitude, identity, and the self to which the writer Gertrude Stein had first drawn attention almost two decades prior.

Murphy's only known explicit incursion into the realm of human subject matter, the nearly three-foot square canvas of *Portrait* displays an amalgamation of personal signs. The following images, disposed in a clockwise fashion, occur on the surface of the canvas: a schematic white head in profile and facing left; three identical fingerprints; an eye, complete with tear duct, lid, and lashes; the outline of a right foot superimposed upon a similar footprint; and a pair of pursed lips. Three different—and differently calibrated—rulers punctuate the composition. The numeral five, the painting's lone element of text, occupies the lower register. A mysterious, even defiant, act of (self) portrayal, *Portrait* holds the rubrics of appearance/dis-appearance, object/objectification, and presentation/representation in an unresolved—and unresolvable—dynamic tension.

Portrait addresses appearance head on. The artist acknowledges the link between portrait subject and portrait object by painstakingly reproducing one of his fingerprints, the ultimate signifier of unique individuality and one-to-one correspondence. Despite its unconventional overall design, other constituent elements of *Portrait* reveal Murphy's familiarity with the trompe l'oeil representational strategies upon which portraiture had frequently—and heavily—relied in the past. In contrast to the footprint, an indexical trace in the first degree, Murphy demonstrated his skill at illusionistic realism through the carefully modeled lips and the expertly highlighted cornea. The triple repetition of rulers within the composition affirms that "man is the measure of all things" while at the same time asserting that, in comparison to past portrait artists of the Western tradition, Murphy "measures up" to the best of them.

In this ambiguous work Murphy also manifests dis-appearance, i.e., the suppression of the sitter, of likeness, and the body (all under an overarching silence). However, as a late 1920s performance of the artist's intimate understanding of dis-appearance, *Portrait* just as often functions as the exception that proves the rules of this constitutive set of principles. Working against the time-tested practice of transcriptive, mirror-based self-portraits, Murphy purposely diminished the importance of sitting for the image. The picture's relationship to physiognomic likeness remains ambivalent: on the one hand, the artist reproduces a generic anthropological profile bust; on the other, he replicates in excruciating detail one of his own fingerprints. If some of the earliest American performances of dis-appearance, such as Andrew Dasburg's *The Absence of Mabel Dodge*, c. 1913, conjured the body completely out of sight, then Murphy's late example should be understood as a valiant post-Victorian attempt (albeit, in the end, an

unsuccessful one) at wholistic reintegration of the modern self. The queer silence that reigns over the picture literalizes the silent queerness that Murphy never seemed fully able to assimilate into his real life persona. The closed mouth depicted in *Portrait* appears tight-lipped for a reason.[308]

In terms of objects, Murphy's self-portrait exhibits the "mania for the literal" that swept both sides of the Atlantic after World War I. Best known for his still life images such as *Watch* (fig. 3.14) and *Razor* (fig. 3.15), here the artist treats the present individual body parts as the compartmentalized elements of a modern rack painting. In a consummate feat of actual disappearance, Murphy's original work is no longer extant, having been lost or destroyed sometime after its creation. The black-and-white print that records the painting's previous existence falls squarely into the category of "documentary" (rather than "interpretive") photograph. Nevertheless, these fortuitous circumstances, adjacent to the performance of object-ification, have guaranteed for posterity the inclusion of *Portrait* within the artist's small but select oeuvre, providing a fuller understanding of Murphy's individual character and aesthetic concerns.

At the margins of the American avant-garde, that is, at the very outer limits of those artists orbiting Alfred Stieglitz and his galleries, Gerald Murphy played little if any role in the development of the presentation and representation of the imagined community of modernists to themselves or to others. Nevertheless, *Portrait* exhibits the return to recognizable imagery found in Charles Demuth's poster portraits, for example, and participates, albeit inconspicuously, within this wider trend of seeing and being seen. We do not know the precise configuration of the ideal audience the artist intended for this

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[308] For a brilliant and moving queer analysis of *Portrait*, see Kenneth E. Silver, "The Murphy Closet and the Murphy Bed," in Rothschild, *Making It New*, 106–117.

work but at least two (non-mutually exclusive) options pertain to the discussion here. It might be that, following a strategy similar to his equally geographically inaccessible (at least to homebound Americans) *transatlantique* compatriot Stein, Murphy planned *Portrait* to image his presence long distance to the avant-garde working in the United States. It is also possible that the artist intended *Portrait*—consciously or unconsciously—as an exercise in self-scrutiny. Certainly the painting em-bodied Murphy's image of himself and to himself, in effect instantiating a representation of the artist within his own imaginary. Though oblique and fragmented as a composition, the picture helped Murphy to know his outer appearance and inner workings better and provides the same benefit to attentive viewers today.

The mysterious fate of the oil on canvas version of *Portrait* remains unsolved. Whether the artist destroyed the original work or it was involuntarily lost is unknown. What can be said, however, is that the painting—or at least the photographic image of it—persists in demonstrating Gerald Murphy's mastery of appearance and dis-appearance, of objects and object-ification, and of presentation and re-presentation. As such the picture summarizes the development of the American avant-garde over the previous fifteen years within an iconic portrait of great silence yet great power.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

As of this writing, the one hundredth anniversary of Alfred Stieglitz's 1912 publication of Gertrude Stein's poems "Henri Matisse" and "Pablo Picasso" in *Camera Work* is approaching rapidly. This centennial occasion felicitously provides the opportunity to reflect upon the circumstances, immediate impact, and long-term effects of Stein's disambiguation of the portrait subject from descriptive likeness. Stieglitz, for one, saw and embraced this development—that is, the free-floating nature of signs under the rubric of portraiture—as part of what it meant to be "modern." Encouraging the visual artists around him—Marsden Hartley and Arthur Dove, Georgia O'Keeffe and Charles Demuth—to explore this conceptual trope, the impresario regularly showed the results of their aesthetic experiments on the walls of his galleries. In so doing he not only sanctioned new ways of imagining the individual and of making art, but he also created the "snapshot" of a particular cultural moment and of a specific social group. As Stieglitz made these unconventional portraits available—through correspondence, through exhibition, through publication—to those informally gathered around him, a distinctive modernist community in the United States began to coalesce. Convinced of the vital role that portraiture regularly played in worldmaking, Stieglitz then directed these images outward, establishing and preserving his stable of artists ("Seven Americans"), as well as his own reputation, as the decade of the 1920s came to an end.

The number of anti-mimetic portraits produced by the early twentieth-century modernists working in the United States dropped rapidly after 1928. Several factors— including the Great Depression, the rise of Regionalism as an art movement, and

Stieglitz's own diminishing force due to his advancing age—influenced artists to attend to concerns other than the intellectual exercise of separating sitter from likeness. In publishing Stein's poems in 1912, however, Stieglitz had opened a Pandora's box. Though the anti-mimetic portrait lost much of its currency within the wider art world during the 1930s as critics and collectors began to prize more mimetically-based styles, the conceit remained available within the cultural unconscious and Stieglitz circle artists—most notably O'Keeffe—continued to create the occasional unconventional likeness during the course of their respective careers. The trope regained some favor after World War II and returned in force during the 1980s and 1990s when identity politics around the issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation impelled artists working in the United States (and elsewhere) to reconsider more conceptual means of portrayal.

These intellectual concerns—racial equality, feminism, queer theory—came to the fore during the years of my undergraduate studies and inform the present text as well as point toward further avenues of investigation that will only strengthen and nuance the developmental history traced here. Readers may have perceived that the subtexts of religion and the "self" encroach each chapter at nearly every turn. The dismantling of Victorian values after the turn of the twentieth century enabled new conceptions of these two aspects of human experience to surface and grow in a mutually productive dynamic. Without a doubt, spirituality and selfhood are germane to any discussion about the imaging of interior life or the representation of individual identity.

Contrary to the popular (and essentializing) conception that the rise of modernism attended an inversely proportional decline in spirituality, religion remained a vital—even

driving—force in the early twentieth century. Sally M. Promey has persuasively argued, in fact, that

> while modernity has been characterized by the pluralization of religions
> and the privatization of aspects of religious choice and consent, it has not
> been attended by the extinction of religious belief, practice, or
> institution.[309]

The American avant-garde is no exception to this observation. Stieglitz, for example, hailed from a family of German Jews; O'Keeffe grew up in a Roman Catholic household. While neither artist regularly participated as adults in the respective religious subcultures of their families of origin, certainly their upbringings informed their worldviews, which, in turn, informed their art. When he first travelled to Europe in the 1910s, Marsden Hartley took advantage of several readily available sacred texts from a variety of world religions. These very personal inquiries manifested for the artist in a series of all-over canvases that betray much about his reading habits and about his own sense of mystical experience; this body of work preceded Hartley's Berlin military paintings by only a matter of months. Painters Katherine Dreier and Arthur Dove both adhered—to greater or lesser degrees—to the tenets of Theosophy, the syncretic belief system that attracted many in the early twentieth century. Fuller understanding of these religious inclinations and their intersections with the lives of particular artists would nuance the discussion of not only the anti-mimetic portraits that these painters, sculptors, and photographers produced but also the development of American modernism itself.[310]

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[309] Sally M. Promey, "The 'Return' of Religion in the Scholarship of American Art," *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 3 (September 2003): 587.

[310] For a good general history of religion(s) in the United States, see Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 4th ed. (Australia; Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2007). For more about the American avant-garde and its engagement with spiritual concerns, see Charles C. Eldredge, *American Imagination and Symbolist Painting* (New York: Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University, 1979); Sherry Cohn, "Arthur Dove and Theosophy: Visions of a Transcendental Reality," *Arts Magazine* 58 (September 1983): 86–91; Gail Levin, "Marsden Hartley and Mysticism," *Arts Magazine* 60

Likewise, early twentieth-century religious currents comprised one of many external pressures that influenced new notions about selfhood. Other influences included the increase of industrialization, a widespread rekindled sense of nationalism, and the beginnings of more appropriate valuation and fairer treatment for women and African Americans. These currents within the larger modernist paradigm shift all impinged upon the individual's sense of identity and social status. One of the greatest stimuli for the reconception of the "self" was the establishment of the field of psychology; the groundbreaking work of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung impelled much debate and change, especially within the sphere of sexuality (an aspect of human existence intimately linked to identity). William James's writings—especially his idea of the "stream of consciousness"—and Albert Einstein's theory of relativity proved important, too. As a result, the Victorian conception of universal experience splintered into a myriad of individual subject positions and the notion of the "self" shifted from a fixed and stable entity to one constantly in flux. At the same time that beliefs and opinions about the nature of the "self" changed, portraiture also reinvented itself as the many unconventional likenesses documented and discussed in this dissertation demonstrate. A more complete accounting for the transformation of subjectivity after the turn of the twentieth century and its impact on portraiture would provide a richer context for—and a deeper comprehension of—these intriguing "new faces" that continue to elude detection and resist interpretation even today.[311]

(November 1985): 16–21; Charles C. Eldredge, "Nature Symbolized: American Painting from Ryder to Hartley," in Tuchman et al., *The Spiritual in Art*, 112–129; and Kristina Wilson, "The Intimate Gallery and the 'Equivalents': Spirituality in the 1920s Work of Stieglitz," *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 4 (December 2003): 746–768.

[311] Regarding the development of modern subjectivity and its mutually enabling relationship with portraiture, see Soussloff, *The Subject in Art*. See also Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). For a succinct account of William

That phrase—"new face"—connotes two meanings within the context of this dissertation's larger argument. On the one hand, it signals the Renaissance and Enlightenment tendency to depict the faculties of consciousness as fixed within the head, and specifically character as best expressed through the elements of the visage. Members of the early twentieth-century avant-garde acknowledged this portrait tradition. Eager to disabuse themselves from past conventions, however, they set out to systematically deconstruct such assumptive aesthetic strategies. Locating the "self" in body parts below the neck, or as deep within an inscrutable interior landscape, or as outside the subject altogether, these modernists imagined a "new face" for their respective sitters, while at the same time they brought up to date what had, by the turn of the century, become a genre seemingly worn out beyond recuperation.

On the other hand, "new face" speaks to the coming to consciousness of this same group of artists. In the 1910s, the general public and art critics alike met the initial artistic attempts of the modernist community working in the United States with hostile reactions and negative reviews. By the mid-1920s, however, through the indefatigable leadership of Alfred Stieglitz, the American avant-garde gained a sense of prepossession that empowered a second, more productive and profitable wave of creativity. Portraiture played a key role not only in the coalescence of the group itself but also in the successful branding and marketing of its members to the world outside its circle.

Almost a century later the contemporary scene is strikingly different than the one inhabited by the modernist community of the 1910s and 1920s. Yet many exigent and

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James's idea of "stream of consciousness" and how it influenced Gertrude Stein's writing and Pablo Picasso's paintings, see Patricia Leighten, "Vase, Gourd, and Fruit on a Table" (catalogue no. 4) and "Shells on a Piano" (catalogue no. 6) in Fisher et al., *Picasso and the Allure of Language*, 47–53 and 62–69.

pervasive stresses continue to call essence and being—and thus their representation—into question. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, raised issues around nationalistic sentiment and religious commitments. Global warming, whose ongoing effects are the result of the modernity embraced by the visual artists and poets discussed above, demands individual consciousness about one's place in the planetary ecology. The complete mapping of the human genome has contributed to our understanding of persons as particular combinations of chemical concatenations that invite alteration. The emergence and tacit tolerance of the trans community invites reflection on the instability of gender categories. The phenomenon of social networking, thanks to the invention of the internet, permits users to appear to others as they desire; it has also (re)made "profile" a household word in the new millennium. Given these challenging—even sometimes disconcerting—circumstances, it is my hope that this dissertation, by holding up a mirror to the Stieglitz circle and limning its image, provides the reader the opportunity to reflect upon the "face" of the United States art world today.

The same year—1928—that Gerald Murphy composed *Portrait* (fig. 7.1) in France, on the other side of the ocean Florine Stettheimer painted *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz* (fig. 6.2) and Charles Demuth completed *The Figure 5 in Gold* (fig. 6.14). While he worked on the "poster portrait" of his friend William Carlos Williams, Demuth also labored over the lines about his other colleague, the caricaturist Peggy Bacon. Averring in the draft of his treatise that "likeness [is] a means not…an end," the Pennsylvania modernist could have been describing any of these pictures—or telescoping the impulse of the previous fifteen years of anti-mimetic portraiture into a pithy aphorism.[312] Having worked through the conceptual problems of bodily appearance and dis-appearance, of

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[312] Demuth, Partial draft of "Three (Peggy Bacon)."

portrait objects and their object-ifications, and of their imagined community's

presentation and re-presentation, the American avant-garde, as the 1930s approached,

found themselves at a new crossroads with new aesthetic, financial, and social challenges

to overcome. And if, as Charles Demuth proposed in his essay, "In portraiture the

likeness is only the start," then that seems, here and now, an appropriate place to end.[313]

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[313] Ibid.

APPENDIX A

Gertrude Stein / "Matisse"

One was quite certain that for a long part of his being one being living he had been trying to be certain that he was wrong in doing what he was doing and then when he could not come to be certain that he had been wrong in doing what he had been doing, when he had completely convinced himself that he would not come to be certain that he had been wrong in doing what he had been doing he was really certain then that he was a great one and he certainly was a great one. Certainly every one could be certain of this thing that this one is a great one.

Some said of him, when anybody believed in him they did not then believe in any other one. Certainly some said this of him.

He certainly very clearly expressed something. Some said that he did not clearly express anything. Some were certain that he expressed something very clearly and some of such of them said that he would have been a greater one if he had not been one so clearly expressing what he was expressing. Some said he was not clearly expressing what he was expressing and some of such of them said that the greatness of struggling which was not clear expression made of him one being a completely great one.

Some said of him that he was greatly expressing something struggling. Some said of him that he was not greatly expressing something struggling.

He certainly was clearly expressing something, certainly sometime any one might come to know that of him. Very many did come to know it of him that he was clearly expressing what he was expressing. He was a great one. Any one might come to know that of him. Very many did come to know that of him. Some who came to know that of him, that he was a great one, that he was clearly expressing something, came then to be certain that he was not greatly expressing something being struggling. Certainly he was expressing something being struggling. Any one could be certain that he was expressing something being struggling. Some were certain that he was greatly expressing this thing. Some were certain that he was not greatly expressing this thing. Every one could come to be certain that he was a great man. Any one could come to be certain that he was clearly expressing something.

Some certainly were wanting to be needing to be doing what he was doing, that is clearly expressing something. Certainly they were willing to be wanting to be a great one. They were, that is some of them, were not wanting to be needing expressing anything being struggling. And certainly he was one not greatly expressing something being struggling, he was a great one, he was clearly expressing something. Some were wanting to be doing what he was going that is clearly expressing something. Very many were doing what he was doing, not greatly expressing something being struggling. Very many who were wanting to be doing what he was doing were not wanting to be expressing anything but struggling.

There were very many wanting to be doing what he was doing that is to be one clearly expressing something. He was certainly a great man, any one could be really certain of this thing, every one could be certain of this thing. There were very many of

them were not wanting to be being ones doing that thing, that is clearly expressing something, they wanted to be ones expressing something being struggling, something being going to be some other thing, something being going to be something some one sometime would be clearly expressing and that would be something that would be a thing then that would then be greatly expressing some other thing then that thing, certainly very many were then not wanting to be doing what this one was doing, clearly expressing something. Some were wanting to be ones doing what this one was doing wanted to be ones clearly expressing something. Some of such of them were ones certainly clearly expressing something, that was in them a thing not really interesting then any other one. Some of such of them went on being all their living ones wanting to be clearly expressing something and some of them were clearly expressing something.

This one was very many were knowing some and very many were glad to meet him, very many sometimes listened to him, some listened to him very often, there were some who listened to him, and he talked then and he told them then that certainly he had been one suffering and he was then being one trying to be certain that he was wrong in doing what he was doing and he had come then to be certain that he never would be certain that he was doing what he was doing and he was certain that he should be one doing what he was doing and he was certain that he would always be one suffering and this then made him certain this, that he would always be one being suffering, this made him certain that he was expressing something being struggling and certainly very many were quite certain that he was greatly expressing something being struggling. This one was one knowing some who were listening to him and he was telling very often about being one suffering and this was not a dreary thing to any one hearing that then, it was not a saddening thing to any one hearing it again and again, to some it was quite an interesting thing hearing it again and again, some knowing this one and being certain that this one was a great man and was one clearly expressing something were ones hearing this one telling about being one being living were hearing this one telling this thing again and again. Some who were ones knowing this one and were ones certain that this one was one who was clearly telling something, was a great man, were not listening very often to this one telling again and again about being one being living. Certainly some who were certain that this one was a great man and once clearly expressing something and greatly expressing something about being struggling were listening to this one telling about being living telling about this again and again and again. Certainly very many knowing this one and being certain that this one was a great man and that this one was clearly telling something were not listening to this one telling about being living, were not listening to this one telling about being living, were not listening to this one telling this again and again.

This one was certainly a great man, this one was certainly clearly expressing something. Some were certain that this one was clearly expressing something being struggling, some were certain that this one was not greatly expressing something struggling.

Very many were not listening again and again to this one telling about being one being living. Some were listening again and again to this one telling about this one being one being in living.

Some were certainly wanting to be doing what this one was doing that is were wanting to be ones clearly expressing something. Some of such of them did not go on in

being ones wanting to be doing what this one was doing that is in being ones clearly expressing something. Some went on being ones wanting to be doing what this one was doing that is, being ones clearly expressing something. Certainly this one was one who was a great man. Any one could be certain of this thing. Every one would come to be certain of this thing. Everyone one would come to be certain of this thing. This was one, some were quite certain, one greatly expressing something being struggling. This one was one, some were quite certain, one not greatly expressing something being struggling.

Gertrude Stein / "Picasso"

One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were certainly following was one who was charming. One whom some were following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were following was one who was certainly completely charming.

Some were certainly following and were certain that the one they were then following was one working and was one bringing out of himself then something. Some were certainly following and were certain that the one they were then following was one bringing out of himself then something that was coming to be a heavy thing, a solid thing and a complete thing.

One whom some were certainly following was one working and certainly was one bringing something out of himself then and was one who had been all his living had been one having something coming out of him.

Something had been coming out of him, certainly it had been coming out of him, certainly it was something, certainly it had been coming out of him and it had meaning, a charming meaning, a solid meaning, a struggling meaning, a clear meaning.

One whom some were certainly following and some were certainly following him, one who some were certainly following was one certainly working.

One whom some were certainly following was one having something coming out of him something having meaning and this one was certainly working then.

This one was working and something was coming then, something was coming out of this one then. This one was one and always there was something coming out of this one and always there had been something coming out of this one. This one had never been one not having something coming out of this one. This one was one having something coming out of this one. This one had been one whom some were following. This one was one whom some were following. This one was being one whom some were following. This one was one who was working.

This one was one who was working. This one was one being one having something being coming out of him. This one was one going on having something come out of him. This one was one going on working. This one was one whom some were following. This one was one who was working.

This one always had something being coming out of this one. This one was working. This one always had been working. This one was always having something that was coming out of this one that was a solid thing, a charming thing, a lovely thing, a perplexing thing, a disconcerting thing, a simple thing, a clear thing, a complicated thing, an interesting thing, a disturbing thing, a repellant thing, a very pretty thing. This one was one certainly being one having something coming out of him. This one was one whom some were following. This one was one who was working.

This one was one who was working and certainly this one was needing to be working so as to be one being working. This one was one having something coming out of him. This one would be one all his living having something coming out of him. This one was working and then this one was working and this one was needing to be working, not to be one having something coming out of him something having meaning, but was needing to be working so as to be one working.

This one was certainly working and working was something this one was certain this one would be doing and this one was doing that thing, this one was working. This one was not one completely working. This one was not ever completely working. This one certainly was not completely working.

This one was one having always something being coming out of him, something having completely a real meaning. This one was one whom some were following. This one was one who was working. This one was one who was working and he was one needing this thing needing to be working so as to be one having some way of being one having some way of working. This one was one who was working. This one was one having something come out of him something having meaning. This one was one always having something come out of him and this thing the thing coming out of him always had real meaning. This one was one who was working. This one was one who was almost always working. This one was not one completely working. This one was one not ever completely working. This one was not one working to have anything come out of him. This one did have something having meaning that did come out of him. He always did have something come out of him. He always did have something come out of him. He was working. He did have some following. They were always following him. Some were certainly following him. He was one who was working. He was one having something coming out of him something having meaning. He was not ever completely working.

William Carlos Williams / "Untitled (The rose is obsolete)"

The rose is obsolete
but each petal ends in
an edge, the double facet
cementing the grooved
columns of air—The edge
cuts without cutting
meets—nothing—renews
itself in metal or porcelain—

whither? It ends—

But if it ends
the start is begun
so that to engage roses
becomes a geometry—

Sharper, neater, more cutting
figured in majolica—
the broken plate
glazed with a rose

Somewhere the sense
makes copper roses
steel roses—

The rose carried weight of love
but love is at an end—of roses

If is at the edge of the
petal that love waits

Crisp, worked to defeat
laboredness—fragile
plucked, moist, half-raised
cold, precise, touching

What

The place between the petal's
edge and the

From the petal's edge a line starts

that being of steel
infinitely fine, infinitely
rigid penetrates
the Milky Way
without contact—lifting
from it—neither hanging
nor pushing—

The fragility of the flower
unbruised
penetrates spaces

Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven / "Affectionate"

Wheels are growing on rose-bushes
gray and affectionate
O Jonathan—Jonathan—dear
Did some swallow Prendergast's silverheels—
be drunk forever and more
—with lemon appendicitis?

William Carlos Williams / "The Great Figure"

Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red
firetruck
moving
tense
unheeded
to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city.

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