

Modern Art and Modern Movement:
Images of Dance in American Art, c. 1900-1950

By

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For Nathan and his seven years of tireless support and steadfast love.
And for Beckett. Thank you for sleeping.

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Abstract

“Modern Art and Modern Movement: Images of Dance in American Art, c. 1900-1950,” examines works from the period that heralded the birth of modern dance. While modern dancers and choreographers experimented with new ways to move the body, American visual artists explored the new formal and stylistic possibilities of the modern movements, many of which originated in Europe. I consider the intersections and interrelations of these two major artistic developments as I discuss paintings, sculptures, photographs, and drawings that engage with the developing art forms of modern art and modern dance.

Dance historians have long recognized the influence of the visual arts on the development of dance. However, scholarship that works in reverse, considering the impact of these dancers on the field of the visual arts, especially American art, is much rarer. Rather than view these images of dance solely as records of the dancers’ costumes or dance steps, this dissertation seeks to broaden the lens through which artistic depictions of dance are generally understood by examining and evaluating both the aesthetic qualities and the historical significance of the works.

During the first half of the twentieth century, numerous American artists created images of dancers in a wide array of media and styles. Modern dance appealed to them for a variety of reasons. For some the dancer represented modernity, while for others he or she brought the exotic past to life. Some artists associated dance with European tradition, while others saw in modern dance a declaration of the American spirit. All of these artists felt inspired by the way the modern dancers moved. I propose that the new dance forms of the twentieth century contributed to the aesthetic development of many modern American artists by allowing them to envision, and thus portray, the human body in new ways.

Prologue

Art, as expressed on canvas or in bronze or marble, has always been sensitive to the influence of the dance. . . . Dancing, painting, and sculpture, are in a sense, the sister arts, however far apart they may seem in modes of expression at first glance. But what seems to me the interesting thing about the present condition in the art world is not merely that the dance is seeking to express many of the same emotions or ideas that the painting or the piece of sculpture is intended to portray, but rather that these two mediums of expression are borrowing more and more directly from the dance than they have for a long time.¹

- Troy Kinney, *New York Times*, 1916

By 1916 when artist and dance historian Troy Kinney's statement was published in the *New York Times*, America was in the midst of a dance revolution. The seeds of the modern dance movement had been planted a decade earlier with Isadora Duncan's successful European tours. By 1916 she had returned to the United States several times to perform for captivated audiences. In 1906 Ruth St. Denis premiered her signature piece, *Radha*, which was influenced by and contributed to the American public's craze for the exotic Far East. In 1914 Ruth St. Denis and her partner Ted Shawn opened their school of dance, Denishawn. There St. Denis and Shawn trained the next generation of modern dancers, including the incomparable Martha Graham. The Ballets Russes began its second tour of the United States in 1916, performing in cities across the country. And, in that same year, Russian dancer Anna Pavlova, the quintessential classical ballerina, toured the country for the third time.

¹ "Allies the Dance to the Fine Arts," *New York Times*, April 16, 1916.

If the first half of the twentieth century saw significant developments in dance, the developments in the visual arts in America were hardly any less dramatic. In 1908, *The Eight*, led by Robert Henri, organized their own exhibition, breaking away from the jury-controlled exhibitions run by the Society of American Artists and the National Academy of Design. The so-called Armory Show of 1913 exposed the greater public to the avant-garde art of Europe and increased American artists' experimentations with styles like cubism, futurism, and fauvism. In the 1930s many American artists replaced European styles with homegrown regionalism. And, as a result of the two world wars and the ensuing political unrest abroad, European artists and intellectuals emigrated to America in unseen numbers, which caused the relocation of the center of the art world from Paris to New York City and helped generate America's first internationally recognized artistic style, abstract expressionism, in the late 1940s.

Throughout this period, between 1899 when Isadora Duncan debuted in Paris and 1950 when Vaslav Nijinsky, star of the Ballets Russes died, American artists created scores of paintings, drawings, sculptures, and photographs portraying the luminaries of the dance world. In just the three years surrounding Kinney's statement, prominent American artists produced over thirty images inspired by the performances of the aforementioned dancers. Malvina Hoffman, Everett Shinn, and Louis Kronberg found inspiration at the ballet. John Sloan, Abraham Walkowitz, Arthur B. Davies, and Robert Henri each made multiple images depicting Isadora Duncan. Gaston Lachaise, Paul Manship, and Elie Nadelman responded to the work of Ruth St. Denis with their sculptures of dancers, and H. Lyman Sayer's art made manifest his admiration of the Ballets Russes. Into the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, the visual artists' fascination with modern dance continued unabated. Photographers Arnold Genthe and Barbara Morgan published books of their photographs

of Isadora Duncan (1926) and Martha Graham (1941), respectively. In the final years of the 1930s, Paul Meltsner created six oil paintings of Martha Graham. Throughout the 1940s Franz Kline depicted Nijinsky, and in 1950 he created an abstract image as a tribute to the celebrated Russian dancer's life.

During the first half of the twentieth century, American artists created images of dancers in a wide array of media and styles. Modern dance appealed to the modern American artist for a variety of reasons. For some artists the dancer represented modernity, while for others he or she brought the exotic past to life. Some artists associated dance with European tradition, while other artists saw in an admired dancer a declaration of the American spirit. Regardless, all of these artists felt inspired by the way these dancers moved. This dissertation considers the intersections and interrelations of these two major artistic developments, modern art and modern dance, in America. Modern art movements created fresh stylistic possibilities for American artists seeking to portray movement in conventionally stationary media, and the new dance forms of the twentieth century contributed to the aesthetic development of many modern artists by allowing them to envision, and thus portray, the human body in new ways.

Chapter 1: Introductions:

American Art and the Balletic Tradition in the Early Years of the Twentieth Century

Prior to the late nineteenth century, dancing, as a performance-based, fine art, was virtually unknown in America. Certainly Americans participated in several forms of social dance adapted from a variety of cultural origins, including country-dances from England, minuets from France, and hornpipes and reels from Scotland and Ireland. However, unlike European countries, America had yet to develop an audience for serious performance dance.¹ Not only did America's Puritan traditions and frontier mentality favor work over frivolity, but the United States, unlike several European countries, did not have a sizeable elite class with time and money available for leisure pursuits. In the late nineteenth century, with the increased industrialization that occurred after the Civil War and the rise of the middle classes, enough American citizens began to accumulate the disposable income and leisure time necessary to support a wide array of theatrical productions, including artistic dance.

A turning point for American dance was the production of the musical extravaganza *The Black Crook* at Niblo's Gardens in New York City in 1866. The spectacle featured dance as a central component in the popular show which initially ran for 474 performances, toured the country, and then ran in revivals with only brief interruptions for forty years. Due to the cancellation of a previous engagement, the creators of the show were able to hire a Parisian ballet company for the dance number. The dance, choreographed in a semi-classical fashion by David Costa, featured

¹ Robert Coe, *Dance in America* (New York: Dutton, 1985), 1.

Italian ballerina Marie Bonfanti and a chorus of 100 scantily clad ballerinas. The production, although decried as scandalous by many, whetted America's appetite for dance. Its multiple revivals and touring productions brought additional dancers from Europe to dance the starring roles and supported newly founded American dance schools that trained the *corps de ballet*.²

The popularity and commercial success of *The Black Crook* helped create an audience for dance performances. Vaudeville impresarios hired European ballerinas in order to incorporate dance into their lineup of comedians, dramatic sketches, and novelty acts. European ballet companies took advantage of America's new enthusiasm for dance with tours to many of the country's major cities. Visual artists responded emphatically to this heightened interest in dance performance. Painters Everett Shinn and Louis Kronberg attended the vaudeville theaters and depicted the dance performances they saw there. Sculptor Malvina Hoffman was drawn to the work of the European ballet dancers then touring the country. In each case, the artist grappled with how best to portray the art of the ballet. The individuals discussed in this chapter represent some of the American artists' first attempts to depict the country's burgeoning dance scene. As such, the paintings and sculptures examined here stand in contrast to those created by the artists discussed in the following chapters. Whereas the artists of the later chapters sought to suggest the innovative movements of the modern dancers performing in the United States, Shinn, Kronberg, and Hoffman were inspired by traditional ballet and they, perhaps fittingly, adopted firmly established artistic styles in order to portray it.

² George Amberg, *Ballet in America, the Emergence of an American Art* (New York: Duell, 1949), 9.

European Models: Everett Shinn and Louis Kronberg and the Spectacle of the Ballet

Everett Shinn, a member of the Ashcan school, and Louis Kronberg, a Boston-based impressionist, frequently painted theatrical scenes. Included among Shinn's many theater types—singers, comedians, trapeze artists, and musicians—are numerous depictions of the ballet. Kronberg made his reputation as a painter of ballet girls. To depict the ballet, a form of entertainment most Americans considered exclusively European, Shinn and Kronberg adopted as models works depicting dancers by European artists. Their ballet paintings owe a great deal to the nineteenth-century European artists who famously depicted dancers and the theater, such as Georges Seurat (1859-1891), Jean Louis Forain (1852-1931), and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901), but most especially Edgar Degas (1834-1917). Like their French forerunners, Shinn's and Kronberg's paintings depict the glamour of the theater with its lights, crowds, and costumes, as well the behind the scenes boredom and hours of practice that define the ballerina's daily existence. For Shinn and Kronberg the movement of the dance and the personality of the dancer remained secondary to the spectacle of the performance.

In 1900 Everett Shinn (1876-1953) and his first wife, Florence Scovel, traveled to Europe, visiting London and Paris. This was Shinn's only trip abroad, but it made a lasting impression on the artist. While in Paris, Shinn explored the city's many theatrical arenas: the outdoor theater, the *café chantant*, the Opéra, and the ballet. He also saw works by artists who frequented these haunts. While studying in Paris, Shinn lived in an apartment in the Latin Quarter. When recollecting his days in Paris, he wrote that he caught "occasional glimpses of Degas when the artist would venture out of his house across from his studio," and that "Degas was the greatest painter France ever turned

out.”³ Degas and Shinn certainly shared some common interests. In addition to both painting street and theater scenes, Shinn shared Degas’s proclivity for pastels. Very few details are known about Shinn’s visit to Paris, but he apparently absorbed Degas’s style well, for when he returned to New York he showed eighty-five pastels at Boussod, Valadon Gallery in an exhibition entitled “Paris Types.” Nearly a third of the works included in that exhibition featured theater subjects.⁴

Louis Kronberg (1872-1965) studied in Boston and at the New York Art Students League. He won a scholarship which allowed him to spend three years in Paris (1894-1897) studying at the Académie Julian.⁵ While in Paris, Kronberg likely attended the ballet and certainly had ample opportunity to see the works of Degas and other artists who depicted its diversions. However, while Shinn professed his admiration for Degas, Kronberg stated that Degas’s work held little sway over his own chosen subject matter and artistic style. In an article published in the *New York Times* in 1919 Kronberg declared, “I had been painting ballet girls for seven or eight years before I ever heard of Degas, the French painter. . . . While Degas had no influence on my actual work, he made the subject of the dancer popular, and with his success and the high prices brought by his pictures he raised the standards over here.”⁶ Despite Kronberg’s claims, his contemporaries recognized the hand of the French Impressionist in his work and in 1906 dubbed him the “American Degas.”⁷

Shinn and Kronberg portrayed the entire spectrum of a dancer’s existence, not only the relatively short period of time spent performing on stage. Of the ballerina’s routine, dancer-and-

³ Everett Shinn, "Unpublished Autobiography," (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum), n.p.

⁴ Linda Ferber, "Stagestruck: The Theater Subjects of Everett Shinn," *Studies in the History of Art* 22, no. 37 (1990): 54.

⁵ Trevor J. Fairbrother, *The Bostonians: Painters of an Elegant Age, 1870-1930* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1986), 217.

⁶ "Ballet Girls as Subjects for the Artist's Brush," *New York Times*, March 30, 1919.

⁷ S.H., "Studio-Talk," *International Studio* 28, no. 109 (March 1906): 74.

artist Teresa Cerutti-Simmons wrote: “We who watch the finished ballet would hardly believe the amount of toil, the hopes and fears, the privations and the bitter tears that have gone to form it. It is a butterfly’s existence, the ballet-girl’s, ephemeral, a life of work and preparation . . . all for a few moments in the sun—of the spotlight.”⁸ Cerutti-Simmons praised Kronberg for remembering and portraying the behind-the-scenes life of the dancer. However, Kronberg and Shinn, in this aspect of their work, took their cues from Degas whose depictions of performances make up only about one-fourth of his vast oeuvre of dance images.⁹ The remaining three-quarters portray the rehearsals, the dressing rooms, and the backstage moments that constitute a dancer’s training and professional life.

The making of a professional dancer begins when the dancer is young and involves years of rigorous training. Kronberg, following Degas before him, depicted the youthful ballet student with her chaperone in works like *Preparing for the Dance* (n.d.) [Fig. 1.1]. A somberly dressed older woman, perhaps the dancer’s mother, grandmother, or chaperone, helps the young girl with her bright blue costume. The chaperone who attended rehearsals with her young charge became something of a fixture in Degas’s portrayals of the ballet studio. For example, she fixes a young dancer’s costume in *The Rehearsal* (c. 1874), and she sits in the foreground of *The Ballet Class* (c. 1878-80) [Fig. 1.2] whiling away the long rehearsal reading a newspaper. By isolating the pair from the hubbub of the studio, Kronberg emphasizes the relationship between the chaperone and the young dancer and endows the older woman a sympathetic and supportive quality that is often lacking in Degas’s bored chaperones. Kronberg explained the difference in training in the United States versus that of France:

⁸ Teresa Cerutti-Simmons, "Behind the Scenes with Louis Kronberg," *American Magazine of Art* 19, no. 4 (April 1928): 197.

⁹ Jill DeVonyar and Richard Kendall, *Degas and the Dance* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 63.

In France the mothers take their children to the opera school and they work all day and dance at night and perhaps receive 40 cents for it. Each one is working to be a *première danseuse*. As she advances her pay increases. Her work is recognized as she improves and she is placed in the ballet according to her proficiency. Then, as it is a national school, when she is too old to dance she is pensioned. Here, where there is no [national] school, the work is taken more casually, and a ballet girl knows that as she grows older there is nothing for her but to be pushed aside.¹⁰

In France, the training of a young dancer was a serious business that could result in financial gains for the whole family given time, training, and talent, thus the lack of tenderness in Degas's chaperones. In the United States, where the financial rewards and the prospects of becoming a star of the stage were less likely, the attitude toward training was more casual and Kronberg conveys this atmosphere.

Ballerinas spend countless hours in rehearsals practicing the steps that will be performed on stage. The studio was a favorite subject of Degas that may have provided inspiration for Shinn's *Ballet Dancers* (1911) [Fig. 1.3]. In *The Dance Class* (1874), for example, Degas portrays the *corps de ballet* in a variety of informal positions [Fig. 1.4]. The ballet master instructs the young dancer positioned in the left hand corner of the canvas while other dancers observe her work, stretch on the bar, practice their positions, and one dancer even sits slumped in a chair. Shinn portrays his figures in *Ballet Dancers* in a relaxed state as well. One dancer practices a pose, another stretches using a chair, a third sits with ankles crossed. The dancer's plain white attire, the type generally worn for practices, indicates that these figures are rehearsing rather than waiting backstage for their entrance.¹¹ Two top-hatted figures converse in the background. Their presence also has its precedent in Degas's work. Similar figures, thought to be gentlemen soliciting the attention of the

¹⁰ "Ballet Girls as Subjects for the Artist's Brush."

¹¹ DeVonyar and Kendall, *Degas and the Dance*, 159.

dancers, are present in Degas's *The Rehearsal OnStage* [Fig. 1.5]. The informality of the setting in *Ballet Dancers* reveals the tedium, long hours of preparation, and some of the more unsavory aspects of a dancer's life, while, at the same time, the luminous color and delicate arrangement of the figures indicates Shinn's interest in the ballet did not go beyond its superficial beauty.

Kronberg and Shinn frequently painted ballet dancers backstage preparing for their performances. In *Orange and Blue, Two Dancers* (1918-1919) Kronberg portrays the dancers' final wardrobe check before they enter the stage [Fig. 1.6]. Images of ballerinas preparing their hair and wardrobe prior to their performance, in works like *Dancer in Her Dressing Room* (1879) and *Dancers in the Green Room* (c. 1880-1894), are a staple of Degas's oeuvre. Kronberg's dancers in *Orange and Blue* are preceded by the ballerinas in Degas's *Dancers, Pink and Green* (1890) [Fig. 1.7]. In this image, Degas portrays a group of ballerinas who, while waiting to go on stage, make final adjustments to their appearance. As in Kronberg's paintings, the dancer on the left checks her hair while the dancer on the right drops her chin to examine her sleeve. Shinn's *In the Wings* (1898) [Fig. 1.8] and *Ballet Girls* (n.d.) [Fig. 1.9] also portray the goings-on backstage. The dancers populating *In the Wings* secure their toe shoes, plait their hair, and rest while, through a ragged hole in the backdrop, the viewer can see a member of the company performing on stage. In *Ballet Girls*, dancers warm up by stretching their arms, legs, and feet. Behind the central figure, who gazes out at the viewer, a dancer performs on a stage bathed in blue light. Taking his cue from Degas, who often depicted his ballerinas in unflattering positions, Shinn attempts with these paintings to portray the unidealized

ballerina.¹² In these paintings by Degas, Kronberg, and Shinn the ballerina is a laborer rather than a muse or a star, and the artists portray the ballerina's work.

Shinn's and Kronberg's works that feature dancers backstage place the viewer in the dancer's position. The artists grant the viewer access to a world hidden from the audience by the curtains and backdrops. However, despite this intimate setting, the dancers remain things of beauty rather than individuals—two of the dancers in Shinn's *Ballet Girls* are literally faceless. Although the dancers may be captured in unflattering poses, they are far from unattractive. The liberal application of paint creates a luscious and sensuous quality; the dancers glow against the darker backgrounds. Paintings, like Shinn's *In the Wings* and *Ballet Girls*, that simultaneously portray the dancers on and offstage, do convey the fact that performing on stage entails a lot of preparation and boredom, but it is a romanticized boredom, one that is still very much caught up in the glamour of the footlights.

In their portrayals of the dancers' performances, Shinn and Kronberg adopted the unusual perspectives for which Degas is well known. In *The Yellow Dancer* (1911) Shinn places the viewer behind and above the dancer [Fig. 1.10]. From this position upstage the viewer can see the seated audience, and the aerial vantage point makes the dancer appear small and isolated. Shinn may have seen Degas's works that employ a similar high vantage point, such as *L'Etoile* (c. 1876-1877) [Fig. 1.11]. In this image, the viewer looks down on the stage as the dancer performs an *attitude*—balanced on her right leg, her left leg, hidden by the tutu, is presumably raised and bent at the knee. The viewer in *L'Etoile*, as in *The Yellow Dancer*, is certainly not seated in a box in the audience because from this raised perspective the figures waiting in the wings are partially visible. Shinn's

¹² Barbara Rand, "The Art of Everett Shinn" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1992), 169.

primary interest in the spectacle of the theater is underscored by the title of this painting, *The Yellow Dancer*. The dancer is merely a small white-clad figure, and the strip of yellow across the front of the stage, perhaps representative of the footlights, first attracts the viewer's gaze and gives the painting its name.

Another unusual vantage point used by Degas and adopted by Shinn is represented in Degas's *Orchestra Musicians* (c. 1870-1871) where the artist paints his dancers as they are seen from the perspective of the musicians in the orchestra pit [Fig. 1.12]. In their black suits, with their bows and music stands, the musicians occupy the foreground of the picture plane while the dancers are relegated to the upper portion of the painting. The foremost dancer takes a bow and seems to gaze at a musician seated below. Shinn employs a similar vantage point in *The Orchestra Pit, Old Proctor's Fifth Avenue Theatre* (c. 1906-1907) [Fig. 1.13]. In this painting the viewer is placed just to the right of the orchestra pit, directly behind a musician whose back fills approximately one third of the painting. From the viewer's perspective, the three dancers, two of whom hold brass horns, seem squeezed into the picture frame. Indeed, if the dancer on the right did not bend at the hips to peer into the orchestra pit only her midsection would be visible. As in Degas's *Orchestra Musicians*, Shinn's painting hints at some kind of relationship between the musician and the dancer who stoops to gaze at him. In *Orchestra Musicians* and *The Orchestra Pit, Old Proctor's Fifth Avenue Theatre*, Degas and Shinn highlight the use of theatrical lighting techniques by juxtaposing the vibrant colors on the stage with the muted tones in the pit below.¹³ The musicians are characterized by their dark suits and hair and the deep shadows on their faces. The dancers, on the other hand, are bathed in

¹³ Patricia McDonnell and Robert Clyde Allen, *On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theater and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 34.

footlights that illuminate their skin and costumes. The radiant light gives the dancers an unnatural glow. The contrast between the colors and the unusual perspective helps to communicate the energy and drama of the theater, though not the movements of the dance itself.

Shinn's interest in the spectacle of the theater is most evident in his paintings that focus on the relationship between the performers on the stage and the seated audience members. The audience at the Opéra was a favorite subject for many of Degas's contemporaries. Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *The First Outing* (1877) depicts a young girl who, attending the theater for the first time, gazes intently from her box completely captivated by the performance [Fig. 1.14]. Mary Cassatt's *Woman with a Pearl Necklace* (1879) depicts a more sophisticated theater goer wearing a low-cut dress, gloves, and pearls, and holding a fan [Fig. 1.15]. By placing his viewer in the opera box with the spectator, Degas's *Ballet from an Opera Box* (c. 1884) offers a slightly different variation on the same subject [Fig. 1.16]. From this perspective the viewer can see the profile of a fellow audience member as she looks down upon the stage where ballet dancers in brightly colored tutus perform. Shinn's painting, *The White Ballet* (1904) is just one of his many works that focus on the relationship between the audience and the performers [Fig. 1.17]. Taking his cue from Degas, Shinn places the viewer of this painting in a box above the orchestra pit. From this vantage point the viewer can see the three major players of a theatrical spectacle—the performers, the musicians, and the audience. On the stage the *corps de ballet* performs; below, in the orchestra pit, the musicians play, and seated to the viewer's left fellow theater goers watch intently the performance taking place. Shinn's work communicates the symbiotic relationship between the audience and the performer, each of whom is there for the other.

Similarly, in Kronberg's *At the Ballet* (n.d.) the viewer occupies an opera box with two attentive audience members [Fig. 1.18]. Kronberg depicts a pair of opera glasses perched on the railing of the box; presumably they are meant to be the viewer's thus further inviting the spectator into the scene. Upon the stage a ballerina holding a bouquet takes a bow, and, in the lower left hand corner of the painting, the scroll of the double-bass peeks out from the orchestra pit below. The inclusion of a portion of the bass-viol is one Degas employed often. In a late work, *Dancer on Stage* (c. 1894) he juxtaposes the graceful figure of the dancer with the elegant curves of the scroll of the instrument [Fig. 1.19]. Shinn, too, applied this motif to similar ends in *A French Music Hall* (1906) [Fig. 1.20] and *Dancer in White Before the Footlights* (1910) [Fig. 1.21]. Kronberg's, Shinn's and Degas's images that include the dancers on the stage, the musicians in the pit, and construct the viewer as an audience member contain multiple levels of looking. While the audience observes the stage, the viewer of the painting observes the observers as well as the performers. The subject is the ambience of the theater with its metropolitan crowd, black-coated musicians, and gauzy ballerinas frozen on a stage bathed in unnatural light.

Shinn's and Kronberg's contemporaries recognized the influence of Degas in their art. In 1906 Albert E. Gallatin cautioned artists in their adaptation of Degas's style, writing: "In Degas, then, the student can learn much; but let him be wary, for if he follows Degas too closely the result will be but gross caricature."¹⁴ However, Gallatin felt that Shinn, though "greatly influenced by Degas ... has only gone to Degas for inspiration, for ideas, not slavishly and unintelligently to copy him. He has learnt to see things from Degas's point of view; he too now sees the artistic

¹⁴ A.E. Gallatin, "Studio-Talk," *International Studio* 30, no. 117 (November 1906): 84.

possibilities of the gas-lighted music-hall.”¹⁵ That same year Sadakichi Hartmann wrote of Kronberg, “Some critics have called him the American Degas. But there is only the similarity of subject, the treatment is quite a different one.”¹⁶

Curator Sylvia Yount believes Shinn’s treatment of the audience represents a major departure from Degas’s style. She explains, “Shinn underlined through formal means the subtle interactions between performer and audience that created a shared experience. Degas utilized the audience more as a compositional element, finding only detachment and isolation in the theater crowd.”¹⁷ In this regard, Shinn is perhaps even more interested in the spectacle of the performance than his impressionist predecessor. Several of Shinn’s theater paintings emphasize the relationship between the figures on stage and the crowd gathered to watch. In paintings such as *A French Music Hall* [Fig. 1.20] and *Dancer in White Before the Footlights* [Fig. 1.21]. Shinn portrays the performers from the perspective of an audience member. In *A French Music Hall* one of the audience members turns to look at the viewer, and in *Dancer in White Before the Footlights* a woman glances at the viewer as she walks to her seat. With works such as these Shinn conveys the complexity of the relationships involved in a theatrical performance: performer to audience member, audience member to audience member, performer to pit musician, performer to performer, etcetera. Thus, while Degas carefully studied the ballet positions in order to portray the dancers accurately, Shinn favored the spectacle over the minutiae of dance steps and body placement.

¹⁵ Ibid., 84-86.

¹⁶ S.H., "Studio-Talk," 74.

¹⁷ Sylvia Yount, "Everett Shinn and the Intimate Spectacle of Vaudeville," in *On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theater and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art*, ed. Patricia McDonnell and Robert Clyde Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 161.

Other critics and historians have not been as kind to Shinn or as forgiving of his dependence on Degas as Gallatin and Yount. A 1904 review of Shinn's theatrical paintings criticized the artist, saying:

Mr. Shinn is, indeed, extraordinarily adroit. But between the personality that it is to be inferred he is endeavoring to express and the sympathetic but unprejudiced eye there stand the brilliant figures of Degas and Forain. It is not that Mr. Shinn has borrowed their motives. Theatrical scenes, ballet girls, have been painted by unnumbered artists. It is that what these Frenchmen mean as regards style keeps getting into the foreground of the young American's work, only there it wears the air of a mannerism, of a derivative thing. It is impossible to consider the situation without regret. A man of such ability ought surely to be doing fresher and finer things.¹⁸

For this critic, Shinn's subjects and his reliance on French precedents made his works appear old-fashioned and unoriginal. Similarly, in the newspaper and exhibition reviews Degas's name always accompanies Kronberg's. His dependence on the French impressionist likely played a role in relegating him to little more than a footnote in the history of American art.

Nevertheless, Shinn and Kronberg both felt passionate about the theater. When *The Eight* famously banded together for their exhibition at the William Macbeth Galleries in 1908 Shinn selected eight theater paintings to represent himself in this momentous event, thus indicating the centrality of the theater to Shinn's conception of himself as an artist. In 1906 David Belasco hired Shinn to paint the murals in his Stuyvesant Theater. Shinn decorated the space with rococo-inspired paintings whose figures presented an allegory of the theatrical arts. Shinn's work on Belasco's theater introduced him to a number of people in show business and paved the way for Shinn's own foray into acting and producing. In 1912 he had a small theater built onto the back of his house. Shinn wrote, directed, produced, and performed in the plays put on there by the Waverly Place

¹⁸ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 13, 1904 in "Everett Shinn Collection, 1877-1958," (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution), reel 952, frame 1298.

Players. He also designed the sets and costumes for these melodramas, some of which were bought and incorporated into vaudeville shows.¹⁹ Shinn's theater was the first little theater in Greenwich Village, an area that would soon be known for its small, experimental theatrical productions. In 1917 Shinn transferred his love of the theater to film and began a second career as an art director in Hollywood.²⁰ Kronberg painted ballerinas almost exclusively. He built himself a small, portable stage for his studio where he could set puppets in costume while he worked out the composition of his paintings.²¹ For both artists the theatrical experience with its bright lights, crowded seats, and staged extravaganzas was intoxicating, and they continued to paint ballet dancers and theatrical subjects throughout their entire careers.

Because the American public in the early twentieth century understood ballet in a European context, it is perhaps unsurprising that the artists who attempted to depict this dance form often used as models portrayals of the ballet by European artists. In the early twentieth century, France was still a primary training ground for American artists, and those artists who studied there, including both Shinn and Kronberg, drew upon their memories of the French Opéra as they composed their theatrical paintings. Even those artists, like Kronberg, who insistently denied the influence of European artists surely based their understanding, though perhaps unconsciously, and thus their paintings of the ballet on the examples of their European counterparts. Similar to the nineteenth-century European depictees of the ballet, for Shinn and Kronberg, the movement of the dancers was secondary to the spectacle of the theater.

¹⁹ Sylvia Yount, "Consuming Drama: Everett Shinn and the Spectacular City," *American Art* 6, no. 4 (Autumn 1992): 102.

²⁰ Ferber, "Stagestruck," 64.

²¹ "Ballet Girls as Subjects for the Artist's Brush."

European Ballet Dancers Tour the United States: Malvina Hoffman and Anna Pavlova

While Shinn and Kronberg focused almost exclusively on the spectacle of the theater, American sculptor Malvina Hoffman showed little interest in the sets, costumes, spectators and other trappings of the ballet performance. Her interest lay primarily in the movement of the dance, and she spent years attempting to capture the motions and gestures of the classical ballerina Anna Pavlova in bronze. With her focus on portraying motion, Hoffman serves as a link between artists like Shinn and Kronberg who depicted the spectacle of the ballet in an increasingly old-fashioned aesthetic and the artists of the following chapters who employed modernist aesthetics to convey the modern dancer's avant-garde movements.

In 1933 Lincoln Kirstein invited George Balanchine, a former dancer and choreographer for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, to relocate to the United States and form a ballet school. Balanchine accepted, opened the School of American Ballet in 1934, formed the American Ballet in 1935, and then in 1948 co-founded with Kirstein the New York City Ballet. As a result of Balanchine's success, permanent ballet companies were established in cities across the country. Balanchine's arrival marks the beginning of a continuous tradition of classical ballet dancing in the United States. Beginning in 1735 when Englishman Henry Holt danced in Charleston, South Carolina and continuing until the establishment of Balanchine's companies, the ballets performed in the United States featured touring European stars.²² During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European ballet dancers occasionally performed in the United States for a season. In 1840 the famous Fanny Elssler came to the United States. She was so well received despite the inadequacies of the American theaters and the lack of a trained chorus that she appeared to be creating an audience for

²² Coe, *Dance in America*, 17.

classical ballet. However, after her departure it would be many years before a European ballet dancer was as well received in America.²³

Due to the success of *The Black Crook* in the late nineteenth century, more Americans began attending performances by touring European dancers. Throughout the early years of the twentieth century, European ballet companies enjoyed favorable receptions from American audiences, and American schools of dance were founded to provide ballerinas for the *corps de ballet*. Danish ballet dancer Adeline Genée performed in New York in 1907 and toured the country through 1908. She received a heart-shaped locket inscribed with the words, “merely a symbol of your conquest of the heart of New York and that of your Yankee managers.”²⁴ In 1916 and 1917, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes performed in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, St. Louis and several other major cities. The ballet dancer who enjoyed the greatest reception and admiration from her American audiences was that exemplar of classical Russian training Anna Pavlova.

Anna Pavlova (1881-1931) first performed in New York in the spring of 1910. Her performances were so well received that the dancer returned later that year to complete an extended tour to many of the country’s major cities.²⁵ For the rest of her career Pavlova made regular visits to the United States. A souvenir book from Pavlova’s initial tour reveals America’s inexperience with dance as a performance art at this time. According to the book, Pavlova and her partner Mikhail Mordkin were “introducing an art new to America, the interpretation of the ponderous messages of the great composers through the most primitive and yet potent of

²³ Amberg, *Ballet in America*, 5.

²⁴ Mary Clarke and Clement Crisp, *The History of Dance* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1981), 205.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 206.

medium—motion!”²⁶ From 1913 until 1925 only Anna Pavlova’s company regularly toured the country. Consequently, during those years, Pavlova asserted a great deal of influence over the country’s perceptions of classical ballet. Anna Pavlova’s dancing significantly influenced the work of American sculptor Malvina Hoffman. From the time Hoffman first encountered Pavlova as a young artist, the dancer served as a muse for the sculptor, who depicted Pavlova many times hoping to convey the ballerina’s quality of movement and the energy of her performances.

In July 1910, while the young sculptor Malvina Hoffman (1887-1966) was studying in Paris, she made a brief visit to London where she attended Pavlova’s performance at the Palace Theater. She wrote of the experience in her biography: “Fireworks were set off in my mind. . . . Here were impressions of motion of a new kind, of dazzling vivacity and spontaneity and yet with a control that could come only from long discipline and dedication. The incomparable Anna cast her spell over me, and it was inevitable that I should wish to portray her in my own work, in sculpture.”²⁷ Hoffman was so taken by the dances she witnessed that summer evening that she attended the theater again the next night and began to make sketches based on the performances. Hoffman was particularly struck by “Autumn Bacchanale,” the concluding movement of *Seasons*, a four-act ballet inspired by the tales of ancient Greece. Choreographed by Mikhail Fokine to music by Alexander Glazunov and performed during that London season by Anna Pavlova and Mikhail Mordkin, “Autumn Bacchanale” staged a Bacchic revelry.

Shortly after Hoffman attended her first Pavlova performances, she returned to Paris and resumed her studies with Auguste Rodin. She soon tired of her commissioned works, which

²⁶ Quoted in Amberg, *Ballet in America*, 11.

²⁷ Malvina Hoffman, *Yesterday Is Tomorrow, a Personal History* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1965), 108.

consisted primarily of portraits and determined to work on a piece whose subject and composition she found both challenging and personally satisfying. For inspiration she looked back on the sketches she had drawn the previous summer of Pavlova and Mordkin. By February of 1911 Hoffman began the first of many sculptures inspired by the dances of Anna Pavlova.²⁸

Hoffman's *Russian Dancers* (1911) [Fig. 1.22] and *Bacchanale Russe* (1912) [Fig. 1.24] seek to capture the movement, spirit, and exuberance of Pavlova's "Autumn Bacchanale." Although she based these works on Pavlova and Mordkin's performance, Hoffman did not attempt to recreate the dancers' features. Instead, she focused on a problem that would occupy her for several decades: how to portray movement in a static medium. Hoffman wrote in her autobiography: "...I believed I could catch something and I was burning to try and wanted to show Pavlova and Mordkin running together; I wanted to show that new kind of freedom in the dance."²⁹ To tackle this problem she hired models to recreate the dancer's poses, and she enrolled in anatomy classes and made a number of anatomical drawings of limbs in dance positions.³⁰ Hoffman wrote of her work to her sister Helen: "I have never had such a difficult problem—it's awful—I pray I may never be seized with the desire to fit two flying creatures together in wax again. If you could see the antics that go on trying to get my two models to take the pose together!"³¹

With *Russian Dancers* Hoffman depicts the frenzied energy and sense of abandon communicated by "Autumn Bacchanale." The female figure extends her left arm and places her hand on the male dancer's chest. The male dancer, his upper body bent from the hips reaches his right arm around the female dancer's back. With bent knees, bent back, raised chin, and open

²⁸ Janis Conner, *A Dancer in Relief: Works by Malvina Hoffman* (Westchester: The Hudson River Museum, 1984), n.p.

²⁹ Hoffman, *Yesterday Is Tomorrow*, 112.

³⁰ Conner, *A Dancer in Relief*, n.p.

³¹ Hoffman quoted in *ibid.*, n.p.

mouth he aggressively charges toward the female figure as she playfully pushes him away. The dancers wear clingy costumes and the female dancer holds a roughly hewn knife in her right hand. On her way to show the work to her teacher, Auguste Rodin, Hoffman accidentally dropped the preliminary study of the female dancer, breaking off the head, an arm and a leg [Fig. 1.23]. Rodin still praised her work saying, “what remains intact is quite sufficient to express your meaning. This fragment suggests the rhythm of the dance and balance of the whole figure.”³² Rodin apparently felt Hoffman was successful in her attempt to convey the movement of the dance.

In *Bacchanale Russe*,³³ the second work inspired by her first Pavlova performance, Hoffman depicts nude dancers running in synchrony— upper bodies bent at the hips and angled forward, right legs lifted and bent at the knee with the dancers’ weight resting upon the balls of their left feet. Behind the dancers streams a scarf, held in their raised hands. By sculpting a passing gesture, Hoffman suggests the dancers’ movements, for they could only maintain this position for a brief moment without pitching forward; they must lower their right legs and raise their left legs to continue the momentum. The scarf helps to convey a sense of movement as well because it appears to billow in the wind created by the running figures. Hoffman’s sculpture conveys the movement of the dance more successfully than a photograph of the same moment [Fig. 1.26]. Studio photography in 1910, the year this particular shot of Pavlova and Mordkin was taken, could not capture the dancers in motion due to slow shutter speeds. Thus, Pavlova and Mordkin had to pose for the picture. In contrast to Hoffman’s sculpture, where the figures rest lightly on the balls of their feet, in the photograph the dancers, in order to maintain their balance, stand on a firmly planted foot and

³² Hoffman, *Yesterday Is Tomorrow*, 125.

³³ Hoffman enlarged *Bacchanale Russe* to six feet for its placement in Paris’ Luxembourg Gardens in 1917. The sculpture was destroyed during World War II [Fig. 1.25]. A replica of the enlarged piece is in the Cleveland Museum of Art’s collection. See Hoffman, *Yesterday is Tomorrow*, 182.

only slightly angle their upper bodies. The scarf, held in their raised hands, hangs limply rather than fluttering in the breeze.

Hoffman sculpted both *Russian Dancers* and *Bacchanale Russes* while studying with Rodin. She began her studies with the celebrated sculptor in 1910 and the two remained close, corresponding regularly, until his death in 1917. In the years that Hoffman associated with Rodin, he too was particularly inspired by dance. Rodin's pointed interest in dance began around 1900 when he met Loïe Fuller (1862-1928), famous for her performances involving dramatic lighting and flowing, silk drapery, whom he had first seen perform in 1892.³⁴ In 1906 Fuller introduced Rodin to a group of Cambodian dancers performing in Paris. Rodin so admired the Southeast Asian dancers that he followed them to Marseilles, the next stop on their tour, and sought permission to draw them. Rodin completed approximately 150 drawings of the dancers during the few weeks they were in France.³⁵ He wrote, "The Cambodian dancers have revealed movements to me that I have never found anywhere before, either in the art of sculpture or in nature."³⁶ Rodin suggests the slow, controlled movements of these dancers with dark, chaotic lines that show through his transparent watercolor and gouache washes [Fig. 1.27]. By representing multiple dance positions upon a single surface, Rodin hoped to give the impression of the movement of the figure as one pose transformed into another.³⁷

³⁴ Mario Amaya, "The Dance in Art 8: Rodin's Dancers," *Dance and Dancers* 14, no. 3 (March 1963): 25.

³⁵ Antoinette Le Normand-Romain and Christina Buley-Urbe, *Auguste Rodin: Drawings & Watercolours* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), 57.

³⁶ August Rodin, "The Dancers of King Sisowath of Cambodia" reprinted in Ernst-Gerhard Güse, *Auguste Rodin: Drawings and Watercolors* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 271.

³⁷ For more on Rodin and the Cambodian dancers see Jacques Vilain, *Rodin and the Cambodian Dancers: His Final Passion* (Paris: Editions du Musée Rodin, 2006).

In 1903 Rodin became acquainted with Isadora Duncan, a pioneering force in the development of modern dance, and he admired the Japanese dancer Hanako (née Ohta Hisa), whom he met in 1908, and Alda Moreno, a dancer for the Opéra-Comique. These three performers all danced for Rodin in the nude, allowing him to study the movements of their bodies without the barrier of costumes or staging.³⁸ Rodin also praised Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, then performing regularly in Paris. Hoffman recorded the excitement she and her teacher felt upon seeing Vaslav Nijinsky in the Ballets Russes's *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*. After the performance Rodin told her: "It was Youth in all its glory, like the days of ancient Greece, when they knew the power and beauty of a human body, and revered it. . . . Go often, Malvina—it is a revelation to inspire us all."³⁹ Nijinsky danced for Rodin in the nude in 1912, an encounter that resulted in sketches of the dancer and a small sculpture [Fig. 1.28]. Rodin portrays the figure grasping his right foot, bringing his knee to his chest. The dancer's joints—elbows, wrists, and knees—are all bent and his back is curved. To convey Nijinsky's dynamic movements, Rodin moulds the figure into a position that is completely unsustainable for more than a fraction of a moment. Curator and art critic Mario Amaya suggests that, as in a number of his drawings of dancers, Rodin represents simultaneous movements in *Nijinsky*, thus his precarious position.⁴⁰ Hoffman also created a number of sketches of Nijinsky⁴¹ and a sculpture of the dancer (1912) [Fig. 1.29], although he never posed for her. In comparison with Rodin's piece, Hoffman's sculpture of Nijinsky stretched out upon a rock playing his pipes is a

³⁸ Güse, *Rodin: Drawings and Watercolors*, 215.

³⁹ Hoffman, *Yesterday Is Tomorrow*, 118.

⁴⁰ Amaya, "Rodin's Dancers," 24.

⁴¹ Julie Rosenberg, "Inventory of the Malvina Hoffman Papers, 1897-1984," (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 1998), 45.

rather straightforward representation of the dancer in his role as the faun. Hoffman's arrangement of the dancer's limbs and torso accentuates Nijinsky's flexibility.

Hoffman greatly admired her teacher, and this high regard is evident in her early images of dancers, a topic Rodin was exploring simultaneously. Like Rodin, in her creations of dancers, Hoffman typically focuses on the movement of the dancing bodies, at times even to the exclusion of clothing, as in *Bacchanale Russes*. Hoffman's *Fragment from Russian Dancers* evokes an impression similar to that conveyed by Rodin's *Nijinsky* of the same year. The similarities between the positions of the figures, balanced on one leg bent at the knee, are striking. Both communicate a sense of energy and abandon despite their unfinished natures. To suggest motion Rodin and Hoffman portray their figures in moments of transition. Hoffman's dancers in *Bacchanale Russes* must keep running or pitch forward. The bent joints in Rodin's *Nijinsky* make the figure appear unbalanced, an indication that he is moving from one gesture to another. The challenge of expressing the movement of the dance in sculpture is encapsulated in the poet and art critic Rainer Maria Rilke's comment on Rodin's Cambodian figures: "They contain, captured in the most remarkable way, the most uncapturable thing: dance."⁴²

When Hoffman returned to New York in the fall of 1912 she brought her sculptures of the Russian dancers along. Although the works had been praised in Paris—*Russian Dancers* received a first place prize at the salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, and one Parisian critic declared the pieces "imbued with joy and emotion"⁴³—Hoffman was uncertain how they would be received by an American public who had very little exposure to ballet. The sculptor brought her

⁴² Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Dance Gesture in Essence" reprinted in Güse, *Rodin: Drawings and Watercolors*, 273.

⁴³ Quoted in Hoffman, *Yesterday Is Tomorrow*, 113.

plaster casts to Roman Bronze Works, where the owner offered to make six copies in bronze to be paid for after Hoffman sold the sculptures. She then took the bronzes to Marcus & Company on Fifth Avenue and Forty-Fifth Street. George Marcus agreed to show the works in the window and within three months all six bronzes had sold.⁴⁴ Hoffman felt the sale of her dancers was one of the first successes of her career.

A major turning point for Hoffman came with the sculptor's introduction to Anna Pavlova in 1914. In October of 1913, Hoffman attended Pavlova's performances at the Metropolitan and Manhattan Opera Houses. Pavlova clearly continued to inspire Hoffman because after seeing the performances the sculptor made multiple sketches of Pavlova dancing *Les Orientales* and *La Gavotte*.⁴⁵ Hoffman was acquainted with Otto Kahn who had arranged Pavlova's tours to the United States, and in April of 1914 Kahn's wife organized a tea and invited both artists. Hoffman wrote of her introduction to her muse:

The fragile, pallid sprite comes into the room—dressed in black—with fiery flashing eyes—quick, unexpected movements—nervous, breathless French conversation. Simple, real, inspired from within, a child of nature—a great artist—this is at once evident . . . I watch her, as a panther might crouch in a thicket and watch a bird. Every gesture records its line on my sensitive plate. From now on I must become a reel to register endless fleeting impressions and characteristic movements.⁴⁶

Hoffman relates how intensely she studied the dancer and her desire to portray the characteristics specific to Pavlova. Mrs. Kahn displayed Hoffman's sculptures in her apartment so that Pavlova could see them when the group met for tea. Evidently the pieces impressed her because she granted

⁴⁴ Malvina Hoffman, *Heads and Tales* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1936), 56.

⁴⁵ Conner, *A Dancer in Relief*, n.p.

⁴⁶ Recorded in Hoffman's diary, quoted in *ibid.*

the sculptor a permanent pass allowing Hoffman access to rehearsals and to the stage wings during performances so that she could study the dancers up close.⁴⁷

At this time Hoffman was working on *La Gavotte* (1915) [Fig. 1.30] and *La Péri* (1921) [Fig. 1.31], and she greatly appreciated the greater access to the dancers. As Hoffman worked in the wings, her business relationship with Pavlova began to develop into friendship. Pavlova and Hoffman frequently talked after rehearsal, and Pavlova began explaining the fundamentals of ballet to Hoffman. The sculptor wrote in her notebook, “La Muse and I have many exciting moments—of discussion, posing, criticism, instruction and dancing, the history and art of toe pointing, poise, rhythm, etc., etc.”⁴⁸ Shortly thereafter Pavlova posed for Hoffman in her studio.

Having Pavlova pose in her studio for *La Gavotte* and *La Péri* allowed Hoffman to capture the gestures unique to the ballerina. With *La Gavotte* Hoffman portrays the lightness of the dance. One of the main tenets of traditional ballet is that its dancers convey an impression of weightlessness to the audience; the toe shoe allows the ballerina to appear as if she skims across the stage, and the lifts and jumps performed by the male *danseurs* should look effortless. Hoffman wrote of this piece, “[Pavlova] insisted upon my catching the airy lightness of her pose, by holding her breath as if in flight.”⁴⁹ To communicate the sense of weightlessness, Hoffman created a delicate piece. She portrays Pavlova in a diaphanous gown with her limbs fully extended. In the ballet, *La Péri*, a man is told by the Fairy Queen that he can have the girl he loves if he refrains from kissing her. The ballet ends tragically with the man succumbing to temptation and the woman dying from the fairy’s curse. Hoffman portrays the climactic moment right before the kiss, as the man dips the woman and leans

⁴⁷ Hoffman, *Yesterday Is Tomorrow*, 138.

⁴⁸ Hoffman quoted in Conner, *A Dancer in Relief*, n.p.

⁴⁹ Hoffman, *Yesterday Is Tomorrow*, 146.

down. At this point it is still uncertain whether he will resist or whether the two will be doomed by their love.

Pavlova's work with Hoffman during her 1913-1914 season was the foundation for a lifelong friendship and multiple artistic collaborations between the two women. When Pavlova toured the United States Hoffman's drawings were used for program covers and for the posters that advertised the performances.⁵⁰ Hoffman's friendship with Pavlova allowed her the opportunity for serious study of the human body in motion. She did so by watching and drawing Pavlova's company and the ballerina furthered her studies by teaching her some dance steps. Hoffman wrote of her dance education, "Pavlova herself had a lively interest in modeling, and while she practiced steps before my long mirror, we both studied the motions of her hands and arms and the position of her feet. . . . She demonstrated many little tricks to me—how to rise up and down on the toes with arms outspread and head erect . . ."⁵¹ Over the next several years, until Pavlova's death in 1931, the two artists spent a great deal of time with one another. They vacationed together in Upstate New York, and Hoffman invited Pavlova and the dancers from her company to her home after performances. The two supported each other through difficult times as well. Pavlova was instrumental in helping Hoffman and her mother return to the United States at the beginning of World War I, and she comforted Hoffman after her mother passed away. Hoffman attended Pavlova's funeral and wrote in her journal of the many memories the two artists shared.

Hoffman's and Pavlova's most ambitious collaboration was the *Bacchanale Frieze* (1914-1924) [Fig. 1.32], a series of low relief sculptures that depict key moments from Pavlova's

⁵⁰ Conner, *A Dancer in Relief*, n.p.

⁵¹ Hoffman, *Yesterday Is Tomorrow*, 146.

“Autumn Bacchanale,” the dance that so entranced Hoffman when she first saw Pavlova perform in London in 1910. Because “Autumn Bacchanale” became one of Pavlova’s signature numbers and she often closed her shows with its performance, Hoffman had ample opportunity to see the piece performed. Working together, the dancer and the artist used a variety of methods to help Hoffman translate the movement of the dance into sculpture.

To facilitate Hoffman’s understanding of the movements in “Autumn Bacchanale,” Pavlova arranged for the artist to learn to dance it herself. One of Pavlova’s dance partners, Andreas Pavley, gave Hoffman lessons. After thirty lessons, Pavlova had Hoffman perform the dance on stage and in costume. Hoffman wrote of her performance:

When the pounding rhythm of the music started, everything in life evaporated except the liberation of a wild desire. We went through the dance in good style, and so enthusiastic was the applause (of the empty house!) of Pavlova [sic] and some members of the troupe that we repeated our world *première* and *last* performance. . . . After that experience, I understood a good deal more about Russian dancing than is generally described. They go just that much further in every gesture and effort than other schools of dancing.⁵²

Hoffman felt this exercise allowed her to fully appreciate the piece she wished to depict, and after she performed it Pavlova declared her ready to begin her sculptural interpretation of the “Autumn Bacchanale.”

Pavlova also consented to let Hoffman take a number of photographs of her and her dance partners in various poses [Fig. 1.33]. Generally, Pavlova insisted on maintaining control over photographs of her dancing. She routinely rejected photographs that she felt were unflattering. She also often insisted that her ballet slippers be altered through darkroom manipulation so that the arch of her foot became exaggerated and the point of her toes appeared impossibly small and

⁵² Hoffman, *Heads and Tales*, 57-58.

sharp.⁵³ However, Hoffman needed pictures that accurately recorded the dancer's physique in various positions. Thus, the photographs that Hoffman took of Pavlova are some of the most candid and most revealing of the dancer's style. Hoffman photographed Pavlova and her partners in simple leotards in front of a white backdrop hung in her studio. The developed photographs gave Hoffman a template to work from when Pavlova was not available to pose in person.

In addition to learning the choreography and photographing the dancers, Hoffman completed numerous drawings of the "Autumn Bacchanale." She made anatomical studies of the dancers' limbs [Fig. 1.34]. She sketched the dancers while they practiced and performed, making notations in her sketchpad about not only the pose but also the music and tempo of the piece at that moment [Fig. 1.35]. Hoffman explained, "Perched on a soap-box behind one of the wings of the theatre, I watched each moment, trying to catch an instantaneous pattern or gesture. Then in the audience I caught other moments from different angles."⁵⁴ Drawing while the dancers performed helped Hoffman to see the connectivity between the dancers' poses, to understand how each movement influences those that precede and follow it, and to practice portraying the dancers in motion. Hoffman created a series of over one hundred drawings of the "Autumn Bacchanale" [Fig. 1.36]. She and Pavlova went through the drawings together, and the two artists originally selected twenty-two (later expanded to twenty-five) moments from the dance to make up the frieze.⁵⁵ After Hoffman and Pavlova selected the poses, Hoffman created detailed sketches plotting the composition of each panel and small maquettes to help her render the three-dimensional dancers in low relief [Figs. 1.37, 1.38]. For the final version, Hoffman created twenty-five bas-relief panels

⁵³ Conner, *A Dancer in Relief*, n.p.

⁵⁴ Hoffman, *Heads and Tales*, 58.

⁵⁵ Hoffman's first *Bacchanale Frieze* consisted of twenty-two three inch drawings mounted on a long strip of cloth that could be rolled for transport.

depicting Pavlova and her partner at a different moment in the ballet. Hoffman placed these sculpted moments one after another in an arrangement of five groups of four panels and one group of five panels. These divisions allowed the frieze to be shown as a whole or to be displayed in pieces, as each panel and group of four or five panels is designed to stand on its own as well as flow into the next set of figures.

In order to help the poses appear natural and the composition harmonious Hoffman carefully depicted the figures' drapery [Fig. 1.39]. She photographed her models in tight fitting leotards so that their bodies would not be obscured by the flowing costumes in which they performed [Fig.1.33]. This allowed Hoffman to compose the poses accurately and then use the drapery to emphasize the dancers' movements. Hoffman carefully observed the appearance of the costumes as they shifted and rippled in performances, and she drew studies of the drapery removed from the figures. As she explained in her book *Sculpture Inside and Out*:

The composition of drapery in such a series of panels presents as much of a problem as the modeling of the figures. For drapery in action is never the same, and the design must always be kept in harmony with the action of the figure. It is by the selection of movement in the floating drapery that we can sometimes suggest the action immediately previous or just to follow. It can serve to carry along the rhythm of our design and make it continuous as the music to which the figures may be dancing. The folds will indicate the tempo of the music and the speed of the action, as well as serving to fill the spaces between the figures with harmonious interest.⁵⁶

Hoffman frequently uses the scarf that Pavlova and her partner carried in the performances of "Autumn Bacchanale" to help convey the dynamic quality of their movement. In the fourth group of panels, for example, she depicts the dancers grasping the scarf in one hand, and, as they run, the scarf billows behind them. In the third panel in this group of four, the scarf whips above the

⁵⁶ Malvina Hoffman, *Sculpture Inside and Out* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1939), 154.

dancers' heads conveying the speed of their movements, and, in the second panel, the scarf floats doubled up on itself indicating a sudden change in direction before the dancer loosed it.

With the *Bacchanale Frieze* Hoffman tackled a very difficult problem: how to depict the chronologically arranged kinetic elements that comprise a dance in a medium that portrays singular, static moments. Hoffman was preceded in this goal by her teacher Rodin, who, in 1911 created a series of sculptures titled *Dance Movement A-H* [Fig. 1.40]. While dancers like Alda Morena performed for him, Rodin rapidly sculpted them in clay. These sculptures were never exhibited in his lifetime, and the casts of the whole series were not made until 1945, but they were first conceived and modeled when Hoffman was studying with the French sculptor and making her own initial investigations into portraying the movement of the dance. The basic idea behind the pieces was that Rodin hoped to suggest animation in clay by portraying sequential poses. To convey the suppleness and flexibility of the dancer, Rodin abandoned anatomical precision in favor of sinuous line. In *Dance Movement B*, for example, Rodin never finished modeling the right foot of the dancer, so the sculpture has an unfinished feel similar to that evoked by a rapid sketch. When viewed as a series, one gets the impression that these poses could exist within a single dance.

With the *Bacchanale Frieze* Hoffman took Rodin's *Dance Movement* series to a logical end, sculpting a series of figures representative of a specific, choreographed piece. She explained the process involved in choosing the twenty-five figures meant to represent the entire dance: "We [Hoffman and Pavlova] would examine [my sketches] together after the performance and decide which ones seemed to catch a movement accurately and which ones suggested the action just

previous and just after the moment we wished to capture.”⁵⁷ When the twenty-five panels are displayed in sequence the viewer can read the frieze from left to right to see how the dancers progress through the various steps in the “Autumn Bacchanale.” Hoffman’s division of individual moments into separate panels in order to depict a succession of events is a familiar solution to the problem of depicting chronology. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, artists often depicted sequential moments from common Biblical stories in an altarpiece’s predella. For example, in the predella of Gentile da Fabriano’s *Adoration of the Magi* (1423) depicts the Nativity scene, The Flight into Egypt, and The Presentation at the Temple. Reading from right to left viewers could follow the story chronologically. Examples common in Hoffman’s day, such as comic strips and film strips, also sequentially arrange moments into separate panels in order to transfer chronological media into static forms.

Of all the methods used to display sequential events that may have influenced Hoffman, perhaps the most applicable are the late-nineteenth century experimentations in chronophotography by Thomas Eakins, Etienne-Jules Marey, and, most especially Eadweard Muybridge.⁵⁸ Most famously, Muybridge’s photographs of Leland Stanford’s race horses proved that horses did, in fact, raise all four hooves off the ground at once when galloping. Using a newly invented electrical apparatus to trigger the shutters of his cameras, which were mounted at intervals along the track, Muybridge succeeded in creating a series of images that showed successive moments in a horse’s gait. Muybridge printed each image in a separate panel and lined and stacked the panels so they could be read from left to right. Even after his relationship with Stanford

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ See Phillip Prodger and Tom Gunning, *Time Stands Still: Muybridge and the Instantaneous Photography Movement* (New York: Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University in association with Oxford University Press, 2003).

dissolved he continued his experimentations with motion, photographing other animals and humans. As Muybridge perfected his technique and improved his materials, he was able to create more detailed images. He published several books of his photographs—*Attitudes of Animals in Motion* (1881), *Animal Locomotion* (1887), *Animals in Motion* (1898), and *The Human Figure in Motion* (1901).

The similarities between Muybridge's work and Hoffman's frieze are striking. In his images of animals and humans walking, jumping, running, and climbing Muybridge divides the movement into still poses and assembles the poses into a group meant to be read from left to right [Fig. 1.41]. Sometimes Muybridge frames each captured moment with heavy, black lines, as in *Fancy Dancing*, and sometimes he places each photograph flush with the next. When taken as a whole the images convey the sequence of the movement in question, although the figures in each individual frame, whether that frame is clearly delineated or not, appear frozen in time. Hoffman, too, dissects Pavlova's dance into a series of successive gestures. She composed her frieze so that each pair of dancers can be separated from the others and displayed on its own. In this sense, Hoffman's frieze is quite different from the friezes of the ancient Greeks, who portrayed a procession of figures, and from the chronophotography of Eakins and Marey, who used overlapping imagery for added continuity. Hoffman herself said she wished to "become a reel to register" Pavlova's dances.⁵⁹ Reels are associated primarily with cinema and consist of panels of individual, frozen images that convey motion when arranged and displayed in a specific manner. Hoffman's *Bacchanale Frieze* could be called a sculpted reel.

As with Muybridge's photographs, the movements of Hoffman's figures can only be understood when the viewer compiles the images. The first group of four panels begins with the

⁵⁹ Hoffman quoted in Conner, *A Dancer in Relief*, n.p.

male dancer, depicted in profile, carrying Pavlova over his shoulder [Fig. 1.32]. In the next panel he holds Pavlova's back with his left hand and her right leg with his right hand; she arches her back and reclines in his arms with her left toe on the ground. In the following panel Pavlova hangs limply from the male dancer's arms; now the toes of both of her feet rest on the ground. In the final panel in this sequence of four, Pavlova stands upright with her back arched and her head thrown back as the male dancer grasps her in a tight embrace. The movement of this sequence is easily imagined: first the male dancer carries Pavlova, then he pivots and lowers her to his waist, next he lowers her other leg and grasps her around the back, finally he raises Pavlova towards his chest and into an embrace.

However, as in Muybridge's photographs, Hoffman's sculpture does not always provide the connective links between the poses portrayed in the *Bacchanale Frieze*. Muybridge dissected the movement of the dancer in images such as in *Fancy Dancing* (1885) [Fig. 1.41]. In the second panel of this group of twelve Muybridge captures the young woman dressed in a gauzy costume with both feet planted; in the next panel her knee is raised so that her thigh is parallel to the floor, and in the succeeding panel her foot is back on the ground. Muybridge fails to capture an intermediate step between the planted and raised foot. In fact, it is possible that movements exist within these three panels that the viewer never sees. Although the viewer assumes that the image of the dancer with her knee raised constitutes the culmination of this step, perhaps the woman completes the *attitude* by bringing her right foot even higher. Similarly, Hoffman does not always depict the connective passages. For example, the fifth group of four panels begins with Pavlova lying on the ground while her male partner stands over her with his arms spread above his head [Fig. 1.42]. In the next panel, Pavlova is on her feet with her arms raised in a sweeping gesture. Two panels later, Pavlova kneels

on the ground with her head lowered. The viewer is left to imagine how Pavlova rose to her feet and then fell back to the earth. In Muybridge's and Hoffman's series of frozen moments, the poses or steps of the dance are delineated carefully, but the artists are unable to convey other aspects of the dance, such as a sense of rhythm or tempo. Like Muybridge, Hoffman risks losing the personalities and the energy of the dancers due to her need for almost scientific accuracy.

Hoffman began working on the *Bacchanale Frieze* in 1914. Ten years later, in May 1924, she threw a costume party in Pavlova's honor at her Sniffen Court studio in order to celebrate its completion. At this time all the panels had been modeled in clay and cast in plaster. However, with no permanent home arranged for the sculpture there were no plans to cast it in bronze. Pavlova and Hoffman originally hoped to place the panels in a school of dance that would be founded and directed by Pavlova in New York City or London. However, this plan never came to fruition as Pavlova passed away unexpectedly in 1931. The panels were then to be displayed in a music auditorium in Cleveland, and Hoffman spent two years making enlargements to fit the site before the project collapsed. In 1937 the frieze was exhibited in a museum in Richmond, Virginia and after it was shipped back to Hoffman she hung it in her own studio where it remained for 35 years.⁶⁰

Pavlova's great support of Hoffman's project likely originated in her desire to leave a record for posterity. Several dance historians believe that Pavlova incessantly toured due to a compulsive wish that as many people see her dance as possible.⁶¹ Pavlova even attempted to make a film so that her dancing could be seen for generations. However, because film technology was still in such an

⁶⁰ Hoffman, *Yesterday Is Tomorrow*, 152-53.

⁶¹ Conner, *A Dancer in Relief*, n.p.

early stage of development, Pavlova found the result of *La Nuit*, created in 1913 in Berlin, unsatisfying. The potential longevity of sculpture, which could certainly outlive any film or photograph, must have appealed to Pavlova. Hoffman felt some disappointment that her work had not found a permanent home where it could be displayed for the public. However, she had achieved her main objective in creating the piece—to record Pavlova’s dance. In Hoffman’s words, “I finally had to get the frieze up out of the way by hanging it on my own wall, no small project in itself with the weight of over two dozen four-foot-square panels—not to mention some weight of frustration—and there they still hang, gathering flowers of dust. Nevertheless, the record is made. There Pavlova still floats in the ivory transports of her first dance, free, rapturous, undying.”⁶²

For Hoffman Pavlova’s movement was a revelation, and she was continually in awe of Pavlova’s ability to communicate without words. She recorded, “Pavlova could create a world of fairy lightness before our eyes, and in a flash could change her mood into one of poignant pathos or savage abandon!”⁶³ Seeing Pavlova perform in 1910 changed the direction of Hoffman’s career. From that very first performance, as Hoffman sat in the audience, she knew she wanted to portray Pavlova’s art, and she dedicated years to doing so. Hoffman felt that her study of the dancers who took the time to work with her contributed greatly to her development as an artist. She paid tribute to them in her book *Yesterday is Tomorrow*, writing:

A number of superb dancers over the years gave up time to me and permitted me to attend rehearsals, which for my study of rhythm in line were even more instructive than the finished public performance. . . . To watch models whose training gave them dynamic control of their bodies was a privilege to me in my profession. Obviously, to be able to draw the muscular coordination of perfect balanced, evenly developed young bodies . . . was one of the greatest opportunities of my career.⁶⁴

⁶² Hoffman, *Yesterday Is Tomorrow*, 153.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Hoffman's biggest challenge was conveying a sense of the dancers' movements in her sculptures, of which she said:

The human body was made for life and movement and only in the course of movement is its true aesthetic logic made evident. The sculptor needs as a model, if he is to feel his art as that of "arrested motion," someone who feels his body as a moving thing... someone who has tested out all the body's multitudinous possibilities for beautiful line—in short, the dancer.⁶⁵

Pavlova represented the epitome of classical ballet, and Hoffman's sculptures, in turn, also have a rather traditional air to them. As Hoffman selected poses to portray from Pavlova's repertoire she hoped that these poses could give a hint of the movements that preceded and followed, and, with the *Bacchanale Frieze*, she even arranged a series of poses in a linear sequence. However, due to the limitations of sculpture, Hoffman's dance pieces, like Muybridge's photographs, often appear as frozen moments snatched from Pavlova's repertoire.

Conclusion

Although ballet did not assert the same kind of influence on American culture as it did on European culture, the popularity of dancers like Anna Pavlova and of productions like *The Black Crook* piqued American audiences' interest in dance. Without the firmly established traditions of ballet that existed in Europe, American artists were able to fill the void with dances of their own invention. The first half of the twentieth century was a particularly significant period for the development of dance in the United States. During this time American choreographers, such as Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Martha Graham, contributed significantly to the invention of modern dance, a new art form that modern dancers and choreographers felt could communicate

⁶⁵ "Malvina Hoffman," *Boston Evening Transcript*, May 8, 1915.

serious ideas. Dance historian Robert Coe believes “American dance became almost by default an art of the modern age—reinventing itself out of the materials at hand, exploring with enormous urgency the qualities of a medium ideally suited to the immediacy of modern expression.”⁶⁶ While modern dancers and choreographers were developing their new aesthetic, American artists were experimenting with modern art movements that offered novel formal and stylistic possibilities. Choreographers explored new ways of moving the body and visual artists manipulated their chosen media in order to create dances, paintings, and sculptures inspired by American life and the issues of modern times. The following chapters will explore the relationship of modern dance and modern art, the appeal modern dance had for the modern American artist, and the resulting portrayals of movement in the static mediums of painting, drawing, sculpture, and photography.

⁶⁶ Coe, *Dance in America*, 2.

Chapter 2:

Pioneers of Modernism: American Artists Discover Isadora Duncan

Hailed as the mother of modern dance, Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) rejected traditional ballet and created an entirely new dance language. With her new dance style she hoped to communicate “the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of the bodies in movement.”¹ Duncan toured Europe and America presenting her vision of dance to audiences through her performances and the impromptu speeches she often gave after dancing. During these travels, Duncan became a muse for many artists. At the height of her career, Duncan was said to be the most frequently portrayed woman in the world.² In Europe, artists such as Auguste Rodin, José Clará, Jean-Paul Lafitte, Jules Grandjouan, André Dunoyer de Segonzac, Maurice Denis, and Emile-Antoine Bourdelle created a myriad of pastels, drawings, and sculptures of the great dancer. Bourdelle even used Duncan as inspiration for his relief sculpture of a dancing figure on the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Duncan was equally popular among the artists of her native United States. John Sloan and Robert Henri deeply admired Isadora Duncan. They each created several images of the artist, wrote of her in articles and journal entries, and spoke of her in their classrooms. The photographers Arnold Genthe and Edward Steichen cherished their opportunities to photograph the notoriously camera-shy dancer. Genthe became one of Duncan’s closest friends, and she inspired him to experiment with portraying motion in still photography. Isadora Duncan also significantly

¹ Isadora Duncan, *My Life* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927), 75.

² Allan Ross Macdougall, "Isadora Duncan and the Artists," *Dance Index* 5, no. 3 (March 1946): 62.

influenced Arthur B. Davies' artistic development, and, perhaps most famously, Abraham Walkowitz obsessively drew Isadora Duncan, creating more than 5000 images of the dancer over the course of his lifetime. These American artists admired Duncan's declarations that dance could express personal convictions and that her dancing should be considered fine art rather than mere entertainment. Walkowitz, Sloan, and Genthe saw in Duncan an artist who shared their own ideas about modern art and modern politics. Steichen, Genthe, and Walkowitz hoped their images of Duncan would mutually increase their fame and that of the dancer. Finally, Duncan's dancing influenced the artistic styles of Davies, Sloan, Henri, and Walkowitz in terms of their choice of medium, their use of that medium, and their forays into abstraction.

Symbol of Modern Art

In 1906, Abraham Walkowitz (1878-1965), who had immigrated to the United States with his Jewish family from Siberia in 1889, left New York City to study art in Europe. An art student since 1894, Walkowitz had saved the money he earned as an art instructor and sign painter to fund this trip.³ During his European sojourn, Walkowitz briefly stopped in London, stayed in Holland for two months, and then traveled to Paris. In Paris, he enrolled at the Académie Julian where he met another American artist, Max Weber. Weber and Walkowitz began a friendship that lasted many years. Through Weber, Walkowitz met many of the leading figures of the avant-garde, including Leo and Gertrude Stein, whose salons he attended, Henri Rousseau, and Auguste Rodin.⁴ Walkowitz later recalled that during this trip to Paris he also first met Isadora Duncan in 1906 "in Rodin's studio, and again the following day in a salon that was given by a very rich French and

³ Martica Sawin, *Abraham Walkowitz, 1878-1965* (Salt Lake City: Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 1975), 53.

⁴ Ellen Avitts Menefee, "Abraham Walkowitz' Drawings of Isadora Duncan," *American Art Review* 12, no. 6 (2000): 166.

Russian. She was dancing there, waltzes, and Schumann, Schubert.”⁵ After his return to the United States, Walkowitz saw Duncan dance in New York in 1908, 1909, 1915, and 1916. A well-worn copy of Duncan’s autobiography, *My Life*, was reportedly found in Walkowitz’s studio after his death in 1965.⁶ Walkowitz’s life-long fascination with Isadora Duncan had nothing to do with a romantic attachment between the two; rather Duncan became for Walkowitz a symbol of artistic modernism.

After his return to the United States in 1908, Walkowitz began to think of himself as a purveyor of the avant-garde styles he had seen in Paris. In the United States in the 1910s, he was one of the few artists incorporating aspects of French post-impressionism and fauvism into his works of art. In 1911, Marsden Hartley introduced Walkowitz to Alfred Stieglitz, a great advocate of modern art in the early years of the twentieth century, and he became a member of Stieglitz’s circle of artists. From 1911 until 1917, when Walkowitz’s relationship with Stieglitz ended with the close of the 291 gallery, Walkowitz thrived in the supportive atmosphere Stieglitz nurtured. He became a close friend to the gallery owner, often dining with Stieglitz and visiting his family at Lake George.⁷ Stieglitz showed Walkowitz’s work at 291 in 1912, 1913, 1915, and 1917, and he devoted the June 1917 issue of *Camera Work* to Walkowitz’s art. During his years at 291, Walkowitz helped Stieglitz arrange several avant-garde exhibitions. Walkowitz also displayed eleven works in the 1913 Armory Show, which introduced modern art on a large scale to the American public.

⁵ "Oral History Interview with Abraham Walkowitz, December 8 & 22, 1958," (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution), <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/walkow58.htm>.

⁶ Belena Chapp, *Line Dance: Abraham Walkowitz's Drawings of Isadora Duncan* (Newark: University Gallery, University of Delaware, 2000), 2.

⁷ Sawin, *Abraham Walkowitz, 1878-1965*, 11.

One reason that Walkowitz saw Isadora Duncan as a symbol of the modern art movement was that she too purposely associated with members of the avant-garde. Before she went to Paris in 1900, Duncan danced in London. While there she drew inspiration from the pre-Raphaelites. She admired their revival of early Renaissance art and their rebellion against traditional artistic standards.⁸ Duncan then became acquainted with the work of Rodin at the 1900 Exposition Universelle and visited his pavilion frequently. She and the sculptor soon became friends, and, in 1903, she attended a celebration in honor of Rodin's promotion to the rank of commander in the Legion of Honor. At the demands of Rodin's guests Duncan danced for the party. She was said to "move, to sway, to rush, to be as a falling leaf in a high gale, and finally to drop at Rodin's feet in an unforgettable pose of childish abandonment" that enchanted everyone present.⁹ Duncan and Rodin remained friends, visiting one another frequently when Duncan travelled to Paris. Duncan also cultivated relationships with younger artists. The art students in Paris enthusiastically supported Duncan's dancing. José Clará, a Spanish artist who created numerous drawings inspired by Duncan's dances [Figs. 2.31, 2.35], recalled that Isadora Duncan and her brother Raymond gave free tickets to her first performances in Paris to the students of the *École des Beaux-Arts*.¹⁰ These devoted students sketched Duncan dancing, showered her with flowers, and flocked to the stage doors afterwards.¹¹ Duncan evidently felt a connection to the students as well, saying at the end of performances "*Je vais danser encore une danse pour mes amies, les étudiants des Beaux-Arts.*"¹² Duncan

⁸ Cheryl Jaye McAfee, "The Ecstasy of Dance in Art: Isadora Duncan as Muse" (master's thesis, Arizona State University, 1997), 13.

⁹ Allan Ross Macdougall, *Isadora; a Revolutionary in Art and Love* (Edinburgh, NY: T. Nelson, 1960), 77.

¹⁰ Macdougall, "Isadora Duncan and the Artists," 67.

¹¹ Susan C. Berryhill, "Magnificent Obsession: Abraham Walkowitz's Drawings of Isadora Duncan" (master's thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1982), 13.

¹² Macdougall, "Isadora Duncan and the Artists," 67.

cultivated ties with artists when she visited the United States, as well. In November 1909, John Sloan wrote in his diary that he, along with Robert Henri, William Glackens, and Everett Shinn, attended a reception for Isadora Duncan. Two weeks later Duncan sent Sloan complimentary tickets to her upcoming performance.¹³ By associating with avant-garde artists Duncan declared her allegiance with their ideals.

Above all, Walkowitz adopted Isadora Duncan as his symbol of artistic modernism because he felt she embodied his personal philosophy of modernism in art. One of Walkowitz's main tenets was that the modern artist should not duplicate the physical properties of an object, but should seek to express an emotion graphically. He stated "art is only through feeling, so alive and sensitive that the picture is as breath out of the mouth, but coming from the heart."¹⁴ Duncan, in turn, insisted that dance could serve as more than mere entertainment; it could express human emotions. She declared, "I am an *expressioniste* of beauty. I use my body as my medium."¹⁵ Both artist and dancer equated the expressive aspects of the visual and performing arts with the emotive power of music. In an interview with Abram Lerner and Barlett Cowdrey, Walkowitz, an accomplished violinist, explained expressionism in the visual arts by comparing painting to music: "art is not in understanding; art is the feeling. Just like music; music has no words, you feel the thing. Music is a language without a language; art is a language without a language."¹⁶ Of modern art's method of communication he said, "Pure abstract art . . . has a universal language, and dwells in the realm of music with an equivalent emotion. Its melody is attuned to the receptive eye as music is to the

¹³ John Sloan, *John Sloan's New York Scene; from the Diaries, Notes, and Correspondence, 1906-1913*, ed. Bruce St. John (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 351-52.

¹⁴ Sheldon Reich, "Abraham Walkowitz, Pioneer of American Modernism," *American Art Journal* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1971): 76.

¹⁵ Isadora Duncan and Franklin Rosemont, *Isadora Speaks* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1981), 53.

¹⁶ "Oral History Interview with Abraham Walkowitz."

ear.”¹⁷ Like Walkowitz, Duncan believed a powerful connection existed between music and her art. She said of the relationship between music and dance, “Music touches the heart, makes it vibrate with emotion. . . . Music is like a great strong goddess which leads the dance by the hand like a child.”¹⁸ Duncan typically danced to the expressive music of romantic composers, such as Beethoven, Wagner, Schubert, and Schumann, and she asserted that she created her dances from an emotional response to this music. Duncan and Walkowitz both felt a strong connection between the emotions evoked by music and their own artistic creativity.

As Walkowitz sought to communicate emotion through pictorial terms he frequently drew upon the wide range of emotions Duncan expressed in her dances. In two of his watercolors of Duncan now in the Dallas Museum of Art, Walkowitz conveys the danced emotions through his depiction of her gestures. In one painting, Walkowitz portrays Duncan in a state of abandon [Fig. 2.1]. She appears caught in mid-skip; her left leg, bent at the knee, kicks out behind, and the toes of her right foot are the only body part that touches the ground. With her arms and head thrown back Duncan seems exultant, and, with her toes barely skimming the floor, she appears full of ecstatic energy. In the second image, Walkowitz attempts to portray Duncan’s representation of emotional struggle [Fig. 2.2]. Her left arm hangs stiffly at her side, and she cradles her thrown back head with her right arm, as if in an attempt to comfort herself. Duncan’s dance style helped Walkowitz formulate the expressive aspects of his artistic philosophy.

Walkowitz and Duncan also shared similar ideas concerning children and artistic creativity. While working with Alfred Stieglitz at the 291 gallery, Walkowitz helped organize four exhibitions

¹⁷ Abraham Walkowitz, Lionello Venturi, and Walter Pach, *Art from Life to Life* (Girard, KS: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1951), n.p.

¹⁸ Duncan and Rosemont, *Isadora Speaks*, 38.

devoted entirely to children's art. These exhibitions of children's art as art were the first of their kind anywhere in the world. The first exhibition, which hung in the gallery from April to May of 1912, displayed the work of young artists aged two to eleven. In 1916, the watercolors of ten-year-old Georgia S. Engelhard, Stieglitz's niece, hung in the main gallery at 291. The exhibition included works of art created by Engelhard from the time she was four through her tenth year. While Engelhard's art hung in the main gallery, works by Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, Stanton Macdonald-Wright, and Walkowitz hung in the inner gallery.¹⁹ This pairing made for inevitable comparisons between the art of Walkowitz and his colleagues and the creations of Stieglitz's young niece. In response to one of the 291 gallery's exhibitions of children's art a reviewer wrote: "Children draw without a special purpose [sic] there is no responsibility prompting the performance and no concessions to make. It is purely an amusement. [In] the pleasure of the moment, they reveal themselves without hesitancy."²⁰ Duncan felt the same. She explained, "The child must not be taught to make movements, but her soul, as it grows to maturity must be guided and instructed; in other words, the body must be taught to express itself by means of the motions which are natural to it."²¹ Because Duncan believed that children were naturally receptive to the art of dance she set up schools where she could influence young dancers. In 1903, she established a school in Berlin, which was run by her sister, Elizabeth. She founded a school in Paris in 1914, and in 1921 she accepted an invitation to start a school in Russia. She hoped to open a school of dance in the United States, but, due to financial difficulties, this project never came to fruition. Duncan decorated her schools with paintings and sculptures, introduced the students to the music of

¹⁹ "Exhibitions at '291' - Season 1916-1917," *Camera Work*, no. 49-50 (June 1917): 33.

²⁰ Sadakichi Hartmann, "The Exhibition of Children's Drawings," *Camera Work*, no. 39 (July 1912): 45.

²¹ Isadora Duncan and Sheldon Cheney, *The Art of the Dance* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1969), 75.

Beethoven, Wagner, Chopin, and Gluck, and encouraged the children to venture outdoors to observe the movement of flying birds and leaves fluttering in the breeze. She believed her students would develop best if constantly exposed to beautiful things.

Of children's creativity Walkowitz said, "A child does some beautiful thing, she doesn't think of exhibition. Children's works of art are more beautiful than many of those artisans. Much more beautiful. I love children's work. Because it's naive, it's real."²² Isadora Duncan's natural and uninhibited style inspired Walkowitz to cultivate childlike qualities in his own works of art. In many of his images of the dancer, Walkowitz evokes an intentional naïveté. He represents Duncan's figure in a doll-like manner and pays little attention to the body's underlying musculature [Figs. 2.1, 2.2]. His rejection of traditional illusionistic space in favor of the flatness of the picture plane also endows his images with a childlike simplicity. In terms of his color application, Walkowitz followed his natural instincts rather than any particular theory. His desire for expressionism in his art correlates to the energy he and Duncan associated with childhood. Walkowitz saw common elements in the art of children and Duncan's dance: immediacy, openness to new ideas, and the ability to see beyond physical properties to the essence of an object, person, or idea. These elements became the core of Walkowitz's personal philosophy of modern art.

In a summary of his artistic philosophy printed in the catalogue for his 1916 exhibition at the 291 gallery, Walkowitz wrote, "I am seeking to attune my art to what I feel to be the keynote of an experience."²³ Duncan's dancing guided Walkowitz as he sought to represent essentials in his art. He said of the dancer, "Isadora is movement. I watched her dances, and I never had her pose, I

²² "Oral History Interview with Abraham Walkowitz."

²³ Reich, "Abraham Walkowitz, Pioneer of American Modernism," 81.

just watched the movement, that's what makes the dance [sic] the feeling, the movement, the grace."²⁴ Just as Duncan never pantomimed the pieces she performed but let the movement itself communicate the emotion of the piece, so too, did Walkowitz emphasize gesture, line, and emotion over the dancer's physical appearance. A superb draftsman, Walkowitz won a prize for his accurate depiction of a male nude in his *Men's Life Class* at the National Academy in 1904 [Fig. 2.3].²⁵ However, in all of his drawings of Duncan, Walkowitz greatly simplifies and even distorts the dancer's body in order to convey the essence of her movements. In a watercolor of Duncan, now at Wellesley College, Walkowitz depicts Duncan with her arms encircling her head; her left arm, which appears too thin in the upper arm, bulges in the forearm before tapering to a spindly point meant to indicate that the remainder of the arm and hand are hidden behind her head [Fig. 2.4]. In the image, Duncan seems to support herself on the toes of her awkwardly bent, left leg, and Walkowitz's depiction of the skipping dancer makes it appear as if her right leg is truncated at the knee. Walkowitz employs very little modeling and Duncan's form looks fairly two-dimensional. The heavy outlines of the dancer's form and the lines inscribed in her tunic further flatten the figure. In this image, as in most of Walkowitz's images of Duncan, he portrays the dancer without any facial features. Walkowitz eliminates the details that would create a lifelike portrayal, such as musculature, bone structure, and facial features and instead focuses on conveying the essence of Duncan's dance movements. The result is a sinuous, flowing design, rather than an accurate description of Duncan's physical appearance.

²⁴ "Oral History Interview with Abraham Walkowitz."

²⁵ Sawin, *Abraham Walkowitz, 1878-1965*, 53.

As he honed in on the essential characteristics of Duncan's dance Walkowitz began creating more abstract figures. Unfortunately, Walkowitz dated very few of his works of art, so it is difficult to construct a true timeline or a complete understanding of his artistic progression. However, most likely, Walkowitz's abstract images of Duncan built upon some of his earlier and more concrete depictions of the dancer.²⁶ In his most abstract images Walkowitz reduces Duncan's form to a series of lines, which he uses to suggest the gestures of her dance. Despite the scarcity of detail the undulating quality of the lines communicates nearly the same sense of movement and gesture found in more detailed drawings of Duncan [Fig. 2.36] because, as Walkowitz said, "these lines are the essence of the dancer's movements, free of all nonessentials, they are living forms of movement; the cosmic, dynamic force of all true artists."²⁷ In a series of three drawings, Walkowitz demonstrates his desire to portray Duncan's quality of movement with minimal detail [Fig. 2.5]. In the first of the three drawings, four separate lines describe Duncan's limbs. Her tunic consists of four lines. Her head is a circle; her face is a dot, and her hair a single line. In the next two images, Walkowitz further reduces the form of the figure by removing all extraneous lines until, in the last of the three images, two lines represent Duncan's legs and torso, one line indicates her tunic, one line serves as an arm, and the circle which signified Duncan's head is gone altogether. Even in the most simplified of the drawings the curves of the languid lines present the smoothness of Duncan's movements and the sinuousness of the lines she created with her body. In his most abstract portrayals of movement, Walkowitz dispenses with the human body almost entirely. His *Dance Swirls* perhaps represents a pattern of movement through time or the energy expended by a moving

²⁶ Reich, "Abraham Walkowitz, Pioneer of American Modernism," 77.

²⁷ "Here's the 'Lowdown' on Modern Art: Abraham Walkowitz Explains Just What He's Driving At," *The Sunday Call*, May 1, 1941 in "Abraham Walkowitz, 1878-1965, Miscellaneous Ephemeral Material," (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution), reel D303, frame 430.

body [Fig. 2.6]. Walkowitz explained, “The swirls represent the forces of Isadora’s dance.”²⁸

Duncan’s dancing played a significant role in Walkowitz’s formation of his style and philosophy of art.

Throughout his life Abraham Walkowitz considered himself to be one of the first American modernists. He sometimes called himself “The Christopher Columbus of Modern Art,” implying that he brought modern art from Europe to the American continent.²⁹ Walkowitz believed his most important work took place during the early decades of the twentieth century when a select few championed modernism and modern artists were routinely criticized and misunderstood. Both Duncan and Walkowitz attempted to educate their audiences about modern art. Duncan frequently gave speeches about her new dance style after her performances, and Walkowitz spoke in galleries about the tenets of modernism. Walkowitz saw Isadora Duncan as a comrade in arms who, like him, endeavored to present modernism to an ignorant and hostile public. By ceaselessly depicting Duncan’s dancing Walkowitz felt too he could declare his position as a staunch modernist.

Icon of Freedom and Liberation

For many of her contemporaries, Isadora Duncan’s dancing became an emblem of freedom—freedom of movement and artistic expression and freedom from social conventions and political oppression. Former editor of *The Masses* Max Eastman wrote of Isadora Duncan in 1929: “It is needless to tell how she changed the art of dancing in our time. She was a revolution in that art. . . . But I think few people realize how far beyond the realm of art—how far and how deep into the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Martica Sawin, “Abraham Walkowitz, Artist,” *Arts Magazine* 38, no. 6 (March 1964): 42.

moral and social life of our time—the influence of Isadora Duncan’s dancing extended.”³⁰ As Duncan rebelled against the restrictions of traditional ballet she also violated many of the social norms of the day. She declared, “If my art is symbolic of any one thing, it is symbolic of the freedom of woman and her emancipation from the hidebound conventions that are the warp and woof of New England Puritanism.”³¹ Duncan lived her life by this philosophy. She chafed at societal conventions that she felt limited a woman’s freedom. She wore loose clothing and did away with the layers of restrictive undergarments. She took lovers who were already married, bore three children out of wedlock, and danced on stage while visibly pregnant.³² She talked and wrote frequently about women’s rights and political matters. She choreographed dances in response to political issues of the day and, as a passionate socialist, she spoke frequently of the freedoms that would come to all with new government. To emphasize the importance of personal expression, Duncan choreographed her dances to give the impression that the works arose without premeditation. For many of the artists drawn to her work, Isadora Duncan and her radical art form served as a symbol of artistic and social freedoms and political ideals.

When Duncan appeared on stage dressed in her free-flowing tunics, she not only made a statement against the tight ballet costumes that she believed discouraged natural body movement, but she also flouted the dress codes of the day. At the height of Duncan’s popularity, arguably between the years 1904 and 1913, the Gibson Girl, with her tightened corset and heavy, floor-length skirts, was considered the height of feminine fashion in the United States. Compared with

³⁰ Arnold Genthe, *Isadora Duncan: Twenty-Four Studies by Arnold Genthe* (New York, London: M. Kennerley, 1929), n.p.

³¹ Duncan and Rosemont, *Isadora Speaks*, 48.

³² Deborah Jowitt, “Images of Isadora: The Search for Motion,” *Dance Research Journal* 17/18, no. 2/1 (Fall/Spring 1985/1986): 22.

these rather conservative models, polite society considered Duncan, who danced with unbound breasts, bare legs and feet, and loose, flowing garments, as practically nude.³³ In her free-flowing garments, Duncan served as modern art's new model for the nude, one not entrenched in the glossy perfection of nineteenth-century academic art.

Arnold Genthe's (1869-1942) photographs of Isadora Duncan contributed to the dancer's position as a paradigmatic nude figure in modern art. He praised Duncan's rebellious nature: "As a creative genius, she was both artist and liberator, releasing by her courage and heavenly grace, not the dance alone, but womankind, from the fetters of Puritanism."³⁴ Genthe, considered a quintessential pictorialist, photographed Duncan and the six of her students known as the Isadorables several times. In 1929 he published a book of photographs of Isadora Duncan that feature the dancer in a variety of dance poses. In several of these images, Duncan lies on her left side, with her tunic bunched near her hips revealing legs naked to her upper thighs [Fig. 2.7]. With her bare arms propping up her torso, the low-cut tunic threatens to slip from her shoulder and reveal her breast. In an interview with dance historian Ann Daly, a student of Isadora Duncan discussed these photo sessions with Genthe. She explained that Duncan's dancers wore tan silk jersey leotard-type garments beneath their tunics, but that, "when we went to have our photos taken by Arnold Genthe we did not use anything underneath! He thought the undergarments spoiled the line of the body. This of course added to the legend that we wore nothing under the tunic."³⁵

³³ Ann Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 109.

³⁴ Arnold Genthe, *As I Remember* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1936), 179.

³⁵ Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America*, 239.

Walkowitz often emphasized Duncan's unfettered body as well. Many of his drawings portray the dancer in a diaphanous tunic. In an ink and watercolor image now in the Dallas Museum of Art [Fig. 2.8], Duncan's yellow tunic does not conceal the shape of body. Walkowitz outlines her rounded thighs and her groin and allows the viewer to read the skin tones of Duncan's flesh through the yellow watercolor draperies. In other images of Duncan, Walkowitz outlines her breasts, sometimes only partially covering them with the diaphanous cloth [Fig. 2.42]. A 1910 article in *Camera Work* described the modern artist's view of the nude: "The nude body reveals its highest beauty only in fugitive visions and fragments. The exponent of the nude must follow a human body in all its actions, its slightest gestures, its almost insensible movements, and most delicate external signs. ..."³⁶ The moving, fragmented, flawed body of the *Camera Work* essay is certainly not the stationary, decorative Beaux-Arts nymph. The statement could easily be applied to Walkowitz's prolific output of Duncan figures wherein he simplifies the dancer's body to a mere outline and focuses on her "actions" and "gestures."

Isadora Duncan also served as a symbol of the liberated woman for John Sloan (1871-1951). After seeing Duncan dance for the first time, Sloan wrote in his diary that Duncan was "free from unnatural trammels" and "dances away civilization's tainted brain vapors."³⁷ In his oil painting of the dancer (1911) [Fig. 2.9], Duncan, alone on stage, with her flowing costume, loose hair, and bare legs and feet represents the New Woman. She appears free, unhindered by convention, and wholly her own person. Sloan never attempted to idealize Duncan. He painted and drew Duncan as he described her in his diary with "her great big thighs, her small head, her full solid loins."³⁸ The artist

³⁶ S.H., "Visions of the Nude," *Camera Work*, no. 31 (July 1910): 30-31.

³⁷ Sloan, *John Sloan's New York Scene*, 352.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

admired Duncan's body, loosed from the artificial hourglass created by the tightened corset. For Sloan, Duncan's "heavy solid figure" and "large columnar legs" helped her to appear strong in both body and spirit. He wrote of the dancer in symbolic terms, saying she "seems like all womanhood—she looms big as the mother of the race."³⁹ Duncan communicated a message of personal freedom to Sloan. He titled one of the several monotypes he made of Duncan *Isadora in Revolt* (1915) [Fig. 2.10]. With her head tilted upward, her bare legs bent at the knee, and her arm thrown back over her head, Duncan appears to dance without restraint. Sloan's brushy swaths of color give the image an appearance of rapid execution, which furthers the sense of abandon. In Sloan's image, Duncan seems to lead a revolt for freedom of expression and freedom from convention. Duncan's lifestyle and costuming choices had far-reaching consequences beyond the world of art. Once, when asked how she thought she would be remembered Duncan replied, "I freed women from corsets."⁴⁰ By 1929, it seemed that Duncan's declaration had become reality. Max Eastman wrote, "All the bare-legged girls, and the poised and natural girls with strong muscles and strong free steps wherever they go . . . owe more to Isadora Duncan than to any other person."⁴¹

In addition to her social agenda, Isadora Duncan used her performances as forums to share her political opinions. After she danced she would often speak to the audience about both social and political causes. She also choreographed some of her dances to convey political messages. For example, Duncan's *Marseillaise* (1915) celebrated the bravery of the French troops and encouraged her American audiences to support France during World War I. The choreography, performed to

³⁹ Ibid., 507.

⁴⁰ Lincoln Kirstein, "Isadora Duncan," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 9, no. 2 (November 1941): 10.

⁴¹ Genthe, *Isadora Duncan*, n.p.

France's national anthem, echoed the poses in Francois Rude's Arc de Triomphe sculpture *La Marseillaise*, a symbol of French pride and valor. Arnold Genthe wrote concerning Duncan's performance:

Of her dances, one of the most compelling, because of its tremendous drama, was the *Marseillaise*. No one who has seen her can ever forget her in that red drapery, on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House during the war, as she danced the indomitable spirit of France under attack, fighting with a mighty fury to preserve herself from destruction. With superhuman power that day Isadora did something that no painter could do with his colors and no sculptor in bronze or marble.⁴²

When Duncan performed the dance in March of 1917, on the eve of America's entrance into the war, she finished by stripping away her red robe to reveal a tunic made from the Stars and Stripes of the American flag. In this attire she spoke to the audience about the war and patriotism.

Duncan's passionate *Marseillaise* inspired Arnold Genthe and Abraham Walkowitz to create images depicting this dance. They both portray the concluding moment of the dance when Duncan, in a pose inspired by Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), raised her arms above her head in a gesture of determination.⁴³ Genthe creates an image full of murky darkness which conveys a sense of the danger and trauma of the war [Fig. 2.11]. Duncan's face, arms, and one foot are lit in stark contrast with the surrounding darkness. Her claw-like fingers express the pain and suffering of the French people. Genthe, unlike Walkowitz who very seldom painted Duncan's facial features, highlights Duncan's face and allows her expression to convey much of the emotion, effort, and passion communicated by the dance. In his book of photographs of the dancer, Genthe also included two close-ups of the *Marseillaise*, which focus exclusively on the dancer's facial features.

One of the images captures Duncan with her mouth slightly open and her chin tilted upward [Fig.

⁴² Genthe, *As I Remember*, 198.

⁴³ Carrie J. Preston, "The Motor in the Soul: Isadora Duncan and Modernist Performance," *Modernism/Modernity* 12, no. 2 (2005): 284.

2.12]. Her expression in this image is very similar to her expression in the photograph of her full body, but the close-up forces the viewer to concentrate on the intense expression on the dancer's face. Inspired by Duncan's performances Genthe attempts to convey the dancer's passion in his photographs.

Abraham Walkowitz's depiction of Duncan performing the *Marseillaise*, now in the Hirshhorn Museum, possesses a more finished quality than many of his images of the dancer [Fig. 2.13]. In this multi-media work comprising pencil, watercolor, and pen and ink on paper, Duncan's opaque cloak, in contrast to the transparent garments in which Walkowitz usually depicted Duncan, causes the dancer to appear solid and immovable. Walkowitz places Duncan in front of a grey background—a somewhat accurate representation of Duncan's set, for she usually danced in front of heavy blue curtains—that may be politically significant. Here Duncan expresses her political convictions by dancing in the red of France against the grey of Germany.

Duncan, an idealistic socialist, also expressed optimism about the Russian Revolution, claiming, "I am convinced that here in Russia is the greatest miracle that has happened to humanity for two thousand years."⁴⁴ She moved to Russia to establish a school of dance and was married briefly to the Russian poet, Serge Esenin. In a tribute to the Russian people Duncan performed the *Marche Slav* (1917), a dance that celebrated the Russian *muzhik* rising from serfdom and fighting for freedom. Critic Carl Van Vetchen described the dance:

With her hands bound behind her back, groping, stumbling, head bowed, knees bent, she struggles forward, clad only in a short red garment that barely covers her thighs. With furtive glances of extreme despair she peers above and ahead. When the strains of *God Save the Czar* are first heard in the orchestra she falls to her knees and you see the peasant shuddering under the blows of the knout. The picture is tragic one, cumulative in its

⁴⁴ Duncan and Rosemont, *Isadora Speaks*, 65.

horrific details. Finally comes the moment of release and here Isadora makes one of her great effects. She does not spread her arms apart with a wide gesture. She brings them forward slowly and we observe with horror that they have practically forgotten how to move at all. They are crushed, these hands, crushed and bleeding after their long serfdom; they are not hands at all but claws, broken, twisted piteous claws! The expression of frightened, almost uncomprehending, joy with which Isadora concludes the march is another stroke of her vivid imaginative genius.⁴⁵

For socialist artists, like Walkowitz and Sloan, Isadora Duncan served as a symbol of their political convictions. While they admired the artistry of her dancing, they also admired her political views, the fact that she was challenging the status quo, and breaking both aesthetic and social conventions.

Duncan inspired four images that John Sloan and Abraham Walkowitz submitted for publication in the socialist periodical, *The Masses*. Sloan worked as an art editor for *The Masses* from 1911 to 1916. He contributed a drawing of Isadora Duncan dancing to Schubert's *Marche Militaire* (1913) [Fig. 2.14] for the cover of the May 1915 issue. In the drawing, Duncan appears with her right arm extended, her left arm reaching behind, her back crouched, and the knee of her right leg lifted almost to her chest. The awkward pose in Sloan's drawing makes it clear that Duncan's dance style bears little relation to ballet. Walkowitz contributed three of his images of Isadora Duncan to *The Masses* between September and December 1917. Many of the readers of the socialist periodical likely respected Duncan as they also reveled in, as Irving Howe, literary critic and socialist, put it, "tearing to shreds the genteel tradition that had been dominant in American culture, poking fun at moral prudishness and literary timidity, mocking the deceptions of bourgeois individualism, and preaching a peculiarly uncomplicated version of the class struggle."⁴⁶ Printing images of Duncan in

⁴⁵ Paul David Magriel, *Isadora Duncan* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1947), 31.

⁴⁶ Irving Howe, "To the Masses -- with Love and Envy," in *Echoes of Revolt: The Masses, 1911-1917*, ed. William L. O'Neill (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966), 5.

The Masses clearly aligned the dancer with the political agendas of the periodical's publishers and contributors.

Even after her death in 1927, Duncan's political ideals continued to inspire Walkowitz. When the artist sought to communicate the struggles of the laboring classes he often turned to Duncan's image. During the 1930s Walkowitz participated in the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration and, in 1935, he entered a competition for a post office mural commission with the theme of Justice. Concerning the mural, Walkowitz told his friend Louis Shapiro, "I have racked my brain for a scene depicting justice but do not want to confine myself to any particular phase. Injustice prevails everywhere and touches everyone there [sic], for the crying need for justice is universal. [There are] just two elements to depict: exploiters and victims."⁴⁷ To represent Justice, Walkowitz used the figure of Isadora Duncan in one of her iconic poses, with her feet firmly planted, her head thrown back and her arms spread over her head [Fig. 2.15]. In the mural, Walkowitz transforms Duncan into a symbolic figure. She towers above the watching crowd, perhaps representative of the common man, and from her hand hangs a banner reading "Justice For All." The WPA did not select Walkowitz's proposal for the Post Office commission, but his plan for the mural indicates how much Isadora Duncan represented ideologically to the artist.

Throughout the 1940s, Walkowitz continued to use Duncan as an allegorical figure. In 1945, Emanuel Haldeman-Julius published for Walkowitz a collection of his drawings of the modern dancer, *Isadora Duncan in Her Dances*, accompanied by essays and quotes contributed by people such as the critic Carl Van Vechten and Duncan's student and adopted daughter, Marie-

⁴⁷ Abraham Walkowitz to Louis Shapiro, "Abraham Walkowitz Correspondence," (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution), reel D303, frame 67.

Theresa Duncan. Walkowitz entitled the final section of his book “Drawings Against War and Fascism” [Figs. 2.16, 2.17]. On the ensuing pages Walkowitz uses Duncan as an anti-fascist symbol. The collection of forty drawings includes skulls, children, cripples, men in chains, and weeping mothers. Two lame men ironically wear signs that read “The Victorious Race” and “The Glory of War.” Figures in chains wear signs that read “The Master Race” and “The Slave Race.” With these images Walkowitz expresses his horror at the suffering caused by the Nazi death camps. As a Jew and a political refugee forced to flee from the Russian pogroms in the 1880s, Walkowitz likely felt great empathy for these victims of war.

Among the piteous figures Walkowitz draws Isadora Duncan dancing. In this final section of his book, Walkowitz transforms Duncan into several allegorical figures. In some frames she symbolizes the injustices of war. Depicted with her arms thrown back and her mouth open in a wail, Duncan represents “Mothers of Death.” In another frame, “Old Enough to Die,” she attempts to shelter an adolescent child with her arms and body. Walkowitz also uses Duncan as a figure of hope. In one frame she skips to the left with her head thrown back holding a banner in her raised arms that reads “World Peace.” In the panel below, Duncan executes an arabesque alongside a banner that reads “The Dance of Peace,” and she wears sashes that say “Fight Against War,” “All religions/one religion,” “No War,” and “Fight for Democracy.” The accompanying text for “Drawings Against War and Fascism” by Konrad Bercovici reads, “Walkowitz is not afraid of the future. He knows that the fascists will be defeated. He knows that democracy will triumph, but he is appalled at the suffering on the way to victory. He is appalled at the idea that the history of

civilization is the history of the martyrdom of man.”⁴⁸ In the final panel a tiny Duncan holds the hand of a larger figure who wears a skull and a sign that reads “The Fear of War.” Duncan, small though she is, wears a banner reading “I Will Bring Peace to the World,” as if she represents “the little child [who] shall lead them,” from images of “The Peaceable Kingdom.” For Walkowitz, Duncan symbolized true freedom.

The American artist Robert Henri equated Duncan with freedom: “Isadora Duncan’s dancing means profound things—the liberation of the spirit, the dignity of life, the fact that a human person can express, that such grace is possible to the human figure.”⁴⁹ For reformers and radicals, modern and realist artists, Isadora Duncan represented the overthrow of old orders. Her dancing signified the breaking down of boundaries, the search for liberation, the expression of self, and the hope for an ideal world. As a radical in her artistry and in her politics she attracted people who shared her ideologies. Her art became a symbol of her social transgressions, and artists adopted her form as a symbol of their politics.

In Pursuit of Fame

Isadora Duncan wished to live on in legend after her death. The many works of art that portray Duncan contribute to that awesome ambition in that they convey elements of her dance style and bespeak of the popularity of the dancer among her contemporaries. Men like photographers Jacob Schloss, Edward Steichen, Arnold Genthe, and artist Abraham Walkowitz hoped their images of Duncan would mutually insure the longevity of both the dancer and the artist.

⁴⁸ Abraham Walkowitz and Haldeman-Julius Company, *Isadora Duncan in Her Dances* (Girard, KS: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1950), 26.

⁴⁹ Robert Henri, “Isadora Duncan,” *Playboy*, no. 1 (January 1919): 12.

Although Isadora Duncan was an extremely popular subject for painters and sculptors, when it came to photographs, for which she would have to collaborate with an artist, the dancer was extremely discriminating. Duncan believed any literal recording of her dancing would limit her legacy. Thus, she conscientiously controlled photographs of herself and refused to allow anyone to film her dancing. She believed that photography was well equipped to capture her likeness but not the quality or movements of her dances. In the foreword to Arnold Genthe's book of photographs of Isadora Duncan, Max Eastman explained, "It was never easy to coax Isadora Duncan into a photographer's studio. Like a wild and wise animal, she fled from those who sought to capture the essence of her—which was motion—by making her stand still."⁵⁰ Because Duncan so carefully regulated photographs of herself, one can speculate that she trusted those photographers for whom she did pose, that their works portrayed her as she wished to be seen and remembered, and that she believed the resulting images would contribute to her legacy.

Jacob Schloss, in New York City in 1899, made the earliest collection of photographs of Isadora Duncan in dance poses [Figs. 2.18, 2.19, 2.20]. Schloss specialized in photographs of stage celebrities that could be used for publicity. At this time the celebrity and photographer relationship was one of mutual gain. An actor or dancer could gain a great deal of publicity by having his or her picture displayed in and sold through a photographer's studio. Likewise, a photographer could receive recognition and business for his studio by displaying and selling his photographs of celebrities.⁵¹ More expensive and celebrated photographers tended to photograph the more famous actors and dancers, and in New York City, Jacob Schloss's studio on West Twenty-third Street and

⁵⁰ Genthe, *Isadora Duncan*, n.p.

⁵¹ David Mayer, "'Quote the Words to Prompt the Attitudes': The Victorian Performer, the Photographer, and the Photograph," *Theatre Survey* 32, no. 2 (November 2002): 238.

Fifth Avenue was considered one of the most prestigious in the city. To have one's photograph taken by Schloss meant that the actor or dancer was a recognized professional.⁵² Duncan's dealings with Schloss indicate that she recognized the importance of disseminating her image through photography. In 1899, Duncan, just beginning her career, had by no means reached the celebrity status of many of Schloss's other patrons. However, in employing the renowned Schloss as her photographer, Duncan declares her serious intentions to become a famous dancer. She had, after all, reportedly felt from childhood that she would revolutionize the world.⁵³

Schloss's photographs reveal Duncan's desire to represent herself in a certain way, despite her youth and inexperience. The images of Duncan differ significantly from Schloss's photographs of other actors and dancers, who often appear stiff with their formal hairdos and elaborate costumes. In contrast to other dancers, such as Mabel Clark and Eunice Hill who used corsets to endow themselves with hourglass figures and stage makeup to increase the drama of their faces, Duncan presents herself barefaced, with loose hair, and in a gauzy, white dress. More established patrons often posed with elaborate sets to add a stage-like quality to their photographs; Schloss shot Duncan in front of plain curtains and a set consisting exclusively of a few flowers strewn over the bare floor. Consequently, Duncan appears youthful, supple, and natural in these photographs. All of these qualities would become important components of Duncan's mature dance style.

In Schloss's photographs, the 22-year-old dancer wears tights and ballet shoes, evidence that she has not fully formulated her dancing philosophy. Despite the constraints of studio photography—in many of the images Duncan uses the back wall to help her sustain the pose over

⁵² Ibid., 240.

⁵³ Duncan and Rosemont, *Isadora Speaks*, 22.

the long exposure time—Schloss clearly conveys Duncan’s emotive dance style. In one of the photographs, Schloss captures Duncan in profile supporting her weight on her right foot with her head bowed [Fig. 2.18]. Her body language in this image communicates feelings of contemplation and reflection. In another photograph, Duncan stands facing the viewer with her weight on her right foot, her arms thrown back, her chest raised, her neck extended, and her head tilted to the right [Fig. 2.19]. Her pose conveys a feeling of emotional release and freedom. Through small details, such as slightly curled fingers, Schloss and Duncan infuse a subtle emotional component into these publicity photographs. Despite Duncan’s unformed style, the images contain hints to the dancer’s potential, and her desire to use her body to communicate emotion rather than merely entertain.

As Isadora Duncan developed her dance style she became even more careful about how her dancing appeared in photographs. In Venice in 1921, Duncan happened to meet the American photographer Edward Steichen, who had taken her portrait in 1913, and she invited him to accompany her to Athens to photograph her and the six Isadorables. He wrote that “the real argument with which Isadora persuaded me to go along to Greece was that we could borrow a motion-picture camera when we got there, and she would let me make motion pictures of her dancing on the Acropolis.”⁵⁴ Steichen, eager to capture Duncan dancing on film, agreed. However, when the party arrived in Athens, Duncan changed her mind stating, “She didn’t want her dancing recorded in motion pictures but would rather have it remembered as a legend.”⁵⁵ Not only did Duncan refuse to allow Steichen to film her dancing, but she also had great difficulty even

⁵⁴ Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography* (New York: Bonanza Books, distributed by Crown Publishers, 1984), n.p.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

replicating her dance poses for still photographs. She told Steichen “she felt like an intruder when she started to move.”⁵⁶ Ancient Greece greatly inspired Duncan in the creation of her dance style. She took many of her dance steps from the poses portrayed on Greek vases and in their sculptures, and her costumes resembled Greek tunics. She wrote of one of her first visits to Athens, “I did not dare to move, for I realized that of all the movements my body had made none was worthy to be made before a Doric Temple. And as I stood thus I realized that I must find a dance whose effort was to be worthy of this Temple—or never dance again.”⁵⁷ It seems that in the presence of the great Parthenon Duncan felt overwhelmed by this font of inspiration and feared her art incomparable and unsuitable to its greatness.

Eventually Steichen convinced Duncan to stand in the portal of the Parthenon. He set his camera up so that it could capture the columns from base to capital. Then he asked the hesitant Duncan to execute her signature move [Fig. 2.21], which she called the “Bacchic Frenzy” and which Steichen described as “the slow raising of her arms until they seem to encompass the whole sky.”⁵⁸ Steichen’s decision to photograph Duncan with uplifted arms and outstretched palms among the towering columns helps to convey the dancer’s reverence for the Parthenon. Duncan appears to be embracing the spirit of ancient Greece. In another photograph taken by Steichen during this photo session, Duncan stands in her Greek tunic with a line of columns on her right [Fig. 2.22]. Steichen captures the dancer as she raises her head and eyes toward the sky and encircles her head with her arms. In this pose, Duncan, standing straight and tall in her pleated tunic, clearly echoes the shape of the fluted columns. Steichen commented, “Then we went around to the portico with its line of

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Duncan and Cheney, *The Art of the Dance*, 64-65.

⁵⁸ Steichen, *A Life in Photography*, n.p.

columns. She removed her cloak and stood there in her Greek tunic. And here she contributed what only an artist like Isadora could contribute. She made a gesture completely related to the columns.”⁵⁹ In her autobiography, Duncan subtly acknowledged the role Steichen’s photographs played in her careful formulation of her image: “Edward Steichen, who was one of our party, took many lovely pictures in the Acropolis and in the theatre of Dionysus, which faintly foreshadowed the splendid vision I longed to create in Greece.”⁶⁰ Steichen said of the experience of photographing Duncan at the Acropolis: “That visit to the Parthenon was the only time Isadora posed for photographs there. She always said she was so completely overwhelmed by what she felt there that she could not pose. Her whole art of dancing was inspired by the Greek architectural friezes and the drawings on Greek vases. She was a part of Greece, and she took Greece as a part of herself.”⁶¹ Steichen’s photographs of Duncan at the Parthenon convey through poses, clothing, reverent expressions, and positions a longing for unity between the dancer and the ancient civilization.⁶²

Isadora Duncan admired Edward Steichen, but Arnold Genthe was her favorite photographer. Genthe, a German-born photographer, met Duncan in New York City in 1911 when she opened her studio, The Dionysion, at Fourth Avenue and Twenty-third Street. Both Duncan and Genthe shared a certain intellectual approach when it came to the creation of art. Genthe, who had studied at the Sorbonne and received a Ph.D. in philology from Jena University, sustained an academic interest in archaeology and philosophy, greatly admired ancient Greece, studied classical languages, and loved music. Duncan, who also studied ancient Greece, philosophy,

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Duncan, *My Life*, 352.

⁶¹ Steichen, *A Life in Photography*, n.p.

⁶² Joanne Pearson, "Stilling Bodies/Animating Texts: Isadora Duncan and the Archive," *Performance Research - A Journal of Performing Arts* 7, no. 4 (2002): 110.

poetry, music, science, and politics, likely felt a kinship with the erudite photographer. For both Duncan and Genthe, the ideas that they absorbed from their intellectual studies confirmed to them that art could be about more than replicating a physical appearance; art could reveal inner truths and ideals. Genthe and Duncan both struggled to do so with artistic forms, photography and dance, not generally considered appropriate vehicles for these kinds of serious aesthetic statements.

Genthe associated with a group of artists who hoped to elevate the status of photography in the art world, and Duncan attempted to do the same for dance.

Despite her friendship with Genthe, the photographer had a difficult time persuading the dancer to let him photograph her. She finally relented to his persuasion, appearing one day at Genthe's studio she said, "I've come to keep my promise. . . . I will let you take my passport picture."⁶³ Genthe reports that when Duncan "saw that having her picture taken was a rapid and painless process" she allowed him to continue to photograph her.⁶⁴ With Duncan willing, Genthe's friendship with the dancer allowed him to experiment with the way dance photography was done in the 1910s. As he explained, "My interest in [photographing dance] came through my desire to capture its rhythm and to suggest it adequately through the camera. Most of the photographs of dancers I had seen were of the kind in which the subject was taken in an arranged pose, simulating movement. Such pictures can never give any suggestion of life or movement."⁶⁵ Genthe left the studio and photographed Duncan dancing on the beach [Fig. 2.23]—an appropriate locale for a dancer who spoke of nature as one of her most significant inspirations, encouraged her students to study the movements of the trees in the wind and birds in flight, and who created a system of

⁶³ Genthe, *As I Remember*, 189.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

breathing based on the ebb and flow of the oceans' tides. Genthe, in capturing Duncan dancing on the shore, uses the power of association or comparison to communicate movement in a still image. One can see how Duncan's gestures mirror her inspiration. Her arms, held aloft, create a rippling curve corresponding to the waves in the background. The ocean, although frozen by the photograph, allows the viewer to imagine the ebb and flow of the tide and to associate Duncan's gesture, captured as she dances in the surf, with the rhythm of the ocean waves.

Genthe, who photographed Duncan repeatedly between 1915 and 1918, captured her mature style at the peak of her career as a dancer and artist. In 1929, after the dancer's death two years prior, Genthe published *Isadora Duncan: Twenty-four Studies by Arnold Genthe* as "a tribute to her memory."⁶⁶ Genthe's book memorializes the dancer with a collection of photographs that convey Duncan's innovative style through images of her most famous dances and poses. Four of the images in the book come from Duncan's dance to a Chopin Mazurka. In these photographs, Duncan lies on her side with her arms supporting her upper body, props up her upper body with one arm and extends the other so that she creates parallel lines with her right arm and left leg, and supports her upper body with her left forearm and throws her right arm over her head [Figs. 2.7, 2.24, 2.25]. Genthe's photographs of the Mazurka portray Duncan's versatile use of the floor, a characteristic that clearly separated Duncan from the classical ballet dancers of her day. Ballet dancers seldom drop to the ground—ballerinas in their toe shoes attempt to appear weightless; *danseurs* defy gravity with their powerful leaps. Duncan, on the other hand, embraced the pull of gravity on the body, incorporating it into her dances by falling to the floor and struggling to arise. Genthe praised

⁶⁶ Genthe, *Isadora Duncan*, n.p.

Duncan saying, “Hers was not a mere talent finding an outlet through accepted techniques, but the flame of genius driving its way through the narrow conventions of the classical ballet.”⁶⁷

Genthe hoped to convey Duncan’s “nobility of gesture” in his book of photographs.⁶⁸ To this end he printed four images of Duncan in her characteristic “Bacchic Frenzy” pose, in which she stood with one foot slightly in front of the other, arms raised above her head, chin lifted, and head flung back [Fig. 2.26]. Perhaps Duncan’s best known pose, it concluded her famous *Marseillaise*. Genthe attempts to convey the strength and passion expressed in this pose by filling the surrounding area with darkness so that the highlighted dancer appears as a beacon of light, a revelation to the world, emerging from the shadows. Duncan’s expressive dance style motivated Genthe to use photographic techniques that could convey the dancer’s emotions.

Duncan apparently felt Genthe succeeded in his attempts to capture her essence. In her autobiography, she declared the photographer to be “not only a genius but a wizard. . . . He has taken many pictures of me which are not representations of my physical being but representations of conditions of my soul, and one of them is my very soul indeed.”⁶⁹ This was high praise, for Duncan considered the soul to be the ultimate source of inspiration for the dance. She wrote of dance’s capacity to expose a dancer’s soul:

Imagine then a dancer, who after long study, prayer and inspiration, has attained such a degree of understanding that his body is simply the luminous manifestation of his soul; whose body dances in accordance with a music heard inwardly, in an expression of something out of another, a profounder world. This is the truly creative dancer, natural but not imitative, speaking in movement out of himself and out of something greater than all selves.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Genthe, *As I Remember*, 196.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁶⁹ Duncan, *My Life*, 327.

⁷⁰ Duncan and Cheney, *The Art of the Dance*, 52.

Genthe's hazy, soft focus pictorialist style creates a somewhat mysterious quality that Duncan connected with her inner life. In one of Duncan's favorite photographs, indeed the image to which she likely referred when she said that one of the photographs "is my very soul," Genthe illuminates the dancer's forehead, right cheekbone, nose and chin [Fig. 2.27]. He arranges the image's lighting so that the shadows, which become progressively darker, obscure the rest of her face and her hair, neck, and shoulders fade into the darkness. Genthe recalled Duncan's comments about this photograph: "I noticed that she had placed the photograph on the mantelpiece. 'There's something peculiar about that picture,' she said. 'When I am alone and look at it, after a while my face fades out and the faces of my children take its place.'"⁷¹ Duncan's biological children all died young. In 1913, Deirdre and Patrick Augustus died in a tragic automobile accident when the car they were riding in plummeted into the Seine. In 1914, Isadora Duncan's second son died only a few hours after his birth. Duncan suffered over these events, and Genthe reported that she seldom spoke about her children.⁷² Duncan felt Genthe's photograph revealed the part of her soul where she kept the pain of her children's deaths. Genthe's murky pictorialist style contributed to the photograph's mutability and allowed access beyond Duncan's outward appearance. The illustrious dancer admired and praised Genthe's photographs because they portrayed her as she wished to be perceived; she felt that in revealing her soul Genthe's photographs conveyed the central component of her dance philosophy and style.

Abraham Walkowitz also contributed to the creation of Isadora Duncan's legend. However, unlike the photographers who shot Duncan, the artist did so without the dancer's direction. In the

⁷¹ Genthe, *As I Remember*, 189.

⁷² *Ibid.*

1900s and 1910s, artists frequently portrayed Duncan. However, after her death in an automobile accident in 1927, only Walkowitz continued to depict her.⁷³ He saw himself as an advocate for Duncan's legacy, and he also used Isadora Duncan to help establish and maintain his own reputation as a modern artist. After the 291 gallery closed Walkowitz never again found the security and inspiration that resulted from working closely with a group of dedicated and progressive artists. It seems that faced with obscurity Walkowitz realized he needed to create something that would be unequivocally identified as his own. Duncan, a physical manifestation of Walkowitz's political and modernist beliefs, was the perfect vehicle to act as an emblem of his art. Thus, by perpetuating Duncan's celebrity, Walkowitz hoped to establish his own renown as well.

A group of drawings in Walkowitz's book, *Isadora Duncan in Her Dances* (1950) indicates how seriously Walkowitz viewed Duncan's legacy [Fig. 2.28]. In a set of twenty-four frames, Walkowitz created abstract line drawings of Isadora Duncan, the six Isadorables and Anita Zahn, a student of Isadora's sister, Elizabeth. Leaping, spinning, and skipping, these dancers recall Walkowitz's drawings of Isadora dancing. Walkowitz felt the Isadorables and Anita Zahn carried Isadora Duncan's torch and that her legacy lived in them. The artist placed his drawing of Isadora Duncan in the third cell from the left on the bottom row. By framing her cell with thicker lines containing the words "make life a dance" and "art is life, life is art," Walkowitz sets Duncan apart from the other dancers. He also portrays Duncan with a monumentality that exceeds that of the other dancers; she seems to nearly burst forth from her cell. Walkowitz depicts Duncan with her feet and legs, represented by single lines, firmly planted at nearly the edge of the frame. One scholar has proposed that the three knob-like forms positioned diagonally down her cloak may be

⁷³ Berryhill, "Magnificent Obsession," 3.

an abstract representation of Isadora's sister and brothers, Elizabeth, Augustin, and Raymond, whose names appear in the lower right-hand corner of the sheet,⁷⁴ and who greatly contributed to Isadora's success.⁷⁵ The image may also be an abstracted representation of birth with the knobs representing Isadora's three biological children. It seems likely that the knobs represent some form of motherhood, as the page in its entirety pays tribute to Isadora Duncan's position as the mother of modern dance. Walkowitz's drawing represents Duncan with all her adopted children who carry on her art. Around the outer border, Walkowitz wrote the names of modern dancers and choreographers, such as Jerome Robbins, Martha Graham, and Vaslav Nijinsky. On the top border he inscribed "To the World of Dance." The image posits Isadora Duncan as the foundation for those who followed in her footsteps and created new modern dance forms.

Hoping to ensure that his art and his reputation would persist after his death, Walkowitz gifted many drawings of Isadora Duncan. In his later years, when his eyesight prevented him from working, these gifts to museums and libraries helped keep Walkowitz's name circulating in artistic circles and newspaper columns.⁷⁶ Walkowitz gave drawings to many of the United States' major artistic institutions, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and major museums in Newark, Philadelphia, Boston, and Washington, D.C.⁷⁷ He gave 250 drawings of Duncan to the Dance Division at the New York Public Library in 1952.⁷⁸ The artist also presented drawings of the dancer to "anybody who he thinks has the right feeling about Isadora"

⁷⁴ Chapp, *Line Dance*, 35.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth, who was also a dancer, was a co-founder and director of the school she and Isadora established in Berlin. Augustin and Raymond served at various times throughout their sister's career as managers, collaborators, and publicists.

⁷⁶ Alfred Werner, "Abraham Walkowitz Rediscovered," *American Artist* 43, no. 445 (August 1979): 55.

⁷⁷ Lillian Loewenthal, *The Search for Isadora: The Legend & Legacy of Isadora Duncan* (Pennington: Princeton Book Co., 1993), 158.

⁷⁸ Chapp, *Line Dance*, 9.

and consequently became well known to Isadora Duncan enthusiasts.⁷⁹ Walkowitz stated in an interview, "I gave away many things. More than I sold. I gave Isadora Duncan like my visiting card to people; the small ones. And large ones. In the hundreds and hundreds."⁸⁰ In his papers, Walkowitz kept a number of letters from people who shared their love of Duncan's dancing and asked him for a drawing of the great dancer. In one such letter, Dale Edward Vern, a recipient of a Walkowitz gift, wrote, "I feel a great responsibility of trying to know more and more of Isadora. For those of you who were the fortunate ones in seeing her are becoming fewer and fewer, and it is only through the fervor of your personality and your work and the appreciation of us who are in our 20s that the glory of dear Isadora can go on ad infinitum."⁸¹ In giving his drawings of Duncan to museums, institutions, and individuals, Walkowitz helped to perpetuate not only the memory of Isadora Duncan but also his own reputation.

Some found Walkowitz's self-promotion less than tactful and his personality abrasive and pushy. In his haste to posit himself as a progressive artist, Walkowitz retroactively assigned dates to many of his previously undated works of art, creating a serious problem for scholars. He often introduced himself in museums and galleries as the "Christopher Columbus of American Art" and then recited an exaggeration of his role in the introduction of modern art in the United States.⁸² However, despite Walkowitz's eccentricities, his tactics seem to have paid off in the end. In 1962, at the age of 82, Walkowitz received the Marjorie Peabody Waite Award, which was given annually between 1956 and 1984 by the American Academy of Arts and Letters to a distinguished elderly

⁷⁹ "Walkowitz X 130," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 1, 1944 in "Abraham Walkowitz, 1878-1965, Miscellaneous Ephemeral Material," (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution).

⁸⁰ "Oral History Interview with Abraham Walkowitz."

⁸¹ Dale Edward Vern to Abraham Walkowitz, "Abraham Walkowitz Correspondence," reel D303, frame 51.

⁸² Sawin, "Abraham Walkowitz, Artist," 42.

artist. By this time he was one of the only artists still living who had participated in the legendary Armory Show of 1913. At this ceremony, several of Walkowitz's works were displayed and the artist received a long ovation. It was the last time he appeared in public.⁸³ Currently museums across the country own works by Walkowitz, and, although his status has suffered more than the other members of the Stieglitz circle, he has certainly not been forgotten. Much of Walkowitz's present day reputation can be attributed to his thousands of drawings of Duncan. Indeed, Walkowitz is rarely disassociated from the mother of modern dance.

In response to the dancer's passing, actress and director Eva Le Gallienne wrote, "There is no death for Isadora Duncan. The spirit and essence of her prophetic Vision [sic] will become a part of the Race [sic] itself. The world is different because she lived. Those who saw her dance and had eyes to see, [sic] are different because she danced."⁸⁴ In her pursuit of fame, Isadora Duncan chose her photographers carefully. With the help of the art of photography, Duncan fashioned images that portrayed her ideals about dance and art and revealed her inspirations. Especially because Isadora Duncan was so wary of the replication of her image, artists like Abraham Walkowitz and photographers such as Jacob Schloss, Edward Steichen, and Arnold Genthe, made significant contributions to Duncan's legacy.

Lyrical Gestures

While without doubt artists admired Isadora Duncan for her views on modern art and modern politics, her dancing, first and foremost, attracted their attention and made the dancer an

⁸³ Werner, "Abraham Walkowitz Rediscovered," 56.

⁸⁴ Duncan and Cheney, *The Art of the Dance*, 43.

appealing artistic subject. To view Duncan's dancing was said to be a life-changing experience. In

Ruth St. Denis's words:

My first impression was a shock of disappointment. She was then a little overweight, arms hanging limply at her side; her hair was badly dressed as if she had done it hastily. She wore very little makeup, and in profile her face was not especially interesting. She came slowly forward to the center of the stage and, standing in the amber ray of light, began to move. It is difficult to find words with which to pay tribute to the indescribable genius of Isadora. I can only say briefly that she evoked in that pitifully small audience visions of the morning of the world.⁸⁵

Duncan constructed her dances around a series of very large, sweeping, natural gestures which seemed to grow out of the music of Chopin, Beethoven, and Wagner to which she danced. Duncan did not endow her gestures with specific meanings; she used gesture to express the rhythmical and emotional qualities of the music.⁸⁶ The artists who portrayed her were inspired by how much the dancer could convey through relatively simple steps. Robert Henri explained, "Isadora Duncan ... carries us through a universe in a single movement of her body. Her hand alone held aloft becomes a shape of infinite significance. Yet her gesture, in fact, can only be the stretch of an arm or the stride of a normal human body."⁸⁷ The dancer's rejection of traditional ballet in favor of a dance inspired by natural gestures paralleled the rejection of mimetic representation by many of the visual artists in the early years of the twentieth century. Duncan's dancing helped inspire American artists Arthur B. Davies, John Sloan, Robert Henri, and Abraham Walkowitz to strip their work of nonessentials and embrace modernist forms of expression.

Isadora Duncan influenced Arthur B. Davies (1862-1928) in the creation of his modernist masterwork, *Dancers* (1914-1915) [Fig. 2.33]. Davies's mistress, Edna Potter, was a dancer, and

⁸⁵ Ruth St. Denis, *Ruth St. Denis, an Unfinished Life; an Autobiography* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1939), 197.

⁸⁶ Berryhill, "Magnificent Obsession," 46.

⁸⁷ Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 55.

from her he gained an appreciation of dance that led him to purchase a book containing photographs of Anna Pavlova, Loïe Fuller, Ruth St. Denis, and Isadora Duncan.⁸⁸ Of these dancers he most admired Duncan, and throughout the 1910s he drew upon Duncan's gestures and poses in an attempt to endow his painted figures with lyricism. In *Isadora Duncan Dancers* (c. 1910-1914), Davies most likely portrays Duncan with her six Isadorables [Fig. 2.29]. He arranges the seven dancers across the canvas with their backs to the viewer in groups of four, two, and one. The dancers stand in slightly different positions—some with their weight on their front foot; others with their weight on their back foot; still others rest their toes on the ground and lift their heels. The arms of the dancers are also varied—some of the figures' arms hang limply at their sides, one figure raises an arm above her head, another figure places her arms near her sides with her hands extended. The subtle variety of poses creates a rhythmical quality that Davies incorporated into his other representations of moving bodies.

Many of Davies's dancing figures, even when they are not meant to specifically represent Duncan, reference her style of dance. In a drawing entitled *Kneeling Dancer* (c. 1920) [Fig. 2.30], Davies portrays a figure crouched on the ground and bent at the waist with her arms extended in front of her head. The figure's filmy clothing and her slightly disheveled hair are reminiscent of Duncan. Furthermore, Duncan was well known for her use of the floor, and the position of Davies's figure is similar to that of Duncan in a drawing by the European artist José Clará [Fig. 2.31]. In *Dance-Uplift* (c. 1920-1928), Davies portrays another figure that has Duncan-like characteristics [Fig. 2.37]. This dancer also wears a gauzy tunic. She stands on one flat, bare foot

⁸⁸ Bennard B. Perlman, *The Lives, Loves, and Art of Arthur B. Davies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 286.

and on the toes of her other foot, and she extends her arms, bent at the wrist, straight above her head. Davies portrays his dancer in a position, although in profile, similar to one used by Abraham Walkowitz to depict Isadora Duncan [Fig. 2.38].

Inspired by his work organizing the 1913 Armory Show, Davies made his most significant attempt at painting in a modernist style with *Dancers* (1914-1915) [Fig. 2.33]. In the years surrounding its creation Davies painted *Isadora Duncan Dancers* (c. 1910-1914) and *Venus Attended [Isadora Duncan Dancers]* (c. 1918), a work which depicts Duncan seated on a rock as if born from the sea and surrounded by her attentive Isadorables positioned in various dance poses [Fig. 2.32]. The figures depicted in *Dancers*, covered in prismatic color patterns, contain the same sinuous quality as seen in works of Isadora Duncan created by artists like Abraham Walkowitz. Davies also depicts his dancers in poses that Duncan's admirers frequently recorded with their pens, paints, and cameras. In Davies's painting, the figure on the right portrayed mid-skip with her arms flung over her head resembles images by Walkowitz of Duncan [Fig. 2.36]. The figure on the left in *Dancers* depicted bent slightly at the waist so as to create a continuous curve from lower back to finger tips, resembles a drawing of Duncan by José Clará and a photograph of the dancer taken by Arnold Genthe [Figs. 2.34, 2.35]. In both the drawing and the photograph, Duncan creates an arc with her flexible arms. In terms of his modernist aesthetic, Davies looked to the fractured forms of cubism, the dance subjects of Matisse, and the color theory of the synchromists. It is fitting that the figures in *Dancers* were inspired by a modern dancer.

Isadora Duncan's dancing inspired Ashcan artists John Sloan and Robert Henri to focus their art on a single "theme." Sloan explained this concept to his students:

A drawing composed of well-developed details never gets over that look. Get hold of the theme, not just a recurrent chord, a lot of little repeats and variations. Make a living organization. Go after the big rhythms not the embellishment of the theme, just as Isadora Duncan, when she danced, followed the big movements and paid little attention to the lesser ornamentation of the music.⁸⁹

In his portrayals of Isadora Duncan, Sloan attempts to evoke the overall feel of Duncan's dancing. He does so by emphasizing her expressive gestures to the exclusion of other details. In 1911, after seeing Duncan dance in concert, Sloan began his only oil painting of the dancer [Fig. 2.9], whom he often portrayed in other media. In the painting, he places the skipping dancer on the far left hand side of the canvas with an open expanse of stage to the right filled only with a few scattered flowers. Above Duncan's head the darkness of the background indicates the vast emptiness of the stage. Sloan draws the viewers' attention to the dancer by spotlighting her figure so her gauzy, white costume and pale skin almost glow. In this image, Sloan emphasizes Duncan's "heavy solid figure, large columnar legs, a solid high belly, breasts not too full and her head . . . no more important than it should to give the body, the chief place."⁹⁰ He portrays the dancer's head and face in shadow so as to highlight the sweep of her arm with its red-tinted fingers. The unrestrained pose helps convey Duncan's expressiveness.

It seems Sloan felt particularly proud of this painting of Duncan. He wrote in his journal of his struggle to convey in paint the expression he desired. He enumerated how he discarded details and even scraped the canvas and began again all in order to emphasize the centrality of Duncan's gesture. Finally he concluded, "Made a last grand slam at the Duncan picture and now I like it! It

⁸⁹ John Sloan and Helen Farr Sloan, *Gist of Art: Principles and Practice Expounded in the Classroom and Studio* (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), 75.

⁹⁰ Sloan, *John Sloan's New York Scene*, 507.

has been a drag and a problem, but I think that I have pulled out a good thing.”⁹¹ Sloan must have felt that the painting represented a substantial achievement because in 1916, when Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and John Weischel of the People’s Art Guild simultaneously offered to host Sloan’s first one-man shows, the artist asked for one show to be delayed by a few days so he could display his *Isadora Duncan* and three other pieces at both.⁹²

In other representations of Duncan, Sloan continues to follow the advice he offered his students and, taking his cue from Duncan’s dancing, he strips his works of nonessential details. In a monotype of the dancer (1915), Sloan portrays Duncan dancing before a plain curtain [Fig. 2.39]. As in his oil painting, Duncan’s face, obscured by shadow, is secondary to the cradling of her head and the *contrapposto* of her stance. In a 1915 etching of Duncan, Sloan portrays the dancer’s facial features in greater detail yet has the theater’s spotlight illuminate the dancer’s body and not her face [Fig. 2.40]. Duncan’s entire body seems to tilt in the direction of her sweeping arms which curve over her head and to the left. Sloan emphasizes Duncan’s expressive gestures in his attempts to evoke the overall feel of Duncan’s dancing.

Duncan’s use of gesture also impressed Sloan’s colleague and fellow Ashcan school artist Robert Henri, who called the dancer “one of the greatest masters of gesture the world has ever seen.”⁹³ Using Duncan as an example, he, like Sloan, advised his students to avoid excessive details. He explained to his students: “When a fine dancer appears before you in very significant gesture, you are caught only by the folds of her drapery, which respond to the great will in her movement.

⁹¹ Ibid., 516.

⁹² John Loughery, *John Sloan: Painter and Rebel* (New York: H. Holt, 1995), 213-14.

⁹³ Henri, *The Art Spirit*, 55.

She is establishing in you a trend of interest.”⁹⁴ Duncan’s dancing focused as it was on the essentials inspired Henri to do the same in his images of the dancer. In a pen drawing from c. 1916 [Fig. 2.41] Henri attempts to convey Duncan’s movements with lines, to the exclusion of form, modeling, and color. He wrote, “Sometimes when I have seen her dance, I have tried to make mental snapshots of certain poses and gestures; I was aware continually that every gesture was made out of one or two, of very few lines.”⁹⁵ With lines Henri describes the folds of Duncan’s costume which, in turn, define the shape of her body. The costume, clinging to the curve of Duncan’s thigh, delineates her legs and bent knee. Even without the details of hands, feet, and face, Henri gives a rather complete impression of Duncan’s movement. In the scarcity of line, Henri pays tribute to Duncan’s ability to communicate, as he says, “infinite significance” through gestures.⁹⁶

Duncan’s style of dancing also influenced Abraham Walkowitz to, like Sloan and Henri, eliminate extraneous details from his art. Duncan believed that expressive human movement originated in the chest or, more specifically, in the solar plexus. She explained the foundation of her dance style in her autobiography:

I spent long days and night in the studio seeking that dance which might be the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of the body’s movement. ... After many months, when I had learned to concentrate all my force to this one Centre [sic] [the solar plexus] I found that thereafter when I listened to music the rays and vibrations of the music streamed to this one fount of light within me—there they reflected themselves in Spiritual Vision [sic] not the brain’s mirror, but the soul’s, and from this vision I could express them in Dance.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Ibid., 49.

⁹⁵ Henri, “Isadora Duncan,” 12.

⁹⁶ Henri, *The Art Spirit*, 55.

⁹⁷ Duncan, *My Life*, 75.

Duncan believed that if her dances originated in the solar plexus she would be able to communicate “the luminous manifestations of [the] soul.”⁹⁸ Many of Walkowitz’s drawings of Isadora Duncan accentuate this “central spring of all movement,” the solar plexus.⁹⁹ In all of his drawings of the dancer, Walkowitz places Duncan’s torso near the center of the page. Her arms and legs, on the other hand, typically seem crowded onto the rectangular sheets of paper, and Walkowitz often even crops these appendages from the page. For an artist who so admired dance, Walkowitz’s decision to deemphasize the limbs—generally a dancer’s most important asset—seems contradictory until one considers the significance of the solar plexus in Duncan’s style. In several of his drawings of the dancer, Duncan’s torso seems to lead the rest of the body. For example, in one watercolor [Fig. 2.2], Walkowitz creates a subtle arc with Duncan’s body, placing her torso near its center and peak so that Duncan’s legs appear to follow the direction designated by the solar plexus. In another watercolor [Fig. 2.42], Walkowitz portrays Duncan with her arms flung out from her sides and her legs bent in a leap. In this image, Duncan’s torso seems to recede from the viewer forcing the legs up and arms out as she attempts to maintain balance. In Walkowitz’s depictions of Duncan the positions of her limbs change, but the torso, wherein the solar plexus and the source of Duncan’s movement reside, remains at the center of the picture. Duncan inspired Walkowitz to focus on the fundamentals in his art, and, in turn, Walkowitz’s images communicate one of Duncan’s central ideas: that all movement originates from the solar plexus and then radiates out to the limbs which react to its call.

⁹⁸ Duncan and Cheney, *The Art of the Dance*, 52.

⁹⁹ Duncan, *My Life*, 52.

The images of Duncan by John Sloan, Robert Henri, and Abraham Walkowitz all share a sense of spontaneity informed by the dancer's style. In her performances, Duncan, who actually carefully choreographed her dances, gave the impression that she composed the works in that very moment with no premeditation. The appearance of spontaneity inspired artists to use quickness of execution to express Duncan's dancing. When creating images of Duncan, Walkowitz and Sloan preferred media that can be rapidly applied, such as watercolor, monotypes, pastels, charcoal, and pen or pencil. In his watercolors of Duncan, Walkowitz laid down clearly visible strokes of paint that help convey a sense of energy and movement. In all media, Walkowitz builds the dancer's body and costume from scrawled lines that endow the works with animation and energy. His rapid application of his media gives the appearance that the works were created in a flash of heady artistic fervor corresponding to the spontaneity of Duncan's movements. Sloan's monotypes of the dancer also contain hastily executed, visible strokes that energize the works [Figs. 2.10, 2.39]. The artist likely removed ink from the printed images with a brush or rag in order to create the highlights on Duncan's costume and on the stage floor and backdrop. In *Isadora in Revolt* [Fig. 2.10] painterly strokes surround Duncan's upper body from her hips to her raised hand. These strokes, which reveal the whiteness of the paper behind, convey a sense of dynamism. The animation in Henri's pen drawing of Duncan also results primarily from the apparent quickness of the sketch.

Even Robert Henri's oil painting of Duncan (1915) possesses an unfinished quality that evokes a sense of spontaneity [Fig. 2.43]. Henri composed the entire work with loose, rapid brushstrokes. Duncan's skin even appears roughly and quickly applied, especially in contrast to Henri's more familiar smooth-skinned nudes. In places, the viewer can see the background colors through Duncan's skin tones. Henri scarcely articulates Duncan's face; rough blobs of paint indicate

an eye and eyebrow, but Henri's dancer hardly possesses any nose or chin. A green blob that spills into the orange of the floor indicates Duncan's shadow. Henri paints the whole of the backdrop and floor on which Duncan dances so abstractly, colorfully, and expressively that if Duncan was removed from the scene one might mistake it for a work by an abstract expressionist. Although Duncan appears fairly stationary in Henri's scene, with her arms spread and one foot placed slightly before the other, the painting itself, with its expressive brushstrokes, contains a sense of motion. Henri, like Sloan and Walkowitz, uses the movement created by his gestural strokes to lend a sense of animation to his painting of Isadora Duncan dancing.

Isadora Duncan so inspired Walkowitz that he created over 5000 images of the dancer, and he seldom replicated a work exactly. Walkowitz's works are a result of his thorough study of Duncan's dancing. Reportedly the dancer encouraged the artist to sit and draw in her studio as she and her pupils rehearsed.¹⁰⁰ After her death Walkowitz purchased books about Duncan and read and reread her autobiography. He became good friends with several of Duncan's pupils and with her sister, Elizabeth, and attended their performances even after Duncan's death. Although Walkowitz was not as intimately acquainted with the dancer as he would have liked to be—he was deeply wounded that Duncan did not mention him in her autobiography—he fervently desired to communicate the dancer's style accurately.

Through his seemingly endless repetition of Duncan, Walkowitz confronts the problem of portraying movement, which takes place over time and through space, on a static, two-dimensional surface. By viewing several Walkowitz drawings of Duncan in succession one begins to get a sense of her style of movement with her large gestures and sinuous lines. Although Walkowitz completed

¹⁰⁰ McAfee, "The Ecstasy of Dance in Art," 88.

most of his drawings of the dancer from memory after her death, those who witnessed Duncan in life often remarked on how accurately Walkowitz's vast output of Duncan drawings reflected her style of dance. Arnold Genthe wrote of Walkowitz in *As I Remember*:

No other artist has devoted himself more faithfully to the making of a complete record of Isadora's dances than A. Walkowitz. Within a period of almost twenty years he has made actually thousands of drawings. . . . It is the most complete record ever made of the work of any dancer. Of course, the only perfect way to preserve for posterity the fugitive art of the dance would be with the aid of the motion picture camera. That Isadora could never be induced to let the cinema camera record any of her dances is a calamity. But in the absence of such a record, the work of A. Walkowitz assumes a special significance and it is something for which we and future generations should be grateful.¹⁰¹

Gallery director Sidney Janis also compared Walkowitz's multitude of Duncan drawings to film saying, "to walk into a room where scores of these are hung is to experience on a high aesthetic level a cinema-like animation of the dancer's choreography."¹⁰² Sheldon Reich compared the formatting of Walkowitz's book, *Isadora Duncan in Her Dances*, to film. In the book, Walkowitz sometimes includes seventy-five or more images of Duncan on a page [Fig. 2.44]. Each figure is contained within a frame, like a film cell, so that taken together the pages resemble stacked film strips. Reich speculates that Walkowitz may have wished to create an animated sequence of Duncan performing.¹⁰³ Walkowitz's Duncan drawings have been put to the test by dancers, dance historians, and choreographers. In 1985 a movement analysis project conducted as part of a summer workshop at New York University distributed Walkowitz's Duncan drawings to eleven workshop instructors who were asked to do a detailed analysis of the movements depicted. Participants in the project reported that Walkowitz's drawings made Duncan's dance style much

¹⁰¹ Genthe, *As I Remember*, 199.

¹⁰² Chapp, *Line Dance*, 3.

¹⁰³ Reich, "Abraham Walkowitz, Pioneer of American Modernism," 77.

more accessible and reproducible than any written description of her dancing.¹⁰⁴ The sheer number of images Walkowitz created of the dancer helps to communicate Duncan's style of movement.

Drawn to Duncan's dancing, Davies, Sloan, Henri, and Walkowitz incorporated elements of her style into their art. Duncan's lyrical movements served as a significant source of inspiration for Davies as he made his contribution to American modernism. Her style inspired Sloan, Henri, and Walkowitz to keep their art work focused on a central theme and dispense with excessive details. All three admired the dynamism of Duncan's dance, and her ability to communicate expansiveness and exuberance with her gestures. Duncan's dancing motivated Sloan, Henri, and Walkowitz to choose media that allowed them to quickly execute their images. Clearly Duncan made her mark on the world of art.

Conclusion

In 1916 Isadora Duncan attended an exhibition at 291 Gallery of Abraham Walkowitz's dance drawings. At this time, she allegedly exclaimed, "Walkowitz, you have written my biography in lines without words."¹⁰⁵ For Duncan, dance was the most important thing in the world. Dance was her life. Whether or not she actually said this about Walkowitz's work, it is true that for a dancer who refused to allow her work to be filmed, the drawings, paintings, and photographs by contemporary artists who knew her, admired her, and watched her dance may be the best records of her famous dances. However, in these still images of Duncan dancing, the artists could not represent the complete dance as it moves through time and space, so they isolated and recorded what they saw, remembered, or imagined to be the essential characteristics of Duncan's dance

¹⁰⁴ Ann Dils, "Capturing Dance on Paper," *JOPERD--The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance* 69, no. 6 (1998): 29.

¹⁰⁵ Sawin, *Abraham Walkowitz, 1878-1965*, 10.

style. In Duncan, visual artists recognized a woman who embraced similar artistic values. In the early years of the twentieth century, many artists, including the incomparable Isadora, sought artistic freedom, hoped to portray personal emotions, became involved in socialist politics, and desired lasting fame. Due to these similar goals, Walkowitz, Sloan, Henri, Davies, and Genthe felt a kinship with Duncan which they celebrated in their images of the “mother of modern dance.”

Chapter 3:

Staging the Exotic: Sculpture, Ruth St. Denis, and Josephine Baker

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many dancers and artists in Europe and the United States sought sources of inspiration that countered the demands of the modern, industrial age. Isadora Duncan, for example, turned to ancient Greece as she strove to create a dance language that she believed was pure and unsoiled by the restraints of civilization and the unnaturalness of ballet. Duncan's interest in ancient Greece was merely one outcome of this desire to revitalize the modern world; artists turned to a wide variety of pre-modern and non-Western sources, including Native American, African, Asian, and archaic art, to invigorate their art forms. The interest in these pre-modern and non-Western cultures was a far-reaching phenomenon that captivated society at large, and artists both responded to and helped cultivate society's taste for the "exotic" and "primitive." From roughly 1870 to 1930 exoticism played a major role in architectural designs, fashion, home décor, advertising, popular entertainment, art, and film in both the United States and abroad. For example, in the late nineteenth century, many fashionable homes had a designated "Turkish corner" decorated with tasseled cushions, potted plants, and ostrich plumes. French fashion designers, in the early years of the twentieth century, adorned women in turbans, long, loose-fitting jackets or bodices, harem pants, short or sheer overskirts, and shoes with

upturned toes.¹ Many women in the United States adopted these fashions, none more devoutly than Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney who was photographed in her tunic and harem trousers by Baron Adolf de Meyer (c. 1913) [Fig. 3.1] and painted reclining, odalisque-like, on a sofa in Chinese pajamas by Robert Henri (1916) [Fig. 3.2].

With regards to this cultural climate, the popularity of performances involving exotic themes increased in the early years of the twentieth century as touring dance companies and travelling vaudeville shows allowed people from all classes easy access to fantastical versions of Africa and the Orient. In the United States, Ruth St. Denis and the Denishawn School of Dance (1916-1931), founded with husband and partner Ted Shawn, became synonymous with the country's ardent fascination with India and the East. In Paris, the American dancer, Josephine Baker, epitomized her audiences' fervor for *l'art nègre* of Africa and the West Indies. A number of visual artists either admired or felt the influence of these dancers and their contributions to the popularization of exotic themes. Robert Henri, Arnold Genthe, Gaston Lachaise, and Alexander Calder depicted St. Denis and Baker in their paintings, photographs, and sculptures. Additionally, Ruth St. Denis influenced artist such as Elie Nadelman and Paul Manship who did not portray her specifically, but did incorporate aspects of her Indian, Asian, and Greek themed dances into their works of art. The art works which depict and were influenced by St. Denis, Denishawn, and Baker reveal the pervasiveness and popularity of exotic subjects and themes as well as the complexity and inauthenticity of this exoticism.

¹ Holly Edwards and Brian T. Allen, *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press in association with the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2000), 227.

Ruth St. Denis and the Dance of India and the Orient

The terms exoticism and Orientalism evoke a number of different ideas. Non-specific terms used throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to encapsulate the Far East, Middle East, Near East, India, Polynesia, and Africa, both conjured images of far-off places, fantasy, savages, lushness, and heat. Although the term Orientalism was used as long ago as the mid-nineteenth century its application was shaped irrevocably by Edward Said's *Orientalism* of 1978. Said writes in his book of how the East, or the Orient, has been constructed for consumption by the West. He argues that romanticized views of the East created justification for colonialism and imperialism. Strongly influenced by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, Said states that the West's perceptions of the East, as circulated in literature and policy, say more about Western attitudes than they do about the actual East. Arguing that the West has stereotyped the East as irrational, weak, feminized, and "Other" in art and literature since antiquity, he also attempts "to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self."² Expanding on *Orientalism*, subsequent scholars, such as Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, have further nuanced the field of postcolonial theory. One of Bhabha's central ideas is that of hybridization, or the emergence of new cultural forms from multicultural societies. Instead of seeing colonialism as a historical construct, Bhabha demonstrates how history and historical perceptions shape present-day cross-cultural relationships.³ Spivak explores how European philosophies exclude those who are not part of the dominant social, political, or geographic power structure and how those philosophies actively prevent marginalized

² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 3.

³ See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

groups from occupying positions as fully human subjects.⁴ Clearly exoticism and Orientalism are not uniform or static concepts, either today or in the past. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the United States, recently recovered from the devastation of the Civil War, was attempting to establish itself as a prominent member of the modern world. In a time of rapid developments in industrialization, urbanization, and territorial expansion, the Orient, as constructed in art, literature, advertising, and the entertainment industry, provided a welcome escape from the challenges of the modern life and allowed viewers to come away with a reaffirmation of the West's progress.

Ruth St. Denis (1879-1968), born Ruth Dennis, was greatly influenced by and then, in turn, contributed to the popularity of exoticism in the United States. St. Denis established her reputation as a solo dancer during her 1906 to 1908 tour to New York City and Europe with a series of Indian-inspired dances: *Radha*, *Incense*, *Cobra*, *Nautch*, and *The Yogi*.⁵ In her autobiography St. Denis traces the impetus of these dances to a 1904 encounter with a poster advertising Egyptian Deities cigarettes in a Buffalo, New York drugstore. In the early twentieth century tobacco companies frequently used Middle Eastern imagery, such as harem girls, turbaned desert wanderers, sultan palaces, and Camel's distinctive dromedary, to capitalize on the appeal of the exotic and attract buyers. The Egyptian Deities advertisement featured the goddess Isis seated bare-breasted in a stone doorway, and, while gazing upon it, St. Denis said she began to imagine a series of dances based on Eastern themes. She wrote of this encounter, "I knew that my destiny as a dancer had sprung alive in that moment. I would become a rhythmic and impersonal instrument of

⁴ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁵ Christena L. Schlundt, *The Professional Appearances of Ruth St. Denis & Ted Shawn; a Chronology and an Index of Dances, 1906-1932* (New York: New York Public Library, 1962), 11-12.

spiritual revelation.”⁶ St. Denis subsequently began researching the art and religion of the East in New York City’s libraries; around this same time, a friend took her to Coney Island where she saw exotic dancers and snake charmers in the East Indian Village.⁷ From these various sources of scholarship, popular culture, and her own imagination St. Denis formulated her versions of the dances of India. St. Denis’s dancing differed from the other exotic and vaguely Oriental performances of the day in that she wished to present something that would be considered serious art. As she explained, “My motive has always been the revelation of things of the mind and the heart that make for beauty and immortality. I have never been content that the Dance [sic] should be a plaything, a mere glitter to the eye, a mere stirring of the sensuous blood.”⁸ Soon St. Denis extended her repertoire to include Egyptian, Japanese, Greek, and Middle Eastern inspired dances.⁹ When St. Denis returned to the United States from her European travels in 1909 she quickly gained admirers in New York and New England and then set off in 1910 on a coast-to-coast tour.¹⁰ By the time Ted Shawn became her dance partner and husband in 1914 and the two formed the Denishawn School of Dance, Ruth St. Denis was one of the most popular exponents of Eastern culture in the West.

In 1919, when St. Denis’s status as a performer was well-established, Robert Henri (1865-1929) asked the dancer to pose for a portrait [Fig.3.3]. St. Denis wrote of her time with Henri in

⁶ Ruth St. Denis, *Ruth St. Denis, an Unfinished Life; an Autobiography* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1939), 52.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸ Albert Goldberg, "Ruth St. Denis, Prophet of Dance: 85, Still Kicking," *Los Angeles Times*, February 2, 1964.

⁹ Selma Jeanne Cohen and Katy Matheson, *Dance as a Theatre Art: Source Readings in Dance History from 1581 to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton Book Co., 1992), 129.

¹⁰ Schlundt, *The Professional Appearances of Ruth St. Denis & Ted Shawn*, 14-16.

her autobiography, claiming it as a “great joy.”¹¹ Henri’s finished portrait portrays the dancer in her solo dance *The Legend of the Peacock*, which Ruth St. Denis first performed in 1914. St. Denis’s inspiration for this dance came from a traditional Muslim tale about a rajah’s favorite female entertainer who was transformed by his jealous wife into a peacock. In the dance, St. Denis strutted, with her arms folded against her back like wings, and her neck thrust forward in an imitation of the ornamental bird.¹² Henri’s painting conveys and accentuates these peacock-like movements. He depicts the dancer with a slightly elongated, sinuous neck to suggest the bird’s slender one, and he places St. Denis’s arms behind her back to evoke the idea of a bird walking on two legs with folded wings. The graceful and emphatic S-curve that Henri uses for St. Denis’s bodily stance suggests the swaying and bobbing of the bird as represented in her dance.

Henri’s exaggerated pose also reveals Ruth St. Denis’s theatricality, evident in the program notes she wrote for this dance:

The peacock wandering in the moonlit Kashmir garden remembers the tragic ending of its human incarnation. As a dancing girl of a powerful rajah, she schemed to be made first wife. At the moment of her success, while putting on the great ring of the ranee, she dies from the poison secreted in the ring by the deposed queen. Because of her cold and cruel vanity, the dancer is doomed to inhabit the body of a peacock.¹³

Henri conveys the peacock’s arrogance by portraying St. Denis with a haughty expression: pursed lips, narrowed eyes, and raised chin. He also lavishes attention on St. Denis’s costume. Costuming played a central role in St. Denis’s creative process. She used costumes and sets to establish the exotic mood of her dances, and she often designed her costumes before she choreographed the

¹¹ St. Denis, *Ruth St. Denis, an Unfinished Life*, 184.

¹² Suzanne Shelton, *Divine Dancer: A Biography of Ruth St. Denis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 125.

¹³ Jane Sherman, *The Drama of Denishawn Dance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 18.

corresponding dances.¹⁴ Henri underscores the dancer's showmanship through his attention to the iridescence of her blue bodice, the jewels on her armbands and dangling from her bodice, and the peacock-eyes of her skirt fashioned from synthetic jewels.¹⁵ Henri portrays the dancer in the jet-black wig she often wore to alter her fair coloring for her performances. He paints her sparkling, green headdress with short, parallel strokes that set it apart from the rest of the portrait. Henri perhaps highlights the headdress because the story of how St. Denis obtained it reveals much about her character. One afternoon St. Denis and Ted Shawn received a visitor who was wearing a stylish, Parisian hat with an ornamental feather crest. St. Denis, who had been struggling to perfect the Peacock's costume, snatched the hat from her visitor's head, cut off the feather ornament, took it to her seamstress in the adjoining room, and returned moments later proudly displaying the finished headdress.¹⁶ Of Henri, St. Denis said, "For once in my life I found someone who knew more and could talk faster than I. I actually listened hour after hour."¹⁷ It seems the peacock dance and Henri's portrait of that dance conveys something of St. Denis's vibrant personality.

Henri wrote to his mother of his sessions with Ruth St. Denis: "I am painting a portrait of Ruth St. Denis, the great dancer. Have had three sittings and am to have 3 more next week—it's a big piece of work getting on very well so far. She is in her dance of the 'Peacock.' The story is Egyptian princess very proud, etc. whose spirit is confined in a peacock. It is a very wonderful dance and she is very beautiful in it."¹⁸ Robert Henri and many of the artists of his circle frequently portrayed entertainers and cultivated relationships with them, and they routinely documented their

¹⁴ Elizabeth Kendall, *Where She Danced* (New York: Knopf, 1979), 68.

¹⁵ Sherman, *The Drama of Denishawn Dance*, 18.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ St. Denis, *Ruth St. Denis, an Unfinished Life*, 184.

¹⁸ Robert Henri quoted in Valerie Ann Leeds, "The Portraits of Robert Henri: Context and Influences," *American Art Review* 7, no. 2 (April-May 1995): 95.

associations with celebrity performers in writing and in works of art. Besides his interest in portraying movement and exotic costuming, Henri's uncommissioned painting of Ruth St. Denis, as his letter to his mother attests, is a document of the time that Henri spent with the dancer and the admiration he felt for her work.¹⁹ With his portrait, Henri also displays an interest in promoting modern dance, which he clarified further in a letter written in 1919 to the editor of *Vanity Fair*: "Why can't we suggest a mighty propaganda for a theater for such great artists as Isadora Duncan and ... Ruth St. Denis ... to give their best in? ... Dance is too great an art for us to miss."²⁰

The Legend of the Peacock became one of Ruth St. Denis's most recognized dances. Ted Shawn acknowledged the significance of the dance when he gave St. Denis a live peacock on their first wedding anniversary.²¹ With its exoticism and ritualism *The Legend of the Peacock* stood for the essence of the Denishawn School of Dance and as a symbol of St. Denis herself, her self-assuredness, her individualism, her desire to portray far-off places, and her love of beauty.

Ruth St. Denis was also a favorite subject of Arnold Genthe (1869-1942), the pictorialist photographer, and he too captured the dancer in this signature piece [Fig. 3.4]. In his photograph, St. Denis appears with her head and legs in profile and her torso slightly twisted toward the viewer. As in Henri's portrait, Genthe's photograph captures St. Denis's imitation of the bird. With bent elbows and wrists with her fingertips touching her hips the dancer creates an angular, wing-like silhouette. The dancer's skirt, with its many eyes, lays fully spread in the foreground of the photograph as if trailing behind the dancer like the tail of the bird. Ruth St. Denis extends one foot

¹⁹ Marianne Martin, "Modern Art and Dance: An Introduction," in *Art and Dance: Images of the Modern Dialogue, 1890-1980* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1982), 30.

²⁰ Henri quoted in James W. Tottis, *Life's Pleasures: The Ashcan Artists' Brush with Leisure, 1895-1925* (London: Merrell, 2007), 35.

²¹ Sherman, *The Drama of Denishawn Dance*, 19.

with toes pointed beyond the skirt conveying the peacock's strut even in the still shot. Genthe captures the peacock's arrogance through means similar to those employed by Henri, outstretched neck, raised chin, and lowered eyelids.

Arnold Genthe strongly supported modern dance, frequented dance concerts, and became a knowledgeable, self-educated dance critic. Many dancers admired Genthe and his work, and Ruth St. Denis spoke highly of him in her autobiography: "Arnold Genthe runs through my whole career as one of those dear beings whose enthusiasm and support I have always counted on, and he has never failed me."²² In 1916 Genthe published *The Book of the Dance*, a collection of photographs of modern dancers. Of the book Genthe wrote, "I merely wanted to show some of the phases of modern dance tendencies that could be recorded in a pictorially interesting manner ... recording something of the fugitive charm of rhythmic motion, significant gesture and brilliant color which the dance has once more brought into our lives."²³ Genthe included in his book eighteen photographs of Ruth St. Denis and her school of dance. Because Genthe did not label the dances in *The Book of the Dance*, his photographs do not explicitly document St. Denis's repertoire; instead they highlight the dancer's ability to transform herself with her use of costuming, make-up, and pose into a variety of personae, from the haughty peacock, to the Japanese, kimonoed girl in *O-Mika*, to her Grecian and Indian characters. Genthe's photographs display the vast range of St. Denis's influences and the means she used to create multiple exotic characters.

²² St. Denis, *Ruth St. Denis, an Unfinished Life*, 150.

²³ Arnold Genthe and Shaemas O'Sheel, *The Book of the Dance* (Boston: International Publishers, 1920), foreword.

Genthe recognized that St. Denis's dances were constructed primarily from her imagination and were not meant as presentations of authentic Japanese or Indian dances. As he explained in his autobiography:

[Ruth St. Denis] saw the salvation of the dance not so much in the rhythms of classic Greece as in those of the Orient—Japan and India. Knowing that the Western mind could not assimilate the content of these dances of the East, with their gestures and movements that had come down through long generations as symbols of faith or legend, she made no attempt to reproduce them. Her aim was to give a free and beautiful translation that would make clear the enduring and universal truths of which they were the parables.²⁴

Ruth St. Denis's dancing, which responded and contributed to the fascination with exotica around the turn of the century, represents America's complex relationship with Eastern culture at this time. Her versions of Eastern rituals, performed for an American audience by an American dancer, reveal the great distance between the works' declared sources and their ultimate presentation. St. Denis, who did not actually travel to India until 1926 at the age of 47, found inspiration for her dance steps, costumes, and sets in photographs in books, at amusement park performances, and, most especially, in her own imagination. St. Denis was quite forthright about her lack of experience with the East and her sources of inspiration. In 1906 she told a reporter that her idea to compose Oriental dances came from a trip to Coney Island. In this same article, she discussed her research in libraries and talked about how she engaged the help of the few Indians she had met.²⁵ Another reporter in 1909 wrote, "It is a remarkable fact that Miss St. Denis never has been to the orient, and has learned all that she knows of the people whose mysticism she translates so well at second hand."²⁶ St. Denis's popularity indicates that images, objects, and performances did not need to be authentic in order to be considered exotic by audiences. In truth, whether or not St. Denis

²⁴ Arnold Genthe, *As I Remember* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1936), 201.

²⁵ "Bringing Temple Dances from the Orient to Broadway," *New York Times*, March 25, 1906.

²⁶ "Has the World Gone Dance Mad?," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 10, 1909.

presented authentic Indian or Japanese dances did not much concern audiences. St. Denis's Americanism, right down to her New Jersey accent, actually served as a great advantage for the dancer and only increased her popularity, for it allowed viewers to witness the Indian, Japanese, or Middle Eastern "Other" of Said's *Orientalism* without completely plunging into the unknown.²⁷ St. Denis's performances may have enthralled audiences, but ultimately, the spectators knew that at the end of the day she would remove her wig and makeup and resume her life as an American. In effect, St. Denis translated India and other exotic locales for her American audiences. With her appropriation of Eastern themes, adapted for Western audiences by an American dancer, St. Denis's work might be read in postcolonialist terms as an example of the West's cultural colonization of the East.²⁸

Evidence of the popularity of Eastern subjects and the complexity inherent in Western images of Eastern exotica can also be found in the sculptures of Gaston Lachaise, Elie Nadelman, and Paulanship. Lachaise, Nadelman, and Manship each represented dancers with exotic qualities of dress and pose. Such subject matter and its reception may have been partly inspired by St. Denis's popularization of Oriental dances. All three of these sculptors frequented the vaudeville halls where Ruth St. Denis first performed many of her dances, and Elie Nadelman kept photographs of the Denishawn dancers in his studio.²⁹ However, of the three, only Lachaise created works of art which specifically portray St. Denis.

²⁷ Kendall, *Where She Danced*, 78.

²⁸ Jane Desmond, "Dancing out the Difference: Cultural Imperialism and Ruth St. Denis's *Radha* of 1906," in *Moving History/Dancing Cultures*, ed. Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 262.

²⁹ Lincoln Kirstein, "Elie Nadelman: Sculptor of the Dance," *Dance Index* 7, no. 6 (1948): 151.

Gaston Lachaise (1882-1935) immigrated to the United States from France in 1906. He initially settled in Boston where his future wife, Isabel Nagle, lived. There, Lachaise saw Ruth St. Denis perform and asked her to pose for him. St. Denis said of their encounter, “While I was here [in Boston] I met the sculptor Gaston Lechaise [sic]. In these days he was a fascinating French boy, newly arrived in America, and he made some delightful studies of me in the *Cobra* and the *Incense*, little figurines that were full of character.”³⁰ Lachaise’s sculpture of *Cobra* (1910) [Fig. 3.5], now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, depicts St. Denis crouched on the ground and wearing a turban. In the dance, Ruth St. Denis mimicked the movements of the snake with her arms. She placed jeweled rings on her index and small fingers to signify the snake’s eyes [Fig. 3.6]. A critic described *Cobra* thus: “The serpents are her undulating arms. They crawl languidly, they twist, they caress, they entwine, they smother.”³¹ In Lachaise’s sculptural version of *Cobra*, St. Denis’s right hand seems to transform at the wrist into the broad, flat head of the snake. With this aesthetic decision, Lachaise emphasizes St. Denis’s use of imitation and pantomime.

Like Lachaise’s sculpture, Marius de Zayas’s caricature of Ruth St. Denis in *Cobra*, which Alfred Stieglitz reproduced in *Camera Work* in 1910, accentuates the sinuousness—although in this instance to a comic degree—of St. Denis’s arms and body as she mimics the movements of the snakes and the snake charmer [Fig. 3.7]. The artist creates St. Denis’s body with curved, flowing lines to convey the undulations of the dancer as she represents the entranced snake charmer, and the turban seems to twist and writhe snake-like around the dancer’s head. To evoke the characteristics of the snakes, de Zayas depicts St. Denis’s left arm as a thin, boneless, and

³⁰ St. Denis, *Ruth St. Denis, an Unfinished Life*, 136.

³¹ "A Marigny," *L'Humanité*, September 25, 1906, 4.

impossibly flexible arc, and he tapers the fingers of the dancer's right hand to convey the pointed head of the snake. Upon the right hand, de Zayas draws the two large rings St. Denis used for snake eyes, each with white, pupil-like vertical stripes down the center. De Zayas then portrays St. Denis with her eyes firmly shut so that only the snake's eyes confront the viewer.

Coney Island's "The Streets of Delhi" exhibit, featuring trained elephants, dancing girls and snake charmers all arranged in an opulent oriental extravaganza, provided inspiration for St. Denis's *Cobra*.³² Her portrayal was said to be so effective that ladies in the audience would swoon when they saw the "snakes" writhing toward them.³³ While Lachaise's sculpture emphasizes the elements St. Denis employed, such as costume, pose, and imitation, in order to present a believable performance, De Zayas's image seems to poke fun at St. Denis's so-called exotic movements as well as the members of the audience who cringed with fear as they watched St. Denis charm her imaginary snakes. St. Denis's biographer wrote that "one of the secrets of St. Denis's enduring popularity was her ability to reflect her viewers' own concerns."³⁴ Lachaise's and de Zayas's portrayals of the dance attest to St. Denis's ability to understand and cater to her audiences' expectations as she dons a costume and assumes a stance congruent with the West's quintessential image of the exotic snake charmer.

After portraying St. Denis in the *Cobra*, Lachaise returned to the subject of the dancing woman multiple times over the course of his career. Lachaise was fascinated by the way dancers transform their bodies through movement and pose, as St. Denis did to represent the snakes in *Cobra*. Portraying dancing figures, in works such as *Nude Dancing* (c. 1917) and *Dancer* (1928),

³² Shelton, *Divine Dancer*, 57.

³³ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

allowed Lachaise to explore his interest in the female form as he worked out how to sculpt a myriad of dance poses and positions [Figs. 3.8, 3.9]. Lachaise also utilized dancing figures to experiment with distorting the human form, causing one contemporary critic to call him “a sophisticated peculiarist ... who by impassioned contortion and distortion of his forms affects a style of sculpture singular to himself.”³⁵ In *Burlesque* (1930) Lachaise manipulates the female form by grossly exaggerating the dancer’s right hip and buttock [Fig. 3.10]. The distortion of form in *Burlesque* serves not only as an artistic experiment but also allows Lachaise to emphasize the sensual bump-and-grind movements of that style of dance.³⁶ Lachaise frequented the burlesque theater at the National Winter Garden in New York City, and he also attended the circus, vaudeville, and Isadora Duncan’s and Ruth St. Denis’s performances.³⁷ Lachaise’s dance sculptures attest to the artist’s interest in the variety of performances taking place in New York City in the early 1900s.

Evidence of Lachaise’s admiration of Ruth St. Denis can be found in his *Dancing Woman* (c. 1915) [Fig. 3.11]. By depicting the figure balancing lightly on the toes of her left foot with her right foot slightly raised off the ground Lachaise gives the impression that the dancer is skipping forward. The dancer’s right arm extends behind and she raises her left elbow to the level of her shoulder so that her left hand, which clutches a necklace of beads, touches her chest just below the neck. Lachaise arranges his dancer’s hair in decorative curls, and depicts the figure in gauzy drapery that accentuates her movements, echoing, for example, her extended right arm. Although the work does not refer specifically to St. Denis, the figure’s pose and clothing points to Lachaise’s contact

³⁵ "Gaston and Isabelle Nagle Lachaise Papers, 1903-1962," (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution), reel 327, frame 280.

³⁶ Jeanne L. Wasserman and James B. Cuno, *Three American Sculptors and the Female Nude: Lachaise, Nadelman, Archipenko* (Cambridge, MA: Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, 1980), 39.

³⁷ Carolyn Kinder Carr and Margaret C. S. Christman, *Gaston Lachaise: Portrait Sculpture* (Washington D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1985), 13.

with the dancer. Photographs of Ruth St. Denis by Orval Hixon (c. 1916) capture the dancer in a transparent veil and two long necklaces of beads—attire similar to that depicted on Lachaise's figure. In one of the photographs, even St. Denis's pose is comparable to the pose of Lachaise's *Dancing Woman* [Fig. 3.12]. The photographer captures St. Denis with her right arm extended slightly behind her body, her left arm raised and bent at the elbow, and her left hand grasping one of the strings of beads that fall across her bodice. Lachaise's dance sculptures reflect the lasting influence of the artist's personal interaction with the popular performer.³⁸

Lachaise, like St. Denis, cultivated interests in the art of India and Asia. The sculptor kept Japanese prints in his studio and admired the Far Eastern and Egyptian collections at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.³⁹ Lincoln Kirstein, a great supporter of Lachaise and a well-known patron of dance, described Lachaise's interest in ancient and non-Western art forms, relating Lachaise's stylized figures to paleolithic, Egyptian, and Hindu sculptures. Of this last influence Kirstein recalled, "He [Lachaise] feels himself close to the Hindu sculptors of India and the Malay archipelagos who allowed themselves great freedom with the human body, adopting hieratic rearrangement and refinement to produce interlocking friezes of terrible dances and scenes of loving and destructive gods."⁴⁰ St. Denis's oeuvre, which includes many Indian-themed dances, the Japanese *O-Mika*, and *Egypta*, thus coincides with one of Lachaise's driving influences. Although Lachaise's *Dancing Woman* does not directly reference St. Denis, he acknowledges, through the pose, costume, and subject of his sculpture, the association between theatrical dance and the exotic locales that St. Denis helped to engender in American culture in the early twentieth century.

³⁸ Gerald Nordland, *Gaston Lachaise: The Man and His Work* (New York: G. Braziller, 1974), 69.

³⁹ Sam Hunter and David Finn, *Lachaise* (New York: Cross River Press, 1993), 19.

⁴⁰ Lincoln Kirstein in Hilton Kramer, *The Sculpture of Gaston Lachaise* (New York: Eakins Press Publishers, 1967), 32.

Dancing figures also constitute a favorite subject for Elie Nadelman (1882-1946). Born in Poland, Nadelman had a successful artistic career in Paris before he immigrated to the United States in 1914 at the age of thirty-two. Unlike Lachaise, who was greatly influenced by theatrical performers and Far-Eastern designs, Nadelman found inspiration for the majority of his dancing figures in popular dance forms and folk art traditions. Nadelman's most famous dancers include his *Tango* (1919) and *Dancer* (1918-1919) [Figs. 3.13, 3.14]. American folk art, which Nadelman collected, inspired his compositions for these figures. He carved *Tango* from cherry wood and *Dancer* from mahogany, both of which he then covered with a reddish-brown stain before he applied the figures' painted facial features, hair, and costumes. The artist allowed the stain to show through the paint to lend his figures a worn and old-fashioned quality. Nadelman portrays these dances not as fashionable or contemporary, but rather as somewhat outdated and old-fashioned. He presents the tango as a folk dance and dresses his figures in conservative clothing instead of in the theatrical costumes of the stage. *Dancer's* pose and hair style recalls the high kickers of Seurat's *La Chahut* (1889-1890) of forty years earlier and not the popular contemporary dance forms. Others of Nadelman's dancers such as *Dancing Figure (Artemis)* (c.1916-1918) and his late plaster figurines were influenced by the artistic traditions and dance forms of archaic Greece. These figures also exhibit influences of contemporary dance styles, as popularized by artists such as Ruth St. Denis.

Early in his career much of Nadelman's inspiration came from Greek antiquity. He created a number of female nudes based on the proportions and poses found in Greek statuary as well as idealized marble heads with Greek profiles and patterned hair.⁴¹ The sculpture *Dancing Figure*

⁴¹ John I. H. Baur, *The Sculpture and Drawings of Elie Nadelman* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1975), 8.

(*Artemis*) is generally considered in terms of Nadelman's interest in ancient Greece [Fig. 3.15].

Nadelman created the large limestone version of this piece as a garden sculpture for William G. Loew's Long Island estate. He depicted the figure on one knee, her head tilted downward, and her arms raised with the elbows bent. According to one historian, the piece conveys "an elegant upward progression of curves and angles."⁴² The pleated skirt and the tightly curled hair may remind the viewer of the stylization of archaic Greek statuary.

When Nadelman moved to New York he began to draw the performers he saw on the New York stage.⁴³ Although Ruth St. Denis is now best known for her Indian and Far-Eastern dances, she also created several works with ancient Greek themes, such as *From a Grecian Vase* (1916) and *Greek Veil Plastique* (1918) [Fig. 3.16]. For each of these dances St. Denis donned Greek tunics and attempted to transform the poses found in Greek statuary into fluid movement. To the Austrian poet and dramatist, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who stated, "she is absolutely unsentimental and as grandiose as Greek art," St. Denis epitomized the Greek ideal.⁴⁴ A comparison between Nadelman's *Dancing Figure* and photographs of St. Denis's *From a Grecian Vase* reveals that the two interpreted their Greek influences similarly. The poses of Nadelman's sculpture and St. Denis's dance, such as the positioning of the arms—raised and bent at the elbows with cocked wrists and slightly spread fingers—convey the juxtaposition between angularity and grace often found in Greek vase painting. St. Denis's performances gave Nadelman the opportunity to see one of his greatest artistic influences, Greek sculpture, come to life. While the popularity of dancing subjects in archaic Greek art must have influenced Nadelman's artistic choices for *Dancing Figure*, the

⁴² Martha N. Hagood and Jefferson C. Harrison, *American Art at the Chrysler Museum: Selected Paintings, Sculpture, and Drawings* (Norfolk, VA: The Chrysler Museum of Art, 2005), 155.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Shelton, *Divine Dancer*, 82.

opportunity to see living, moving Greek-inspired dance gave sculptors like Nadelman insights into how the ancient figures cast in bronze and painted on terra-cotta may have moved.

With the stock market crash in 1929 Nadelman suffered devastating financial losses. Due to debts, he eventually lost his collection of folk art and his large studio, and he retreated to his home in Rivendale, New York, effectively withdrawing from the art community. In Rivendale Nadelman began to make small plaster figurines [Fig. 3.17]. To create these figures he used the medium of plastilene, a non-hardening clay from which he took the mold used to cast the final piece in plaster. He often drew on his figures with pencil or cut and carved them with forks and penknives so that the end result appeared rough, unfinished, and ancient.⁴⁵ For inspiration Nadelman looked to ancient Tanagra and Alexandrian votive figures and to his scrapbook where he pasted his collection of fashion advertisements and photographs of actresses, burlesque queens, circus performers, vaudeville acts—and the Denishawn dancers. Most of Nadelman's small figurines bear some relation, in terms of gesture, pose, or costume, to dance.⁴⁶ A group of these plaster figures placed side by side appears something like a stop motion photograph of a dance sequence. The figures raise and lower their arms, bend their knees, and sway their hips. Perhaps because of their poses and gestures, their costumes of unusual hats, cross-hatched girdles, and wide collars, or their antique appearance, the figures appear somewhat exotic. Around this same time, dancers also found inspiration in Tanagra votive figures. In 1926, Martha Graham, a student of the Denishawn school just starting her solo career and still indoctrinated with the exoticism of Denishawn, performed a piece entitled *Tanagra*, a depiction of one of the Hellenistic terra-cotta figures Nadelman so

⁴⁵ Barbara Haskell, *Elie Nadelman: Sculptor of Modern Life* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2003), 187.

⁴⁶ Kirstein, "Sculptor of the Dance," 150.

admired.⁴⁷ Nadelman responded to a number of influences when creating his figurines, including, it seems, the work of Ruth St. Denis and her company.

Paulanship's (1885-1966) exotic dancing figures and his interest in the art of India were also fostered, in part, by Ruth St. Denis's popularizing of Indian and Eastern dance motifs. In 1916 Manship agreed to be represented by Martin Birnbaum of the Berlin Photography Company. The New York Dealer, in addition to representing American artists, collected and sold Asian art and was a member of the India Society, founded to promote the study of Indian art.⁴⁸ At Birnbaum's gallery Manship saw firsthand a number of pieces from India and the Far East. With Birnbaum's encouragement Manship began including elements from Indian art in his sculptures along with the elements of the pre-classical, classical, and medieval periods that had previously preoccupied him. Several of Manship's works that exhibit the influence of Indian art depict dancers. In India, dance plays a central role at traditional religious festivals; temples are decorated with dancing figurines, and the gods are thought to have created cosmic events through dance. Manship's choice of subject matter in his Indian-inspired pieces certainly relates to the prominence of dance in the art of India, but he was also influenced by the popularity of Eastern motifs in performance dance in the United States at that time.

In the exhibition catalogue for Manship's first show with the Berlin Photography Company Martin Birnbaum wrote of the sculptor's varied interests: "Manship travelled extensively and learned a great lesson—the essential unity of all great primitive art, whether Greek, Assyrian, Gothic, Egyptian or Indian. From each and all of them he took something, moulded it to his own

⁴⁷ Anna Kisselgoff, "Dance View: Martha Graham--Where It All Began," *New York Times*, June 15, 1986.

⁴⁸ Susan Rather, *Archaism, Modernism, and the Art of Paul Manship*, American Studies Series (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 109.

purposes. . . . In each case he produced something original.”⁴⁹ *Day and the Hours—Sundial* (1916) [Fig. 3.18], displayed at this exhibition, illustrates how Manship, in a single work of art, often combined his various archaic influences. The sculpture features a seated woman—her lower half draped with a cloth and her upper body bare. The figure with her stylized hair, delicate features, slender form, upraised hand, and graceful gesture appears to be Asian in origin. However, Manship inscribed the base upon which this Eastern maiden sits with the ancient Greek names and symbols of the signs of the zodiac as well as the meander pattern so frequently found in Greek vase painting. A circular form, decorated with dancing women, a modified egg and dart motif, and stylized leaves and waves, frames the figure. The arrangement of the seated figure framed by a circular form contains parallels to the stage design and choreography of Ruth St. Denis’s Indian-themed dance *Radha* (1906) [Fig. 3.19]. One of Ruth St. Denis’s signature works, *Radha* was well-known and oft performed. In the dance, St. Denis played the role of the Hindu goddess Radha who inhabits the body of her idol during a temple ceremony, thus allowing the goddess to experience life briefly. The dance began with St. Denis seated on a pedestal ornamented with simplified lotus leaves and surrounded by an elliptical frame decorated with foliage.

Manship and St. Denis both looked to images of Buddha and his followers, who are often depicted seated on lotus leaf pedestals, when composing *Day and Hours* and *Radha*. One contemporary critic found prototypes for Manship’s sundial in sculptures of Bodhisattvas, followers of Buddha who have achieved enlightenment and now seek to help others do the same.⁵⁰ Like Manship’s seated figure in *Day and Hours*, often the Bodhisattva’s hands are arranged in delicate

⁴⁹ Martin Birnbaum, *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Sculpture by Paul Manship, February 15-March 8, 1916* (New York: Berlin Photographic Co., 1916), 7.

⁵⁰ George Humber, "Paul Manship," *New Republic* 6 (March 25, 1916): 208.

gestures while he or she reclines in front of a leaf-like or circular form, as seen in a sculpture now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection [Fig. 3.20]. In his book *Ruth St. Denis: Pioneer and Prophet*, Ted Shawn included a description of *Radha* taken from a booklet printed when *Radha* was copyrighted in 1905: "Interior of a Hindu temple. At center back is a large niche and shrine in which is seated the image of Radha, cross-legged in the attitude of Buddha."⁵¹ Conflating two Eastern religions, St. Denis as the Hindu Radha assumes the Buddha's pose upon his lotus leaf pedestal. St. Denis and Manship drew upon similar influences, some contradictory, in the creation of their exotic aesthetic.

Manship used a circular framing device again in his sculpture *Dance of Air and Fire* (1930) [Fig. 3.21]. Likely influenced by depictions of the Hindu god Shiva, the sculpture portrays two male figures dancing upon clouds inside a ring of fire. In 1918, Indian scholar, Ananda Coomaraswamy, a founding member of the India Society to which Manship's dealer belonged, published the *Dance of Śiva*. In his book Coomaraswamy explained Shiva's (Śiva) role as the Lord of the Dance, his ability to create or destroy the world with his dance, and the common iconography of this tale which involves depictions of Shiva dancing within a ring of fire [Fig. 3.22].⁵² One historian argues that after Coomaraswamy's publication depictions of Shiva surrounded by a ring of fire "came to embody Indian art for Western audiences."⁵³ Manship, who likely encountered representations of the dancing Shiva at Birnbaum's gallery or in Coomaraswamy's book, would have also been able to see a live interpretation of Shiva's dance. Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn also

⁵¹ Ted Shawn, *Ruth St. Denis: Pioneer & Prophet; Being a History of Her Cycle of Oriental Dances* (San Francisco: Printed for J. Howell by J. H. Nash, 1920), 30.

⁵² Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva; Fourteen Indian Essays* (New York: Sunwise Turn, 1918), 56-66.

⁵³ Rather, *Archaism, Modernism, and the Art of Paul Manship*, 118.

knew Coomaraswamy's books,⁵⁴ and in 1926, Ted Shawn choreographed a piece entitled *The Cosmic Dance of Siva*, wherein he presented Shiva's dances of creation, preservation, destruction, reincarnation, and salvation within a golden, upright metal ring lined with flames [Fig. 3.23]. Like Shawn's stage set,anship places his ring of fire on a multi-tiered pedestal consisting of a circular support atop a rectangular base.anship's figures, dancing among clouds and flames, remind the viewer of the elements commanded by Shiva in his dance of creation.

A characteristic of Indian art that anship often incorporated into his sculptures was an emphasis on gestures, particularly hand gestures. In Hindu and Buddhist religion, dance, drama, and art, the *mudrās*, a complex system of hand gestures, play an important role.anship's sculpture most frequently associated with Indian art, his *Dancer and Gazelles* (1916), exhibits the delicate gestures of Indian dance [Fig. 3.24]. In 1916, A.E. Gallatin wrote that the sculpture displays "the lessons the artist has learned from Indian art, particularly from Hindu and Buddhist sculpture," and that these influences are most evident in "the significance that the Indian artist attaches to gesture, as well as the symbolism of the hands." Gallatin concluded, "[anship's] gazelles ... possess a smoothness and vitality one very rarely finds outside of Indian art."⁵⁵ The two gazelles flanking anship's dancer are attentive to her gestures. The dancer raises her left arm with her thumb, index, and middle fingers slightly lifted and her ring and small fingers curled toward her palm. The gazelle on her left responds to this delicate gesture by curving its neck and lifting its head in an echo of the dancer's raised arm and tilted wrist. The dancer extends her right arm, with her wrist bent and fingers together, away from her body and the gazelle to her right responds to this gesture. It

⁵⁴ St. Denis, *Ruth St. Denis, an Unfinished Life*, 247.

⁵⁵ A.E. Gallatin, "The Sculpture of Paul anship," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 11, no. 20 (Oct. 1916): 220.

rears up on its hind legs, lifting its nose toward the dancer so that its body, from the tip of the nose to the tip of the tail, creates a line parallel to the dancer's outstretched arm. The gazelles' reactions to the dancer's arms and hands emphasize her subtle, yet significance, gestures.

St. Denis also relied heavily on gesture to create an atmosphere of exotic, Eastern otherworldliness in her dances. The dancer initially gained much of her knowledge about Indian dance from the photographs she studied in New York City's libraries. She incorporated the gestures in these still photographs into her dances, but she had no way of knowing how a series of gestures would be connected in a traditional Indian dance. Her "Oriental" gestures were, in reality, a hybrid of the images she saw in photographs and the Delsarte system. Developed as an acting technique by French philosopher François Delsarte, the method connected codified gestures to specific emotions. Adapted in the United States as a health and exercise program, Delsartean gymnastics became popular among American women in the 1880s and 1890s.⁵⁶ Ruth St. Denis's mother, Ruth Emma Hull Dennis, a devout proponent of the Delsartean technique, commenced her daughter's training at a young age. When St. Denis, who hoped to endow her dances with a measure of spirituality, began formulating her own dance style she revisited her training in the Delsarte system which taught that every movement of the body conveyed a deeper significance. In 1906 she said of her background, "Delsarte . . . is, in spite of all . . . the best foundation of all truly expressive dancing."⁵⁷ The Delsarte system helped St. Denis connect the disparate gestures from the photographs into a smooth routine. Photographs of St. Denis in her Indian-inspired dances reveal her careful attention to hand gestures. For instance, in a photograph of *Radha* [Fig. 3.32], St. Denis

⁵⁶ Kendall, *Where She Danced*, 24.

⁵⁷ "Bringing Temple Dances from the Orient to Broadway."

stands with arms to her sides, hands extended perpendicularly with the tip of the forefinger touching the tip of the thumb to create a circle. In Ruth St. Denis's performances of dances like *Radha* and *Incense* (1906), audiences could see the use of Indian-inspired gestures, central to Manship's composition, in action.

The subject of Manship's *Dancer and Gazelles* also carries strong associations with Indian art. A common motif in Indian *ragmala* paintings, which illustrate musical ideas, is the portrayal of Todi Ragini, a young woman in a long, flowing skirt who attracts birds and gazelles to her side with her beauty and music [Fig. 3.26]. She often appears with her vina, the instrument she used to draw the beasts, and she frequently exhibits delicate hand gestures. Manship's figure, however, is not a musician but a dancer. In this substitution, Manship's sculpture becomes more closely aligned with what was becoming, thanks in part to St. Denis's relentless touring, the general public's image of India. As a solo artist and then with the Denishawn company, Ruth St. Denis tirelessly toured the United States, performing in large and small venues across the country in places as diverse as New York City, Albany, Georgia, and San Diego, California. In addition to their own tours, Denishawn toured the vaudeville circuit for decades further widening their audience. Denishawn dancer Jane Sherman believed that Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn's work "paved the way for our country's acceptance of this Hindu art form."⁵⁸

Being able to see India-inspired dances may have helped Manship as he attempted to endow his *Dancer and Gazelles* with the qualities of Eastern or exotic movement. In a 1956 interview Manship explained, "I was very much interested in movement, lightness and [sic] effectiveness of the relationship of solid masses to open spaces in the composition. . . . That is one feature which has

⁵⁸ Sherman, *The Drama of Denishawn Dance*, 134.

always fascinated me—to make figures in movement.”⁵⁹ In comparison to Manship’s piece, Jacques Lipchitz’s sculpture of the same subject, *Femme et Gazelles* (1912), seems static and rooted in Western traditions [Fig. 3.27]. His figure stands in *contrapposto* with her feet planted on the ground and her arms extended symmetrically toward the gazelles on either side. Manship, on the other hand, suggests a delicate swaying motion by balancing his figure on the balls of her feet, draping her body with undulating fabric, and giving her an S-curve posture. Ruth St. Denis, in her description of *Radha*, explained that the dance must be performed on the balls of the feet to lend it an exotic quality.⁶⁰ Manship depicts his dancer in *Dancer and Gazelles* with her body turned toward the viewer and her head in profile. He said of this arrangement, “the linear feeling and the silhouettes and the open spaces between solids always played an important part in my feeling for composition. . . . For a composition group like the dancing gazelles, . . . in which the central figure is balanced by the two gazelles, in which they play in silhouette, . . . the front view is the important view.”⁶¹ This stance, with the head in profile and body turned toward the viewer, is often used in depictions of Todi Ragini, and it is also a position that St. Denis identified with India and frequently incorporated into her dances.

The long, flowing skirt and drapery on Manship’s dancer exhibits similarities to Ruth St. Denis’s sari costumes. For *Incense*, for example, St. Denis created a costume with a beaded bodice and a flowing skirt that wrapped over one shoulder like a traditional Indian sari [Fig. 3.25]. St. Denis’s *Incense* costume resembles the attire worn by Todi Ragini in many of the *ragmala* paintings. Manship, in his sculpture, portrays his dancer nude to the waist, and rather than appearing

⁵⁹ "Paul Manship Interview, October 9-31, 1956," (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution), reel 5044, frame 1184.

⁶⁰ Shelton, *Divine Dancer*, 62.

⁶¹ "Paul Manship Interview, October 9-31, 1956," reel 5044, frame 1183.

provocative this choice bestows the figure with a sense of innocence and closeness with nature, as she seems unblemished by modern civilization. Manship also separates the skirt from the shoulder wrap, allowing him to create garments that are slightly more ambiguous in their cultural origins. The drapery may be associated with the classical toga, while the folds in the skirt resonate with archaic and Romanesque statuary or Asian art.⁶² The rippling quality of the drapery contributes to the swaying movement communicated through all aspects of the sculpture, from the prancing gazelles to the figure's posture.

Even the subject of Manship's *Dancer and Gazelles* had been performed on the stage. In 1905, before she launched her solo career, Ruth St. Denis was involved in the Progressive Stage Society's production in New York City of *Sakuntala*. Adapted from a poem written in the first-century B.C.E. by the Indian poet Kalidasa, the three-act play revolves around Sakuntala, a young woman who dwells in the forest and communes with creatures there, even raising an orphaned faun. Sakuntala falls in love with a king, is exiled from her idyllic home for becoming his lover, and after a lifetime of goodness and suffering is welcomed into paradise.⁶³ The production in New York attempted to create an Indian atmosphere with the costumes and décor. The article in the *New York Times* advertising the event explained that the Progressive Stage Society borrowed "valuable Oriental costumes of cloth of gold and costly textiles" for the actors to wear from notable people, such as Mrs. O. M. Eakins, wife of the American consul at Calcutta.⁶⁴ In addition, the production included "native Hindu music and native Hindu instruments," and according to the *Times* article,

⁶² Harry Rand, *Paul Manship* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 44.

⁶³ "India's Shakespeare," *New York Times*, Jan. 26, 1913.

⁶⁴ "To Produce Sanskrit Play," *New York Times*, June 4, 1905.

“native Hindus . . . are greatly interested and will aid the production, and some will take part.”⁶⁵

Ruth St. Denis played the role of the nymph Sanumati and danced a solo before the fourth scene of *Sakuntala* that may have been an early version of *Radha*.⁶⁶ Thus, for Manship’s contemporaries the connections between *Dancer and Gazelles* and Indian dance and drama were firmly established.

Traces of the influence of Indian art and Ruth St. Denis’s dance productions can also be found in Manship’s portrayal of *Salome* (1915) [Fig. 3.31]. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Salome became the quintessential example of exotic dance. The story of Salome, the step-daughter of Herod who danced for the head of John the Baptist, was the subject of numerous stage productions. Among the most famous was Richard Strauss’s operatic version of Oscar Wilde’s 1891 play, which featured a nine-minute *Dance of the Seven Veils* wherein Salome danced for Herod. First performed in Europe in 1905, Strauss’s *Salome* inspired imitation and outrage. Maud Allan’s *The Vision of Salome* (1906), set to music by Marcel Remy, was the first Salome dance staged as a solo performance. The twenty-minute dance, debuted in Vienna, established her career as a modern dancer. The Metropolitan Opera brought Strauss’s *Salome* to New York in 1907, but New Yorkers considered it so scandalous that it closed after one evening’s performance. However, that one performance bequeathed Salome a long life on the vaudeville stage. In August of 1908 there were four Salomes performing in New York and by October of that year there were twenty-four. Florenz Ziegfeld’s Salome, Mlle. Dazié, even opened a school to train Salome dancers that, at one point, sent 150 Salomes every month into the vaudeville circuit.⁶⁷ By the end of 1909 there was not

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Shelton, *Divine Dancer*, 50.

⁶⁷ Toni Bentley, *Sisters of Salome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 39.

a variety or vaudeville show in America that did not offer a Salome act.⁶⁸ In 1909 Strauss's *Salome* reopened at the Metropolitan Opera House's rival venue, Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera House, and was a smashing success.

Salome played a role in Ruth St. Denis's career as well. In 1907 Max Reinhardt approached St. Denis, then on her European tour, and asked her to create a Salome dance for his production of Wilde's play for Berlin's Kammerspielhaus Theater. St. Denis took exception to Wilde's *femme fatale* Salome, and instead envisioned her, as she explained, as "a young girl just beginning to be aware of her body but still enough of a child to lose herself in the fantasies of games. Her dance involves imaginative transformations into various creatures—a peacock, a butterfly—to beguile Herod's mind as well as his senses."⁶⁹ The project never came to fruition due to creative differences, and St. Denis did not perform her version of Salome until 1931.⁷⁰ During the first decade of St. Denis's career, much to her chagrin, critics called her a "rival of Maud Allan"⁷¹ and often compared her dances to various productions of Salome, the touchstone of Eastern, exotic dance. Despite her protests, many of St. Denis's Middle-Eastern dances, such as *Algiers* from *Three Ladies of the East* (1918) and *The Legend of the Peacock* (1914), were indebted to the Salome dances. Therefore, even though St. Denis did not perform her own version of Salome during the height of Salome's popularity, the public likely associated St. Denis and her Oriental dances with Salome, the quintessential figure of exotic, non-Western dance.

The Salome dance craze of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries inspired several artists to take up their brushes in pursuit of this quintessential *femme fatale*. After viewing the 1909

⁶⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁶⁹ Chris Pasles, "Reviving Ruth St. Denis' 'Salome,'" *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1979.

⁷⁰ Schlundt, *The Professional Appearances of Ruth St. Denis & Ted Shawn*, 76.

⁷¹ Shelton, *Divine Dancer*, 83.

production of Strauss's opera at Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera House, Robert Henri completed two paintings of the infamous temptress [Figs. 3.28, 3.29].⁷² Henri hired a professional dancer, known as Madame Voclezca, to pose for him. Contemporaries considered his Salomes, dressed in a revealing midriff and sheer, wide-leg pantaloons, as rather scandalous. The first version [Fig. 3.28], which depicts a haughty Salome, her chin lifted and eyes narrowed, was exhibited at the Exhibition of Independent Artists in 1910 after being rejected from the National Academy of Design's annual exhibition that same year. In this *Salome* Henri alludes to Strauss's *Dance of the Seven Veils* by depicting the dancer loosely grasping thickly painted white cloth in each hand. These veils, which cascade to the floor, represent two of the seven layers Salome sheds during her seductive dance. Henri's second version of the dancer [Fig. 3.29] was not exhibited during his lifetime. In this version, the dancer's arched back, extended arm, perpendicular hand, and eye contact with the viewer contribute to the dancer's sensuality, as does Henri's sumptuous paint application in both versions.

Paulanship's *Salome* shares similarities with both the popular Salomes of the stage and Ruth St. Denis's exotic dances. Manship's *Salome* is dated 1915, but there is evidence that at least some version of this sculpture existed two years earlier. The piece, or one very like it, appears in a 1913 photograph of Manship in his Lexington Avenue studio [Fig. 3.30].⁷³ This earlier date situates Manship's sculpture even closer to the 1907 controversy surrounding the Metropolitan Opera House's production of Strauss's *Salome* and the resulting windfall. Manship, who studied in both New York City and Philadelphia from 1905 until 1909 when he left on a scholarship to the

⁷² Tottis, *Life's Pleasures*, 34.

⁷³ John Manship, *Paul Manship* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), 49.

American Academy in Rome, surely felt the impact of the Salome frenzy. In fact, Manship was studying with Robert Henri in 1909 when the painter completed his two depictions of Madame Voclezca as Salome. In Manship's sculpture, Salome turns her head back over her right shoulder and arches her back to look down upon the head of John the Baptist on its silver platter. She bends her arms at the elbows and wrists. One historian has suggested that the angular pose of Manship's sculpture corresponds with Maud Allan's interpretation of the Salome's story [Fig. 3.32].⁷⁴ A newspaper review from 1908 described Allan's dancing as "hot, barbaric, lawless ... grotesque, sinister, repulsive; one moment she enervates, with a gliding sweetness; the next she stabs with a terrible attitude."⁷⁵ Allan used angularity—bent elbows, cocked wrists—to lend an exotic feel to her dance just as Manship communicates the exoticism and barbarism of the presented story through the dancer's ecstatic pose. Allan rose to stardom in London in the first decade of the twentieth century. The only opportunity Manship would have had to see Allan perform would have been when he traveled to London on his way to Rome in 1909. Allan's first tour to the United States took place in 1910 while Manship was studying in Rome, and she did not perform again in New York City until 1916, well after Manship's work was conceived and executed. Consequently, Manship's work may be more closely tied to the various Salomes performing in the opera and vaudeville houses of New York City and to the exoticism of Ruth St. Denis than it is to Maud Allan's *Vision of Salome*.

The revealing and sumptuous costume of Manship's dancer seems especially tied to the work of Ruth St. Denis, who was performing in New York City when Manship returned from

⁷⁴ Rather, *Archaism, Modernism, and the Art of Paul Manship*, 128.

⁷⁵ *Labour Leader*, June 26, 1908 quoted in Felix Cherniavsky, *The Salome Dancer: The Life and Times of Maud Allan* (Toronto: M & S, 1991), 165.

Rome in 1912. Allan's costume for *Salome* included a sheer ankle-length skirt with an elaborately beaded bodice and belt. America's most well-known Salome, Gertrude Hoffman, had a very similar costume, as did Henri's Madame Voclezca. Manship's *Salome*, although draped with sumptuous jewelry and carrying heavy veils, does not wear the long sheer skirt or pantaloons that had become standard fare for theatrical versions of Salome. Also, unlike the aforementioned dancers, whose jewels hung loose so as to sway freely and accentuate their movements, Manship's Salome looks as though her jewels are glued to her skin, in a manner similar to Ruth St. Denis's costume for *Radha* [Fig. 3.33]. When St. Denis first performed *Radha* she wore a beaded jacket, gold pants, and a gauze overskirt, but by 1909 she dispensed with this attire and began performing her dance in a silk body suit decorated with sewn-on jewels.⁷⁶ Ted Shawn described St. Denis's *Radha* attire: "The costume ... made from her own design ... consisted largely of chains of jewel-studded gold plaques. ... There were large ornaments for the upper and forearms as well as for the legs just above the ankle. A pointed jeweled crown with large pendant earrings made the head-dress. The body, at first sight, appeared to be entirely nude, except for the jeweled chains."⁷⁷ A photograph of St. Denis in her *Radha* costume reveals the similarities with Manship's *Salome*. Both dancers wear elaborate jewelry around their respective necklines with two strings of beads that lie over, but do not cover, the breasts and a large pendant secured atop their breastbones. Each of the dancers also wears armbands and ankle-bands. A jeweled girdle, complete with a large decorative feature placed over the pubic area, accentuates the dancers' hips. In each case, Manship's *Salome* and St. Denis's

⁷⁶ Shelton, *Divine Dancer*, 63.

⁷⁷ Shawn, *Ruth St. Denis: Pioneer & Prophet*, 32.

Radha, the artist decorates the nearly nude female body to convey a quality of exoticism, sexuality, and hedonism.

Manship's *Salome* stands as an example of the prevalence of exotic themes in the United States in the early twentieth century and of the many sources out of which this interest in exotica grew. Manship's *Salome* refers to a British play, a German opera, the *Salomes* of London and vaudeville, and Ruth St. Denis's popularization of Indian-themed dances. As seen in Manship's *Dancer and Gazelles* and *Day and Hours—Sundial*, works of art which contributed and responded to the public's interest in exotica pulled from a wide variety of source material. The exotic was a constructed aesthetic, formulated from several non-Western cultures, contemporary American performers, and the imagination.

In the creation of their exotic-flavored works, Henri, Genthe, Lachaise, Nadelman, and Manship appropriated stylistic motifs that signified exoticism to themselves and their American viewers. Their works of art were not meant to be faithful copies or exact replicas of the art of one particular culture. In fact, each work exhibits a combination of styles and cultures, including Indian, Egyptian, Japanese, Middle Eastern, and archaic Greek, that Americans at this time viewed as exotic. Furthermore, in the formulation of these works of art, which contributed and responded to the American public's passion for the exotic in the twentieth century, artists also found inspiration in the work of contemporary figures, such as dancer Ruth St. Denis, who helped popularize non-Western themes. Like the visual artists, St. Denis also formulated her choreography, costuming, and stage designs from a number of sources, including contemporary dance techniques and her own imagination. The works by these artists speak to the prevalence and popularity of exotica and the complexity of its creation in early twentieth-century America.

Josephine Baker and Paris, Primitivism, and Modernism

In the United States Ruth St. Denis's productions fed her audiences' hunger for exotic subjects and locales. In Paris, an African-American dancer and singer, Josephine Baker (1906-1975), fulfilled a similar desire [Fig. 3.34]. Whereas in America patrons preferred their exoticism in the Indian or Far-Eastern varieties, in France *l'art nègre*, a term used to describe art connected with African and West Indian peoples, was all the rage, and Baker's appearance on the Parisian stage in the late 1920s coincided with and contributed to its apex. A witness to Baker's success, the young American artist Alexander Calder (1898-1976), made five sculptures of Josephine Baker between 1926 and 1929 [Figs. 3.35, 3.37-3.40]. These works mark a critical transition in Calder's career; they are some of his first sculptures made entirely out of wire, and indicate an important artistic phase leading to the creation of his mobiles and stabiles. Years later, in 1965, Calder said of this moment, "There was also a curious guy from California, a painter of sorts ... Clay Spohn. ... When he visited my studio and saw the objects I made out of wood and wire ... he said, 'Why don't you make them completely out of wire?' I accepted this suggestion, out of which was born the first Josephine Baker and a boxing Negro in a top hat."⁷⁸ Calder's portrayal of Baker at this crucial juncture in his career underscores both the Parisian fascination with jazz and "primitivism" as well as the artist's interest in incorporating movement into his works of art.

Alexander Calder's initial interest in Josephine Baker may have originated from his attraction to celebrity. While in Paris he wrote to his parents of the famous people he met.⁷⁹ At his first solo show at the Weyhe Gallery in New York in 1928, Calder exhibited *Josephine Baker* along

⁷⁸ Alexander Calder, *Calder: An Autobiography with Pictures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 80.

⁷⁹ Joan Simon and Brigitte Leal, *Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-1933* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2008), 38.

with wire sculptures of several other well-known figures, including John D. Rockefeller, Sr., the American tennis star Helen Wills, the honky-tonk pianist Jimmy Durante, and the boxer “Panama” Al Brown. Calder’s three extended trips to France between 1926 and 1929 coincided with Baker’s rise to fame. Josephine Baker, after a short stint on Broadway, arrived in Paris in 1925 and became an overnight sensation due to her performance in *La Revue Nègre* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, where her final appearance in *La Danse Sauvage* with Joe Alex stole the show. Janet Flanner, a theater critic present at the first performance of *La Revue Nègre*, described the scene and the audience’s response:

She [Baker] made her entry entirely nude except for a pink flamingo feather between her limbs; she was being carried upside down and doing the splits on the shoulder of a black giant. Mid-stage he pauses, and with his long fingers holding her basket-wise around the waist, swung her in a slow cartwheel to the stage floor, where she stood, like his magnificent discarded burden, in an instant of complete silence. She was an unforgettable female ebony statue. A scream of salutation spread through the theater. . . . Within half an hour of the final curtain on opening night, the news and meaning of her arrival had spread by the grapevine to the cafés on the Champs-Élysées, where the witnesses of her triumph sat over their drinks excitedly repeating their report of what they had just seen. . . . So tremendous was the public acclaim . . . most of us in Paris who had seen the opening night went back for the next two or three nights as well.⁸⁰

Baker quickly developed into a recognized celebrity in Paris and could be seen modeling designer clothing at the most exclusive parties. In 1926 she starred at the Folies-Bergère in *La Folie du Jour* where she donned her famous banana skirt. All along the streets of Paris publicity posters advertised Baker’s shows. Soon Parisian shops began to sell Josephine Baker dolls, costumes, and perfumes and its salons to offer a hairdressing called Bakerfix.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Janet Flanner, *Paris Was Yesterday, 1925-1939* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), xx-xxi.

⁸¹ Karen C.C. Dalton and Henry Louis Gates, "Josephine Baker and Paul Colin: African American Dance Seen through Parisian Eyes," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 4 (Summer 1998): 916.

Calder's portrayals of Baker also signify the coming of jazz to Paris and its many implications. The Parisians' rampant interest in Baker's dancing and singing in the mid-1920s resulted partly from their exposure to African-American music and dance at the turn of the century. At the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900, John Philip Sousa's band played Scott Joplin's compositions introducing Paris to ragtime with its syncopated rhythms. Louis Mitchell and his band, The Seven Spades, brought jazz to Paris in 1917. African-American regimental bands stationed in France during and after World War I popularized this distinctive American music with their many concerts and performances. The Parisians raved about the concerts played by the Harlem Hellfighters of the 369th Regiment at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and the Tuileries Gardens in August 1918.⁸² African-American dance came to Paris around this same time. In 1902, performers at the Nouveau Cirque danced the cakewalk, a ragtime dance which became a fad in dance halls throughout Paris. Cabaret goers soon adopted other jazz dances, such as the mooch, the shimmy, and the black bottom.⁸³ Although most of these dances and musical forms originated in the United States, for the Parisians these new trends did not simply carry American connotations; they also evoked images of the people in France's West African colonies.

In 1925, when Josephine Baker arrived in Paris, France was still recovering from World War I and its devastating losses. Some scholars claim performances of African-American dance and music allowed Parisians "a degree of mirth and hedonism and voyeuristic pleasure that they had not known for some time."⁸⁴ Edward Said proposed in *Orientalism* that Western peoples use Oriental cultures to "help to define Europe (or the West) as its [the Orient's] contrasting image, idea,

⁸² Ibid., 907.

⁸³ Carole Sweeney, *From Fetish to Subject: Race, Modernism, and Primitivism, 1919-1935* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 30.

⁸⁴ Dalton and Gates, "Josephine Baker and Paul Colin," 906.

personality, experience.”⁸⁵ Said’s ideas, later applied by postcolonial theorists to the West’s relation to all non-Western cultures, could pertain to France’s situation in the 1920s. Feeling vulnerable after the devastation of the war, the French attempted to redefine themselves and their culture, and in doing so became increasingly interested in non-Western cultures, feeling perhaps that through contact with what they believed they were not they might better understand what they were. Thus, *l’art nègre* captivated audiences because of its unfamiliar and exotic qualities and because it allowed the French to better understand themselves and their place in the post-WWI world. In this environment, *l’art nègre* came to signify not only the art and artifacts of African peoples of both the continent and the diaspora, but it also encompassed the cultural creativity of other non-Western groups of people, as well as any art that imitated, referenced, or evoked associations with African, West Indian, or other non-Western works of art.⁸⁶ Baker’s dancing, which combined elements associated with several cultural backgrounds and offered Parisians an escape from daily life in the bawdy music halls, was the very essence of *l’art nègre*.

Baker’s performances represent the very complex and contradictory nature of *l’art nègre*. Because of her race, Baker, although a native of St. Louis who had never been to Africa or the West Indies, stood in for the African or West Indian native—the primitive—in the Parisian mind. Her dance steps did not recreate the rituals or dances of any native group or tribe and her costuming was equally inauthentic. Baker’s most famous costume, the banana-skirt she donned for *La Folie du Jour*, was made from the fruit of Central and South America, not Africa. The producers of Baker’s shows combined her gyrating dance steps with flesh-baring costumes in order to cater to the

⁸⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

⁸⁶ Sweeney, *From Fetish to Subject*, 30.

Parisians' notion that tribal peoples were wild, passionate, and sensual. Baker's roles in *La Folie du Jour*, written and produced by Louis Lemarchand, reveal *l'art nègre's* implicit incongruities. For instance, in one scene Baker wore feathers around her neck and a short skirt of silk fringe that resembled a grass skirt. In this costume, which conjures images of Polynesian dancers, Baker performed the Charleston, the newest dance craze from the United States. The concept of *l'art nègre* was not limited to one particular tribe or continent, nor was it even necessarily devoid of modern components. Baker and jazz music and dancing came to signify two seemingly contradicting notions: primitivism and modernity. The primitive elements of Baker's performances assured audience members of their own culture's progress, while simultaneously Baker served as a bearer of modern culture bringing the newest, hippest dance craze, the Charleston, to Paris.

For artists, Baker's dual roles as primitive and modern were hardly at odds. In the early years of the twentieth century, European composers, such as Claude Debussy with his piece "Golliwog's Cakewalk" (1906), began to experiment with ragtime and jazz in their musical compositions. Many musicians and critics believed that jazz and ragtime contained elements which could rejuvenate tired European musical models.⁸⁷ Additionally, visual artists in Paris, led by Matisse and Picasso, embraced African sculpture and incorporated lessons learned from its stylization into their revolutionary modern pieces, and their art also helped bring African art to the forefront of Parisian culture. Although initially many critics disparaged these artists' African influences, throughout the following decades, elements of *l'art nègre* became more and more culturally acceptable and eventually strongly influenced mainstream designs.

⁸⁷ Dalton and Gates, "Josephine Baker and Paul Colin," 907.

Unsurprisingly, when Baker hit the Parisian scene in the 1920s she quickly became a favorite of many artists. Fernand Léger encouraged the director of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, André Daven, to hire the cast of *La Revue Nègre* and strongly supported Baker during her early career.⁸⁸ Baker also served as a model for artists who sought to incorporate “primitive” influences into their modernist pieces. European artists such as Kees van Dongen, Foujita, Henri Laurens, and Le Corbusier all drew, painted, or photographed Josephine Baker. And, although no painting or drawing of Baker is known to exist by him today, Baker recalled posing for Picasso many times.⁸⁹ Gertrude Stein wrote a cubist poem titled “Among Negroes” about Baker,⁹⁰ and Alice B. Toklas even invented a Baker-inspired dessert called Custard Josephine Baker with bananas as the main ingredient.⁹¹

Alexander Calder’s images of Josephine Baker express the dancer’s dual appeal to artists, as a modern and a primitive. In his sculptures of celebrities, Calder often accentuates his subject’s most notable features, creating a caricature. In his portrait of Jimmy Durante, for example, Calder highlights the pianist’s bulbous nose and bushy eyebrows [Fig. 3.36]. In his sculptures of Josephine Baker, Calder accentuates the dancer’s racial characteristics, which allowed her to assume a number of “primitive” personae. Although Baker had rather refined features—big almond-shaped eyes, a straight nose, and thin lips—Calder’s third version of the performer [Fig. 3.38] clearly demonstrates how the artist typically depicted Baker with what were considered distinctly African-American features—wide set eyes, large, flat nose, and protruding ears with her mouth open wide

⁸⁸ Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and the Image* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 130.

⁸⁹ Bryan Hammond and Patrick O'Connor, *Josephine Baker* (London: Cape, 1988), 52.

⁹⁰ Gertrude Stein, *Useful Knowledge* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1988), 60-62.

⁹¹ Alice Babette Toklas, *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960), 127.

as if in song. Additionally, Calder suggests Josephine Baker's hair with a row of tiny loops lining her skull that is perhaps more representative of a cropped Afro than of Baker's sleek 1920s hair style. Despite the incongruities between Calder's portrayals and Baker's actual appearance, the rather stereotypical depiction more accurately represents Baker than one might initially assume. Baker built her entire celebrity and stage career on her ability to represent racial stereotypes. On Broadway she performed in blackface as the comic and dull-witted clown. In Paris, she took on the role of the stereotypical primitive savage; her explicitly sensual movements and near nudity played to the Parisian audience's notions of the oversexed native. Along with Baker's African-American features, Calder emphasizes the "primitive" elements of Baker's dances. In *Josephine Baker I-IV*, Calder accentuates the dancer's sexuality by portraying her breasts and stomach with tightly spiraled wire. He also adorns his figures with wire jewelry, placing bracelets on both arms, anklets on both legs, and hanging large, hoop earrings from the dancer's ears. In many dances, as in her "banana dance," Baker adorned her nearly nude body with heavy necklaces, multiple armbands, anklets, and dangling earrings, all of which reminded the Parisians of tribal peoples.

Calder also responded to Baker's ability to take on a variety of "primitive" roles with *Aztec Josephine Baker* (c. 1929), his fifth and final version of the dancer [Fig. 3.40]. In this portrayal, Calder depicts the dancer with generalized facial features that would not be considered stereotypically African-American. He also abandons the spiraling wire stomach of his other versions, though he keeps the spiral breasts, and he fails to adorn his figure with wire jewelry. In this final version, it seems the body itself, without the African-American facial features or jewelry as indicators, conjures primitive associations. The title, which references the pre-Columbian Native

Americans of Mexico, indicates that these primitive associations need not be limited to Africa or the West Indies.

Although Calder emphasized the so-called “primitive” qualities associated with Josephine Baker’s career, he used a very modern form to portray the figure. *Josephine Baker* [Fig. 3.35] and *Struttin’ His Stuff*, a sculpture of the boxer “Panama” Al Brown, were the first figures Calder created entirely out of wire. With his wire sculptures, Calder introduced a new, industrial, and very modern material as a viable medium, and he also created a new form of sculptural aesthetic. Using simple tools to form his pieces, he did not disguise the material in any way.⁹² Essentially, he bent and twisted the wire in order to “draw” in space, and, thus, he had to greatly simplify his figures. Calder describes Baker’s arms and legs by single, thin wires, and her hands and feet as mere outlines in wire. Calder said of his drawing style, “I seem to have a knack for doing it with a single line,”⁹³ and his linear style of drawing translates to beyond the page with these first two wire sculptures. Because of the similarities to line drawings, Calder’s wire sculptures express the sense of spontaneity often espoused by modern artists.

Additionally, Calder’s use of Josephine Baker as a model allowed him to experiment with an idea that would become one of the motivating factors in his artistic development: the incorporation of movement into the traditionally static sculptural medium. Calder’s interest in creating moving pieces did not originate with his sculptures of Baker. During his years in Paris, Calder invented a number of toys with moving parts, which he sold to commercial toy manufacturers. He also built an elaborate miniature circus, with figures made from wire, wood,

⁹² "Oral History Interview with Alexander Calder, October 26, 1971," (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution), <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/oralhistory/calder71.htm>.

⁹³ Calder, *Calder: An Autobiography with Pictures*, 61.

and cloth, and he invited his friends to come watch his circus perform. With the creation of the first *Josephine Baker*, Calder conclusively combined his toy making and his art. Calder's friend, art critic James Johnson Sweeney, wrote of the toys, circus figures and wire sculptures: "Here every movement of a waddling duck, an oriental dancer, or a trotting horse is translated into a mechanical movement which is strictly a simplification without any loss of the natural vitality, or a translation of movement into a suggestive linear vibrancy of wire."⁹⁴ In his toys, circus figures, and wire sculptures the movement in the piece, which Calder mimics or implies despite the simplicity of form, is of primary importance.

In Calder's multiple *Josephine Baker* wire sculptures one can trace the convergence of sculptural art with the movement found in Calder's toys and circus figures. Calder secured his first sculpture of Baker to a wood base. The only parts of the sculpture with the potential to move are the bracelets and anklets that hang loose on the figure's arms and legs. Calder did attempt to suggest the dancer's famous gyrations which the French dance critic André Levinson described thus: "There seemed to emanate from her violently shuddering body, her bold dislocations, her springing movements, a gushing stream of rhythm."⁹⁵ The Parisians used the term *danse de ventre* or "belly dance" to describe Baker's style.⁹⁶ Calder indicates the dancer's "springing" shimmying and shaking of her breasts and stomach with a clever pun: the spring-like spiraling wires that connote rapid movement even when still.

In his subsequent sculptures of Baker, Calder dispensed with the wooden base and suspended the sculptures from the ceiling. With this reversal of the traditional sculptural pedestal,

⁹⁴ James Johnson Sweeney, "Alexander Calder . . . Work and Play," *Art in America* 44, no. 4 (Winter 1956/1957): 9.

⁹⁵ Phyllis Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in Her Time* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 31.

⁹⁶ Hammond and O'Connor, *Josephine Baker*, 52.

Calder allowed his *Josephine Bakers* literally to move. The entire figure quivers and shimmers in the breeze. With his *Josephine Bakers*, Calder essentially created prototypes of his later mobiles. In the second, third, and fourth versions of *Josephine Baker*, Calder conveys Baker's movements both figuratively, with the spiral stomach and breasts, and literally, by the free suspension of the figures [Figs. 3.37, 3.38, 3.39]. A still from a 1929 film shoot [Fig. 3.41] shows Calder dangling the *Josephine Baker* (c. 1928) now held by the Centre Pompidou from a wire. Calder appears to manipulate the sculpture like a toy marionette. Thus, the *Josephine Bakers* represent the confluence of Calder's toy designs and his artistic endeavors.

Calder created his final depiction of the dancer, *Aztec Josephine Baker* (c. 1929) [Fig. 3.40], with the most mobile parts. Although in this version he dispensed with one of the signifiers of movement, the spiral stomach, the articulated joints allow the figure to move even more freely than her sisters. *Aztec Josephine Baker's* spiral, wire breasts dangle and sway from the figure's shoulders; her hands and feet move independently of her arms and legs; and Calder used pivoting joints to attach her neck, head, and torso. In his depictions of Josephine Baker, from the first figure mounted on a wood base to the final version, Calder progressively moved toward a figure that could move freely.

Calder's sculptures of Josephine Baker represent a critical transitional period for the artist. With his *Josephine Bakers* Calder experimented with creating works of art out of metal wire and with incorporating movement into his sculpture, both of which became hallmarks of the artist's mature style. Baker represented the Parisians' obsession with *l'art nègre*; through her dance style and physical appearance she epitomized for Parisians the exotic "primitive." Baker's popularity and her

uninhibited dance style, which stressed the mobility of her varying body parts, helped Calder make the transition from stationary to mobile sculpture.

Conclusion

St. Denis and Baker responded and contributed to the growing trend for the exotic or primitive in Western culture. St. Denis translated the dances of India and the Far East for her insatiably curious audiences, and Baker became the face of *l'art nègre* in Paris. Both dancers helped to popularize the desire for the exotic by introducing, through their performances and tours, Oriental and *l'art nègre* dancing to a wide range of social classes. In their performances, they presented a whole other world for their audiences—one far removed from Western norms. However, in many ways, that world was far removed from its supposed Indian and African origins as well. John Martin, America's first major dance critic, called Ruth St. Denis's work an "Indiantesque Never-never land" and went on to explain, "Miss St. Denis's India is an India of fantasy. She created her first cycle before she had been in India and with the underlying purpose of presenting not authentic Indian dance, but a personal vision of the Indian approach to art and life."⁹⁷ Nonetheless, and perhaps partially because of this disconnect, St. Denis and Baker influenced visual artists who also felt drawn to non-Western sources of inspiration. In St. Denis and Baker, visual artists could see their non-Western influences, however inauthentic, in action. Artists, such as Robert Henri and Arnold Genthe, expressed an interest in the celebrity of the dancer and the perpetuation of dance as an art form. Other artists, such as Gaston Lachaise, Elie Nadelman, and Paul Manship, used Ruth St. Denis as a resource in their attempts to incorporate non-Western

⁹⁷ John Martin, "Ruth St. Denis Turns the Calendar Back," *New York Times*, April 24, 1933.

sources and portray exotic dancers. Alexander Calder found with his portrayals of a dancer, for whom movement is her creative expression, a new medium and a new direction for his art. In every case, whether dancer or artist, the exotic creation resulted from a combination of sources—including, most especially, the artists' own imagination. These art works and dances, created by American men and women with very little direct exposure to Indian, African, or Far Eastern cultures, testify to the complexity, inauthenticity, and fabricated aspects of exotica in the early twentieth century.

Chapter 4:

The Production of a Dance: H. Lyman Sayen and the Ballets Russes

In 1909 the Ballets Russes, founded by impresario Sergei Diaghilev (1872-1929), opened for its first season in Paris. Over the course of the next two decades, Diaghilev gathered together some of the most innovative dancers, choreographers, composers, and theater designers in Europe. Vaslav Nijinsky, Anna Pavlova, Michel Fokine, and George Balanchine all danced for a time in Diaghilev's company. Nijinsky, Fokine, and Balanchine also became renowned choreographers with pieces such as *Rite of Spring* and *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* choreographed by Nijinsky, *The Firebird* and *Petrouchka* choreographed by Fokine, and *Apollo* choreographed by Balanchine. Their choreography challenged the accepted standards of ballet. The musical scores, by composers such as Igor Stravinsky, Claude Debussy, Erik Satie, and Sergei Prokofiev, to which Diaghilev's Ballets Russes performed, are counted among the first compositions to experiment with atonality and irregular rhythmical structures. Léon Bakst and Natalia Goncharova are among the well-known designers who worked for the Ballets Russes, and Diaghilev also invited modern artists to design sets and costumes for his ballets. Between 1917 and 1921, Picasso, André Derain, Matisse, and Robert and Sonia Delaunay all contributed theatrical designs and costumes to Diaghilev's productions. Throughout its existence, the company was an effective purveyor and popularizer of twentieth-century modernism.

American artists working abroad in Paris had ample opportunity to attend the performances of this ground-breaking ballet company, and in 1916, Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes toured the United States, performing in sixteen cities including New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Philadelphia.¹ American artists Stanton Macdonald-Wright, Morgan Russell, and H. Lyman Sayen, who witnessed the company's performances firsthand, were particularly inspired by Diaghilev's insistence that every element of his productions—the choreography, music, costumes, and sets—help convey the emotional power of his ballets. The synchronists, Macdonald-Wright and Russell, felt the influence of Diaghilev's melding of music and drama. In *The Thundershower* (1917-1918), Philadelphia modernist H. Lyman Sayen draws upon Diaghilev's determination that all the elements of a ballet production, including dance, music, and theatrical design, are integral to its meaning. The influence of the Ballets Russes continued to impress artists long after the pinnacle of the company's popularity. A photograph of Nijinsky, who had retired in 1919, inspired Franz Kline's repeated portrayals of the dancer in his seminal role as the title character in the ballet *Petrouchka* (1911). In his abstract painting of Nijinsky, Kline, who never saw Nijinsky dance, conveys the revolutionary choreography of this leader among Russian dancers.

The Ballets Russes's Choreography and the Visual Arts

For artists interested in movement and portraying motion, the Ballets Russes's choreography provided distinctive and ground-breaking examples. Vaslav Nijinsky, one of the Ballets Russes's most inventive choreographers, was also one of its most famous performers. Nijinsky's *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* and *Rite of Spring* employed angular movements and inventive

¹ Nesta Macdonald, *Diaghilev Observed by Critics in England and the United States, 1911-1929* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1975), 136.

body positions. In their attempts to portray the Ballets Russes's unique choreography, American artists H. Lyman Sayen and Franz Kline turned to the unconventional artistic styles of cubism and abstract expressionism in search of the means to convey the ballet's progressive quality of movement.

In 1906 H. Lyman Sayen (1875-1918) and his wife, Jeanette Hope Sayen, traveled from their home in Philadelphia to France in order to report on French fashions and create posters for Rodman Wanamaker's New York and Philadelphia department stores.² While in Paris, Sayen, who had studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, recognized that a new era in art had begun, and that he could be a part of it. His wife recalled, "He felt the old painting was wonderful, but a new approach to art must be born to fit the New World."³ In 1907, while most other Americans in Paris were studying at conservative art schools like the Academy Julian, Sayen enrolled in Matisse's art class. Of his teacher he said, "Matisse has never broken away [from nature] entirely, but in order to get his color and form relations, he distorts them to give the fullness of the expression of his emotion."⁴ Impressed by Matisse's brilliant and revolutionary use of color, Sayen began his own experimentations with intense color. His studies with Matisse drew the attention of Leo and Gertrude Stein who invited Lyman and Jeanette to take part in their Saturday evening salons. There they became better acquainted with the ideas of modernist artists, writers, critics, and collectors. Sayen, always interested in innovation, was very accepting of the new ideas he encountered at the Steins. Alice B. Toklas recalled, "Oh! Gertrude [Stein] had a very strong feeling

² Adelyn D. Breeskin, *H. Lyman Sayen* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1970), 14.

³ Jeanette Hope Sayen's memoir "Blossoms of Liberty," 25 in "H. Lyman Sayen Papers, 1895-1973," (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution), folder 17.

⁴ Eva Nagel Wolf, "Confessions of a Cubist," *The Philadelphia Press Magazine*, January 23, 1916 in *ibid.*, folder 11.

for Saÿen. She believed in him. . . . He was very, very shrewd. He knew everything that was going on and why.”⁵

In 1914 the onset of the First World War forced Saÿen, his wife, and their new baby to leave Paris and return to the United States. Back in Philadelphia, after a harrowing trip out of France,⁶ Saÿen quit his work with Wanamaker’s to focus on his art. He continued to use striking colors, painting a series of fauvist landscapes, which included works like *Décor Slav* (1915) and *Abstract Landscape* (1915-1916). At this time he declared, “To me color, or rather color-form, is the most essential quality in painting. . . . Individual expression is the only way we have of producing art and he who beholds the world of art simply assists in its creation.”⁷ American critics were struck by Saÿen’s brilliant reds, golds, and greens, writing in their reviews things like “the work of Mr. Saÿen is a riotous and, on the face of it, irresponsible slashing of color,” and “Mr. Saÿen has tried to make the color and form and massing in his picture result in a beauty which is quite a different matter from the beauty of the scene as it actually exists.”⁸ Until his unexpected death in 1918 at the age of forty-three Saÿen was a stalwart advocate for modern art, organizing exhibitions and giving lectures on modernist aesthetics. He claimed modern art “is the making of reality, not the representation of it,” and he believed that the United States could play a significant role in the development of

⁵ Alice B. Toklas, in a conversation with Adelyn D. Breeskin, Paris, November 1966, recorded in Breeskin, *H. Lyman Saÿen*, 10.

⁶ Jeanette Hope Saÿen records in her memoir that the family caught the last train from Paris. It was stopped outside a tunnel near Rouen for hours because of rumors that the Germans had mined the tunnel. Finally they reached the port where the ship had been held waiting for the train and managed to get on the last ship to the United States.

⁷ Wolf in “H. Lyman Saÿen Papers, 1895-1973,” folder 11.

⁸ “Latest Development of Futurist Art Shows,” *Pennsylvania Ledger*, November 17, 1914 in *ibid.*

modernism in the visual arts.⁹ Saÿen quickly became one of the leading proponents of modern art in Philadelphia.

H. Lyman Saÿen's last works, *Daughter in a Rocker* (1917) and *The Thundershower* (1917-1918), represent a new stylistic step for the Philadelphia modernist [Figs. 4.1 and 4.2]. In *Daughter in a Rocker* and *The Thundershower*, Saÿen breaks away from his Matisse-inspired fauvist style and uses cubism to help convey a sense of movement. This he does partly by portraying his figures in the multiple perspectives typical of analytic cubism. In *Daughter in a Rocker*, Saÿen presents the head of the child as a combination of a profile and three-quarter view. The child's head recalls the fragmentation of the analytic cubism of Picasso and Braque, but it seems more indicative of salon cubist Jean Metzinger's presentation of simultaneous perspectives in works like *Le Goûter* (1911).¹⁰ Saÿen may have known this work because Metzinger's painting was originally shown at the Salon d'Automne in 1911¹¹ where Saÿen also had works on display. Although multiple perspectives are not as prominent in *The Thundershower* as they are in *Daughter in a Rocker*, Saÿen does depict the foreground dancer's right leg and body in profile and her left leg, bent at the knee, from the front. The figures' positions may represent the child and the dancer as seen from multiple perspectives. However, both paintings involve a subject wherein movement is inherent—a rocking chair is built to sway back and forth and dance is an art form conveyed over time through movement. Therefore, it seems likely that the daughter's fragmented face and the dancer's contorted, yet graceful figure represent both shifting perspective and the movement of the rocker or the dance.

⁹ H. Lyman Saÿen, "The United States and Modern Art," an address given at the Philadelphia Sketch Club, November 1914 in *ibid.*, folder 9.

¹⁰ Incidentally, the Metzinger work was acquired by the Chicago collector Arthur Jerome Eddy in 1914; it then became part of Louise and Walter Arensberg's collection and was given to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1950.

¹¹ David Cottington, *Cubism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 52.

Saÿen had a fairly deep knowledge of cubism which helped him to incorporate the style into his own works of art and employ it for his own ends. While living in Paris, Saÿen became acquainted with Picasso and Braque through his interactions with the Steins. Jeanette recalled that she and her husband often saw Picasso at Gertrude Stein's Saturday night salons.¹² Saÿen was also in Paris when the salon cubists made their shocking debut at the Salon des Indépendants in April of 1911. Furthermore, from 1909 until 1913, Saÿen displayed his paintings at the Salon d'Automne, where he shared exhibition space with works like Metzinger's *Nude* in 1910 and the "Maison Cubiste" in 1912. Despite these frequent encounters with cubism while in France, it seems to have taken Saÿen some time to digest cubist innovations. Upon his return to the United States in 1914, he expressed admiration for both the work of his former teacher, Matisse, and the work of Picasso. At a speech delivered at the Philadelphia Sketch Club in 1914 entitled, "The United States and Modern Art," Saÿen declared, "Modern Art . . . has revealed to us men of great power. Picasso and Matisse will, I believe, exert a powerful influence for a long time on painting and sculpture."¹³ Furthermore, through his friendships with Morton Schamberg, Charles Demuth, and Charles Sheeler—American artists with roots in the Philadelphia area—Saÿen kept abreast of the New York art scene and the events at Alfred Stieglitz's 291 gallery.¹⁴ In 1916, Saÿen and Schamberg organized an exhibition entitled "Philadelphia's First Exhibition of Advanced Modern Art," which featured works by Matisse, Picasso, Duchamp, Metzinger, and Brancusi.¹⁵

¹² Jeanette Hope Saÿen, 26 in "H. Lyman Saÿen Papers, 1895-1973," folder 17.

¹³ Saÿen, "The United States and Modern Art" in *ibid.*, folder 9.

¹⁴ Breeskin, *H. Lyman Saÿen*, 21.

¹⁵ "Philadelphia's First Exhibition of Advanced Modern Art," May 17-June 15, 1916, McClees Galleries in "H. Lyman Saÿen Papers, 1895-1973," folder 19.

Sajen's attempts to use cubism to depict movement in *Daughter in a Rocker* and *The Thundershower* may have been influenced by his knowledge of the paintings of the salon cubists. Although early twentieth century depictions of motion are often associated with the Italian futurists of whom, according to Adelyn Breeskin, Sajen had a very limited knowledge, the salon cubists also attempted to represent movement. In *The Wedding* (1910-1911), Fernand Léger portrays the procession of the bride and groom through the streets of the small town of Argentan, and Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), which also depicts motion, was one of the most influential and most ridiculed works in the New York Armory Show of 1913. Sajen identifies Duchamp's painting by name in a 1914 letter to Miss Margareta Archambault, a leader of the art community in Philadelphia, wherein he exhibits his first hand knowledge of cubism: "[Cubism] was seized upon in theory by some of [Picasso's] followers who carried it much further than Picasso saw fit. This is the present cubist crowd of painters in Paris of the *Nude Descending a Staircase* variety."¹⁶ Sajen, though still in France when the Armory Show exposed the general public to modern art, could have seen Duchamp's work in October 1912 when it was displayed at the Salon de la Section d'Or. Furthermore, Sajen's return to the United States in 1914 allowed him to feel the lasting effects the Armory Show wrought upon the American art scene.

While both Léger and Duchamp simulate movement through the repetition of forms, Sajen tracks the motion of his figures through shapes and colors. Despite the incorporation of multiple perspectives in his first cubist works, Sajen never had a true analytic cubist phase. Instead, he began his cubist experiments by combining the traits of analytic cubism with the traits of synthetic cubism. Sajen composes *Daughter in a Rocker* and *The Thundershower* with a patchwork of shapes and

¹⁶ Sajen, Letter to Miss Margareta Archambault, November 24, 1914 in *ibid.*, folder 9.

colors that endow these works with a collage-like quality. Similar to his use of cubist simultaneity, Saÿen uses the collage-like elements in *Daughter in a Rocker* and *The Thunderhower* to help integrate an element of movement into his paintings. Circular patterns surround and embrace the child in *Daughter in a Rocker*. Through the curved arcs, Saÿen leads the viewers' eyes from the girl's face to her cubistically depicted hand and back again, which effectively recreates the lulling, rocking motion of the chair. In *The Thunderhower* the graceful curves and angular corners of the thick, dark lines convey the ability of the human body to move in a variety of ways.

With the amalgamation of wavy lines, checkerboards, stippling, and the blending of these patterns with elements of analytic cubism Saÿen's works recall the paintings of his more famous contemporary Max Weber. In Weber's *Chinese Restaurant*, for example, the artist combines collage-like elements and analytic cubism in order to convey the chaos that assaults a patron the moment that he enters the restaurant from the darkened street [Fig. 4.3]. Weber and Saÿen also shared an interest in the Ballets Russes. Weber completed his tribute to the ground-breaking company [Fig. 4.4] in 1916, the year after he painted *Chinese Restaurant*. His encounter with Diaghilev's ballet likely occurred during the company's first tour of the United States when they performed at the Century Theater in January of 1916 and at the Metropolitan Opera in April of that same year.¹⁷ In his painting, now in the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Weber conveys the energy on the stage through an array of bright colors, angular forms, and overlapping planes. Described by a group of circles and triangles, Weber's dancers are almost completely abstracted with the merest suggestion of a tutu, legs, and hair. The multiple planes of Weber's cubo-futurist style help to convince the viewer

¹⁷ Lisa Mintz Messinger, "American Art: The Edith and Milton Lowenthal Collection," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 54, no. 1 (Summer 1996): 39.

that the dancers' choreography is not representative of the epitome of the classical style. He, like Saÿen, was clearly interested in conveying the atmosphere of the entire production in his *Russian Ballet*. His dancers occupy a small section of a stage that is brimming with color and shape. Two overlapping triangular forms, with their peaks near the top left corner of the painting, signify spotlights, illuminating the theater's decorative scrolls and the cubistically rendered dancers below. The green triangular shape originating near the center and top of the canvas represents a third spotlight. These spotlights pierce the darkness of the theater, indicated through the regularly spaced areas of black paint. In the upper right an arc represents the stage's proscenium. Rippling lines of red, white, and light blue near the bottom right of the painting may be a visual representation of the invisible sound waves created by the music to which the dancers perform. The alternating shapes and bright, jewel-like colors convey the dynamism and spectacle of the production. Weber, a Russian immigrant, loved music and dance and was a very good singer.¹⁸ This vivid painting is a tribute to the arts of his homeland melded with his interest in the styles of the Parisian avant-garde.

Weber and Saÿen were fellow students of Matisse in Paris in 1907 and 1908.¹⁹ Whether or not the two stayed in contact after Weber returned to the United States in 1909 and Saÿen followed in 1914 is uncertain, but it seems likely that Saÿen would have been interested in the work of his more successful colleague. In 1915, Weber exhibited his paintings at the Ehrich and Montross galleries in New York, and he became one of the directors of the Society of Independent Artists in 1917, where Saÿen displayed *The Thunderstorm* in 1918. Saÿen, who periodically traveled to New York City, may have had the opportunity to see Weber's works in one of these forums.

¹⁸ Lloyd Goodrich, *Max Weber* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1949), 32.

¹⁹ Abraham A. Davidson, *Early American Modernist Painting, 1910-1935* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 234.

Both artists combine decorative patterns and analytic cubism in order to convey a singular impression—perhaps something they learned from Matisse, who taught his students to translate their emotions, feelings, and reactions to the world into color and design.

Saïen had ample opportunity to see the Ballets Russes perform. The Saïens lived in Paris during some of the company's most successful years, and Jeanette recalled that their work in fashion often "took [them] to the best plays and the Opera and the Opera Comique."²⁰ The couple could have seen the Ballets Russes again when the company toured to Philadelphia in 1916. Cubism helped Saïen convey the experimental movement he would have seen at the Ballets Russes's performances. Diaghilev's choreographers experimented with modifying the most defining elements of ballet technique, alignment, turnout, and extension, with positions that could be regarded as their opposites. In *Rite of Spring*, for example, the ballet dancers danced pigeon-toed and their movements were stiff, sharp, and angular. The dancers of the Ballets Russes also experimented with contracting their bodies at the midsection [Fig. 4.5], rather than exclusively using their figures to create long, fluid lines. Traditional ballet attempts to defy gravity with movements that make the dancer appear weightless. A contracted position, on the other hand, allows a dancer to succumb to the force of gravity and does not hide his or her efforts. Saïen portrays the right hand dancer in *The Thunderstorm* in the contracted position commonly used by the Ballets Russes. She is bent towards the earth, her arms perhaps skimming the floor. Additionally, the multiple perspectives, which result in the anatomically impossible positions of her legs, seem to be Saïen's attempt at portraying the strangeness of the Ballets Russes's choreography,

²⁰ Jeanette Hope Saïen, 32 in "H. Lyman Saïen Papers, 1895-1973," folder 17.

which at times appeared awkward to an audience familiar with the choreography of traditional ballet.

Saÿen's title, *The Thundershower*, may subtly refer to the Ballets Russes's *Rite of Spring* (1913) [Fig. 4.6]. At the conclusion of the ballet, set in archaic Russia, a young girl dances to her death. Her sacrifice brings spring to the wintery land. In the final act, the tribe dances in a circle around the ballerina playing the role of the sacrificial virgin. As in the ballet, Saÿen's painting contains a male figure who circles a central female dancer. Saÿen's work may refer to springtime as rain and thundershowers are associated with the season and the renewal of the earth. At the 1913 *Rite of Spring* premiere at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Nijinsky's ground-breaking choreography and Stravinsky's unconventional music nearly caused a riot in the French capital. Saÿen, who was in Paris in 1913, would have heard talk, at the very least, of *Rite of Spring's* outrageous debut at the Steins' salons and read about it in the Parisian theater reviews. Although Saÿen's painting is not an exact representation of *Rite of Spring*, the ballet seems to have made an impression on Saÿen that accounts for either a conscious or unconscious reference to the famous production in *The Thundershower*.

In 1917, to convey the movement and the choreography of the Ballets Russes in *The Thundershower*, H. Lyman Saÿen used cubism. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Franz Kline's interest in dance and the Ballets Russes helped him make the transition from a figurative style to that of gestural abstraction. Kline, who was nine when Nijinsky retired in 1919 and nineteen when Diaghilev died in 1929, missed the Ballets Russes's prime, during Diaghilev's years as impresario. After Diaghilev's death the Ballets Russes splintered into several companies. In 1932 René Blum and Colonel Wassily de Basil formed the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo, with Balanchine as ballet

master and Leonide Massine as major choreographer, both of whom had worked for Diaghilev. Balanchine moved to the United States in 1933 and in 1936 Blum and de Basil split company. Blum formed The Ballets de Monte Carlo with Michel Fokine serving as ballet master and choreographer, and de Basil formed Colonel de Basil's Ballet Russe. De Basil's group installed itself in London with the new name Covent Garden Russian Ballet and Blum's company toured the United States extensively until it disbanded in 1962. Blum and de Basil's companies did perform in London while Kline was there studying from 1935 to 1938, but lack of funds prevented the artist from attending their performances. Kline had more opportunities to attend dance performances after his return to the United States in 1938, and it is possible that he saw Blum's touring group. Kline, however, was most fascinated with the early years of the Ballets Russes, and he gained most of his knowledge about Diaghilev's company from his study of photographs and literature.

Kline was especially interested in Vaslav Nijinsky's portrayal of Petrouchka, the title character in one of the Ballets Russes's most famous productions. According to Kline's biographer, Harry Gaugh, Kline sketched and painted Nijinsky as Petrouchka at least six times between 1936 and 1949, and then, in 1950, Nijinsky became one of the first subjects Kline depicted in the style of gestural abstraction.²¹ *Petrouchka* (1911), composed by Igor Stravinsky and choreographed by Michel Fokine, tells the story of a puppet clown who, although made of straw and sawdust, comes to life and develops emotions. Petrouchka is the epitome of the sad clown who, despite the happy expression painted upon his face, feels lonely, rejected, and miserable.

Kline based several of his images of Nijinsky as Petrouchka on a 1911 photograph of the dancer by Elliot and Fry [Fig. 4.8]. The photograph captures Nijinsky in his Petrouchka costume

²¹ Harry F. Gaugh, *The Vital Gesture, Franz Kline* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 67.

and makeup with his shoulders hunched and his head tilted to his right. In his paintings, Kline includes the details of Nijinsky's costume and makeup, including the tasseled hat with the zigzag band, the large, ruffled collar, and the white and black face paint. However, Kline also adds a few details of his own. For instance, in his 1948 version of the dancer as Petrouchka, Kline's brushstrokes loosen considerably as the painting extends to the borders of the canvas, leaving Nijinsky's face rather precisely constructed in comparison to the clown's flouncy ruffles and floppy hat [Fig. 4.7]. Kline also paints Nijinsky's eyes a vibrant red, which, along with the tighter brushstrokes used for the face, draws the viewer's attention to the clown's facial features that are more sunken and skull-like than in the photograph. These changes exaggerate Petrouchka's feelings of despair; the red eyes appear bloodshot from weeping, while the sunken face suggests that the clown wastes away as a result of his sorrows. Kline's images of Petrouchka focus on the very human pain felt by the supposedly happy clown.

Kline's 1947 pastel entitled *Nijinsky* [Fig. 4.9] could potentially be a study for the larger c. 1948 oil painting. In the pastel, Kline does not meticulously replicate the Elliot and Fry image. He combines geometric planes and muted colors and greatly simplifies the figure's facial features. This Nijinsky, like the more detailed painting, tilts his head to the left. For Kline, Nijinsky's tilted head not only conveyed the melancholy of the clown, but also stood metonymically for the dancer himself. In 1949, while visiting his friend David Orr, Kline claimed he could paint Nijinsky blindfolded. He closed his eyes and drew the figure on a piece of cardboard. Orr reported that, although the rough drawing contained very little detail, it clearly displayed the tilted head Kline

painted again and again in his many versions of Nijinsky.²² Kline also uses a tilted head to convey a melancholic emotion in images that do not portray Petrouchka. In a pencil on paper self-portrait (1941-1942) Kline depicts himself with a titled head, which, along with his hooded eyes, slightly downturned mouth, and drooping mustache, helps to create a subdued feeling.

Kline felt drawn to Nijinsky as Petrouchka for several reasons. Even before he first saw the Elliot and Fry photograph of Nijinsky, Kline frequently drew and painted clowns and puppets, including *Punchinello* (1930-1931) and *Buffoon* (1935-1937) [Fig. 4.10]. *Still Life with Puppet* (c. 1940) includes a top-hatted puppet with his head, like Petrouchka's, tilted to one side [Fig. 4.11]. Although dressed in different attire than Nijinsky and painted with a warmer palette, the composition of Kline's *Red Clown* (1947) [Fig. 4.12] contains similarities to Kline's 1948 *Nijinsky as Petrouchka*. Like Nijinsky, the Red Clown tilts his head to the left, has a close-mouthed smile, and a dot of makeup on his nose. The Red Clown's hollow eyes make his face more masklike and sinister than Nijinsky's. While Nijinsky appears painfully sad, the Red Clown, with his gray face, hollow eyes, and lolling head, exudes a deathly pallor.

Kline identified with the sad clown, who displays an outwardly cheerful expression while suffering on the inside. He told his wife Elizabeth, "I have always felt that I am like a clown and that my life might work out like a tragedy, a clown's tragedy."²³ Indeed, Kline did experience a number of truly tragic events in his life. His father committed suicide when Kline was still a young boy. Kline's wife, Elizabeth Parsons, spent much of their married life in and out of mental institutions. And, at the age of 50, Kline developed heart disease that took his life a year later in 1962. Perhaps

²² Ibid., 71.

²³ Ibid., 68.

Kline felt that he, like Petrouchka, had to present a cheery disposition. A photograph of Kline taken in his studio with *Nijinsky as Petrouchka* on the easel in front of him seems to support this idea [Fig. 4.13]. In the photograph Kline's position mirrors Nijinsky's pose. Both artist and figure gaze out of the corners of their eyes, raise their eyebrows slightly, furrow their brows, and, of course, tilt their heads. The photograph seems to capture an intimate moment where artist and dancer reveal something of the private figure behind the public persona.

Nijinsky also reminded Kline of his wife, Elizabeth, whom he met in 1937 while studying art in London. A former ballet dancer, Elizabeth was working as an artist's model when the two first became acquainted. Born in 1907, Elizabeth, the daughter of Colonel W. Forrester Parsons, studied ballet from 1921 until 1928 with Enrico Cecchetti, Marie Rambert, and Ninette de Valois consecutively.²⁴ She danced as a professional ballerina under the stage name Elizabeth Vincent. One of Elizabeth's teachers, Enrico Cecchetti, was a former ballet master for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.²⁵ Under Elizabeth's tutelage, Kline became interested in ballet and the work of Vaslav Nijinsky. While studying in London he first saw the Elliot and Fry photograph that he used for his paintings of Nijinsky. According to Kline's biographer, Elizabeth also gave her husband Nijinsky's published diary and the *Life of Nijinsky*, written by Vaslav's wife Romola, which included a copy of the Elliot and Fry photograph.²⁶

In addition to Nijinsky's connections with Elizabeth, London, and Kline's first encounters with ballet, Elizabeth and Nijinsky both battled depression and insanity. Kline's drawing, *Dancer at Islip* (1949) [Fig. 4.14], references Elizabeth's dancing and her fragile mental health. In 1946

²⁴ Ibid., 176.

²⁵ Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, David Anfam, and Dore Ashton, *Franz Kline, 1910-1962* (Milan: Skira, 2004), 380.

²⁶ Gaugh, *The Vital Gesture*, 67.

Elizabeth entered Central Islip State Hospital for six months. She reentered the institution in February of 1948 and remained there for the next twelve years. Kline's black and white *Dancer at Islip* conveys an impression of heavy bars over an abstracted human figure. The figure, painted on the verso, with its grey, ghostlike quality as if fading into nonexistence behind the solid cage, likely references Elizabeth's deteriorating mental faculties. Elizabeth's illness was difficult for Kline, and he made many images relating to her poor health and the absence she left in his life. Kline visited Elizabeth periodically over the twelve years she remained at Islip. The couple never divorced, although Kline began a relationship with Elisabeth Ross Zagbaum in the 1950s, and he and Elizabeth Parsons never again lived together.²⁷

Dancing occupied a central role in Kline's life and work, so much so that some of his initial forays into abstraction featured images of dancers. According to Kline, *The Dancer* (1946) was his first abstract painting [Fig. 4.15].²⁸ In this cubist-inspired piece, Kline builds *The Dancer* from a series of geometric planes. In Kline's work, as in the cubist paintings of Picasso and Braque, elements of the subject are identifiable; the viewer can clearly discern the shape of a foot, sheathed in a pink ballet slipper, flush with the bottom of the canvas. From this foot the calf, knee, and thigh of the dancer ascend into the abstract planes of the image. *The Dancer* represents a step between Kline's figurative style and his signature black-and-white action paintings. Dance, which communicates abstractly through gesture and movement, apparently guided Kline in his transition to abstract painting.

²⁷ Christov-Bakargiev, Anfam, and Ashton, *Franz Kline*, 306.

²⁸ Gaugh, *The Vital Gesture*, 81.

Nijinsky, who played such a dominant role in Kline's figurative style, inspired one of his first black and white paintings. Kline said of this development, "Well, [my previous work] was mostly figure drawing. I kept simplifying the forms in black and white and breaking down the structure into essential elements. Eventually it came to this."²⁹ *Nijinsky* (1950) [Fig. 4.16] does not portray the melancholic facial expression of the dancer in the role of Petrouchka; rather, it attempts to convey Nijinsky's dancing style as Kline imagined it. The choreography of Nijinsky's *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, inspired by Mallarmé's poem and Debussy's music, demanded that the dancers perform in profile to simulate the figures on a Greek vase. Nijinsky choreographed *Rite of Spring* to fit the primitive subject matter; the dancers performed with flexed feet and bent elbows and knees, instead of pointed toes and extended arms and legs. Of Kline's painting, Japanese artist Sabro Hasegawa wrote, "Nijinsky was one of the great dancers of the century. Was his legendary dance not like this painting? Strange movements, stiff and supple, harsh contradiction and strong harmony, projected into the atmosphere with something tragic—powerful."³⁰ Hasegawa refers to the innovations of the Ballets Russes as he describes both Kline's painting and Nijinsky's choreography.

Accounts of Nijinsky's dancing remark upon his charismatic stage presence and the height and lightness of his famously powerful leaps. In order to portray the dancer's power, Kline uses strong strokes of black paint. *Nijinsky* contains no hint of the dancer's face or figure; instead its diagonal lines capture the energy of the dancer in action. In the words of one historian, "Kline captures the sense of forces rushing through space in defiance of gravity. . . . Nijinsky, fabulous

²⁹ Ivan C. Karp, "The Unweary Mr. Franz Kline: Artist without Metaphysics," *The Village Voice*, March 9, 1956.

³⁰ Sabro Hasegawa, "The Beauty of Black and White," *Bokubi*, no. 12/4 (1951): n.p.

Nijinsky, an abstracted flying leap, caught by the painter in midair, a tangle of springing curves gathered in a horizontal rush that bounds out of the canvas on the right like the dancer sailing through the window in *Le Spectre de la Rose*.³¹ In 1950, the same year that Kline created this painting, Nijinsky died in London, the city where Kline became acquainted with the work of the fabulous dancer. Nijinsky's death may have inspired Kline's new take on the dancer. Rather than portraying the sad Petrouchka, Kline's 1950 *Nijinsky* celebrates the dancer's remarkable abilities and original choreography. However, the rough edges and tangled lines still convey something of Nijinsky's tragic life. Diaghilev, Nijinsky's former lover, scorned by Nijinsky's marriage to Romola Pulszky, dismissed his star dancer from the Ballets Russes in 1913. During the First World War, while living in Romola's native Hungary, Russian-born Nijinsky was held as a prisoner of war and only freed by Diaghilev's intervention which contributed to the continued friction between impresario and dancer and resulted in a second dismissal from the ballet company. In the years that followed, Vaslav and Romola failed in all their attempts to create their own ballet troupe. Nijinsky gave his final performance in 1919 and spent the remainder of his life battling his mental and emotional illnesses. While celebrating his prowess, Kline's *Nijinsky* also mourns the dancer's passing. Kline said of his abstract works, "I think that there is a kind of loneliness in a lot of them which I don't think about as the fact that I'm lonely and therefore I paint lonely pictures but I like kind of lonely things anyhow ... the impending forms of something [sic], do maybe have a brooding quality ... that I'm aware of ... as I paint."³² Like a true romantic, Kline was drawn to figures who suffered for their art.

³¹ April Kingsley, *The Turning Point: The Abstract Expressionists and the Transformation of American Art* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 276.

³² David Sylvester, "Franz Kline 1910-1962: An Interview with David Sylvester," *Living Arts* 1 (Spring 1963): 8.

Kline's first one-man show took place in 1950 from October 16 through November 4 at the Egan Gallery in New York City. At this show Kline displayed *Nijinsky* (1950) as well as another black and white painting inspired by dance, *Giselle* (1950) [Fig. 4.17]. In 1950 the Sadler Wells Ballet, on its first tour of the United States, performed *Giselle* at the Metropolitan Opera House. In the ballet, Giselle's tragic death occurs due to the madness she suffers once she learns her lover's true identity. Kline's biographer suggests the cross-like forms in the painting refer to the graveyard setting in the ballet's second act.³³ The artist commented that at their essence his works "are painting experiences."³⁴ *Giselle* continues the connection Kline drew, due to his personal experience, between dancers and insanity that can be seen in his many versions of *Nijinsky* and his *Dancer at Islip*. In comparison to *Nijinsky* of 1950, Kline creates *Giselle* with delicate strokes that help convey the light, graceful steps of the ballerina.

With images like *Nijinsky* and *Giselle*, Kline made his transition to action painting—finished paintings that reveal the vigorous processes of their creation. It seems more than coincidental that for his first paintings meant to reveal the gestures necessary for their formation, Kline turned to dancers. In his attempts to depict the kinetics of the dance, movement became the subject of Kline's paintings. Dancers continued to inspire Kline throughout his career. He designed backdrops for dance concerts and invited dancers to practice in his studio.³⁵ In 1961, the year before he died, Kline painted *Merce C* [Fig. 4.18], inspired by the modern dancer Merce Cunningham whom he knew personally from their time at Black Mountain College. Like his paintings of *Nijinsky* and *Giselle*, the movement in *Merce C* results from the sweeping brushstrokes and forceful diagonals.

³³ Gaugh, *The Vital Gesture*, 95.

³⁴ Katharine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 144-45.

³⁵ Christov-Bakargiev, Anfam, and Ashton, *Franz Kline*, 386.

The critic Dore Ashton asserts that Kline's paintings "reflect his inner rhythms" and that "anyone who has seen Kline dance will recognize immediately how profoundly instinctual his 'thrust' is. He dances as he paints, beating out an idiosyncratic rhythm over sustained periods. . . ." ³⁶ Kline's action paintings communicate to audiences in physical terms. One historian even used the image of a dancer on a stage to explain how Kline's paintings affect viewers. "Kline discovers and at the same time conquers space. You receive the shock of recognition that you are in space, within the space he makes. . . . The room around you is active and alive, and your body in it is part of its animation. As a dancer's pose and movement transform and activate the whole stage, Kline's space becomes a physical event and is filled with events." ³⁷ Thus dance may be described as an inherent part of the entire arc of Kline's works, from his inspiration, to the dance-like gestures that spread paint on canvas, and, finally, to the viewer's response to these images.

Both Saÿen and Kline created images of dance as they were transitioning from one style to another, Saÿen in his progression from fauvism to cubism and Kline from a figurative style to cubism and finally to gestural abstraction. The innovative choreography of the Ballets Russes, as seen by Saÿen and imagined by Kline, appears to have partly inspired the artists to adopt their new aesthetic. As they struggled to portray the company's progressive dance techniques both artists gravitated toward modernist styles that would help illustrate the angularity and awkwardness of the choreography in ballets like *Rite of Spring* and *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* and the power and dynamism of Nijinsky's leaps in performances such as *Le Spectre de la Rose*.

³⁶ Ibid., 28.

³⁷ Georgine Oeri, "Notes on Franz Kline," *Quadrum*, no. 12 (1961): 94.

Music, The Ballets Russes, and the Visual Arts

In addition to encouraging innovative choreography in his ballet productions, Diaghilev also transformed the role of music in theater. The impresario felt so strongly about the potential of musical expression that his first career choice was to be a composer. After turning his attention to dance production, he insisted that choreography should express the meaning of the accompanying music, rather than simply showing off the agility of the dancer.³⁸ Thus, the relationship between the dance and the music in Diaghilev's ballets ceased to be based primarily on narrative and instead relied on the expressive similarities between the two mediums. Diaghilev's ideals challenged the traditional practices of balletic composition. *Petrouchka*, for instance, was the first ballet for which the score preceded, and hence controlled, the choreography. Additionally, Diaghilev was as untraditional in his choice of music as he was in all other aspects of theatrical production. His dances moved to the rhythms of some of the most revolutionary composers of the day, such as Igor Stravinsky, Claude Debussy, Sergei Prokofiev, and Erik Satie.

Visual artists responded not only to the pioneering dance techniques of the Ballets Russes, but also to the music that inspired that choreography. Artists had attempted to portray the effects of music visually throughout the nineteenth century.³⁹ And, in the twentieth century, synaesthesia—the idea that the sensory experiences of one sense can be translated to another—was an essential component of early artistic modernism. One common form of synaesthesia was the conflation of color and sound. Synchrony, founded by the American artists Morgan Russell and Stanton Macdonald-Wright, adapted a system invented by their teacher Percyval Tudor-Hart that involved

³⁸ Nancy Van Norman Baer, *The Art of Enchantment: Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, 1909-1929* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1988), 5.

³⁹ Kerry Brougher and Olivia Mattis, *Visual Music: Synaesthesia in Art and Music since 1900* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 15.

mathematically relating musical notes to the color spectrum. Tudor-Hart believed the mind perceived color and sound in a similar fashion. He wrote, "in both cases [those of color and sound] our knowledge of their mode of perception, and the exact relation between subjective reaction and objective stimulus, is as yet largely a matter of conjecture."⁴⁰ Tudor-Hart created a "color keyboard" based on his ideas that the relationships between different colors are similar to the regularly increasing or decreasing frequencies of the vibrations that distinguish one pitch from another. Furthermore, Tudor-Hart equated pitch in music with luminosity, tone with hue, and intensity in music with saturation or purity, and he believed the lower notes of the scale conveyed "melancholy and sadness" whereas the higher notes conveyed "brightness and cheerfulness."⁴¹ He equated the lower tones with blues and violets and the higher tones with yellow-orange, yellow, and yellow-green because he believed these colors produced emotions similar to their corresponding musical notes.

Russell and Macdonald-Wright used Tudor-Hart's color keyboard to create painted scales. When composing a work of art, such as Russell's *Synchromy in Orange: To Form* (1913-1914), the artist selected a color to be the basis of his color scale, just as the tonic note serves as the foundation for a musical scale [Fig. 4.19]. The colors chosen to complete the painting corresponded to the intervals between the seven remaining notes in the musical scale. Tudor-Hart wrote, "It will be found that the intervals between the colours are pleasant to the eye in exactly the same degree as the sounds are to the ear."⁴² This system was meant not only to replicate the mathematical order of music but also its emotional characteristics. As Macdonald-Wright said in an interview in 1913,

⁴⁰ Percyval Tudor-Hart, "The Analogy of Sound and Color," *Cambridge Magazine* 7, no. 21 (March 2, 1918): 480.

⁴¹ Will South, *Color, Myth, and Music: Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Synchromism* (Raleigh: North Carolina Museum of Art, 2001), 32.

⁴² Tudor-Hart, "The Analogy of Sound and Color," 481.

“Synchronism is an attempt to make of painting an emotional art, such as music.”⁴³ In his *Treatise on Color*, published in 1924, Stanton Macdonald-Wright explained the emotional significance of colors and the color scales. He wrote, “for a picture painted in the key of yellow, the painters should choose a subject that is radiant, joyous, lively and sunny and of no great solidity. . . . For the blue scale, a subject soft and even sentimental; also one that has spirituality and will call up thoughts of the past. . . . Red-orange is violent, and as a scale requires a subject in which there are violent contrast, harsh shocks and frenzied action.”⁴⁴ In their color combinations, the synchronists hoped to produce works of art that could convey, in means similar to that of musical compositions, the vast range of human emotions.

Music is an art form that exists in time. The movement up and down the scale gives a musical piece its structure. The emotional resonance in a song results from the relationship between the notes as the piece develops over time. Russell and Macdonald-Wright attempted to incorporate the movement of a musical piece into their synchronist pieces. The two artists used color to create the qualities of space and movement, in addition to musical and emotional sensations. They did so by juxtaposing colors that seem to advance toward the viewer, such as yellows and reds, with colors that seem to recede, such as blues and green, thus establishing in their paintings a rhythmical quality. Russell explained the significance of rhythm for a synchronist: “These “color rhythms” somehow infuse a painting with the notion of time: they create the illusion that the picture develops, like a piece of music, within a span of time; while the old painting existed

⁴³ Anthony Anderson, "Art and Artists," *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1913.

⁴⁴ Reprinted in Stanton Macdonald-Wright, *The Art of Stanton Macdonald-Wright* (Washington D.C.: Published for the National Collection of Fine Arts by the Smithsonian Press, 1967), 91-92.

strictly in space, its every expression grasped by the spectator simultaneously and at a glance.”⁴⁵

Thus, the viewer should not experience a synchromist work in a single moment, but over a period of time, moving in and out of the composition in a manner analogous to a listener’s response to the varied durations of notes and rests in a musical piece. In conjunction with their interest in the depiction of movement Russell and Macdonald-Wright began designing a kinetic light machine in 1912. Although limited resources forced the artists to use candles for illumination, Russell’s color studies on transparent paper could be mounted in the light projector to create color in motion.⁴⁶ The artists’ ideal was to build a machine which would communicate the visual, rhythmic, and musical elements of their paintings.⁴⁷

Perhaps unsurprisingly considering Russell’s and Macdonald-Wright’s attempts to depict movement and the close relationship between dance and music, the two artists also drew inspiration from the innovations of their dancer contemporaries. In 1910 Russell created an abstract sketch of Isadora Duncan [Fig. 4.20], who was then dancing in Paris. In the image he distills Duncan’s fluid, lyrical movements to simple curves. Historian Marianne Martin postulates that Duncan’s dancing, in conjunction with his thorough study of Michelangelo’s sculptures, helped Russell develop his system of curves and voids which he termed “principle rhythm.” She states that in the spiraling forms of Russell’s paintings “the body and arm gestures of Michelangelo’s sculptures and Duncan’s dances remained clearly legible and act as fulcrum for the picture’s self-perpetuating

⁴⁵ Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell, *Les Synchromistes S. Macdonald-Wright et Morgan Russell* (Paris: Berheim-Jeune & Cie., 1913) reprinted in Gail Levin, *Synchromism and American Color Abstraction, 1910-1925* (New York: G. Braziller, 1978), 130.

⁴⁶ Brougher and Mattis, *Visual Music*, 46.

⁴⁷ Gregory Galligan and Nancy Johnson, "Morgan Russell Archives and Collection: A Comprehensive Guide," (Montclair, NJ: Montclair Art Museum, 2006), 23.

vitality.”⁴⁸ Russell and Macdonald-Wright acknowledged the influence of moving bodies in the catalogue for their 1913 exhibition at the Bernheim-Jeune gallery in Paris:

Having always been more profoundly moved by pure rhythmic form (as in music) than by associative processes (such as poetry called up), [we] cast aside as nugatory all natural representation in [our] art. However, [we] still adhered to the fundamental laws of composition (placements and displacements of mass as in the human body in movement), and created [our] pictures by means of color-form, which, by its organization in three dimensions, resulted in rhythm. ⁴⁹

The artists also expressed interest in the work of the Ballets Russes. Morgan Russell fervently admired Igor Stravinsky’s compositions, including the pieces he composed for the Ballets Russes, such as *The Firebird*, *Petrouchka*, and *The Rite of Spring*. Russell saw similarities between his work and Stravinsky’s. In his personal notebook Russell wrote that Stravinsky’s innovations in terms of tonality and rhythm “dispensed with subject for the sake of working with pure elements of sonority.” Russell believed that his own experimentations with abstraction in the visual arts “paralleled” Stravinsky’s in the performing arts. ⁵⁰ In 1916 Russell wrote a letter to Stravinsky expressing his great esteem for the renowned composer. In his reply, Stravinsky states that he was touched by Russell’s letter. That same year Russell drew a portrait of the composer as a tribute to his work. ⁵¹

⁴⁸ Marianne Martin, "Modern Art and Dance: An Introduction," in *Art and Dance: Images of the Modern Dialogue, 1890-1980* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1982), 30.

⁴⁹ Reprinted in Richard F. Brown, *A Retrospective Showing of the Work of Stanton Macdonald-Wright* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum, 1956), 9.

⁵⁰ Galligan and Johnson, "Morgan Russell Archives and Collection," 104.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Russell's admiration for the Ballets Russes and avant-garde dancers culminated in 1924 with a collaboration between himself and Blaise Cendrars for the Ballet Suedois.⁵² Founded in 1920, this progressive dance company formed by Swedish art patron Rolf de Mare and developed under the direction of dancer and choreographer Jean Börlin was similar to the Ballets Russes in its use of innovative dance steps and elaborate theatrical designs. Like the Ballets Russes, the Ballet Suedois sought to integrate dance, poetry, music, and theatrical design into one cohesive whole. Russell wished to create a ballet based on one of his large figurative paintings, but Cendrars persuaded Russell to construct his ballet from a synchromist work instead because he felt this style to be a better representation of the ballet company's integrative ideals.⁵³ Russell contacted Macdonald-Wright in California to inform him of the project and ask him to also participate. Unfortunately, the Ballet Suedois folded in December of 1924 before Russell and Macdonald-Wright could solidify their plans for a ballet.⁵⁴ Russell's interest in the dance company and his desire to be involved in the production of a ballet illustrate the artist's interests in the combined effects of dance, music, movement, and color.

After many years experimenting with various styles, Macdonald-Wright returned to the principles of synchromism in the 1950s. In an interview, Jean Macdonald-Wright, Stanton's wife, explained, "His return to Synchromism in 1954 meant a return to a strict observance of the color scales."⁵⁵ The artist's later synchromist works exhibit crisper outlines and more definite geometric shapes than those he produced in the 1910s. During this period Macdonald-Wright created *Danse*

⁵² For Russell/Cendrars correspondence see "Morgan Russell Papers, 1891-1977," (Washington, D.C.: Owned by the Montclair Art Museum; microfilmed by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution), reel 4524, frames 271-343.

⁵³ Galligan and Johnson, "Morgan Russell Archives and Collection," 73.

⁵⁴ Marilyn S. Kushner, *Morgan Russell* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1990), 147.

⁵⁵ South, *Color, Myth, and Music*, 152.

Russe (1958) [Fig. 4.21]. *Danse Russe* may be a somewhat nostalgic work for the artist who, in reviving his earlier style, recalls the vibrant Parisian culture, of which the Ballets Russes was a part, at the time of synchromism's inception. As in earlier synchromist paintings, Macdonald-Wright creates a sense of rhythmic movement in *Danse Russe* by layering various shapes and colors. The layering gives the painting a sense of depth or the impression of colors floating or moving through time and space. Macdonald-Wright said of this later period of synchromism:

At first I saw my new painting with a certain astonishment, for I had made the "great circle," coming back after 35 years to an art that was, superficially, not unlike the canvases of my youth. However, at the bottom there was a great difference. I had achieved an *interior* reality. . . . This is a sense of reality which cannot be seen but which is evident by feeling, and I am certain that this hidden reality was what I felt to be lacking in my younger days.⁵⁶

Thus, in his late synchromist works Macdonald-Wright felt he achieved that higher level of emotional resonance for which he strove in his earlier works as well. Macdonald-Wright believed that communication of personal emotions could only be accomplished if he "immersed himself completely in an idea and allowed his inner feelings to dictate to his brush."⁵⁷ Thus, *Danse Russe* is likely an abstract impression of the work of the Ballets Russes meant to communicate Macdonald-Wright's memories of the Russian ballet company and their elaborate, progressive, and sometimes shocking performances.

H. Lyman Saÿen also attempted to incorporate the musical aspects of a dance production into *The Thundershower* [Fig. 4.1]. While in living in Paris, Saÿen became acquainted with the art of the synchromists, whose works were displayed in the same arenas as his own.⁵⁸ During his years in France, he too attempted to translate music into colors and forms. Jeanette recalled, "Lyman was

⁵⁶ Brown, *A Retrospective Showing of the Work of Stanton Macdonald-Wright*, 9.

⁵⁷ South, *Color, Myth, and Music*, 157.

⁵⁸ Saÿen, Letter to Miss Archambault in "H. Lyman Saÿen Papers, 1895-1973," folder 9.

not so much interested in what had been done as he was interested in what had not been done. He felt while the old things were fine, new and important things would come as the old things died away. . . . He was interested in color—in music—in all sorts of things.”⁵⁹ While in France, Saÿen developed an interest in scientific studies of color. He admired the theories of French chemist Michel-Eugène Chevreul that attempted to explain systematically the perception of color, and he also experimented with mixing his own pigments using a paint mill.⁶⁰ Influenced by the work of his teacher, Henri Matisse, the canvases Saÿen painted in France exhibit vivid colors. He continued his experimentation with color after his return to Philadelphia. In one such project, commissioned by his friend Carl Newman, Saÿen decorated the ceiling of Newman’s studio in Bethayres, Pennsylvania, with an immense chromatic spectrum based on the color theories he studied in Paris.⁶¹

In *The Thundershower* the large, green crescent-like shapes that surround the dancers correspond to both Saÿen’s knowledge of the color theories of the synchronists and his interest in Diaghilev’s use of music. The circular form of the green pigment is similar to the spiral compositions of Morgan Russell’s and Stanton Macdonald-Wright’s 1913 and 1914 compositions. The synchronists’ desire to portray music—a medium that exists over time—corresponds to Saÿen’s aspirations to portray dance—a medium that exists in space over time. Generally, dance phrases are built upon musical rhythms, and the emotions conveyed by dancers are heightened in intensity and accessibility by their correlation to the expressive qualities of music. In *The Thundershower* Saÿen generally presents unmodulated planes of bold color; in contrast, the green

⁵⁹ Jeanette Hope Saÿen, 35 in *ibid.*, folder 17.

⁶⁰ Levin, *Synchronism and American Color Abstraction*, 44.

⁶¹ Davidson, *Early American Modernist Painting*, 237.

form to the left of the upright dancer and below the bent dancer shifts between opaqueness and transparency. A comparison can be drawn between the subtle variations in the pigment's shade and musical dynamics. It is as if, as the music grows louder, the depth of color increases, and, as the music fades, the color's intensity also fades. The leg of the dancing figure on the left emerges from the cloudy green revealing its nebulousness; like music, the green crescent surrounds and influences the movement of the dancer but is not physically substantive. The close proximity of the green form to the dancers also indicates the importance of music to the dance.

Macdonald-Wright wrote of the green and yellow-green color scales: "For yellow-green, a subject in which is desired freshness, youthfulness, a feeling of spring and poetry. This scale is like a spring landscape, freshly washed by rain, delicate and adolescent. For green, a subject in which calm is desired; where movement is not violent, although the forms may be rugged; where gentleness and peace pervade the atmosphere."⁶² Although Macdonald-Wright wrote this in his *Treatise on Color* in 1924, the statement seems appropriate for Saÿen's *The Thunderstorm*, which is, in a sense, a rain dance. Saÿen also firmly believed that art and color could convey emotion. He said in his lecture on modern art, "Popular sense has supposed the new type of art as representing peculiar emotions. It is more than that, it is the emotions themselves."⁶³ In *The Thunderstorm* the color green contributes to the feeling that the dancers welcome and celebrate the storm as bringing life and renewal.

For artists captivated by the power and potential of music in the first decades of the twentieth century, Diaghilev's work with the Ballets Russes served as a prime example of music's

⁶² Reprinted in Macdonald-Wright, *The Art of Stanton Macdonald-Wright*, 91.

⁶³ Saÿen, "The United States and Modern Art" in "H. Lyman Saÿen Papers, 1895-1973," folder 9.

expressive capabilities. The dance company attempted to use music and dance symbiotically to enhance the emotional aspects of both art forms. The intersections between music and dance influenced Macdonald-Wright and Russell in the formation of the tenets of synchromism. Stanton Macdonald-Wright, Morgan Russell, and H. Lyman Saÿen all sought to incorporate the emotional and rhythmical aspects of music into their works of art.

The Ballets Russes's Theatrical Designs and the Visual Arts

In addition to innovative choreography and experimental musical scores, Diaghilev insisted that the costumes and sets also help to express the narrative and emotive aspects of his ballets. The Ballets Russes held a particular fascination for many artists because of its emphasis on the visual aspects of its productions. Picasso, André Derain, Matisse, and Robert and Sonia Delaunay designed stage sets and costumes for several Ballets Russes productions between 1917 and 1921. Saÿen, due to his encounters with the Ballets Russes, also developed an intense interest in theatrical design which merged with his artistic pursuits and consequently permeates his final painting, *The Thundershower*.

The art of the Ballets Russes first came to Philadelphia in 1915 when the thirteenth annual Philadelphia Water Color Club Exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts displayed a large selection of the costumes and stage designs Léon Bakst (1866-1924) created for Diaghilev's company.⁶⁴ The Bakst exhibition must have held a significant attraction for Saÿen. The ballet company originally used many of Bakst's costume and set designs while Saÿen was living in Paris. Additionally, the Saÿens had a background in fashion, having spent their years in Paris reporting on

⁶⁴ Sylvia Yount and Elizabeth Johns, *To Be Modern: American Encounters with Cézanne and Company* (Philadelphia: Museum of American Art of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1996), 13.

French fashions for their employer, Rodman Wanamaker. After their return to the United States, while Lyman Sajen focused exclusively on his painting, his wife, Jeanette, continued to produce fashion illustrations.⁶⁵ For, the Sajens, Bakst's art would have represented innovation in theater, art, and fashion and served as a reminder of their years abroad.

Bakst is best known for the sensuous, exotic designs of his oriental ballets, such as *Cléopâtre* (1909) and *Schéhérazade* (1910) [Fig. 4.22]. Contemporary viewers recognized *Schéhérazade* as Bakst's masterpiece. Stravinsky declared it "the perfect achievement of the Russian ballet from the scenic point of view. Costumes, sets, the curtain were colourful in an indescribable way."⁶⁶ Bakst used bold and rich colors, brilliant greens, deep reds, and fiery golds, to convey the sense of elegance and decadence appropriate for the tale of a harem's seduction of a band of African slaves that ends in a bloodbath when the harem master discovers the betrayal. Instead of using a painted backdrop, Bakst decorated the stage with soft draperies, cushions, and carpets whose lushness enhanced the sensuality of the production. He also created equally lavish and erotic costumes for the ballet's characters. Historian Charles Spencer considers *Schéhérazade* the Ballets Russes's first original creation.⁶⁷ With this production, the company established its visual style, largely thanks to the designs of Léon Bakst.

In 1915, the year of the Bakst exhibition in Philadelphia, Sajen responded to the designer's work by painting his own *Scheherazade* [Fig. 4.23].⁶⁸ Sajen's painting displays bold colors similar to those used by Bakst in his set design. Sajen arranges his colors in sweeping, rounded forms juxtaposed with angular geometric patterns reminiscent of the rise and fall of the curtains and

⁶⁵ Breeskin, *H. Lyman Sajen*, 18.

⁶⁶ Igor Stravinsky, "Memories of the Russian Ballet--2: Bakst, Benois and Picasso," *The Observer*, August 31, 1958.

⁶⁷ Charles Spencer, *Leon Bakst and the Ballets Russes* (London: Academy Group, 1995), 85.

⁶⁸ Breeskin, *H. Lyman Sajen*, 56.

carpets in Bakst's work. As Bakst fills the stage with the scenery for *Schéhérazade*, Saÿen fills every inch of his painting with color and shape. Saÿen's *Décor Slav* (1915) also reflects the artist's admiration of Bakst's set designs [Fig. 4.24]. The title of this work connects it to set design as theater mock-ups are generally titled with the term *Décor*, as in Bakst's *Décor, Les Orientals* (1910) or *Décor, Salomé* (1912). Saÿen likely alludes to Diaghilev's Russian ballets by including "slav" in the painting's title, hence referencing Eastern Europe from whence the company hailed. Saÿen often used *Décor* in the titles of his paintings, including *Décor Persian* (c. 1915) and *Décor Plat* (c. 1915), illustrating his ongoing interest in the theater. All outdoor scenes with bold colors and patterning, contemporary critics commenting on the works declared them to be "frank adventures in the bizarre, mystical domain of post-impressionism, where pattern and design take on a broader and more elastic significance than the earlier classicists and romantics ever knew."⁶⁹ Critics also claimed that "if the works of former artists have been but the imitation of nature, here will be found the impression that nature makes on this particular artist."⁷⁰ *Décor Slav* represents a garden scene, created with the same rich colors of Saÿen's *Scherehezade* and Bakst's set designs. Saÿen's garden beds, trees, and bushes create a pattern of horizontal and vertical forms. The composition of these forms corresponds to the organization of a stage. The horizontal garden beds represent the stage floor with the arbor serving as a set prop. Behind the arbor, the trees and the cloudy sky act as the stage's backdrop. In these works, Saÿen's simplification of forms into geometric shapes and his attention to patterning have precedents in Bakst's work.

⁶⁹ "Fine One-Man Exhibit of Oils at the Sketch Club," *Philadelphia North American* in "H. Lyman Saÿen Papers, 1895-1973," folder 11.

⁷⁰ "Saÿen's Paintings at Sketch Club," *Philadelphia Press*, January 9, 1916 in *ibid*.

In addition to the influence from cubism, Bakst's designs may have contributed to Sajen's use of patterning and geometric forms in *Daughter in a Rocker* and *The Thunderstorm*. In both his set and costume designs, Bakst employed large expanses of patterned drapery. For the production of *Daphnis and Chloë* (1912), for example, he decorated the costumes with chevrons, triangles, checkerboard motifs, and stylized vines [Figs. 4.25, 4.26]. Sajen surrounds his dancers in *The Thunderstorm* with broad expanses of colors and patterns much like those in Bakst's designs. The black band at the top of the painting appears reminiscent of the black trim on the bottom of the *Daphnis and Chloë* costume. The checkerboard and chevron patterns used by Bakst in his costume designs also appear in *The Thunderstorm*.

Sajen places the checkerboards, chevrons, and stripes in *The Thunderstorm* upon a background of patterned wallpaper. The artist created two versions of *The Thunderstorm*. In the smaller of the two paintings, he glued actual wallpaper to the cardboard backing [Fig. 4.27].⁷¹ However, in the larger painting Sajen painted a *trompe l'oeil* version of the wallpaper with some notable changes. Sajen exhibited both of *The Thunderstorms*. He displayed the smaller work in a watercolor exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and he sent the larger version to the 1918 New York Society of Independent Artists Exhibition which opened on April 20, 1918, a few days before his death.⁷²

Sajen's use of wallpaper was a point of great confusion for his critics: "[*The Thunderstorm*] is supposed to represent the blinding and distorting effect upon vision of a sudden flash of lighting. It appears to be an interior. There are apparently glimpses of a conventional wallpaper, contorted

⁷¹ Wayne Craven, *American Art: History and Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 448.

⁷² Breeskin, *H. Lyman Sajen*, 22.

human figures, and areas of darkness.”⁷³ Saÿen’s application of wallpaper, his painted recreation of that wallpaper, and his combination of paper and paint in *The Thunderstorm* recall the *papiers collés* of Picasso and Braque, and, once again, speak to Saÿen’s impressive understanding of cubism. As he explained the style to Miss Archambault: “The term Cubism was inflicted by the layman on a group of Parisian painters who believed that the essential thing in painting was the canvas itself, and that aesthetic vision is a kind of instinct or property of mind.”⁷⁴ In the *papiers collés* Picasso and Braque toyed with the notions of reality and representation by sometimes using actual wallpaper and *faux-bois* paper in their works and sometimes recreating the look of wallpaper and wood grain with paint. For example, in *Guitar, Sheet Music and Wine Glass* (1912), Picasso used wallpaper as a “canvas” for his creation, and often the artists used wallpaper fragments to stand for another object—the *faux-bois* paper could serve as the wood of a guitar or clarinet, as in *Guitar, Sheet Music and Wine Glass*, and the wallpaper could serve as a figure’s shirt or tie, as in Picasso’s *Man with a Pipe* (1914).

Picasso and Braque began to create *papiers collés* in 1912, while Saÿen was still in Paris. Because Saÿen was frequently a guest of the Steins he may have had the opportunity to see some of Picasso and Braque’s rarely exhibited artistic experiments. Although Saÿen’s incorporation of wallpaper is not as playful or as evocative as Picasso’s, the wallpaper does serve to flatten the image. Saÿen inserts his dancers between layers of colors and patterns that seem to lie one on top of the other, in a manner similar to the way Picasso’s sheet music, drawing, and newspaper rest flush against each other and the wallpaper backdrop. Saÿen’s use of wallpaper helps to negate any sense of three-dimensionality and forces all figures and forms closer to the picture plane. In this sense,

⁷³ “Independents Make Art Safe for Democracy by Alphabetical Arrangement at Exhibition,” *New York Herald*, April 21, 1918 in “H. Lyman Saÿen Papers, 1895-1973,” folder 14.

⁷⁴ Saÿen, Letter to Miss Archambault in *ibid.*, folder 9.

Saÿen uses wallpaper patterning in a method that is similar not only to Picasso and Braque, but also to his teacher Matisse. During the years that Saÿen lived in France and studied with Matisse, Matisse often used wallpaper patterning in images like *Harmony in Red* (1908) in order to help flatten the perspective of his paintings. In comparison, the wallpaper and the geometrical forms of Saÿen's painting represent two types of flatness. The bold colors and flat patterns indicate the artist's conscious decision to avoid any representation of perspectival three-dimensionality. Additionally, although Saÿen portrays the flowers and leaves on the wallpaper in a fairly realistic manner, he sets them against a flat, white background. Generally wallpaper serves as decoration for the flat surface of the wall and does not create an illusion of three-dimensional space upon that surface. Both Saÿen's patterning and the wallpaper backing reinforce the flatness of the painted surface.

The *trompe l'oeil* wallpaper in Saÿen's final version of *The Thunderstorm* creates a striking juxtaposition between abstraction and realism, and the fine arts and the decorative arts. Saÿen's exactitude in replicating this wallpaper calls attention to the abstract qualities of the rest of his painting. The flatness of the figures and the broad, expansive swaths of color seem a little stranger against the details of petals and leaves. Saÿen's attention to the details of the wallpaper through his careful, hand-painted reconstruction calls into question the divisions between the fine arts and the decorative arts. Like many modernists, Saÿen collapses the gap between the high and low by incorporating a commercial product into his work and then carefully recreating that product by hand. Thus, in the creation of *The Thunderstorm*, Saÿen played the role of both the craftsman and the fine artist.

Saÿen's use of wallpaper patterning in *The Thunderstorm* may be related not only to his admiration of cubist collage but also to his interest in Bakst's set designs. The wallpaper's pattern

resembles the floral designs on the curtains and carpets in Bakst's set design for *Schéhérazade*. Like wallpaper, curtains and rugs decorate flat surfaces. Thus, Saïen's figures dance in elaborate scenery similar to Bakst's ostentatious theatrical designs. Furthermore, Bakst serves as a superb example of the overlapping roles of the craftsman and the fine artist, an idea Saïen references by precisely recreating wallpaper. Bakst painted his décors and costume designs knowing those designs needed to be practical to reconstruct with actual furniture and drapery for the stage, and, while living in Paris, Saïen likely saw Bakst's designs in this capacity. However, Bakst's paintings also stand on their own merits as works of art, which is how Saïen encountered them in 1915 at the Philadelphia Water Color Club Exhibition. Saïen makes one distinctive change in the *trompe l'oeil* version of his floral wallpaper that may also bear some connection to Bakst and the Ballets Russes. The actual wallpaper used in Saïen's first version of *The Thundershower* contains a sparrow amongst the flowers, and in the *trompe l'oeil* version Saïen paints a parrot in the sparrow's place, although he carefully recreates the flowers and leaves [Fig. 4.28]. Saïen's decision to substitute the parrot for the sparrow may simply reflect a desire for a more colorful bird for his colorful image. However, the addition of the exotic bird could be another tribute to Bakst, who was best known for his set and costume designs for exotic ballets like *Schéhérazade* and *Les Orientals* where a parrot would fit into the décor perfectly.

Baskt believed that the set designer, the costume designer, the dancer, the actor, and the singer were all of equal importance within a theatrical production. Therefore, he created designs which allowed for interactions between the human figures and the sets and costumes. In order to expose and amplify the body's movements with his costume designs, Baskt attached appendages such as veils, feathers, and jewelry which could extend and emphasize a dancer's physical

movements. In his design for *Cléopâtre*, for example, the scarf extends the figure's arms and the divided skirt echoes the movement of her legs [Fig. 4.29].

Similarly, in Saÿen's *The Thunderhower*, the colors and patterns that surround the figures extend and emphasize the movements of the dancers. The shape of the left figure's lifted leg repeats in the black band above. The solid blue form that surrounds the leg perhaps indicates its range of motion—where the leg has been and where it will go. The white line that splits the deep blue also follows the leg's trajectory. The blue, comma shape on the right emphasizes the graceful sweep of the female figure's dark hair and white arm. The comma form extends to the base of the figure's lower arm, creating a graceful sweeping motion across the patterns of diagonal lines and is repeated by the dancer's other arm and dark hair, creating concentric curves. Saÿen juxtaposes the smooth, graceful movements of the female dancer's arms with the sharp, jutting movement of her left leg. The two small black triangular forms at the base of the painting and the large, black triangular band surrounding the female dancer's leg emphasize her sharply bent left knee. An echo of the curve of the female dancer's body, from her straightened left leg to her curved grey back, begins with the vertical checkerboard pattern at the painting's base and extends past the male dancer's head to the curved black band at the top of the image and back down to the bent figure through the orange band. The red highlight behind the male dancer's head and the falling red rivulets also echo this expansive curve. Saÿen takes a cue from Bakst and places his dancers in an elaborate set in which the interactions between the dancers and the scenery amplify the expressive power of the piece.

Saÿen's admiration for the Ballets Russes served as the inspiration for his own attempt at theatrical production. In 1917, Saÿen and his friend and fellow Philadelphia modernist, Carl Newman, designed the sets and costumes for the production of the annual artist's masque

sponsored by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Written by William Young, the drama, *Saeculum*, which is Latin for “the spirit of the age,” involved the wanderings of the “Soul” through the “Cosmos.”⁷⁵ The conceptual plot served as an ideal forum for experimentation in lighting, costumes, and sets. Sajen and Newman created abstract paintings with chromatic colors and geometric forms in order to depict the “atmospheric realms” [Fig. 4.30].⁷⁶ Sajen, who also played the role of The Cosmos and served as the play’s director, desired that the music, sets, and costumes of the drama act as interpretative elements of the performance. These goals reflect Sajen’s personal admiration for Diaghilev’s philosophies and aesthetic. Sajen’s description of the performance reveals his understanding of Diaghilev’s artistic intentions:

The idea of the piece is expressed in terms which are to be understood emotionally, or in the spirit of pure decoration. In two prologues and two acts it will present the emotional episodes of the mental life in terms of dramatic action of the human form, color-forms, the spoken work, music and light; so arranged that these plastic elements aid each other by the law of contrast rather than harmony.⁷⁷

Saeculum gave Sajen the opportunity to combine his varied artistic interests into one grand production.

The use of color in the play, especially, corresponds to Sajen’s interests in the correlation between music and color. The script declares that “the most important idea to be expressed . . . is the emotional episodes of the mental life in terms of color” and that the music “will, obviously, be subject to same conditions as the color scheme.”⁷⁸ Near the beginning of the play, the Color Bearers, characters played by eighteen women, “are seen mixing colors, in which they steep the

⁷⁵ Yount and Johns, *To Be Modern*, 14.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Saeculum* prospectus, Archives of the Pennsylvania Academy quoted in Yount and Johns, *To Be Modern*, 14.

⁷⁸ “*Saeculum* Script” in “H. Lyman Sajen Papers, 1895-1973,” folder 15.

silken threads of human emotion.”⁷⁹ Blue represented depression and humility, green peacefulness, yellow happiness, orange gladness, red violence and action, and violet memories. Once the Color Bearers established the roles of the colors, the lighting in the play served to reveal the emotional state of The Soul. In the play’s program parenthetical notes clarify The Soul’s feelings: “[The Soul] awakens to a sense of loneliness and grief in remembrance of the departed joys and pleasures (violet lighting). He becomes remorseful and repentant (blue lighting, then green), and in his repentance he sees the way to his real existence.”⁸⁰ The progressive set design, costuming, and use of lighting in *Saeculum* corresponds with Saÿen’s interests in Bakst’s work. One reviewer even mentioned Bakst by name, saying of *Saeculum*, “youthful genius with the brush has worked its way into the theatre, practicing the new ways of Craig, Bakst, and the Germans.”⁸¹ That same critic compared the modern choreography in *Saeculum*, which he described as “leggy and angular,” to the work of the Ballets Russes. Of the entire experience one newspaper article said, “The bewildering masses of color, and myriads of lights which flashed batteries in the gallery and in the wings, together with the motion of the dancers and the effect of the cubist scenery . . . left the audience spellbound.”⁸²

Saeculum was Saÿen’s last large project. During its production he was also working on *The Thundershower*. The crossover between the two projects is evident in a comparison between Saÿen’s set and his painting [Figs. 4.30, 4.1]. A figure in Saÿen’s set design is very similar to the figure on the left of *The Thundershower*. The two men each raise one leg to step through an opaque, cloud-like form. Much like the dancers in *The Thundershower*, the god-like man in Saÿen’s set design dances in

⁷⁹ “*Saeculum* Program” in *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ “Variously Setting the Stage of the Soul,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, February 24, 1917 in *ibid.*, folder 8.

⁸² “*Saeculum*, Art Masque, is Carnival of Color,” clipping in *ibid.*

the midst of geometric abstractions. Saÿen's work on *Saeculum* stands as a lasting confirmation of his fervent interest in theatrical production and the art of the Ballets Russes.

Conclusion

Alexandre Benois, who designed the sets and costumes for the Ballets Russes's productions of *Petrouchka* and *Giselle*, wrote in *Reminiscences of the Russian Ballet*:

The ballet is one of the most consistent and complete expressions of the *gesamtkunstwerk*, the idea for which our circle would give its soul. . . . Everything followed from the common desire of several painters and musicians to see the fulfillment of the theatrical dreams which haunted them.⁸³

The Ballets Russes's contributors, under Diaghilev's guidance, made certain that every aspect of their productions enhanced the meaning of the ballet. In this sense, the Ballets Russes is a twentieth-century example of *gesamtkunstwerk*, namely a production in which all the elements involved—music, dance, acting, scenery, costumes—are unified and integral to its meaning. Because Diaghilev and his designers, composers, choreographers, and performers carefully developed the various aspects of their productions, artists responded not only to the Ballets Russes's innovative choreography but also to its use of music and theatrical design. The lure of the Ballets Russes was so strong that even years after Vaslav Nijinsky retired Franz Kline was drawn to the personality and celebrity status of this star performer and choreographer. Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell felt the influence of the company's experimentations with music. H. Lyman Saÿen, in *The Thundershower* and *Saeculum*, celebrated the integration of dance, music, and design in the Ballets Russes's productions. Each of these artists turned to the Ballets Russes for inspiration as they began to experiment with their artistic styles. With his Nijinsky pieces, Franz

⁸³ Alexandre Benois and Mary Britnieva, *Reminiscences of the Russian Ballet* (London: Putnam, 1941), 371-72.

Kline transitioned from figurative works to his black-and-white abstract expressionist style; Macdonald-Wright and Russell first felt the influence of the Ballets Russes as they developed synchromism, and the Ballets Russes aided Saïen in the creation of his first cubist pieces. For these modern artists, the Ballets Russes served as a quintessential example of avant-garde experimentations.

Chapter 5:

Dance and High Modernism: Martha Graham in Painting, Photography, and Sculpture

Martha Graham (1894-1991) is often considered the foremost modern dancer and choreographer of the twentieth century, perhaps partly because her life and career nearly spanned its entirety. Graham's reputation has risen to almost legendary status, evidence of which can be seen in the anecdotes surrounding her life. One such tale chronicles the origins of Martha Graham's dance language, said to be the result of a conversation between the five-year-old Graham and her physician father. Her father scolded her for lying by telling her that her body language had revealed her falsehood because "movement never lies."¹ According to the story, this experience taught Graham that the body's actions reveal the inner workings of the mind and can communicate some ideas more effectively than words. Consequently, she developed a dance technique that allowed her to reveal intense, inner emotions, such as grief, fear, desire, and pain.

Many artists sought to capture Graham's innovative dance style. Barbara Morgan published a book of photographs of her dances. Paul Meltsner painted the dancer at least seven times.

Scholars have identified Martha Graham as a significant influence in the development of David Smith's and Louise Nevelson's artistic styles.² These artists, who portrayed Graham in painting,

¹ Julia L. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey*, Cultural Studies of the United States (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 30.

² For information on Smith and Graham see Rebecca Spence, "Something in the Way She Moved," *ARTnews* 105, no. 2 (February 2006): 33. For information on Nevelson and Graham see Laurie Wilson, *Louise Nevelson, Iconography and Sources*, Outstanding Dissertations in the Fine Arts (New York: Garland Pub., 1981).

sculpture, and photography, admired the dancer and her work. They saw Graham as a serious artist who shared their interests in Americanism, primitivism, surrealism, and cubism, and who expressed those interests in her choreography just as they embraced them in their works of art.

Celebrating America

In the 1930s, the climate of the Depression greatly influenced Martha Graham's artistic style and choice of subject matter and that of the artists who depicted her in visual media. During this time, representations of the people, history, traditions, and the various regions of the United States contributed to the nationwide trend that sought to preserve the country's heritage, rediscover what it meant to be American, and offer solace during a period of economic crisis. The most common artistic subject matter depicted an idealized American past or present with an emphasis on the interaction between the figures and the landscape—be it industrial city or rural farmland. Curator Barbara Haskell asserts that these subjects “most effectively answered the need for continuity, self-esteem, and faith in America.”³ The national crisis of the 1930s intensified the desire to discover an American art tradition, an authentic American culture, and a common American history or, as Van Wyck Brooks termed it in his 1918 essay, a “usable past.”⁴

Martha Graham served as an appropriate subject for artists concerned with national identity because she, too, sought to convey the American spirit in her dances. She admonished the American dancer to “Know your country.” Claiming that when America's “vitality, its freshness, its exuberance, its overabundance of youth and vigor, its contrasts of plenitude and barrenness are

³ Barbara Haskell, *The American Century: Art & Culture, 1900-1950* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999), 220.

⁴Van Wyck Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," in *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the 20th Century*, ed. Patricia Hills (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 56.

made manifest in movement on the stage, we begin to see the American dance.”⁵ During the 1930s and early 1940s Graham choreographed a number of dances inspired by American history. *Frontier* (1935) portrayed a pioneer woman alone on the vast prairie, who despite loneliness, uncertainty, and fear is resolutely optimistic. The dance celebrated the potential of the pioneer, and perhaps of America herself. In *American Document* (1938) the performers recited excerpts from texts such as the Declaration of Independence, Jonathan Edwards’ sermons, and the Gettysburg Address. In regard to that dance, Graham said, “Our documents are our legends—our poignantly near history, our folk tales.”⁶ *American Provincials* (1934) and *Letter to the World* (1940) were inspired by the literature of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Emily Dickinson, respectively. The culmination of Graham’s American dances, *Appalachian Spring* (1944), once again celebrated the American pioneer and was hailed as a reaffirmation of American democratic values when it was first staged during World War II.⁷

Barbara Morgan (1900-1992) included four of Martha Graham’s American themed dances, *Frontier*, *American Provincials*, *Letter to the World*, and *American Document*, in her collection of photographs of the dancer, which in 1941 was published as a book entitled *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs*. In order to create the book, the culmination of five years of work, Morgan, a painter and photographer, worked closely with Graham, and the finished result was a true collaboration. Graham chose the dances she considered her most important, Morgan determined which moments in the dances to photograph, and together the artists selected the photographs to be

⁵ Martha Graham in *Martha Graham: The Early Years*, ed. Merle Armitage (New York: Da Capo Press, 1978), 105.

⁶ Barbara Brooks Morgan, *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 1st rev. ed. (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Morgan & Morgan, 1980), 17.

⁷ Anna Kisselgoff, "Dance View: Graham's 'Deep Song': 51 and Still Protesting," *New York Times*, October 16, 1988.

published.⁸ One quarter of the sixteen dances chosen by Graham as her most significant works express American themes and draw their inspiration from American history.

Frontier (1935), subtitled *American Perspective on the Plains*, is Graham's tribute to the experiences of the pioneer. The set, the first of many designed for Graham by the sculptor Isamu Noguchi, consisted of a small fence, constructed from two horizontal beams, placed near the center of the stage. A long rope, looped beneath the fence's bottom rung, extended upward to the left and right and into the stage wings. The rope symbolized the vastness of the wilderness and how it extends beyond the eyes' view. The dance itself consisted of bold gestures. Graham advanced toward the audience as if resolutely journeying westward. She leaped as if to celebrate the potential of her new home, and sank to the floor to embrace the soil. At times her movements seemed hesitant and unsure as if the pioneer woman was fearful of the dangers of the frontier, yet, in spite of her fears, the pioneer remained stalwart and optimistic.⁹

Morgan's photographs of *Frontier*, the first dance pictured in *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, convey the themes of the dance pictorially. The eleven-page spread begins with a photograph of Noguchi's rope stretching beyond the image's border. Below this image is a small photograph of Graham leaning on the fence [Fig. 5.1]. Morgan's layout, which depicts Graham as dwarfed by Noguchi's set, conveys the individual's insignificance compared to the vast wilderness.¹⁰ Two photographs portray the pioneer's connection with the land. One image depicts Graham on the floor, her legs spread and hands extended in front of her chest. In another image, Graham supports herself on one leg and pivots the rest of her form ninety degrees with arms and leg extended so that

⁸ Morgan, *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 13.

⁹ Ernestine Stodelle, *Deep Song: The Dance Story of Martha Graham* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1984), 96-97.

¹⁰ Jack Anderson, "Morgan's Graham: Images of Images," *Dance Chronicle* 4, no. 3 (1981): 4.

her body mirrors the horizontal qualities of the fence behind her and the land she homesteads [Fig. 5.2]. A two-page spread depicts the pioneer's anxiety and loneliness. Graham stands near the center of one page, eyes downcast, fists clenched at her sides, surrounded by darkness extending onto and filling the facing page with the exception of one sliver of light which only serves to emphasize the stage's emptiness [Fig. 5.3]. Morgan conveys the pioneer's determination in images of Graham leaping and kicking [Fig. 5.36] and in those which depict the dancer with a leg raised and an arm extended above her head. The sequence of images ends with a photograph of Graham pictured in profile leaning against the fence, facing right; her strong stance indicates that she is proud of her accomplishments.

The final dance pictured in Barbara Morgan's book is *American Document* (1938). Through music, words, and dance *American Document* presented the history of the United States from just prior to its colonization by Europeans to the present day. The dancers performed to composer Ray Green's melding of American folk tunes and original themes as an interlocutor quoted from significant American texts, such as the Declaration of Independence and Walt Whitman's poetry. Just as Graham's dance combined movement with the spoken word, Morgan's layouts for *American Document* combine text and image. To convey the central theme of each episode, Morgan chose the most salient images from the five sections of the dance and combined them with short excerpts from the narration. For example, in the "Indian Episode" Morgan photographed the dancers reaching upward and crouching on the floor [Fig. 5.4]. Below, a quote taken from a letter written by Red Jacket of the Senecas, reads, "I do not remember the flocks of pigeons in the virgin forest, before these states were ... but my blood remembers ... my heart remembers." The text combined with the image of figures reaching upward to the sky and crouching on the ground conveys the

mourning of a people who remember a pristine wilderness that no longer exists. The texts and images in the “Puritan Episode” communicate the theme of Puritan inhibition toward sexual love [Fig. 5.5]. The photograph captures Martha Graham and Erick Hawkins as partners who complement one another—he reaches up; she bends down; he is dressed in black; she is dressed in white; his body is composed of angles; she is round curves. And yet, despite this partnership, this collaboration, they do not look at one another. The text, taken from a sermon by Jonathan Edwards, reads, “A stiff-necked generation claims the land/ Claims the Lord, denying the tender creature.” The two dancers, inhibited by Puritanical restrictions toward affection, cannot rejoice in their partnership.

Two images in Morgan’s book represent *American Document’s* “Now.” On the left hand page, Morgan presents Erick Hawkins striding resolutely forward with one arm fully extended and hands and feet flexed [Fig. 5.6]. Printed below are the words, “This is one man ... this is one million men ... This man has a power. It is himself, and you. ...” On the facing page the text reads, “We are three women ... we are three million women ... We are the mothers of the hungry dead ... We are the mothers of the hungry living.”¹¹ Above the text Morgan printed a double-exposure created in the camera of three female dancers [Fig. 5.7]. The double-image multiplies the women as the text does below. The women do not touch or interact with one another; as if pleading, they reach outward with their hands extended and palms facing upward. The photographs and texts of the “Now” communicate two opposing forces in Graham’s present day. The striding figure of Erick Hawkins and the text proclaiming man’s power suggests a resolute optimism about the potential of

¹¹ Morgan, *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 138-39.

the world. The three women and their accompanying text represent the sorrows and trials of the present in 1938, which included the Great Depression and the Spanish Civil War.

The final images of Morgan's book include a photograph of three dancers leaping beneath the words "That Government of the people/ by the people/ and for the people/ shall not perish from the earth" [Fig 5.8]. This text and image is a powerful affirmative conclusion to *American Document* and *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs*. Following as they do the other episodes in *American Document*, the image and text seem to say that, despite all the mistakes of the past and trials of the present, the United States will endure and that is worth celebrating. On the facing page is the final image of the book: a photograph of Martha Graham, the choreographer and creative force behind all the dances pictured in *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, dancing [Fig. 5.9].

The placement of *Frontier* at the beginning and *American Document* at the end of Morgan's book is certainly not coincidental. Morgan did not arrange the dances chronologically; thus, the importance of the first and last images must have been carefully considered. Morgan photographed dancers at a time when many other American photographers, such as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and Margaret Bourke-White, were documenting the poverty of the depression. Morgan, a friend of Roy Emerson Stryker, the head of the Farm Security Administration's photography division in the 1930s and 1940s, stated that though she admired the work of the FSA photographers she wished to contribute to the artistic developments of the time with works of art that were more optimistic. She told curator Leonard Amico that she found that optimism in Martha Graham's dances:

I felt that in the anguish of that period there wasn't enough joy or confidence or hope, and I began to see it in these dancers who were barely scraping along. They had no money. They were doing something they believed in. They were giving out joy, confidence, hope. Here

was something human, something warm, something dedicative. They were giving out to the people and I began to photograph them.¹²

Morgan felt that Martha Graham's dances provided a needed "emotional lift" during the Depression.¹³ Graham's love of democracy and America, pictured at the beginning and end of *Sixteen Dances* with the photographs of *Frontier* and *American Document*, allowed the book to open and close with an affirmation.

Not only were Graham's subjects in the 1930s and 1940s tied to American themes, but dance critics increasingly hailed her developing dance style as a distinctly American expression. In a period when Americans were interested in the creation of, in Georgia O'Keeffe's words, the "great American thing," Graham expressed the sentiments of many when she said in 1936, "we must look to America to bring forth an art as powerful as the country itself."¹⁴ Critics supportive of Martha Graham and modern dance praised dancers for creating an American art form not indebted to the traditions of Europe. *New York Times* dance critic John Martin, in the text displayed with a 1945 exhibition of photographs of modern dancers, explained, "In the field of the dance the United States has made its most distinctive and original contribution to the fine arts. . . . Instead of acquiescing without question in the general acceptance of the academic ballet as the only possible art form for the dance in the Western world, it has developed its own quite independent creative approach to dance as a fine art."¹⁵ Graham explained the connection between her style of dance and its American roots: "Since the dance form is governed by social conditions, so the American rhythm is

¹² Leonard N. Amico, *The Photographs of Barbara Morgan* (Williamstown, MA: Williams College Museum of Art, 1978), 9.

¹³ Jennifer Dunning, "The Photographer Who Best Caught Martha Graham," *New York Times*, November 20, 1980.

¹⁴ Graham in *Martha Graham: The Early Years*, 107.

¹⁵ John Martin quoted in Edward Alden Jewell, "Dance as Pictured by Camera Shown," *New York Times*, March 28, 1945.

sharp and angular, stripped of unessentials. It is something related only to itself, not laid on, but of a piece with that spirit which was willing to face a pioneer country. . . . An American dance is . . . a characteristic time beat, a different speed, an accent, sharp, clear, staccato.”¹⁶ In composing her dances Graham drew upon the tales of the American past, and she also felt her dance style with its angularity and sharp rhythms was indicative of America’s vigor and vitality.

Like many artists working in the United States in the 1930s, Paul Meltsner (1905-1966), a graduate of the National Academy of Design and a member of the Society of Independent Artists, received Works Progress Administration commissions, painted the American scene, and produced murals for public buildings.¹⁷ His mural *Ohio*, painted for the city of Bellevue, celebrates the labor of the farmer and factory worker by portraying aspects common to each.¹⁸ A critic for the *New York Post* felt Meltsner “has been able . . . to make man more important than the machine.” He continued, “This effect is achieved not only through power of organization which presents the intricacy of modern industrial equipment as a setting for the figures of workers, but, also through a penetration of character and sympathy with the subject that lays the emphasis on humanity rather than machinery.”¹⁹ Meltsner’s paintings from the 1930s aligned with the realist and regionalist styles advocated by art critics Thomas Craven, Henry McBride, and Edward Alden Jewell and with the advice offered by the officials of the Works Progress Administration, who encouraged those who received commissions to paint subjects applicable to the region in a style accessible to the public. In

¹⁶ Graham in *Martha Graham: The Early Years*, 101, 105.

¹⁷ Howard E. Wooden, *Collected Essays on 101 Art Works: From the Permanent Collections of the Wichita Art Museum* (Wichita: The Art Museum, 1988), 122.

¹⁸ Barbara Melosh, *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater*, New Directions in American Art (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 65.

¹⁹ Brochure for exhibition at Midtown Galleries, April 20-May 9 (no year) in “Paul Meltsner Artist File” (New York: Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives).

doing so they felt art could be a balm to the viewer. Alfred Kreymbourg certainly felt this way about Meltsner's painting. He noted, "It is refreshing, in these days of depression, among all the activities and inactivities of the American scene, to come upon a man who vitally enjoys the movement and color of life and conveys that delight in unmistakable terms."²⁰ In the mid-1930s, Meltsner began to paint portraits of Broadway celebrities, including figures like Carmen Miranda, Gertrude Lawrence, and John Barrymore, but his favorite subject was Martha Graham whom he painted at least seven times [Figs. 5.10, 5.15-5.20].²¹ This shift in subject matter was nevertheless a continuation of Meltsner's desire to capture the American Scene.

Meltsner's depictions of Martha Graham pay tribute to her pioneering role in the development of modern dance and to her contributions to American art and culture. In *Martha Graham Dance Class* (c. 1939), for instance, the main formal elements direct the viewer to Graham, mirror her form, and set her apart from the other dancers [Fig. 5.10]. The edge of the central wall leads directly to Graham's head and visually extends the taut tendon in her neck. Her vertical posture and the slight curve of her waist correspond with the fall of the curtain and its tie, while the gathered cloth above parallels Graham's raised arms and bent left hand, which are also repeated by the double archway to her right. The lifted piano lid supported on its arm creates a triangular form that, in its echo of Graham's uplifted arms, emphasizes the angularity of her position. Her gold dress, intensified by the contrasting blue background, is markedly brighter than the other figures' garments. Framed by her white headband, Graham's turned and tilted head highlights the dancer's distinctive features: her angular jawbone and chin, high cheekbones, large almond-shaped eyes, and

²⁰ Brochure for exhibition at Midtown Galleries, March 13-26, 1932 in "Paul Meltsner Artist File" (New York: Watson Library, The Metropolitan Museum of Art).

²¹ Three of Meltsner's paintings of Graham are known only from the images printed in contemporary newspapers. Meltsner lost thirty-nine paintings in a fire and some of his paintings of Graham may have been among that number.

long eyebrows. She dominates the scene in terms of scale and proximity to the center of the canvas and surface of the picture plane. She is the brightest figure in the image, appearing as if a spotlight illuminates her form, casting deep shadows on the left side of her body but brightening her face. Graham's prominent placement in Meltsner's image emphasizes not only her importance in her own dance company but also in the development of modern dance.

Meltsner's images of the modern dancer also communicate Graham's notable position in American culture through their similarities with other works by well-known American artists. In almost all of his paintings of Martha Graham, Paul Meltsner includes a curtain, pictured flush with the surface of the picture plane [Figs. 5.10, 5.15-5.19]. The curtain's presence connotes a stage and a performance, but its inclusion in Meltsner's images is often far from straightforward. The title of *Martha Graham Dance Class*, for example, indicates that the figures in the painting are rehearsing rather than performing. Certainly Graham's dancers could be rehearsing on stage, but the setting with its sofa and archway leading to another room, calls this assumption into question, for the curtain is clearly not an integral part of the scene itself. However, the curtain painted flush with the picture plane is a common motif in the history of art that communicates on both a symbolic and thematic level. In American art, the curtain brings to mind Charles Willson Peale's *The Artist in His Museum* (1822) and *Parson Weems' Fable* (1939), a witty updating of this motif painted by Meltsner's contemporary Grant Wood. Meltsner strongly desired to establish his place in the history of American art and was familiar with its themes and tropes. Peale's and Wood's images that use the curtain motif are concerned with the creation of national emblems and national myths; with the inclusion of the curtain in his images of Graham, Meltsner reiterates that his art shares these same objectives.

In Peale's painting, the artist portrays himself lifting a curtain to reveal the spectacular treasures housed in his museum [Fig. 5.13]. As one of the nation's first public museums, Peale's museum holds an important place in United States history. The museum, which opened in 1786 and moved to the second story of the State House (now Independence Hall) in 1802, became a public institution in the 1820s. The trustees commissioned Peale to paint a self-portrait to be installed in the newly incorporated Philadelphia Museum as a celebration of his contributions to the society and culture of the United States. In the painting, Peale presents a cross-section of his many interests: on his left lie the mastodon bones that were exhumed in his presence; on his right sits a wild turkey, Benjamin Franklin's choice for the national bird, with his taxidermy tools; an American bald eagle perches in the gallery. Above the rows of taxonomically classified animals hang portraits of America's leaders, many of whom Peale had painted. According to art historian Roger Stein, each element of the painting is part of Peale's search as a naturalist, lecturer, museum-keeper, and artist "for American national emblems. [It is] an aesthetic contribution to a process of national self-definition."²² In front of it all stands Peale himself inviting his viewer into his painting and into his museum. His position in the foreground heightens Peale's presence and creative vitality.²³ As Peale presents his museum he also presents himself; he has become a symbol of American culture and American history.

The establishment of American national icons and myths is a central theme in Grant Wood's *Parson Weems' Fable* [Fig. 5.14]. Wood portrays Parson Weems drawing back a curtain to reveal a

²² Roger Stein, "Charles Willson Peale's Expressive Design: *The Artist in His Museum*," in *New Perspectives on Charles Willson Peale: A 250th Anniversary Celebration*, ed. Lillian B. Miller and David C. Ward (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 177.

²³ David C. Ward, "Celebrating Self: The Portrait of Charles Willson Peale and Rembrandt Peale," *American Art* 7, no. 3 (Winter 1993): 12.

portrayal of the preacher's tale of George Washington and the cherry tree. Parson Weems' fable may not be factual but it does communicate the American people's faith in the father of their country and their belief in his impeccable character. Wood's painting connotes that the nation's understanding of George Washington is constructed from stories and images. For example, for the head of his young Washington Wood recreates Gilbert Stuart's 1796 painting of the first president. Stuart's depiction of Washington first appeared on the one dollar bill in 1923 and by 1939, when Wood painted *Parson Weems' Fable*, that face had become embedded in national memory. Wood's image seems to imply that it may be impossible to know the real George Washington, but his legacy is essential to the United States' national mythology.

Meltsner by invoking the *The Artist in His Museum* and *Parson Weems Fable*, images that express the contributions of their title figures to the history of America, seeks to celebrate Graham's contributions to her country as well. In *Martha Graham Dance Class* Meltsner portrays Graham with upraised arms and a downturned face, a position that resembles Charles Willson Peale's stance in *The Artist and His Museum*. Just as Peale presents his museum containing all that he could offer to American culture, Meltsner presents Graham's contribution: her unique dance style. Dancer and choreographer Agnes de Mille claimed that Graham "made a greater change in her art—in the idiom, in the technique, in the content, and in the point of view—than almost any other single artist who readily comes to mind."²⁴ Like Peale, Graham, though working in a different medium and separated by time and gender, played a seminal role in the development of America's artistic tradition. Meltsner's painting also connects Graham to Parson Weems through the compositional

²⁴ Agnes De Mille, *Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham* (New York: Random House, 1991), vii.

and narrative similarities with Wood's painting. Parson Weems wrote tales and Graham composed dances about American history. Meltsner's painting aligns a contemporary woman's work with the achievements of men of the past. In doing so he paints an optimistic picture of progress in America even in the midst of the Depression Era, and he comments on the increased ability for women to contribute significantly to the arts and culture of the modern United States. Meltsner draws back his curtains and presents Graham to the audience of both the dance and the paintings, thereby revealing her achievements and signifying that she is a major contributor to American art and culture.

Meltsner's contemporaries recognized the correlation between his work and their nation's growing desire for a unique cultural and artistic identity. Emily Genauer of the *New York World-Telegram* stated that Meltsner's portrait of Martha Graham, "extraordinarily effective in its forthright gauntness, in the simplicity and strength of the design, and in the succinct characterization, ... belongs among the top-notch contemporary American portraits."²⁵ In an article written in 1940, the *New York Times* art critic, Edwin Alden Jewell, compared Meltsner's and Wood's styles saying that they were similarly "relate[d] ... to early American portraiture."²⁶ In that same year, a fellow New York City artist, James Rosenberg, presented one of Meltsner's paintings of Martha Graham to the National Museum of Argentina in Buenos Aires as a goodwill gesture between the two American countries. The *New York Time* article announced, "Mr. Rosenberg's gift ... sends to the South American republic what is in effect a representation of two arts of the United

²⁵ "Exhibition of Paintings by Paul Meltsner," February 20-March 9 (no year) in "Paul Meltsner Artist File," The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

²⁶ "Paul Meltsner Turns His Eyes to Broadway," *Art Digest* 14, no. 5 (March 1, 1940): 7.

States,”²⁷ American painting and American dance. In this manner, Meltsner’s paintings of Graham contributed to the quest for national identity and culture.

Americanism was a primary concern in the art of Graham, Morgan, and Meltsner. They, like many artists during the Depression years, sought to portray America’s past and present, bringing hope for the future as they recalled the challenges the United States had successfully overcome. Louise Nevelson, a sculptor who was inspired by Graham’s dances, commented upon the choreographer’s role in these developments:

At that time dance was a vital force. It was like dance was carrying America. Martha Graham, by the nature of her spirit, by the nature of her energy, by her presence and intensity, reflected our times. Graham was undoubtedly [the] movement of the twentieth century. She was a pioneer.²⁸

Works like Graham’s *Frontier* and *American Document* conveyed the potential of America in a time when economics could not. Meltsner and Morgan both created images of Martha Graham that highlighted her contributions to the art of the United States because they felt that her work lifted the spirits of her viewers and gave the nation something worth praising.

Primitive Inspiration

Barbara Morgan first saw Martha Graham in concert in 1935 when she attended a performance of Graham’s *Primitive Mysteries*.²⁹ As Morgan watched Graham’s choreography, the photographer began to feel that it was connected to the Native American dances she had witnessed during her trips to the American Southwest. Morgan wrote of the resonance between Graham’s choreography and Native American ceremonies: “Seeing Martha Graham dance in 1935 struck the

²⁷ “Buenos Aires: Gift of a Meltsner Canvas,” *Art News* 39, no. 10 (December 7, 1940): 14.

²⁸ Louise Nevelson and Diana Mackown, *Dawns and Dusks: Taped Conversations with Diana Mackown* (New York: Scribner, 1976), 67.

²⁹ Barbara Brooks Morgan, *Barbara Morgan* (Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: Morgan & Morgan, 1972), 155.

same chord in me as seeing the Southwest Indian ritual dances. There on the desert with the distant mountains, the Indians conveyed a cosmic synthesis rhythmically unifying the People with the Sun, the Earth, and the fertility of all life. So it is with Martha Graham's dances, which evoke spiritual-emotional energy."³⁰ The connection between Graham's dances and Native American ritual brought the two artists together. Morgan recalled their first meeting:

I said to her "I have seen Indian dances in the Southwest and felt the wonderful spirit. When I saw your dance, I had a strange feeling that there might be a connection." Martha agreed, "Absolutely. When Louis Horst and I were in the Southwest, Indian dance inspired me and has been one of the greatest inspirations of my life." I said, "I would like to do a book on your work." And Martha said "I will work with you." Just like that.³¹

For Barbara Morgan, the similarities between Graham's dance and Native American rituals lay in their ability to express deep emotions. As she stated, "The inner core of Martha's art is her deep understanding of both the universal and the timeless; the uniquely individual and the common denominator of us all: the joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears, and the creative potential of life."³² In the early 1930s, when Morgan and her husband, Willard Morgan, spent their summers in the Southwest, Morgan often painted the ritual dances. Her woodcut, *Rain Dancers* (1931) conveys her interest in depicting movement and her conviction that with certain dances humans can commune with nature.³³ The figures in *Rain Dancers* wear masks and costumes that are combinations of human and animal forms; the broad swaths that identify the land and the sky harmonize with the figures of the dancers and convey movement through their pulsating colors. Morgan believed Graham's dances could also connect humans with one another and with nature. "To the American Indian and to Martha," she said, "dance is not mere theatrical virtuosity but

³⁰ Morgan, *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 9.

³¹ Margaretta Mitchell, *Recollections: Ten Women of Photography* (New York: Viking Press, 1979), 180.

³² Morgan, *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 9.

³³ Maggie Lewis, "Barbara Morgan: The Dance Suspended," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 20, 1981.

communal catharsis and the unification of Man and Nature.”³⁴ Morgan hoped to convey these qualities in her photographs of Graham’s dances.

Graham’s and Morgan’s interest in New Mexico and Native American rituals was part of the larger early twentieth-century cultural phenomenon of primitivism. Art historian Jack Flam explains that at this time, throughout Europe and America, artists developed an intense interest in primitivism and primitive art because it allowed them to grapple with other versions of reality. For the modern artist primitivism symbolized a letting go of restrictive traditions in favor of a more intuitive view of the world, and it provided new formal and expressive possibilities.³⁵ Graham declared in 1932 that “primitive sources ... though they may be basically foreign to us, are nevertheless akin to the forces which are at work in our life.”³⁶ While in New Mexico in 1931, Graham studied the rituals of the Pueblo Indians and those of the Hispanic Catholics, whose ancestors first came to New Mexico in the 1500s and established the capital of Santa Fe in 1609. After her return to New York City she choreographed several dances related to her experiences in the Southwest. Works like *Primitive Canticles* (1931), *Incantation* (1931), and *Ceremonials* (1932) all paid tribute to the Pueblo Indians, and others, like *El Penitente* (1940), referenced the traditions of the Hispanics of the Southwest. Graham’s first great success, *Primitive Mysteries*, inspired by the melded religious rituals of the Hispanic Catholics and Native Americans, premiered on February 2, 1931, two years after she had formed her all-female dance company.

Although Paul Meltsner’s *Martha Graham Dance Class* [Fig. 5.10] does not represent one particular dance from Martha Graham’s repertoire, it does incorporate elements of *Primitive*

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Jack D. Flam, "The Spell of the Primitive: In Africa and Oceania Artists Found a New Vocabulary," *Connoisseur* 214, no. 9 (September 1984): 125.

³⁶ Graham in *Martha Graham: The Early Years*, 100.

Mysteries. The pose of the figure in red, portrayed leaning back with her arms raised toward the ceiling, is almost identical to one captured in Paul Hansen's photograph of *Primitive Mysteries* [Fig. 5.11]. The similarities between the photograph and Meltsner's painting include details such as the hyper-extended elbows of the dancer and the headband holding back her hair. The design of the figure's costume is also drawn directly from the photograph. Meltsner, however, dresses his figure in red, whereas the dancers in *Primitive Mysteries* wore navy blue (a fact that could not be gleaned from the black-and-white photograph). The figures are so similar that Meltsner almost certainly used the photograph to create his painting.

The rearmost figure in olive green in Meltsner's *Martha Graham Dance Class* may be connected with the choreography of *Primitive Mysteries*, which involved a group of three pieces that transitioned from one to the next through a series of silent entrances and exits. One of Graham's dancers explained they were to "stalk in dead silence with long reaching legs, the foot brought to the earth with heavy forcefulness, as though staking our territory."³⁷ Another of Graham's former dancers added, "Martha wanted a high, ecstatic contraction as we walked. Our knees were bent. We felt the earth on our feet and in our thighs."³⁸ The choreography of *Primitive Mysteries* may partially explain the position of the figure in olive green and why she appears to be exiting the scene. Additionally, in order to get the heavy, plodding quality she desired, Graham cast tall and strong dancers in *Primitive Mysteries*. The figures in *Martha Graham Dance Class* are certainly not the lithe, weightless sylphs of the romantic ballet; rather, they possess a presence and a power.

³⁷ De Mille, *Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham*, 177.

³⁸ Jennifer Dunning, "Dancer Recalls the Thrill of a Graham Work in 1931," *New York Times*, June 25, 1982.

The dancer in *Martha Graham Dance Class* who does not correspond to *Primitive Mysteries* is Graham herself. In *Primitive Mysteries*, a portrayal of a three-act Passion play in which the Virgin Mary relived the tragedy of her son's crucifixion and the ecstasy of his resurrection, Graham played the part of the Virgin. She wore a white gown with large, billowing sleeves. Meltsner represented Graham in this role surrounded by her company in *Martha Graham and Group*, a painting reproduced in the *New York Times* in 1940 [Fig. 5.16].³⁹ Likely painted around the same time as *Martha Graham Dance Class*, this painting serves as an additional indication of Meltsner's interest in *Primitive Mysteries*.

Morgan's, Graham's, and Meltsner's interests in the traditions of the American Southwest may be regarded as another aspect of their Americanism and of the generation's drive to foster an American identity. In the early twentieth century many Americans were enchanted by New Mexico's distinctive characteristics, especially its rich Native American and Hispanic history and its unique desert landscape. As interest in a "usable past" continued to develop so too did America's interest in New Mexico, and the cultures that inhabited this region became the primary source of the United States' own version of "primitivism." In the 1930s, many American scholars, artists, and writers understood the widespread interest in the landscape and cultures of the Southwest as part of the search for an American art and culture.

The public's reaction to the "Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts," held at Grand Central Art Galleries in New York City in the winter of 1931-1932, perhaps best illustrates the connections between Americanism, primitivism, Native Americans, and the traditional cultures of the

³⁹ Edward Alden Jewell, "With Stress on Ownership of Work," *New York Times*, November 24, 1940.

Southwest.⁴⁰ On its opening day, November 30, 1931, more than 3,000 visitors viewed the 650 displayed objects. After the exhibition closed in New York it began a two-year tour to fourteen cities and was eventually installed in Washington D.C.'s Corcoran Gallery as part of the George Washington bicentennial commemorations.⁴¹ Of the relationship between modern and native arts, an article in the *New York Times* stated:

In the picturesque richness of Indian craft now brought to our doors ... the visitor may discern a yet comparatively untapped source of decorative inspiration. While we have had our eyes turned to Europe with momentary vogues this authentic native American art has been overlooked ... [Here are] examples of design even the most famous contemporary artists might envy.⁴²

Indeed, the Americanism of Native American art was one of the most important considerations for the organizers of the exhibition. The essays in the exhibition catalogue, although certainly overly romantic, stressed the relationship between Native American culture and national identity.

Herbert Spinden wrote of what he called the “new social personalities” of Mexico and Peru that had come about because those countries had accepted the “traditions and capabilities” of their native peoples. Spinden believed that this could be the case in the United States as well. As he put it, “our own aborigines must supply an ingredient to the national character of the United States.”⁴³ A critic writing in *Art Digest* partially attributed the search for an American artistic identity during the 1930s to this landmark exhibition:

⁴⁰ The exhibition was particularly noteworthy as the first to select the displayed works for their aesthetic value, rather than their ethnographic interest.

⁴¹ W. Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism*, American Studies Series (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 97.

⁴² “Native American Art,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1931.

⁴³ Frederick Webb Hodge, Herbert J. Spinden, and Oliver La Farge, *Introduction to American Indian Art: To Accompany the First Exhibition of American Indian Art Selected Entirely with Consideration of Esthetic Value* (New York: The Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts, Inc., 1931), 74.

Perhaps the “American Wave”—the movement launched by artists and art lovers to save American art from inundation by the so-called “alien flood”—had something to do with the commotion caused in New York by the opening of the Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts . . . probably never before has an exhibition been given so much space in the newspapers and periodicals.⁴⁴

The “Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts” was perfectly timed to receive the greatest amount of attention possible from a public which, as art critic Edward Alden Jewell put it, was “so alive just now to the American heritage.”⁴⁵

Martha Graham’s *Primitive Mysteries* (1931) premiered the same year that the “Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts” opened. The general interest in New Mexico and Native American art and culture in the early 1930s certainly contributed to the positive reception of Martha Graham’s New Mexico-inspired dance. In 1941, dance critic John Martin stated that the “primitiveness” of modern dance’s subject matter and choreography was one of its most admirable and most American qualities:

When America set out to create its own dance art it proceeded in characteristic American manner to cut through tradition and get at once to the heart of the matter. It sensed intuitively and put into practice what primitive people had long known from experience, namely that when men are deeply stirred they resort automatically to spontaneous bodily movement to express their emotional states and convictions, which are too elemental to be rationalized in words. Such movement, shaped by a sensitive and skillful craftsman into the stuff of art, becomes a direct means of emotional communication—an instantaneous transfer, so to speak, of pure mood.⁴⁶

The Hispanic rites and Native American rituals Graham witnessed in the Southwest not only inspired the subject matter of works like *Primitive Mysteries*, *Ceremonials*, and *El Penitente* but also directly influenced the choreography of many of Graham’s dances. Art historian Stephen Polcari explains that in her dances Graham wished to create a modern equivalent to the intensity she saw in

⁴⁴ “Indian Tribal Arts Exhibition,” *Art Digest* 6, no. 6 (December 15, 1931): 32.

⁴⁵ Edwin Alden Jewell quoted in *ibid.*

⁴⁶ John Martin, “Moods of the Dance,” *New York Times*, September 28, 1941.

the dances of the Southwest.⁴⁷ In Graham's choreography repetition, asymmetry, flexed feet, and angular gestures communicated the "rough textures and broken rhythms" of the Native American dances.⁴⁸ Both the subject matter and the choreography of *Primitive Mysteries*, in their associations with New Mexico and Native American and Hispanic-American traditions, carried American connotations.

The tie to the American Southwest is only one aspect of Martha Graham's, Paul Meltsner's, and Barbara Morgan's "primitivism." Graham and Morgan, for example, shared an interest not only in New Mexico but also in the Japanese concept of *esoragato*, which requires an artist to imagine him or herself as the object or idea that he or she wishes to recreate in art. Morgan first became interested in *esoragato* as a student studying art at UCLA (1919-1923). The artist explained, "If you are drawing a tiger you have to become fierce. You have to take on this emotional change. ... You had to literally breathe in the rhythm of it and feel it in your whole body, your positioning. And you couldn't do anything until you became that, and then you'd take the brush and paint it."⁴⁹ During their photo sessions, Graham and Morgan would begin by sitting together on the floor while concentrating on becoming the images they wished to create.

Paul Meltsner was not strongly influenced by the aesthetics of the Southwest outside of his exposure to Graham; rather, the primitive qualities in Meltsner's painting style developed via Picasso. In *Martha Graham Dance Class* [Fig. 5.10], for example, the faces of the seated figures, with their high foreheads, oval eyes, and full, protruding lips, resemble the Iberian sculpture that so influenced Picasso. As a critic for *Art News* asserted, "Meltsner treats the figure monumentally,

⁴⁷ Stephen Polcari, "Martha Graham and Abstract Expressionism," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 14-15.

⁴⁸ Stodelle, *Deep Song: The Dance Story of Martha Graham*, 74.

⁴⁹ Lewis, "Barbara Morgan: The Dance Suspended."

keeping it simple in its mass.”⁵⁰ *Martha Graham Dance Class* also contains similarities to Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*; each picture shows a room with a blue backdrop and a red curtain, and each contains five female figures captured in various poses. Meltsner’s *Graham* seems to echo the position of Picasso’s central figure, with her raised arms and sharply pointed elbows. Although Meltsner’s painting does not contain the fractured forms of Picasso’s, his figures do possess an angular, geometric quality. The faces of Picasso’s prostitutes and Meltsner’s dancers share simplified features of ovoid eyes and straight noses. The figures in each image seem strangely devoid of passion, despite the emotional aspects of their given activities.

In the 1930s primitivism symbolized for artists a whole range of ideas; it offered new formal arrangements, represented a more intuitive and simplistic existence, and conveyed national pride and character. Barbara Morgan wrote of the possibilities of primitivism:

The history of Art [sic] created throughout the world, from cave painting days to now reveals the universals of the human psyche. . . . This revelation hit me while looking at the Lascaux cave painting in France before the caves were closed. . . . Suddenly I thought nothing is basically New [sic] in art—only variations on life's fundamental themes through the millennia.⁵¹

The desire to “reveal the universals” and to express “life’s fundamental themes” lay at the heart of Graham’s and Morgan’s versions of primitivism. In Martha Graham’s words, “To me, the body says what words cannot. I believe that dance was the first art . . . it’s communicating a feeling. Dance is the hidden language of the soul.”⁵² Graham sought to portray fundamentals in her dances, and she adopted primitive forms in order to do so. She identified the cultures of New Mexico as “form[s] of

⁵⁰ Pamphlet for exhibition at Barzansky Galleries, May 1-15 (no year) in “Paul Meltsner Artist File,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁵¹ Barbara Brooks Morgan, *Barbara Morgan-Photomontage* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Morgan & Morgan, 1980), 3.

⁵² “Martha Graham Reflects on Her Art and a Life in Dance,” *New York Times*, March 31, 1985.

indigenous dance” that would allow modern dance to be rooted to America and reveal these elements “of the soul.”⁵³

Portraying the Psyche

In all of her dances, Graham sought to create a physical manifestation of intense emotions, such as anguish, joy, and terror. She wrote of this objective in 1937: “To understand dance for what it is, it is necessary we know from whence it comes and where it goes. It comes from the depths of man’s inner nature, the unconscious, where memory dwells. As such it inhabits the dancer. It goes into the experience of man, the spectator, awakening similar memories.”⁵⁴ Graham believed that her choreography came from her unconscious mind, and she wanted her audience to comprehend her dances emotionally rather than visually. Dance and art, for Graham, were larger than any single individual; they are, she said, “the history and psyche of race brought into focus.”⁵⁵ Thus, artists who depicted the dancer sought to find a way to represent the interiority of Graham’s art. Paul Meltsner did so by portraying his dancing figures as isolated from one another and the viewer, as if ruminating on their inner thoughts. Barbara Morgan used photomontage, double exposure, and careful lighting to lend a psychological quality to her photographs of the renowned dancer.

Meltsner’s paintings of Martha Graham all contain a somewhat unnerving quality which communicates the psychological aspects of Graham’s style. When Meltsner depicts Graham’s company of dancers, as in *Martha Graham Dance Class* and *Martha Graham and Group* [Figs. 5.10, 5.16], this peculiarity partially results from the lack of interaction between the figures. Even within a group, the dancers seem isolated and appear unwilling or unable to connect with one another. In

⁵³ Martha Graham, “The Dance in America,” *Trend* 1, no. 1 (March 1932): 6.

⁵⁴ Graham in *Martha Graham: The Early Years*, 83-84.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Meltsner's *Martha Graham Dance Class*, apart from their similar garments, the relationship between the five figures in Meltsner's scene is not readily apparent. While Martha Graham and the woman in red appear to be dancing, it is unclear whether they dance together or alone, whether the rearmost figure participates in the dance, and whether the women rest on or direct from the sofa. Generally, a performance by a dance company involves regulated and coordinated movement; however, in this image all the dancers exist in isolation and move independently from one another. Meltsner always portrays Graham's face in profile or three-quarter view [Figs. 5.10, 5.15-5.20], and often he depicts her eyes downcast [Figs. 5.10, 5.16-5.20]. The lack of eye contact hinders the viewer's ability to connect with Meltsner's Graham, who appears aloof and isolated, a figure driven by her obsessive desire to dance.

Meltsner's dance images possess a quiet strangeness that is similar to the tone of Picasso's blue and rose period paintings. Meltsner's dancing figures echo the stiff, unnatural pose of Picasso's *Woman with a Fan*, for instance. The deeply shadowed eyes, the attenuated fingers, long limbs, dark hair, pallid skin, and the slender forms of Picasso's figures all resonate with Meltsner's images of Graham. These formal elements create a sense of artificiality. Art historian Howard Wooden describes Meltsner's dancers as "classically sculptural and although perhaps somewhat dramatic ... rendered with composure and grace," an observation which could also describe any number of images from Picasso's blue and rose periods.⁵⁶ The figures in Meltsner's Graham paintings, with their hollow cheeks, sharply defined jawbones, dark eyes, and frozen bodies, seem almost zombie-like. Their angular, simplified faces appear passionless; their dance positions suddenly seem unnatural, and the figures appear frozen in time, all resulting in a melancholic strangeness.

⁵⁶ Wooden, *Collected Essays on 101 Art Works*, 122.

Meltsner's depiction of Graham in *Martha Graham Dance Class*, in particular, evokes an unsettling quality. Graham, with her hands encircling her head and her calm and almost passionless face, recalls the paintings of the martyrdoms of Catholic saints. Specifically, Graham's position evokes images of Saint Sebastian, a third-century figure whom the Emperor Diocletian ordered shot to death with arrows for refusing to worship the Roman gods. In the history of art, Sebastian is generally depicted bound to a tree and pierced by arrows. Guido Reni portrays the saint (1615-1616) [Fig. 5.12] with his hands tied above his head and eyes heavenward in the expression of peaceful acceptance so common in martyrdom images. Graham, in Meltsner's image, seems trussed up as well, bound to the edge of the pink wall that follows her spine, with raised arms encircling her head in a fashion comparable to Saint Sebastian. Her hands are eerily similar to those of Reni's *Saint Sebastian*—the right hand relaxed, finger's spread, the left upright with fingers curled. Graham certainly was not unfamiliar with the themes of martyrdom and sainthood. In 1940 she choreographed *El Penitente*, a *pas de trois* in which she danced with the first two male members of her company, Erick Hawkins and Merce Cunningham. Like *Primitive Mysteries*, this dance was inspired by Graham's experiences in the Southwest, specifically her observation of the cult of the Penitentes who practiced self-flagellation. In the dance, the penitent, played by Erick Hawkins, inflicted the various tortures of the saints upon himself to signify his baseness, convictions, and contrition.

The unsettling atmosphere created by the figures in Meltsner's images of Graham extends to their surroundings, as well. In *Martha Graham Dance Class*, the silent piano transforms into a gaping maw, the conical lamp hanging in the backroom, into some kind of torture device, the accordion screen into a strange mechanism. In this image, familiar aspects of life, such as

performers, stage sets, and pianos, have become slightly strange and disconcerting. Meltsner's portrait of Martha Graham that now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. (c. 1940) also exudes strangeness [Fig. 5.20]. Meltsner used a photograph of Graham in her dance *Chronicle* (1936) to compose this painting [Fig. 5.21]. In both images Graham sits, with her body turned toward the viewer and her face in profile, upon a multi-level stage prop placed on top of a raised, circular platform. Her extended arm holds a long staff, which in the photograph is attached to the veil draped over her head. Meltsner, departing from the photograph, frames Graham's angular and austere figure with an archway, behind which a grey-blue mist evokes a stormy sky. In *Chronicle* Graham portrayed the isolation caused by war's debilitating effects on the human spirit. Meltsner seeks to evoke the spirit of the dance with the unworldly setting in which he paints Graham. The oddness in Meltsner's images of Graham is subtle. No one element seems distinctly out of place or obviously bizarre, nevertheless the works are easily capable of making a viewer uncomfortable for reasons that cannot quite be defined. One might go so far as to connect Meltsner's portraits of Graham to surrealism and Freud's uncanny, where the familiar and unfamiliar merge creating a situation of discomfort, fear, and confusion.

Certain aspects of Graham's choreography could be described as surreal also. Psychology, the unconscious, and the work of Freud and Jung all greatly interested Martha Graham. Her father, a physician who specialized in mental disorders, often cited the movement of his patients in his diagnoses. Graham believed movement could express inner emotions and the hidden facets of the psyche, and she developed her dance technique so that each pose, step, and pivot had the potential to reveal deep emotions. She explained the development of the contraction and release, the core movement to her dance technique, in an interview in 1980: "I was alone and working and suddenly

I discovered the pelvic thrust. I felt it was very important. It was ... the beginning of a cycle of distortion, not for distortion's sake but for deeper meaning and feeling."⁵⁷ With this foundation Graham could use her dances to explore human behavior and deeply entrenched human emotions.

Graham stated that "movement in modern dance is the product, not of invention, but of discovery—discovery of what the body will do, and what it can do in the expression of emotion."⁵⁸ Emotion lay at the core of works like *Lamentation* (1930), which concerned intense grief, and *Frontier*, which explored courage and determination in spite of fear. *Letter to the World*, however, was Graham's first truly psychological piece. *Letter to the World* explored Emily Dickinson's multifaceted psyche. Various dancers portrayed the different aspects of the poet's personality. The "One who Dances" expressed Dickinson's hopes and fears through movement and the "One who Speaks" did the same through the reading of Dickinson's poetry. "March" represented Dickinson's wit and playful side. Graham also personified what she saw as the two opposing forces in Dickinson's life: Death, portrayed by "The Ancestress," a figure formed from Dickinson's strict Puritan background that forbade love, and Love, portrayed by "Dark Beloved," an enticing lover who also represented the attraction of the world beyond Dickinson's room.⁵⁹ *Letter to the World* involved split personalities, narration, a non-chronological sequence of events, and the combination of reality and imagination in order to plumb the depths of Dickinson's inner life.⁶⁰ Graham continued to explore the psychological aspects of the human experience in works such as *Every Soul's a Circus*, *Death and Entrances*, and in her pieces based on Greek tragedies.

⁵⁷ Anna Kisselgoff, "Powerful Images of Martha Graham's Art," *New York Times*, November 23, 1980.

⁵⁸ Morgan, *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 145.

⁵⁹ De Mille, *Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham*, 242.

⁶⁰ Polcari, "Martha Graham and Abstract Expressionism," 5.

Certain aspects of surrealism appealed to Barbara Morgan as well, and scholars have compared Morgan's photomontages to the works of surrealist photographer Man Ray.⁶¹ Morgan used a number of methods to create her photomontages including printing multiple negatives simultaneously, creating double exposures in the camera, and re-photographing collaged images. Photomontage allowed Morgan to juxtapose recognizable images in order to rearrange reality, play with time and space, and create fantastical and strange worlds. She wrote that she often used photomontage to bring imagination into her photography.⁶² In *City Shell* (1938) Morgan combines a photograph of the Empire State Building taken from below and tilted diagonally with an image of a spiraling seashell [Fig. 5.22]. On the seashell diminutive figures seem to descend. The shell, which Morgan declared as "also a Habitat,"⁶³ takes on the function of the building; it spirals toward the sky and holds the people, while the building below acts as a foundation for the skyward-reaching shell. In this instance Morgan used photomontage to transform familiar images into a strange and other-worldly environment. Morgan frequently included images of dancers in her photomontages. *Spring on Madison Square* represents the chance occurrences of a particular day in 1938 [Fig. 5.23]. While developing negatives of the dancer Erick Hawkins, Morgan gazed out her window to the snow-covered square below. At that moment a friend came to visit bringing tulips and saying, "Don't worry it's springtime."⁶⁴ In the combined image, created in the darkroom, a larger than life Erick Hawkins seems to stride across the snowy Madison Square; atop the square and the dancer sit the

⁶¹ Curtis L. Carter and William Agee, *Barbara Morgan: Prints, Drawings, Watercolors & Photographs* (Milwaukee: Patrick & Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art, 1988), 10.

⁶² Mitchell, *Recollections: Ten Women of Photography*, 180.

⁶³ Morgan, *Barbara Morgan-Photomontage*, 9.

⁶⁴ Amico, *The Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, 3.

tulips as if layering spring on top of winter. Morgan's photomontage emphasizes the surreal aspects of day-to-day existence.

Morgan's tendency toward surrealism was influenced by Graham's interest in the psychological and is evident in the photographs of Martha Graham and her company published in *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs*. The format of the book bears some similarities to Morgan's surrealist photomontages. Not only do the single photographs inscribe meaning but the succession of related images creates a montage-like juxtaposition where the significance of each new image is affected by those that come before and after.⁶⁵ Morgan's layout leads the viewer through the broad range of human emotions, from *Lamentation*, "a dance of sorrows," to *Ekstasis* (1933), which "reveals the exquisite awareness of the body in motion," to *Celebration* (1934), an expression of "intense inner excitement."⁶⁶

Individual images contain surreal qualities as well. A planned double-exposure created in the camera of Graham's *Lamentation* depicts two states of the dancer [Fig. 5.24]. Morgan photographs Graham from below, highlighting the anguish on her face as her body doubles over. Atop that image Morgan layers another image of the dancer with one hand extended above her head and the other grasping the cloth near her throat. This second image is rotated 90 degrees so that it appears as if one Graham lies with her back to floor facing the ceiling while the upright version gazes down on the prone form. The combination of the two images communicates how disorienting grief can be. Morgan said of the piece: "I saw in my mind's eye the overlapping emotional transformation from anguish and utter tragedy to final acceptance and release."⁶⁷ Morgan's image

⁶⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁶ Morgan, *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 14.

⁶⁷ Carter and Agee, *Barbara Morgan: Prints, Drawings, Watercolors & Photographs*, 3.

calls attention to the inner turmoil of Graham's dance and her attempt to reduce a single powerful emotion to its essentials.

Morgan also used lighting to bring mood and emotion to her photographs of Martha Graham. She claimed a project undertaken from 1930-1938 photographing Dr. Albert Barnes's collection helped her to learn of lighting's ability to transform an object.

One day while photographing a Sudan fertility icon and an ivory totemic mask, using lights, I discovered that I could make these ritual sculptures seem either menacing or benign, simply by control of the lighting. This was a new shock to me to realize how tremendously subjective this supposedly objective medium could be. Actually this light manipulation became the prelude to psychological lighting of dance motion for camera compositions.⁶⁸

Morgan never photographed Graham's company during performances; instead she used her own studio or the theater at Columbia University. Having the dancers perform especially for her camera allowed her to light them in a variety of ways. In many of Morgan's photographs of Martha Graham, the lighting plays a symbolical role. In the images of *Frontier* the overhead light guides the pioneer through the unsettled territory.⁶⁹ In *American Provincials*, a dance based on Nathaniel's Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*, the lighting casts deep shadows, meant to invoke the "mighty and terrifying holiness" of the hidden underbelly of Puritanism.⁷⁰ Morgan uses lighting to transform Graham's body and create an eerie atmosphere in her photographs of *Deep Song* (1937), a dance about the Spanish Civil War [Fig. 5.25]. The final image in Morgan's sequence of photographs from this dance portrays the struggling, dying body of Graham lying on the stage floor. In order to set up

⁶⁸ Amico, *The Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, 10.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Morgan, *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 13.

this shot, Morgan positioned herself in the orchestra pit and placed her camera on the stage.⁷¹ The result is that Graham's body appears to loom over the viewer. With her raised arm and foot Graham could pivot and engulf the dwarfed viewer with her voluminous skirt. Graham faces the ground; an overhead spotlight forms a white reflection on the top of her head creating the dark circle of hair that supplants her face. The spotlight also illuminates Graham's upward reaching hand. Because her arm is wrapped in dark cloth, the hand appears to be separated from her body, floating above her head. The white and black horizontal stripes of Graham's costume, accentuated by Morgan's lighting, and Graham's form, which hovers on the verge of collapse, echo the suspense between life and death communicated by the dance.⁷²

Years later Morgan wrote of her use of lighting, "I love to build a lighting scheme in which light and the moving subject is reciprocally alive; now moving in opposition, by-passing, flowing together, modulating into shadow, reappearing in muted areas, until the entire design is rich and mobile."⁷³ Lighting, above all else, for Morgan, made a photograph art. She wrote in *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*:

Light is the most enthralling of all photographic elements, possessed of endless excitements. Light is to the photographer what movement is to the dancer, the active principle without which there can be no dance. The reaction I get from light is of energy, vibrations, responsive, impersonal, timeless, tapping the inexhaustible dynamics of the universe. This cosmic force is everybody's workaday tool. Light has a real parallel with dance, being itself a dance of frequencies.⁷⁴

When Morgan began photographing Graham she had little experience with photographic lighting.

Over the course of the five years the two worked together, Graham's expressive dance style

⁷¹ Willard D. Morgan and Henry M. Lester, *Graphic Graflex Photography: The Master Book for the Larger Camera* (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1944), 237.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Barbara Brooks Morgan, "Kinetic Design in Photography," *Aperture* 1, no. 4 (1953): 27.

⁷⁴ Morgan, *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 150.

allowed Morgan to experiment with lighting techniques as she sought to convey the essence of each dance. Morgan learned to visualize how the photographed dances would appear under different lighting schemes. She always chose the one that she felt would transform the scene from a dance pose to work of art capable of conveying the emotional resonance of Graham's piece.

Graham wrote about her experience working with Barbara Morgan: "To me Barbara Morgan through her art reveals the inner landscape that is a dancer's world."⁷⁵ The essence of Graham's dance and its connection to humankind's emotional experience always remained foremost in Morgan's mind while photographing the dancers. She explained the difficulty of conveying the expressive aspects of a dance:

To prepare for actual shooting I watch breathing rhythms and other changes of mental states which catalyze physical exertion, for the body is an external vehicle of mood and will. But to portray the emotional-mental-spiritual expression is usually a more subtle problem that requires more empathy with the subject.⁷⁶

Morgan wished to capture the "philosophical root experience" of the dance in her photographs, and she saw Martha Graham as a philosopher who shared her interpretation of the world.⁷⁷

Movement, Angularity, and Fractured Forms

The artists who portrayed Martha Graham typically endeavored to translate the movement of her dancing into a still image by portraying the most distinguishing characteristics of her style. Graham's "powerful, dynamic, jagged" and tension-filled choreography, is, as one dance critic argued, what "set her above other dance innovators."⁷⁸ The core element of Graham's dance language, the contraction and release, dramatized and formalized the act of breathing. The

⁷⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁷⁶ Morgan, *Barbara Morgan*, 155.

⁷⁷ Amico, *The Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, 7.

⁷⁸ Anna Kisselgoff, "Martha Graham Dies at 96: A Revolutionary in Dance," *New York Times*, April 2, 1991.

contraction originated in the dancer's pelvis; a dancer tightened the pelvic muscles when exhaling and relaxed them when inhaling. The contraction and release "created the percussive, angular movement" for which Graham was known.⁷⁹ To convey these qualities, the most distinctive of Graham's system of movement, artists often portrayed Martha Graham in a cubist-inspired fashion. The fractured, geometric aesthetic of cubism allowed artists to accentuate the angularity of Graham's dances.

The "forceful lines and contour tensions" of Graham's dances appealed to the sculptor David Smith (1906-1965) an artist well-known for his large steel, geometric abstractions.⁸⁰ Dorothy Dehner, Smith's first wife, who trained for a time with Graham, may have introduced Smith to Martha Graham's performances.⁸¹ In 1938, the sculptor made a number of drawings of Martha Graham [Fig. 5.26] based on Barbara Morgan's photographs of the dancer. Smith employs a cubist-inspired style to depict Graham. In his drawing of Martha Graham performing *American Document* [compare to Fig. 5.9], Smith even depicts Graham's hair with sharp contours and straight lines. Smith also exaggerates the angularity of Graham's face and turns her rippling collar into a series of jagged geometric planes.

Smith most admired Morgan's photographs of Graham's *Lamentation* [Fig. 5.27]. These photographs are the most geometric of all the images taken of Graham by Morgan. Graham restricted her own movement in *Lamentation* by wearing a tube of stretchable, grey jersey that left only her face, hands, and feet exposed. During the dance, meant to symbolize how sorrow can be entrapping, Graham pushed and pulled against the restrictive costume with her arms, torso, and

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Deborah Jowitt, "Dances with Sculpture," *Tate Etc.*, no. 8 (Autumn 2006): n.p.

⁸¹ Ibid.

knees creating geometric forms—triangles, rectangles, and trapezoids. The folds in the costume formed by Graham’s stretching and pulling, fractured her figure like cubist force lines. *Lamentation* concerns grief and also, in some sense, Graham’s evolving movement system by showcasing the angles and the tension of her developing style. In Barbara Morgan’s photographs of *Lamentation*, the dancer is carefully lit so that deep shadows mark the folds of the costume and highlight the geometric angularity of Graham’s choreography. Critic William Zimmer asserts, “Morgan’s major achievement with Graham is the fixing of the dancer’s movements as abstract shapes. This endeavor is abetted, of course, by the ample and pliant costumes worn by Graham. . . . the observer appreciates how Miss Graham’s movements are shaping the drapery, but one also realizes the contours that Morgan captures are like modern line drawings.”⁸² In one of Morgan’s photographs of *Lamentation*, for instance, Graham appears against an indistinct background, and her body, bent and enveloped in the grey jersey, looks to be composed from simple, geometric shapes.

In his drawings of *Lamentation*, based on Morgan’s photographs of the dance, Smith simplifies his forms in order to accentuate Graham’s angular movements. The sheer costume with which he replaces Graham’s heavy jersey knit allows Smith to give visual form to the placement of Graham’s legs and arms as they create these geometric shapes. Candida Smith, the sculptor’s daughter, believes that Graham’s choreography influenced her father’s sculpture. She explains, “When Graham extends her fist in one direction and a knee in the other, a stretch is made that is of a similar shape to the stretched metal.”⁸³ This stretching that Candida Smith describes can be seen in Smith’s *Dancer* (1935) [Fig. 5.28]. The triangle on the lower left hand side of the sculpture

⁸² William Zimmer, "At Hudson, Three Shows on Dance," *New York Times*, April 1, 1984.

⁸³ Spence, "Something in the Way She Moved," 33.

connects to the articulated triangle opposite by a thin cylinder of metal. Two other thin strips of metal connect this same triangle to the half cylinder on the right. One could speculate that this sculpture is also related to Graham's *Lamentation* and Morgan's photographs of that dance. The triangle on the lower left becomes her knee extended in one direction. The articulated triangle above is her hand raised above the small knob that is her head. The half cylinder becomes the tube of fabric that is Graham's costume, and the stretched metal connotes the stretch and pull against the costume that creates the angles that connect all these elements.

The photographer Edward Steichen (1879-1973) photographed Graham in *Lamentation* [Figs. 5.29, 5.30] while working as the chief photographer for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*. Graham was one of the many celebrities Steichen photographed for the magazines.⁸⁴ In these celebrity photographs he attempted to present in a single image his sitters' personalities, as well as their physical appearances, to the magazines' readers.⁸⁵ In the case of Graham, Steichen communicates the dancer's strength, power, and the emotion as well as the angularity and severity of her modernist style by transforming the dancer into a cubist sculpture. For the photo shoot Steichen placed Graham on a multilevel platform, a sculptural pedestal. Working without the help of a flash, which would not be available until the mid-1930s, Steichen could not photograph Graham in action.⁸⁶ Instead, as Steichen explained, "She moved into sculptural gestures and held them for an instant. Each movement was related to the preceding movement or to the next one."⁸⁷ The

⁸⁴ For more on this subject see William A. Ewing, *Edward Steichen: In High Fashion, the Condé Nast Years, 1923-1937* (Minneapolis: Foundation for the Exhibition of Photography, 2008).

⁸⁵ Christian A. Peterson, *Edward Steichen: The Portraits* (San Francisco: Art Museum Association of America, 1984), 11.

⁸⁶ William A. Ewing, *Edward Steichen*, Photofile (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), n.p.

⁸⁷ Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), n.p.

photograph chosen for *Vanity Fair's* December 1931 issue⁸⁸ captures Graham with her feet firmly planted and her legs spread [Fig. 5.29]. The fabric of her costume, stretched between her legs, becomes a solid triangle. Graham extends one arm, pushing the cloth above her head and partially obscuring her face. Her other arm, encased by the costume, is bent at the elbow and holds the fabric away from her face to reveal the sorrow conveyed by her bowed head and closed eye. Steichen's stark, dramatic lighting deepens the folds in the costume, fracturing the geometric forms created by Graham's pose.

In a second, unpublished image of *Lamentation* Steichen completes his transformation of Graham into a sculptural form [Fig. 5.30]. As in the first photograph Graham stands on a sculptural pedestal with her legs spread and invisible beneath her stretched costume. Now with both arms reaching above her head and angled slightly to the left, Graham's costume conceals her face and head and envelops her body so that only the tips of her fingers are visible. With Graham's body almost completely obscured, the dancer appears to be an abstract sculpture, frozen in perpetuity. The lighting illuminating the scene creates triangles of light and dark, cubist force-lines that add depth and solidity to the seemingly concrete form. Steichen's images of Graham seem reminiscent of his earlier photographs of Rodin's *Balzac* [Fig. 5.31]. For the photographs of Graham, Steichen employs the central spotlight he so frequently used to illuminate Rodin's great monument, and Steichen's Graham, like his *Balzac*, photographed in the photographer's then-favored pictorialist style, appears as a sculpted figure, solid and shrouded in folds of cloth.

Sculptor Louis Nevelson (1899-1988) created an image of Martha Graham in bronze. The artist, who studied dance for twenty years beginning in 1933, was shy as a child and into adulthood;

⁸⁸ "Martha Graham," *Vanity Fair*, December 1931, 50.

she declared, "I love dance because I think that it freed me, and then I knew that I had to free my voice."⁸⁹ Dance helped the sculptor overcome her inhibitions and taught her how to use art to express ideas and emotions. Nevelson admired the expressive capacity of modern dance, especially the work of Graham whose dances communicated deeply planted emotions. Her cubistic rendering of the dancer (c. 1950) depicts Graham as a series of solid, simple rectangles and triangles [Fig. 5.32]. Nevelson generally employed a literal and simplified version of cubism, forming her sculptures from solid cubes and dispensing with simultaneity. Cubism, as Nevelson understood it, was best suited for sculpture. In 1961 she explained: "Cubism was too pronounced a form for painting in its two dimensional space. When we look at the early paintings of [the] cubist school we find a paradox. The cube is a solid. In painting it becomes abstract. In sculpture we accept the cube: it has become concrete and consequently has been resolved and become tangible."⁹⁰ Nevelson's pared down version of cubism expresses Graham's strength through its visible solidity. Kimon Nicolaides, one of Nevelson's art teachers, taught her to strive for a sense of motion in her work. He wrote, "no matter what path you pursue, you keep going back to gesture. . . . in gesture drawing you feel the movement of the whole."⁹¹ Nevelson's depiction of Graham evokes a particular quality of movement inspired by the teachings of Hans Hoffman who explained to her the "push and pull" of negative and positive space in cubism.⁹² The angularity of Nevelson's *Martha Graham* evokes Graham's rigid system of movement. The blocky forms of the figure communicate the difficulty of

⁸⁹ Louise Nevelson, "Prologue" in Arnold B. Glimcher, *Louise Nevelson* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 20.

⁹⁰ "Louise Nevelson Papers, 1903-1979," (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.), box 5, folder 30, page 2.

⁹¹ Kimon Nicolaides, *The Natural Way to Draw* (Boston: Houton Mifflin Company, 1941), 15.

⁹² Suzette Lane McAvoy, "Louise Nevelson: The Farnsworth Collection," *American Art Review* 6, no. 5 (October-November 1994): 145.

Graham's choreography with its refusal to pretend effortless and its challenge to the traditional elegance of ballet.

The solidity of Nevelson's *Martha Graham* reveals the sculptor's belief that negative and positive spaces are equally important and exert equal influence over the viewer. She related in an interview in 1964: "You can think of modern dance, the way the body flows. ... You're not just jumping, but you have space and the body has space."⁹³ In other words, as she told historian Arnold Glimcher, "dance made me realize that air is a solid through which I pass, not a void in which I exist."⁹⁴ Rather than give the impression that Graham has the ability to float through air, Nevelson's geometric depiction of the dancer seems to push against a surrounding pressure. The sculpture's solidity conveys a sense of the dancer's power. The discipline of dance also impressed Nevelson: "Dance fascinates me because I don't think we know how to control our bodies. We think that walking on two feet controls it. But you can't really control the body, unless you're like Martha Graham, who took all her life to control her body."⁹⁵ Nevelson resolved to maintain the same drive and dedication she saw in the modern dancers in her work as a sculptor.

Perhaps no image of Graham is more cubist than William Meyerowitz's *The Dance (Martha Graham)* (1935), in which the artist reduces the dancer to a series of fragmented planes [Fig. 5.33]. Meyerowitz (1898-1981), a Russian, Jewish immigrant who came to the United States in 1908, often painted Biblical and religious subjects, but he claimed that musicians, horses, and dancers

⁹³ "Oral History Interview with Louise Nevelson, June 1964-January 14, 1965," (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution), www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/nevels64.htm.

⁹⁴ Glimcher, *Louise Nevelson*, 41-42.

⁹⁵ Nevelson, "Prologue" in *ibid.*, 20.

were some of his favorite subjects because of his interest in depicting movement.⁹⁶ Meyerowitz's wife, fellow painter Theresa Bernstein, said of her husband, "Bill has a deep belief in the things around him—in life, motion, rhythm, and growth. His horses are always galloping, his trees always growing, his musicians always playing, and his dancers always dancing. He gets movement into his painting."⁹⁷ Meyerowitz was also a talented singer, and he sang with the Metropolitan Opera's chorus for many years. Perhaps due to his own experiences, Meyerowitz insisted upon the interrelation of the arts. He said that all the arts express emotion and therein lies the connection between them.⁹⁸ Meyerowitz explained his philosophy thus: "Art expresses for us the fundamental rhythms and harmonies that are craved by our soul. A work of art is a creation more in harmony with the essence of nature than the haphazard array of things actually about us."⁹⁹ Meyerowitz may have been drawn to Martha Graham because she explored the emotive possibilities of dance. In his image of the dancer, Meyerowitz almost completely abstracts her figure, but he succeeds in portraying her expressiveness through the alternating geometric forms and the vivid colors which evoke a rhythmical quality.

Parodies of Graham's style also highlight the angular, geometric characteristics of her choreography. Miguel Covarrubias's (1904-1957) image of *Sally Rand and Martha Graham*, printed in *Vanity Fair* in December 1934, depicts a hypnotized Graham with swirls for eyes and a white, skull-like face that almost certainly pokes fun at Graham's distinctive facial features and her dramatic stage makeup [Fig. 5.35]. Covarrubias portrays Graham with a slim body of sharp knees

⁹⁶ Norman L. Kleeblatt and Susan Chevlowe, *Painting a Place in America: Jewish Artists in New York, 1900-1945: A Tribute to the Educational Alliance Art School* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1991), 183.

⁹⁷ Charles Movalli, "Conversation with William Meyerowitz and Theresa Bernstein," *American Artist* 44, no. 450 (January 1980): 65.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁹⁹ David Hall, "William Meyerowitz: Modernist," *American Art Review* 13, no. 1 (2001): 148.

and elbows devoid of Rand's womanly curves; he emphasizes the angularity of her pose with the geometric shadows on her costume. In fact, the costume looks quite similar to the one that Graham wore for *Lamentation*, the dance that showcased Graham's system of movement.

In her photographs of Graham, Barbara Morgan used many means, including cubism, to represent Graham's choreography. She attempted to convey the "essential emotion of [each] dance" by selecting its "most pregnant moments."¹⁰⁰ Barbara Morgan's interest in portraying movement increased her desire to photograph Martha Graham. Morgan claimed movement captivated her attention from the time she was a small child. She often told a story about her father explaining atoms to her five-year-old self to illustrate this fascination. "My whimsical-philosophical father, holding a green leaf in his hand, said: 'this leaf is not moving, but millions of atoms are dancing inside it, and atoms are dancing in everything in the world.'"¹⁰¹ Morgan's interest in movement continued into her adult years. As an art student at UCLA, Morgan preferred to portray bodies in motion, and she grew bored of the standard figure drawing classes. In order to practice depicting motion, she and some other students went to see the dance instructor, Bertha Wardell, a former student of Isadora Duncan.¹⁰² With Wardell's help they studied rhythms and gestures and arranged sessions where one person would dance while the others drew.¹⁰³ Morgan's interest in depicting movement is also evident in the images she produced on her trips to the Southwest where she attempted to convey the energy and vitality of the ritual dances she witnessed. Morgan's admiration of Graham's dancing inspired the artist to seek the means to convey movement in a photograph.

¹⁰⁰ Morgan, *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 12.

¹⁰¹ Morgan, *Barbara Morgan-Photomontage*, 8.

¹⁰² Mitchell, *Recollections: Ten Women of Photography*, 179.

¹⁰³ Lewis, "Barbara Morgan: The Dance Suspended."

However, despite her long interest in movement, Morgan was up against some very difficult problems when it came to portraying the movement of a dance in photography. Firstly, photography is an inherently static medium, whereas dance moves in time. Secondly, photography is a two-dimensional art form, whereas dance exists in three-dimensional space. And thirdly, because a photographer's art can reproduce the world in detailed precision, a photographer has fewer opportunities than a painter to convey movement through abstraction.¹⁰⁴ For example, in Meltsner's portrayals of Martha Graham, the artist seldom depicts the dancer with an accurate physique; he lengthens the dancer's arms and legs, giving them a sinuous quality in order to portray the kinetic energy of her dances. Although a photograph can capture with exactness a dancer's position, a frozen frame does not necessarily convey the movement of a dance. In fact, still photography can have the opposite effect and lose all sense of movement, effectively turning the dancer into a statue. In an article on dance photography Barbara Morgan wrote, "today's cameras and fast films make dance action photography possible—but stopping action mechanically means nothing. Speed in the raw means nothing. Often finer overtones of emotion and imagination are transmitted by relatively slow dance gestures and camera shutters. It is now possible to express with modern cameras the vitality and rhythmical poetry of dance."¹⁰⁵ Thus, a dance photograph does not, in fact, reveal a dancer's movements; as in paintings or sculptures of dance, a photograph can only represent or suggest movement.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Judith Mackrell, "Moments in Time: A Century of Dance Photography," *Art and Design (U.K.)* 8, no. 11-12 (1993): 80.

¹⁰⁵ Morgan and Lester, *Graphic Graflex Photography*, 231.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew Reason, "Still Moving: The Revelation or Representation of Dance in Still Photography," *Dance Research Journal* 35/36, no. 2/1 (Winter 2003/ Summer 2004): 63.

Martha Graham's dancing greatly influenced Morgan's approach to image making and her photographic style. When Morgan began photographing the dancers in Graham's company she stopped using her Leica camera and switched to a Speed Graphic 4x5 which was better suited for capturing moving figures. She experimented with moving in tandem with the dancers instead of setting up a tripod.¹⁰⁷ Soon she found lighting was her best tool, and through its manipulation she could convey the essence of each dance. In preparation for photographing Graham, Morgan studied the dances over the course of several weeks and months. She attended rehearsals and performances and watched the progression of the dance as it became a complete work of art. Morgan noticed that as she watched the dances specific moments struck her so powerfully that she remembered them long after she had forgotten the sequence of the movements. Of these moments she said, "I find that certain gestures remain vividly fixed in my memory, and come to symbolize the whole dance."¹⁰⁸ These remembered gestures formed the basis for her dance photographs:

Every dance has peaks of emotional intensity; moments when the dance "speaks" to the audience. These are the moments when the form of the dance is in closest unison with the original compulsion which gave it birth. Dance is experienced continuously in time and space, but is remembered by these instants of combustion. While we are watching it, gestures and attitudes may seem unforgettable, but the crescendo of attention ends when the curtain goes down. The trivial dance ends when the performance is over, but the great dance haunts the memory. Why? Because a vital essence, projected most intensely in these peaks, stirs the memory again and again, although the merely transitional movements may fade away. It is the role of photography to seize such moments; to fuse reality, art and time.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Franklin Cameron, "Barbara Morgan: Quintessence," *Petersons Photographic* 13, no. 11 (March 1985): 36.

¹⁰⁸ Morgan, *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 148.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Once Morgan selected her moment, she would then “prevision,” as she termed it, the final outcome, imagining how she wished to capture that instance.¹¹⁰ Morgan used a variety of methods to convey in these singular, significant, and generally climatic gestures the dance’s movement.

For some of the dances, Morgan suggested the sequence of Graham’s choreography in the layout of *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*.¹¹¹ With *Deep Song*, Morgan printed four photographs of Graham on one page [Fig. 5.35]. In each of the images Morgan lights Graham with a spotlight that illuminates the dancer and the floor immediately below her form. The space beyond the illuminated area fades to complete blackness allowing the images to transition from one to another without clearly defined borders. All four images capture Graham on the floor in slightly varied positions. The figure in the top left-hand corner of the page is on her hands and knees, crossing one arm over the other with her head facing downward and turned to the left. The figure below, nearer the center of the page, also rests on hands and knees, but her arms are not crossed and she is depicted in profile. The figure in the top right-hand corner of the page has her back toward the viewer. She squats and arches her back toward the floor with a bent arm raised over her head. The final figure, nearest to the bottom of the page, also on her hands and knees, has her arms crossed and head turned toward the right. In each image Graham does floorwork, but the images are not exact replicas of one another. They are varied slightly so that they appear as if they could be a sequence of movements. The viewer can imagine that Graham easily transitions from one position to the next. Furthermore, Morgan varies the scale of her figures. Of the four photographs the figure nearest the bottom of the page is the largest, and the figure in the top left-hand corner of the page is the

¹¹⁰ Morgan, *Barbara Morgan*, 9.

¹¹¹ Morgan, *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 13.

smallest, which gives the impression that the largest Graham is nearest the viewer and the smallest farthest away. Thus, Graham appears as if she moves slowly downstage. The scale of the figures helps the viewer to construct a possible order to the movements of the dance. It seems to progress from the small figure in the top left-hand corner of the page, to another small figure nearer the center of the page, to the noticeably larger figure at the top of the page with her back toward the viewer—in between these last two stages Graham must have rotated and pivoted back on her heels—to the largest figure at the bottom of the stage, who is once again represented on hands and knees. The viewer's final impression is that these four images represent a series of movements.

Paul Meltsner's painting, *Martha Graham Dance Class*, may also represent movement sequentially [Fig. 5.10]. In Meltsner's image, perhaps the movement of the dance is not portrayed by the individual dancers but implied by the relationships between the three standing figures. When one considers each of these figures as representative of a dance step in a sequence of three the rearmost figure, represented in first position, with her bent elbows and knee embodies the first step in the sequence. The viewer must imagine the arms of this dancer swinging out in front of her body as her back bends so that she can become the figure in red who, depicted in third position, represents the successive step. The dance then moves to Martha Graham who, represented in fifth position, has pivoted ninety degrees and encircled her head in an angular *bras en couronne*. Like a stop-motion photographer's attempt to analyze motion with a series of still shots, the series of stationary poses signifies the dance's movement. As in Morgan's photograph of *Deep Song*, movement occurs not in the bodies of the dancers, but in the shifting of the viewer's focus from left to right and from background to foreground.

One of the great benefits of photography is its ability to capture and still split-second motions that are difficult for the eye to see unaided. However, in freezing the action, the photographer runs the risk of losing all sense of movement. Morgan carefully controlled the camera's ability to freeze motion:

Timing should be attuned with musical precision to the character implicit in the action. Over-fast freezing of action will always make a sensational picture, but it may reveal body tension psychologically foreign to the intention of the dance. ... Timing determines whether the over-all action is to be frozen or whether the sense of motion will be increased by blurring movement.¹¹²

In order to convey the sense of movement and energy of a dance, Morgan often captured the dancers in positions impossible to sustain, sometimes freezing the action and sometimes allowing blur depending on which technique would best convey the movement of the dance.

One of Morgan's photographs of the dance *Celebration* (1934) depicts a circle of three of Graham's dancers leaping [Fig. 5.36]. The dancers appear suspended in the air, toes pointed, skirts billowing about their knees, and hair lifted from their backs. Morgan wrote concerning the image, "another timing tie-up concerns muscular effort and facial expression. In the *Celebration* trio, I clicked at the instant when muscular effort to reach the elevation had been spent and momentary relaxation conveys triumph rather than strain. If I had wanted an expression of frenzy I would have shot earlier and faster—at the moment of greatest stress."¹¹³ The dancers in this image seem to float because Morgan's image captures the instant in the leap when the muscles no longer propel the dancers upward, and they hover for a split-second waiting to fall back to the floor. The leaping

¹¹² Ibid., 150.

¹¹³ Ibid.

dancers' seemingly effortless grace conveys the exultant mood of the dance.¹¹⁴ A sense of movement results from the viewer's knowledge that these dancers must return to the earth despite their statuesque appearance.

In *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, Morgan used double exposure only once to convey motion. In her photograph of the "Three Women" from *American Document* the double exposure gives the impression of a lingering trace of where the dancers were [Fig. 5.7]. Morgan wrote that the "double print was used to convey the repetition of action and the rhythmically chanted accompaniment of the dance."¹¹⁵ In the image the viewer sees the dancers facing forward and in profile, with their bodies bent to the left and to the right, and their hair billowing and lying flat against their heads. The double exposure communicates the transitory nature of a dance. With one image atop another it is difficult to separate the dancers' doubled forms just as when watching a dance performance it is difficult to separate one movement from another; they meld and blur together like the figures in the double exposure.

Morgan used the accoutrements of the dance to suggest a sense of motion, as well. In *Satyrical Festival Song* (1932) Graham danced with her hair loose. One of Morgan's photographs of this dance depicts Graham with her hair flying out behind, slightly blurred to suggest an arc of motion [Fig. 5.37]. The body and face of Graham remain in sharp focus. Morgan described this technique of suggesting motion, which she called "kinetic design": "the shutter speed must fall between center and circumference, freezing the center—letting the circumference go."¹¹⁶ Morgan often used the flow of Graham's costumes to create "kinetic design" and suggest movement of the dancer. Again,

¹¹⁴ Brett Knappe, "Barbara Morgan's Photographic Interpretation of American Culture, 1935-1980" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 2008), 74.

¹¹⁵ Barbara Brooks Morgan, "Dance Photograph," *The Complete Photographer* 3, no. 18 (March 10, 1942): 1137.

¹¹⁶ Morgan, *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 150.

this forced the photographer to carefully time the shutter speed of her camera. She used the photographs of *Frontier* to explain, “At 1/500 second shutter speed of the camera, the *Frontier* costume billows, at 1/1000 second it would have lashed out, destroying that gentle buoyancy registered at the slower speed.”¹¹⁷ In Morgan’s images of *Frontier* the viewer can see how the costume responds to Graham’s movements—the collar seems to float, and the skirt accentuates the distance between her upraised foot and the ground [Fig. 5.38]. Costuming plays a large role in Morgan’s images of *Letter to the World* (1940), as well. In one of Morgan’s well-known images, Graham, dancing the part of Emily Dickinson, bends at the hips with her torso parallel to the floor, one hand, fingers curled, placed on the top of her head, and one leg kicked up behind [Fig. 5.39]. The skirt suggests the movement of the figure. Because the extremities of a dancing body move faster than the center, the edges of the skirt blur very slightly. The deep folds in the skirt, intensified by the lighting of the scene, dramatize the upward kick of Graham’s leg. The photograph, said to be Graham’s favorite, portrays the central moment in *Letter to the World* when Emily Dickinson, whose hopes for love have been dashed, stalwartly resolves to continue onward. Martha Graham said of this photograph, “it reflects a kind of adolescence of the modern dance. It reveals a great deal of what I felt, which I normally don't like to talk about. But there are certain moments that are caught—like the kick, which are deep moments in my life.”¹¹⁸

Stark Young, a New York theater critic, once complained about going to one of Graham’s performances, saying, “Oh must I go? I’m so afraid she’s going to give birth to a cube on stage.”¹¹⁹ Indeed, the similarities between Graham’s style and cubism were difficult to ignore. George W.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Kisselgoff, "Powerful Images of Martha Graham's Art."

¹¹⁹ "Martha Graham Reflects on Her Art and a Life in Dance."

Beiswanger, a dance critic, aesthetician, and philosophy professor who explored the relationships between dance and the other arts, compared Martha Graham's style to the modernist paintings of Cézanne and Picasso. He explained that Graham felt "the surface of dance had to be 'broken up' so that the underlying structure could be disclosed" in a way similar to the modern artists' exploration of their media.¹²⁰ The parallels between Graham's dance language and cubism—the use of fragmentation, angularity, geometry, and a desire to simplify forms—offered artists, like Smith, Morgan, Meyerowitz, and Nevelson, an aesthetic language that could appropriately conjure the quality of Graham's system of movement. Because photography, painting, and sculpture can only portray one instant at a time, these artists sought to find a way to suggest the movement of Graham's dances in singular moments.

Conclusion

Martha Graham said of the relationship between dance and the visual arts:

The only record of a dancer's art lies in the other arts. A dancer's instrument is his body bounded by birth and death. When he perishes his art perishes also. The art of the dance is not arrested, but the world has only a legend about the individual, and the quality that has made him an artist. The work of an individual can be explained, criticized, or eulogized by means of the written word. A painting or work of sculpture can give the world another artist's concept of a dancer. . . . Photographs, when true to the laws that govern inspired photography, reveal facts of feature, bodily contour, and some secret of his power.¹²¹

In the 1930s when artists such as Barbara Morgan, Paul Meltsner, David Smith, and Louise Nevelson photographed, painted, drew, and sculpted Martha Graham, the dancer sat on the cusp of a long, successful career. She continued to choreograph dances until her death in 1991 at the age of ninety-six. Her seventy-five-year career greatly contributed to her towering status among modern

¹²⁰ Morgan, *Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 145.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

dancers and choreographers and inspired both responses from and collaborations with visual artists. Graham became a monumental figure even in her own lifetime as she essentially revolutionized the world of dance. The artists who depicted Martha Graham generally did so because they admired her and her work. Barbara Morgan wished to preserve for future generations something of the dancer's spirit, vitality, and quality of movement in her photographs.¹²² Paul Meltsner's paintings present Graham as a great contributor to American culture. Additionally, many of the artists who depicted Martha Graham did so because they shared common artistic objectives with the dancer. Barbara Morgan and Martha Graham shared an interest in the American Southwest, psychology, and the bolstering of the country during the Great Depression. David Smith, Louise Nevelson, and William Meyerowitz shared with Graham an interest in modernism, cubism, and the simplification of forms. Graham was always attuned to the climate of her times. The major cultural impulses of the twentieth century, such as modernism, psychology, war, primitivism, and nationalism, all significantly influenced the development of her aesthetics and, consequently, these inclinations also are primary in artists' representations of Martha Graham and her dances.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 12.

Chapter 6: Conclusions:

Abstract Art and Dance in America

As discussed in the preceding chapters, the confluence between art and dance in America during the first half of the twentieth century engaged a multitude of artists working in a variety of styles and media. From artists like Malvina Hoffman and Everett Shinn, who admired the ballet and adopted the style of Rodin and Degas, respectively, in order to depict it, to H. Lyman Sayer, who first experimented with cubism in order to convey the angularity and creativity of the avant-garde Ballets Russes, performance dance provided inspiration for both subject and style. This concluding chapter examines the work of two abstract artists for whom dance played a crucial role in the development of their mature styles.

Abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock placed his canvas on the floor and spread his paint with lunging steps, rotating wrists, and outstretched arms. His poured paintings are records of the artist's dancelike gestures. From the early 1930s until his death in 1976, Alexander Calder created his unique and celebrated mobiles. Rather than suggest movement, these sculptures incorporate motion into their very design. Unlike the artists of the previous chapters, Pollock and Calder did not respond to individual dancers or specific dance styles. They did not hope to convey the quality of movement of one figure or another with their art; their involvement with dance occurred at a much more basic level. Pollock and Calder incorporated into their art the fundamental element of dance itself, movement through time.

Painting by Dancing

By the late 1940s and early 1950s concert dance in the United States had come into its own. Martha Graham was at the height of her career. In the 1940s she created many works inspired by Greek tragedies and myths. Considered by critics and historians to be Graham's most evocative works, the mythic pieces explore deeply planted emotions, such as romantic and motherly love in *Night Journey* (1947), a retelling of the Oedipus myth, and revenge in *Clytemnestra* (1958), Graham's only full-length ballet. By the late 1940s ballet had also generated enough interest in the United States to support the New York City Ballet founded by Lincoln Kirstein and choreographer George Balanchine. Dance on Broadway began to evolve into a more serious artistic expression in the 1940s and 1950s as well with shows like *Oklahoma!* and *West Side Story* choreographed by Agnes de Mille and Jerome Robbins, respectively. In the visual arts America also took center stage as New York City became the hub of the art world after World War II. The visual artists at the forefront of these developments, the abstract expressionists, were not immune to the climate of creativity created by the aforementioned choreographers. Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) claimed to be more influenced by nature, Native Americans, the West, and his own subconscious impulses than by the cultural climate of New York City. However, the four paintings that he created with dance as their subjects, *Dancing Head* (c. 1938-1941), *The Night Dancer* (1944), *The Dancers* (1946), and *Rhythmical Dance* (1948), indicate that dance served, at the very least, as a point of interest for Pollock [Figs. 6.1-6.3].

Related primarily in terms of subject matter, *Dancing Head*, *The Night Dancers*, and *Rhythmical Dance* represent Pollock's artistic progression over a ten-year span. Stylistically, *Dancing Head* [Fig. 6.1] is similar to the other works Pollock created in the late 1930s and early 1940s, such

as *The Mad Moon-Woman* (1941).¹ In *Dancing Head* Pollock presents a distorted head atop a short body. The expressionistic application of the thick paint, the bold colors and the undulating forms convey a sense of energy. During this phase of his career Pollock often depicted distorted figures to evoke a primitive expression connected with ancestral peoples.² Pollock created *Night Dancer* with slabs of impasto [Fig. 6.2]. The thickly encrusted paint seems to engulf traces of moving figures. A darker section in the top right hand corner of the canvas may represent the silhouette of one such figure with a raised arm and a leg bent at the knee. Near the left side of the canvas, a crescent form might represent the moon. Below these forms, Pollock's slashing lines and half circles convey a sense of the pulsing energy of the night dancer. *Rhythmical Dance* contains the fluid lines and spatters associated with Pollock's poured paintings of the last years of the 1940s [Fig. 6.3]. In the center of the canvas Pollock attached two abstract figures cut from paper. The black forms are vaguely anthropomorphic with the suggestion of arms, legs, torsos, and heads. Perhaps the distortions of the figures represent the movements of their dancing bodies. The surrounding composition of tangled lines and drips also conveys movement—the movement of the artist, as he created the work with a dance style of his own.

Pollock's dancing figures are connected to his interests in Native American art and culture and the prevalence of dance in those societies and religions. Pollock's affinities with Native American ideas and art forms are well documented. Art historian Stephen Polcari believes that Pollock, who underwent Jungian psychoanalysis, associated the unconscious with the primitive and

¹ See Carol Sims, "The American Avant-Garde: A Decade of Change 1936-1946," *Antiques and the Arts*, October 31, 2000.

² Leesa Fanning, "Abstract Expressionism and the Body: Philosophical and Cultural Interpretations" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1998), 99.

that he felt by unlocking the unconscious he could be closer to the essence of mankind.³ Pollock's interests in shamanism and Navajo sand painting are two manifestations of these ideals;⁴ his dancing figures are another. Dancing is one of the earliest human expressions, and it is fundamental to all cultures. The dances of so-called primitive peoples often have a ceremonial function that connects the dancers and their society to their larger sense of purpose. In Baker Brownell's *Art is Action* (1939) the author writes "that a mystical identity is created between dance and the forces of nature." The dancer "becomes dancing and finds there the primeval unity" of humanity's first existence.⁵ Pollock first expressed his interest in dance by depicting dancers. As he developed his abstract, gestural style, Pollock himself became the dancer.

In 1930 Jackson Pollock moved from California to New York City to study with Thomas Hart Benton at the Art Students League (1930-1932). Although Pollock did not continue on with Benton's regionalist agenda for long after his teacher's relocation to Kansas City in 1935, his work contains aspects of Benton's sense of rhythm. Benton designed his method of composition to direct the viewer's eye naturally from one element to the next with a series of arcs [Fig. 6.4]. The arc became the foundation for his paintings, and he taught this system to his students. Using diagrams, Benton illustrated for his students how this method functioned. Around a series of axes Benton arranged arcs and half-circles with the idea that the spectator would complete the broken curves with the movement of his eyes. By demanding movement from his viewers, Benton created a sense of rhythmical motion in his paintings. Under Benton's instruction, Pollock, who once accused his

³ See Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁴ See W. Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism*, American Studies Series (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

⁵ Baker Brownell, *Art is Action: A Discussion of Nine Arts in a Modern World* (New York: Harper & Bros. Publishers, 1939), 42, 39.

own drawings of lacking rhythm, began to develop an ability to portray movement in a controlled fashion.⁶ Benton said of his pupil, “[Jack] did catch on to the contrapuntal logic of occidental form construction quite quickly. In his analytical work he got things out of proportion but found the essential rhythms.”⁷ As Pollock began to strip his work of recognizable forms, what remained was the rhythmic flow of Benton’s instruction.

As Pollock developed his abstract style, movement and the gestures of the artist became increasingly important. In 1943 he received a commission from Peggy Guggenheim to paint an eight-by-nineteen-foot canvas for display in the entrance hall of her new apartment on East Sixty-First Street. The completed piece, *Mural*, was his largest and most abstract work to date [Fig. 6.5]. Finishing the work was quite a challenge for Pollock who allowed the blank canvas to sit untouched for months. Finally, without drawing a single preparatory sketch, he painted the whole piece in a night. The painting dispenses with the narrative cycles traditionally portrayed on murals and instead foregrounds rhythmic harmonies.⁸ Vague biomorphic forms are dispersed across the canvas, overlapped by layers of undulating colors. Years later Pollock recounted his inspiration for the piece: “I had a vision . . . It was a stampede” involving “every animal in the American West . . . cows and horses and antelopes and buffaloes. Everything is charging across the goddam surface.”⁹ His statement and the size of the canvas may conjure images of the expansive western scenes of Albert Bierstadt or Thomas Moran. However, instead of mimetically recreating the American West, the artist focused primarily on the frenetic energy of the stampede. Splatters of red and yellow and

⁶ Eugene Victor Thaw and Francis V. O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works*, 4 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), Vol. 4, 209.

⁷ Benton quoted in F.V. O'Connor, "The Genesis of Jackson Pollock: 1912-1943," *Artforum* 5, no. 9 (May 1967): 17.

⁸ Fanning, “Abstract Expressionism and the Body,” 134.

⁹ Jackson Pollock quoted in Steven W. Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: C.N. Potter, 1989), 468.

swirling lines of white, teal, and magenta seem to multiple around black poles. The painting, inspired by a vision of turbulent movement, becomes a record of the artist's gestural strokes.

In Pollock's abstract paintings, from *Mural* to *Blue Poles* (1952) [Figs. 6.5, 6.6], Benton's underlying structure of arcs clustered around axes also forms the basic structure of his former pupil's work.¹⁰ In *Blue Poles* especially, Pollock brings the axes and arcs to the foreground of the painting. They serve as both the foundation of the piece and the closest thing it has to iconography.

Thomas Hart Benton told Francis O'Connor, author of Pollock's catalogue raisonné:

I think it highly improbable that anybody but Jack would have thought of them (the poles)—anybody, I mean who had not studied composition with me. . . . In an actual composition I always erased the poles or most times simply imagined them. I never made them parts of a composition as did Jack in the "Blue Poles" painting. But it was probably some vague memory of my theory demonstrations that caused him to 'inject' the poles in that painting. Their use however is a purely Pollock concept. I never did anything like it or suggested anything like it.¹¹

Around these blue axes in *Blue Poles* cluster swirls of orange, yellow, white, grey, and brown paint creating the dynamic rhythm Benton emphasized in his teaching.

Benton proposed that successful compositions depend on the shared understanding of movement between the artist and the spectator. According to Benton, a knowledge of movement develops:

In the 'feel' of our bodies, in the sight of the bodies of others, in the bodies of animals, in the shapes of growing and moving things, in the forces of nature and in the engines of man, the rhythmic principle of movement and counter-movement is made manifest. But in our own bodies it can be isolated and understood. This mechanical principle which we share with all life can be abstracted and used in constructing and analyzing things which also in their way have life and reality.¹²

¹⁰ J. Richard Gruber, "Thomas Hart Benton: Teaching and Art Theory" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1987), 237.

¹¹ Thaw and O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock*, Vol. 4, 193.

¹² Thomas Hart Benton, "The Mechanics of Form Organization in Painting: Part 4," *The Arts* 11, no. 2 (February 1927): 96.

Thus for Benton, the viewer's understanding of and experience with the movements of arms, legs, birds, and breezes operate in tandem with the artist's careful use of dynamic arcs. Benton attempted to animate his figures, be they human, animal, or vegetable, through this system. Pollock's works, on the other hand, use, in part, Benton's *Compositional Diagrams* to convey the artist's gestures. As Pollock developed his poured technique, the movements of the artist became more controlled, regular, and precise. In a sense, in order to create his poured paintings, Pollock had to create his own dance language.

In the mid-1940s, Pollock and his wife, Lee Krasner, moved to Springs, New York on Long Island and into an old farmhouse. Pollock converted the barn into a studio and there he dispensed with traditional easel painting, placed his bare canvases on the floor, and further developed his style of gestural abstraction [Fig. 6.7]. Many critics note the importance in Pollock's artistic development of moving the canvas from the easel to the floor. As Harold Rosenberg observed, the canvas became "an arena in which to act—rather than ... a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze, or 'express' an object. ..."¹³ Rosenberg sees the abstract expressionist painter as an actor, and the viewer's interest in the work "lies in the kind of act taking place in the four-sided arena."¹⁴ The canvas, in other words, became a stage on which to act or, perhaps more precisely in Pollock's case, on which to dance. Pollock, in this transition from easel to ground, transforms the canvas from the backdrop before which the artist performs to the stage where the action actually takes place. In the first and only edition of the avant-garde art magazine, *Possibilities*, Pollock commented on his new working method:

¹³ Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News* 51, no. 8 (December 1952): 22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

My painting does not come from the easel. I hardly ever stretch my canvas before painting. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be *in* the painting.¹⁵

Pollock's move to the floor necessitated a change in his working method. He poured paint directly from cans onto the canvas and dripped and splattered it with stiff brushes and mixing sticks. By placing the canvas on the floor, Pollock also removed himself from the traditional, relatively stationary, vertical stance of the artist applying paint to canvas. The canvas's horizontal orientation expanded Pollock's working area, and, in order to take advantage of this additional space, Pollock moved around the canvas—painting from all four sides and occasionally stepping onto the surface of the painting itself.

Painting on a horizontal canvas required an entirely new use of the body. No longer could Pollock paint in the traditional manner that primarily involves hands and wrists; instead, he employed his entire body. He circled the canvas, lunged forward, leaned his shoulder across the work, flung his arm and hand over the canvas, and flicked his wrist to release the paint [Fig. 6.8]. Those who observed Pollock at work often used dance and dance-related terms to describe his technique. Hans Namuth, who photographed and filmed Pollock at work, said of the experience, "His movements, slow at first, gradually became faster and more dancelike as he flung black, white, and rust-colored paint onto the canvas."¹⁶ Fellow artist Robert Motherwell said of Pollock's technique, "Dancing around the room, he finally found a way of painting that fitted him. . . ."¹⁷

Curator and art critic Mario Amaya described Pollock's works in these terms: "Jackson Pollock's

¹⁵ Jackson Pollock, "My Painting," *Possibilities* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1947/1948): 79.

¹⁶ Hans Namuth and Barbara Rose, *Pollock Painting* (New York: Agrinde Publications, 1980), n.p.

¹⁷ Robert Motherwell quoted in B. H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock; Energy Made Visible* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), plates.

canvases betray this sensitivity for dance movements. Woven together with swirls of spun enamel and aluminum paint, his enormous works seemed to encompass the very essence of the dance with their *arabesques*, their exciting *jetés*, their thrust and energy.”¹⁸ As Pollock dripped, poured, and splattered paint with the motions of his shoulder, elbow, wrist, and fingers, he rarely touched the canvas with his stiffened brushes and sticks. The resulting lines and splatters serve as a record of the motions performed by Pollock above the canvas.

Pollock’s method of painting captured the attention of photographer Hans Namuth who, in 1950 and 1951, made a series of photographs and two films of Pollock at work. When studying these photographs and films one must take into account that Pollock was indeed performing for Namuth. However, despite their limitations, Namuth’s images provide the most complete record of Pollock painting in existence. Namuth encountered a number of difficult circumstances as he attempted to photograph Pollock. The largeness of Pollock’s canvases made it impossible for Namuth to record an entire work of art in a single shot. He, therefore, took many photographs from above, and in them Pollock seems small and stooped. Also, the dimness of the studio and Pollock’s swift motions resulted in a number of blurred images [Fig. 6.9]. The blurring has benefits as it animates the prints and gives the viewer a sense of which part of his body Pollock was moving at the moment of exposure.

Namuth felt displeased with the results of his photo shoots and decided the only way to truly communicate Pollock’s technique was to make a film because, as he wrote, “Pollock’s method of painting suggested a moving picture—the dance around the canvas, the continuous movement,

¹⁸ Mario Amaya, "The Dance in Art: The 'Twenties and After," *Dance and Dancers* 12, no. 2 (February 1961): 18.

the drama.”¹⁹ Namuth made one film in black and white and one in color. The black and white film allowed Pollock to work in his studio in his usual manner. The color film, however, needed more lighting than the barn could provide and Pollock had to paint outdoors [Fig. 6.10]. In terms of Pollock’s health and well-being the color film was disastrous. The stress of filming and the lack of control Pollock felt he had over the final product contributed to a bout of depression and alcohol abuse. These films, despite their alterations to the artist’s routine, provide insights into Pollock’s working method. In the film Pollock shuffles from side to side, placing one foot behind the other. He repeatedly stoops and performs a sweeping motion with his right arm loosing the paint. To create a curving line he extends his arm forward with the palm down then rotates the wrist, turning the palm upward. To create small circular splatters Pollock raises his right arm and then flings it down from the elbow keeping the palm facing upward. The thickness and thinness of the lines of paint vary according to the speed with which Pollock’s arm and hand travel above the canvas as he rotates his wrist and fingers. As Pollock executes the same sequence of steps, creating similar effects on the canvas, the viewer can see the dancelike repetition and regularity of Pollock’s motions.

Because gravity played a large role in the creation of his works, Pollock had to perfect his gestures in order to achieve his desired results. The paint’s fall to the canvas could exaggerate and amplify even the slightest flick of the wrist. Also, the speed of Pollock’s gestures, the height of his hand when the paint was released, and the viscosity of the paint itself all affected the final outcome. Thus, it was necessary for Pollock to maintain control over his movements. Like a modern dancer creating a new style of dance, Pollock invented and then honed his gestures, and as his dexterity

¹⁹ Namuth and Rose, *Pollock Painting*, n.p.

developed he began to understand how to create and then reproduce a desired outcome. When asked about his working method, Pollock explained that because he worked above the canvas he was “able to move free and to have greater freedom and move about the canvas, with greater ease,” and yet despite this increased freedom he asserted, “it seems to be possible to control the flow the paint, to a great extent, and I don’t use . . . the accident.”²⁰ The critic Clement Greenberg agreed. In a 1967 article for *Vogue* he wrote that the power of Pollock’s method of painting with its “mazy trickling, dribbling, whipping, blotching, and staining of paint” resulted from the artist’s ability to create tension between disorder and harmony. According to Greenberg, in Pollock’s poured paintings “order supervenes at the last moment . . . triumphantly.”²¹ Throughout the years in which Pollock created his poured paintings (1947-1950), his style retained a remarkable continuity, meaning that over the course of these three years, in works spanning from *Cathedral* (1947) to *One: Number 31, 1950* (1950) [Figs. 6.10, 6.11], he kept his gestures consistent, and that he regulated his movements. Pollock built himself a repertoire of gestures, then, without premeditation, he assembled the various steps to create each painting. Thus, each work of art, created with deliberate gestures, could be likened to a dance, for although one might recognize similar steps in two dance pieces the manner in which they are put together and executed often results in very different outcomes.

The Hungarian movement analyst Rudolf Laban (1879-1958) developed a language for interpreting, describing, and visualizing human movement. Used by dancers, athletes, and doctors, Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) separates the effort involved in creating movement into four

²⁰ Jackson Pollock, interview with William Wright, The Springs, Long Island, New York, Late 1950 reprinted in Pepe Karmel, *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 21-22.

²¹ Clement Greenberg, “Jackson Pollock: ‘Inspiration, Vision, Intuitive Decision,’” *Vogue* 149, no. 7 (April 1, 1967): 160-61 reprinted in *ibid.*, 112.

factors: space, weight, time, and flow. Space refers to the direction and extension of movement, and weight indicates the strength behind that movement. Time refers to the movement's energy, whether it is sustained or sudden, jerky or fluid. Lastly, flow, has to do with the continuousness of motions. Dance historian Mary Watts equates Pollock's work with dancing because, in each case, the painter or dancer consciously controls all four of these elements.²² The sense of rhythm in Pollock's paintings results from the calculated effort behind the corporeal movements with which they were created. Robert Goodnough attempted to explain the artist's working method in a 1951 article for *Art News*:

... [Pollock] dipped into the paint and then began to move his arm rhythmically about, letting the paint fall in a variety of movements on the surface. At times he would crouch, holding the brush close to the canvas, and again would stand and move around it or step on to it to reach the middle. Within a half hour the entire surface had taken on an activity of weaving rhythms. ... As he continued, still with black, going back over former areas, rhythms were intensified with counteracting movements.²³

Rhythm is an important element in formalized dance. Consistent rhythm creates coherence in a dance and holds together the various dance phrases from which a piece is composed. In this way, rhythm in dance works much like rhythm in music, providing a consistent background upon which the choreographer or composer builds his piece. Such is the case with Pollock's works as well. The rhythm of his dancelike movements creates balance and order in the finished paintings. That *Number 30* (1950) is also known as *Autumn Rhythm* is a testament to the importance of the rhythmical element in all of Pollock's poured paintings [Fig. 6.12].

Dance exists in space and time. The creation of a painting, however, was Pollock's final goal, and his dancelike movements served as the means that allowed him to craft his desired

²² Elizabeth Watts, *Towards Dance and Art* (London: Lepus Books, 1977), 91.

²³ Robert Goodnough, "Pollock Paints a Picture," *Art News* 50, no. 3 (May 1951): 38-41, 60-61 reprinted in Karmel, *Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, 76.

aesthetic. Through the lines and forms of paint on canvas, Pollock adds permanence to his movements, leaving a record of his dance that can be viewed long after the painting's completion. As one critic wrote, Pollock's "action painting represents the deed of a moment in time made tangible. ... By becoming visible it ruptures the bonds of time as a dimension."²⁴ Pollock displayed his finished works on the wall, in a vertical orientation like other paintings. Although he rotated the stage where he performed before presenting it to spectators, reverberations of the movements used to create the work remain. The lines, whiplashes, and splatters can be read as traces of directional energy. The overlapping colors give some indication as to the order of Pollock's movements. The viewer follows these elements with his or her eyes across the all-over composition. However, Pollock's dance record is imprecise and in many ways indecipherable. Looking at Pollock's action paintings does not offer the viewer an exact understanding of the artist's movements or the order in which he executed those movements. Pollock's works do allow viewers to sense and imagine the motions of the artist as they connect the movements of their eyes with the movements of the body. As art historian Claude Cernuschi explained, the viewer of a Pollock painting "reconstructs the 'illusion' left by the artist" by relating the painting to the movement encountered in his or her daily existence. Cernuschi proposes that "without the most rudimentary knowledge of movement, it is doubtful whether a spectator could experience the effect of dynamism and energy so often felt before a Pollock painting."²⁵ In a sense, when Pollock's poured paintings are placed on the wall, the dance passes to the viewer. However, now the dance is not a faithful reproduction of Pollock's

²⁴ Italo Tomassoni, *Pollock: The Life and Work of the Artist* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1969), 9.

²⁵ Claude Cernuschi, *Jackson Pollock: Meaning and Significance* (New York: Icon Editions, 1992), 250.

actions; instead it is an imagined dance as the viewer contemplates the movements needed to complete the work.

Sculptures that Dance

In October of 1930 Alexander Calder (1898-1976) visited Piet Mondrian's studio in Paris [Fig. 6.13]. As Calder later reminisced, "this one visit gave me a shock that started things."²⁶ The arrangement of Mondrian's studio made a powerful impression on the American artist. He recounted, "I was very much moved by Mondrian's studio, large, beautiful and irregular in shape as it was, with the walls painted white and divided by black lines and rectangles of bright color, like his paintings. It was very lovely ... and I thought at the time how fine it would be if everything there *moved* ...".²⁷ Mondrian thought very little of Calder's suggestion, but the American artist immediately went to work. He abandoned the figures he had been making for the previous four years and began composing abstract works, first on canvas and then as wire and wood constructions. Calder hoped to incorporate movement into his new works of art and that became his primary motivation because he believed "the next step in sculpture is motion."²⁸ Over the course of the next several years Calder experimented with how best to do so. He first created paintings and constructions that suggested motion, next he used motors to propel his forms, and finally he assembled wind-driven apparatus.

Throughout the early years of the twentieth century, representing motion greatly concerned a number of avant-garde artists. The futurists lauded speed and the machine; dada artists, such as Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and Man Ray, sought to portray movement, and

²⁶ Alexander Calder, *Calder: An Autobiography with Pictures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 113.

²⁷ Alexander Calder, "Mobiles," in *The Painter's Object*, ed. Myfanwy Evans (London: G. Howe, 1937), 63.

²⁸ "Objects to Art Being Static," *New York World-Telegram*, June 11, 1932.

photographers from Thomas Eakins to Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey deconstructed the actions of moving figures in their photographs. Unlike other artists, Calder did not simply represent movement on a static plane; he created works of art that actually moved. Instead of suggesting motion he treated movement as another compositional element. Calder declared, "Why not plastic forms in motion? Not a simple translatory or rotary motion, but several motions of different types, speeds and amplitudes composing to make a resultant whole. Just as one can compose colors, or forms, so can one compose motions."²⁹

Prior to becoming an artist, Calder studied engineering at the Stevens Institute of Technology, and his engineering background served him well in his pursuit to incorporate movement into his artistic designs. While his engineering training helped Calder with the technical aspects of moving sculptures, his inspiration came from a variety of sources. Calder spoke frequently of his interest in outer space and equated his hanging mobiles to the bodies of stars and planets,³⁰ stating that "art was too static to reflect our world of movement."³¹ He acknowledged the influence of nature on his works of art,³² and he also found inspiration in the theater and modern dance. Like performing dancers, Calder's mobiles move through space and time. The attraction of a Calder mobile depends on the relationships of the moving elements to one another, just as on the stage individual dancers complement one another to form a complete ballet. Furthermore, just as a dance, existing in time, cannot be captured in one moment, experiencing a mobile also demands

²⁹ Alexander Calder, "Artist Statement," in *Modern Painting and Sculpture: Alexander Calder*, George L.K. Morris, Calvert Coggshall, Alma De Gersdorff Morgan (Pittsfield, MA: Berkshire Museum, 1933), 2.

³⁰ Peggy Guggenheim, *Art of This Century: Objects, Drawings, Photographs, Paintings, Sculpture, Collages, 1910 to 1942* (New York: Art of This Century, 1942), 96.

³¹ Selden Rodman, *Conversations with Artists* (New York: Devin-Adair Co., 1957), 139.

³² Katharine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 39.

that a viewer take the time to watch these arrangements occur, change, and develop. Calder, as the composer of the mobile's motion, is the choreographer, creating sculptures that dance.

In February of 1932 Calder exhibited his first moving sculptures at the Galerie Vignon in Paris. At Marcel Duchamp's suggestion he called the works "mobiles," highlighting their moving parts. Motors drove a number of the moving sculptures, composed of abstract shapes, displayed at Galerie Vignon. Titles like *Crank-Driven Mobile* (1931-1932) and *Dancing Torpedo Shape* (1932) [Fig. 6.14] emphasized the primacy of the movements the works performed. For these motorized works, Calder felt it best to combine his geometric forms with the simple movements of raising, lowering, rotating, and spinning—all performed at various speeds.³³ Contrasting speeds allowed the sculptures to exhibit a wider variety of spatial relationships. The charm of Calder's earlier wire sculptures and toys resulted from the artist's ability to mimic the movements of the figure, be it a horse, lion, or dancer. With the mechanically driven abstract sculptures, Calder shifted his methods. Instead of attempting to conjure the movements of specific beings he presented motion for its own sake. With the mechanized pieces, Calder took his first steps into designing motion. The motors allowed Calder to closely control the way the various parts of his pieces moved in relation to one another. He could designate the speed of each moving form and the length of time over which each movement occurred. He said of these pieces, "With a mechanical drive, you can control the thing like the choreography in a ballet ...".³⁴ Calder organized the movements of his mechanized works to a greater extent than previously explored by other artists.

³³ James Johnson Sweeney, Lincoln Kirstein, and Henry R. Hope, *Five American Sculptors* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 34.

³⁴ Calder, "Mobiles," 67.

Calder often referred to his motor-driven mobiles as mechanical ballets or ballet-objects. The term, which is not a title for a particular work of art, refers to an entire category of mechanized pieces that feature brightly painted, independently moving, geometric forms. Calder described one of these ballet-objects:

For a couple of years in Paris I had a small ballet-object, built on a table with pulleys at the top of a frame. It was possible to move coloured [sic] discs across the rectangle, or fluttering pennants, or cones; to make them dance, or even have battles between them. Some of them had large, simple, majestic movements; others were small and agitated.³⁵

Calder continued his description with a discussion of the lighting and backgrounds of this object, indicating that they could be changed, furthering the similarities between Calder's piece and a performance onstage. As early as 1933 Calder expressed a desire to create works for the theater. He showed a ballet-object to the Ballets Russes master Léonide Massine, and they discussed the difficulties Calder would need to overcome were he to enlarge the work for the stage.³⁶ The ballet-objects indicate Calder's affinity for dance and emphasize the parallels between the two art forms.

Calder often set the moving forms of his ballet-objects within a frame as in *Untitled (Model for Ballet-Object)* (c. 1936) [Fig. 6.15]. Critics and historians frequently read the framed works as Calder's attempt to create moving paintings.³⁷ The frames may also reference the proscenium of a stage which contributes to the works' theatricality. *Red Frame* (1932), one of Calder's earliest abstract sculptures, does not contain moving parts [Fig. 6.16]. Composed of a framed group of circles and spheres of various sizes, this early work reveals Calder's interest "in space, vectoral

³⁵ Ibid., 64.

³⁶ Marla Prather and A. S. C. Rower, *Alexander Calder: 1898-1976* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1998), 331.

³⁷ Jean Lipman and Ruth Wolfe, *Calder's Universe* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 1989), 253.

quantities, and centers of differing densities.”³⁸ To further explore these interests, Calder constructed his *White Frame* (1934) with moving parts [Fig. 6.17]. The increased size of *White Frame*, measuring seven and a half feet high by nine feet wide, resembles a large puppet theater and corresponds to Calder’s theatrical ambitions. In *White Frame* a spiral form on the left rotates, two wooden balls suspended from springs sway back and forth, a hoop appears to form a sphere as it turns, and a large red disc swings like a pendulum [Fig. 6.18]. Calder, with *White Frame*, composes motion and presents that motion within a somewhat theatrical setting. He stated, “I went to the use of motion for its contrapuntal value, as in good choreography.”³⁹ *White Frame*, with its variety of forms moving in harmony with one another to create changing patterns in space, is a prime example of Calder’s attempts to bring choreography and sculpture together. Calder takes the stage-like quality of his framed works one step further in a ballet-object (known only from photographs) set within a cube delineated by a wire framework [Fig. 6.19]. The spheres and spindles rotate within this confined three-dimensional space just as an actor or dancer is confined to the limitations of the stage. Thus, Calder’s framed works resemble small theaters of objects in motion.

Calder set several of his motorized works upon flat platforms. If Calder’s framed works reference the stage’s proscenium, one can presume the horizontal platforms correspond to a stage’s horizontal surface. In *Dancers and Sphere* (1936) two bifurcated metal strips represent dancers with extended arms [Fig. 6.20]. As they twist they give the impression of twirling bodies. The white sphere rises and falls in a looping fashion while a spindle rotates on a diagonal axis. The action takes place upon a raised horizontal piece of wood as if the shapes perform on a stage. *Dancers and Sphere*

³⁸ Calder, "Artist Statement," 3.

³⁹ Alexander Calder, "Statement," in *Alexander Calder*, ed. Maud Morgan and Patrick Morgan (Andover, MA: Addison Gallery, 1943), n.p.

is one of Calder's few mechanized works with a title that references human figures. Generally preferring to underscore the non-representational aspects of his work, Calder assigned the majority of the mechanized pieces titles that cite the shapes involved in the construction, such as *Half-circle, Quarter-circle and Sphere* (1932), and several are known as simply *Mobile* or *Untitled*. That Calder called this piece *Dancers and Sphere* may indicate the importance of dance as an influence.

Furthermore, the bifurcated ribbon denoting the dancers reappears throughout Calder's career, as in *Four Elements* (1962) installed in front of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm [Fig. 6.21]. *Dancers and Sphere* is a more literal translation of what all Calder's moving constructions accomplish: they replace the performances of moving, human forms with inanimate shapes.

Another category of mechanical mobiles also contains parallels to the theater. In works such as *Orange Panel* (1936) [Fig. 6.22] and *Red Panel* (1936), Calder set moving parts in front of colored back panels reminiscent of theatrical backdrops. Calder constructs some of his mechanized mobiles with both a back panel and a horizontal platform, bringing the stage and the backdrop together. In *Blue Panel* (c. 1936) Calder places a crescent and spiral form into the back panel [Fig. 6.23]. They serve as props or stage sets to the larger abstract form set on a platform in front of the panel. This form's somewhat humanoid shape with what appears to be a slender waist and long neck rotates on a pulley and creates the impression of a twirling dancer.

When possible, Calder conscientiously controlled the lighting of his mechanized works. In a photograph of Calder's *Untitled (Model for Ballet-Object)* the shadows double all the forms in the mobile [Fig. 6.15]. When those forms begin to move the shadows will also shift and change. Lighting is an important theatrical element that can help create mood, emotion, and drama in a production. Lighting contributes to the way the audience perceives the figures on stage. For

example, different colored lights and the creation of shadows can cause figures to loom large and menacing or appear small and timid. Painter and art critic George L.K. Morris agreed that the lighting of Calder's pieces played a significance role: "I have further observed that shadows cast on a wall by Calder's mobiles are apt to be more dramatic than the works themselves."⁴⁰ Calder remembered that when he installed his 1937 and 1938 exhibitions at the Mayor Gallery in London he "used to turn out the light and project them [the mobiles] on the wall with a flashlight as they turned around."⁴¹ Careful lighting and the resulting shadows enhanced the mobiles' theatricality.

In the 1930s Calder created a notation system to track the movements of the forms in his works. The system involved crisscrossing, twisting lines, demarcated by numbers meant to measure durations of time and overlaid with small arrows to indicate the direction in which the shapes traverse the space. In a notation drawing for *Ballet in Four Parts*, a proposed theatrical production that never came to fruition, Calder tracks the movements of a disc, a sphere, a pennant, and a flat, triangular form [Fig. 6.24]. Reading the notation system indicates that the larger sphere descends across the work in a large arc and then ascends with a series of loops; the pennant moves the fastest of the four figures, and the triangle travels from right to left. Calder's notation system looks somewhat similar to the dance notation invented by Raoul-Auger Feuillet in 1700 [Fig. 6.25]. Historian Arnauld Pierre argues that Calder thought of motion in sculpture in a manner comparable to the way in which dancers and choreographers think about motion, and he concludes that this indicates that the mobile is essentially a theatrical object.⁴²

⁴⁰ George L.K. Morris, "Relations of Painting and Sculpture," *Partisan Review* 10, no. 1 (January-February 1943): 70.

⁴¹ Calder, *Calder: An Autobiography with Pictures*, 166.

⁴² Prather and Rower, *Alexander Calder: 1898-1976*, 334-35.

Calder's mechanical ballets allowed the artist to explore the relationships and harmonies created by various moving forms. However, after a time, Calder found the set movements of the mechanized works limiting. The motors tended to break down, and Calder felt even his most ambitious mechanical works eventually became tedious due to their continuous repetitions.⁴³ With his wind-driven mobiles, Calder lost the ability to execute precisely all the movements of his works, but he gained greater variety and freedom [Fig. 6.26]. Despite the loss of perfectly planned choreography, Calder's wind mobiles still owe much to the world of the theater and dance.

Whether large or small, hung from the ceiling or suspending from a base, the moving arms and dangling shapes of Calder's mobiles encompass, traverse, and enliven the surrounding spatial dimensions. As the mobiles move with the breeze the viewer may contemplate the space in which each piece resides. Alexander Calder said of the mobile's movement:

A mobile in motion leaves an invisible wake behind it, or rather, each element leaves an individual wake behind its individual self. Sometimes these wakes are contracted within each other, and sometimes they are deployed. In this latter position the mobile occupies more space, and it is the diameter of this maximum trajectory that should be considered in measuring a mobile.⁴⁴

Photography can help illuminate a mobile's relationship with its surrounding space [Fig. 6.27]. The first in a series of photographs captures *Hanging Mobile* (1936) motionless. The other images, created with multi-flash photography, communicate through the blurred lines and dots the areas the mobile traverses as it moves in a variety of ways. The photographs illustrate the contrast between the static form of the mobile and the greater area its movements describe. The mobile's ability to rotate, turn, and twist allows the work of art to reach beyond its limited physical dimensions of

⁴³ Kuh, *The Artist's Voice*, 18.

⁴⁴ Alexander Calder, "A Propos of Measuring a Mobile" reprinted in James Johnson Sweeney, ...*Alexander Calder* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1951), 70.

height and width much like the gestures of a dancer, by reaching up, stretching out, and curling inward, force the audience to consider the space in which he or she performs.

Due to the movement and, thus, the transitory nature of his mobiles Calder successfully incorporated the element of time into these works of art. To experience a mobile, a viewer must spend enough time in front of the piece to see the changes occur. At an exhibition of Calder's art at the Guggenheim, Albert Einstein reportedly spent forty minutes watching one Calder piece move through its cycle.⁴⁵ As a mobile's pieces shift and turn they create a rhythmic quality that can only be observed if one settles in to watch the rotations. Calder, by introducing physical motion into his works of art, also brought to sculpture temporality, typically a hallmark of the performing arts. Traditional static sculpture, even sculpture that attempts to convey movement, exists solely in space. Performing arts, such as music and dance, develop over time. Dance can be defined as the movement of bodies in space through time, and Calder's art, like dance, exists in both space and time. As the elements of the mobiles rotate through time describing the space around them, it is as if they are performing. The geometric forms become metaphors for dancers, performing in subtle or dramatic ways in a limited area. In a certain sense, Calder fills the role of choreographer. While he allows his forms a degree of freedom and embraces chance to an extent, he demarcates the limitations in which his geometric forms will move; he selects and hones the individual pieces, and he defines their relationships with one another.

Calder's mobiles are an art of motion. Instead of conveying the effects of motion through line, shape, color, or forms, actual physical movement became a key component of Calder's

⁴⁵ Richard Lemon, "Mobiles: The Soaring Art of Alexander Calder," *Saturday Evening Post*, February 27, 1965, 32.

aesthetic, and he treated motion as another compositional element. When discussing the treatment of materials that may be used to create a sculpture, Calder included movement:

A knowledge of, and sympathy with, the qualities of the materials used are essential to proper treatment. Stone, the most ancient, should be kept massive ... Bronze, cast, serves well for slender, attenuated shapes. ... Wood has a grain which must be reckoned with ... Wire, rods, sheet metal ... respond quickly to whatever sort of work one may subject them to. ... Also there is the possibility of using motion in an object as part of the design and composition.⁴⁶

In 1946 Jean-Paul Sartre wrote an essay on Calder's mobiles for the catalogue that accompanied an exhibition at the Galerie Louis-Carré in Paris. He affirmed, "Calder's art does not suggest movement, but rather captures it."⁴⁷ With his mobiles, Calder created moving works not in order to describe or imitate the movements of flora or fauna, but for the sake of the movement itself. Movement is the motive behind each piece and the end result. For Sartre this is why Calder's mobiles relate to dance. The philosopher continued: "Calder suggests nothing, he captures real living movements and gives them shape. His mobiles signify nothing, and they refer to nothing but themselves: they are, that is all. They are absolutes. ... Calder sets for each of them, a general destiny of motion, then he abandons it to its own. It is the hour, the sun, the heat, the wind, which will decide each individual dance."⁴⁸ In dance, movement acts as the primary form of communication and all other elements—music, lighting, costuming, etc.—are secondary; this separates dance from other expressive art forms. Movement is also the most important element in

⁴⁶ Calder, "A Propos of Measuring a Mobile" in Sweeney, ...*Alexander Calder*, 70.

⁴⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre and James Johnson Sweeney, *Alexander Calder; Mobiles, Stables, Constellations* (Paris: Galerie Louis Carré, 1946), 12.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Calder's mobiles. As Calder related in an interview, while size, color, and shape matter, "the most important thing is that the mobile be able to catch the air. It has to be able to move."⁴⁹

Many of Calder's contemporaries recognized and celebrated the theatrical qualities of his works of art. Over the course of his career, Calder created sets for thirteen theatrical productions of various genres. In each case, movement served as a key component in Calder's sets, and it differentiates Calder from the other artists designing for the theater at the time. With his contributions to the stage, Calder followed the paths of several well-known and innovative avant-garde artists, such as Picasso and Matisse who designed for the Ballets Russes and Fernand Léger who worked with the Ballet Suedois. However, Calder saw his set designs not merely as background to the human figures on stage but as performers in their own right. His moving pieces rivaled and at times took the place of the human actors and dancers.

Calder's first collaboration was with the consummate modern dancer and choreographer, Martha Graham. Calder created mobiles for Graham's *Panorama*, produced for the 1935 Bennington Festival at Bennington College in Vermont, a haven for modern dance in the 1930s. *Panorama* was the Workshop Program piece of 1935, meaning the college subsidized Graham's work allowing the choreographer greater freedom to experiment. Over the course of six weeks a workshop production choreographer would train his or her dancers, choreograph the piece, and oversee the composition of the music, sets, and costumes for the culminating performance. *Panorama* marks Graham's first collaboration with Norman Lloyd, who composed the music, Arch Lauterer, who designed the sets and lighting, and Alexander Calder, who created mobiles for the

⁴⁹ Yvon Taillandier, "Calder: Personne ne pense à moi quand on a un cheval à faire," *XXe Siècle*, no. 2 (March 15, 1959): n.p.

piece. In addition, with *Panorama*, Graham choreographed her largest number of dancers in her longest work to date. *Panorama* endeavored to present three American themes. Graham based the first movement, the “Theme of Dedication,” on the religious fervor of the Puritans. The second, the “Imperial Theme,” portrayed the bondage of the slaves, and the final section, the “Popular Theme,” presented the growing social consciousness of contemporary people.

For *Panorama*, Calder designed moving sculptures meant to be fully integrated into the dance. The mobile used in the first movement, “Theme of Dedication,” consisted of four white and red-and-white striped disks and a small red ball, suspended from the ends of long rods. Ruth Lloyd, wife of composer Norman Lloyd, recalled how Calder intended the mobile to function: “Calder had devised two mobiles for the dance. The first was a set of primary-colored discs, suspended from pulleys. Each disc was attached to the wrist of one of the five dancers. The effect was stunning, with the dipping and rising space patterns of the discs counterpointing the slow-moving, earth-bound movement of the dancers.”⁵⁰ By linking the dancers to his mobiles, Calder created sets or props that augmented and participated in the choreography of the dancers. The mobiles’ possibilities fascinated Martha Graham, and one of her dancers recalled that “Martha became so involved with the mobiles that she never got her piece finished.”⁵¹ In 1976 Graham reminisced about her first experience working with Calder:

We had no place to rehearse [with the mobiles] so we rigged them up in the open field, stretched ropes from tree to tree, and learned to manipulate them to give the illusion of the world of fantasy that Sandy wanted and which enchanted me. The field bordered a public highway and by the loud blowing horns we became aware that we had stopped traffic and

⁵⁰ Ruth Lloyd, “The Lloyds at Bennington,” MS., 1977, quoted in Sali Ann Kriegsman, *Modern Dance in America: The Bennington Years* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1981), 133.

⁵¹ Interview with May O’Donnell for *ibid.*, 134.

people were caught up in this fantastic world of trees and meadow and yellow flowers and Sandy and his mobiles and dancers.⁵²

However, the lack of time to prepare and the difficulty of handling the mobile described by Ruth Lloyd forced Calder to replace it with a simpler device for the final performance. Despite this, reviewer Margaret Lloyd felt that the mobiles presented “beguiling possibilities” for the stage.⁵³

With *Panorama* Graham and Calder attempted to create a seamless bond between Graham’s dancers and Calder’s mobiles. In their second collaboration, *Horizons* (1936), the performance featured mobiles as, in Calder’s terms, “visual preludes” between the four movements while the dancers were offstage. The painted circles, spirals, and pennants, controlled by behind-the-scenes stagehands, helped establish the mood of the upcoming section by the speed of their movements and their relationships in space. Graham attempted to clarify the role of the mobiles in *Horizons*’ program notes, quoted in her autobiography: “The ‘mobiles,’ designed by Alexander Calder, are a new conscious use of space. They are employed in *Horizons* as visual preludes to the dances in this suite. The dances do not interpret the ‘mobiles,’ nor do the ‘mobiles’ interpret the dances. They are employed to enlarge the sense of horizon.”⁵⁴ In *Horizons* Graham gave Calder’s mobiles the opportunity to stand alone as performers. However, audiences and critics alike found the juxtaposition of dancers and mobiles confusing and distracting. Although *New York Times* critic John Martin praised Graham’s willingness to experiment he felt that the revolving mobiles added nothing to the dancing itself.⁵⁵ Henry Gilford, critic for *The Dance Observer*, condemned the mobiles

⁵²“Fellow Artists, Others Pay Tribute,” *New York Times*, November 12, 1976.

⁵³ Margaret Lloyd, “Dance History in the Making,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 24, 1935.

⁵⁴ Martha Graham, *Blood Memory* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 166.

⁵⁵ John Martin, “The Dance: Experiment,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1936.

“as distracting forces that tend to break into the unity of the composition.”⁵⁶ However, both critics saw promise in the fusion of the sculptural mobiles and the art of the stage. The mobiles in *Horizon* inspired Martin to write:

Basically there is an idea here of certain theatrical potentialities. If the décor for dancing could be made to partake of the actual substance of the dancing itself, in something of the way in which an orchestral setting partakes of the same substance as a soloist’s voice or a chorus, it is evident that a whole new theatre approach would come into existence, and virtually a new world of possibilities for the theatre dance.⁵⁷

Perhaps the similarities between the mobiles and the dancers hindered the collaboration and resulted in the relatively unsuccessful blending of the two art forms. The dancers and mobiles, instead of performing complementary roles, performed the same role; both communicated through movement. The motion of the mobiles performed a dance of its own that rivaled and at times eclipsed the movement of Graham’s dancers.

In Calder’s most successful theatrical productions his mobiles took the place of human performers. Of the thirteen productions for which Calder supplied sets, only two, *Socrate* (1936) and *Work in Progress* (1968), featured his mobiles alone onstage. These performances were the fruition of an idea Calder first expressed when he began creating ballet-objects in the 1930s: “My idea with the mechanical ballet was to do it independently of dancers, or without them altogether...”⁵⁸

In *Socrate*, directed by Virgil Thomson and first performed at the Wadsworth Athenaeum, Calder’s mobiles accompanied a performance by orchestra and two singers of Erik Satie’s 1920 composition. For the performance, Calder suspended a red disc, about thirty inches in diameter, by

⁵⁶ Henry Gilford, "Martha Graham and Dance Group," *The Dance Observer* 3, no. 4 (April 1936): 40.

⁵⁷ Martin, "The Dance: Experiment."

⁵⁸ Calder, "Mobiles," 67.

a rope hung across the length of the stage [Fig. 6.28]. Stage right he placed a vertical rectangle, three feet by ten feet, painted white on one side and black on the other. Stage left he suspended two seven foot steel hoops joined at right angles to one another and controlled by a hook and a pulley. Calder divided the work into three parts: nine minutes for the first two, and eighteen minutes for the third. The first nine-minute section involved the red disc moving from the center of the stage to the right and then to the left and then back to center. In the second nine-minute section a minute went by without any of the objects moving. Then the steel hoops rotated toward the audience for three minutes before they were lowered to the floor at which time they stopped and began rotating in the opposite direction and then again in their original direction. The section concluded when the steel hoops were lifted to their starting position. In the final section the vertical, white rectangle fell to the right until it was resting on its long end. After a pause the rectangle fell toward the audience until it rested on the floor. It rose again with the other side, the black side, facing the audience and then rose back to the vertical position. The eighteen-minute section ended with the red disc moving to the left.⁵⁹ In an essay explaining the performance, Calder describes in precise detail the movements and their durations—what might be called the choreography—of the performing geometric forms. To convey the production's theme of Socrates's stoicism as he prepares for death, Calder directed that his shapes should move one at a time in a rather slow and methodical manner. Virgil Thomson said of Calder's work, "It was as though the music itself moved the set."⁶⁰ *Socrate's* set resembled an enlarged version of one of Calder's framed mobiles, such as *White Frame* (1934). In *Socrate* the geometric shapes performed a

⁵⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁰ Ruth Wolfe, "Calder's Set for Socrate," in *The National Tribute to Alexander Calder* (New York: Beacon Theater, 1977), 9.

set arrangement with a definite beginning and ending for the audience members who, from the comfort of the theater seats, watched the shapes move harmoniously to the musical score.

Work in Progress marks the culmination of Calder's theatrical ventures. After the performance of *Socrate*, Calder worked on several theatrical productions, but his contributions were always limited to the sets. He expressed his longing to create his own theatrical piece:

For thirty years I have been thinking about a production that would be entirely mine, form and music working together. I long ago discussed this with Massine, but he insisted on having dancers. I later made stage sets, but this is not exactly what I wanted to do. . . . The idea of a production that was totally mine had already come to me in spirit in 1926 when I finished the *Cirque*, and when I tried to frame it in a stage opening, amusing myself by thinking it an actual theater.⁶¹

Calder's interest in theater and his sense of showmanship generated his first artistic breakthrough with his miniature *Circus* (1926), wherein Calder created the performers, wrote the acts, designed the sets, organized the publicity, and executed the show. Throughout his career, theatricality remained an important element of Calder's art, and the desire to create a production all his own never left him. Near the end of his career, Massimo Bagianckino of the Teatro dell' Opera in Rome gave Calder the opportunity for which he had been waiting—complete control over every aspect of a theatrical production.

Calder titled his show *Work in Progress*. It lasted nineteen minutes and featured mobiles moving to the accompaniment of electronic music [Figs. 6.29, 6.30]. The production melded a presentation of the course of Calder's career—many of the mobiles on the stage resembled enlargements of his earlier works—with that of the creation of the world, from the birth of the stars and the earth to the first appearance of animals and humans. When he saw it performed Calder

⁶¹ Calder quoted in Giovanni Carandente, *Calder* (Turin: Palazzo a Vela, 1983), 231.

remarked, “I ought to have called it *My Life in Nineteen Minutes*.”⁶² *Work in Progress* presented many of the themes and subjects Calder explored with his art, from the animals he created for his *Circus* and as toys, to his exploration of nature and the cosmos in his mobiles. Above all, *Work in Progress* communicated Calder’s ongoing desire to compose movement. Giovanni Carandente, who worked with Calder on the production, described this aspect of the production:

As a theatrical event it is almost impossible to describe exactly. It was a ballet without dancers, there was some good music but it did not have any particular effect on the performance, and the sets were used as a background to the action, but they were an action in themselves. The dancers, if they can be called dancers, were Calder’s mobiles.⁶³

Novelist Alberto Moravia said of Calder and his production, “As a sculptor he revealed a great sense of theater. It was done with delicacy, with elegance, or maybe the word I mean is magic.”⁶⁴

The success of *Work in Progress* resulted, at least partially, from the underlying theatricality of Calder’s mobiles. In the mechanized mobiles of the 1930s the frames, platforms, and panels resemble the physical properties of the stage and the exactness of the movements suggest the choreography of a performer. The wind-driven mobiles, as they revolve, describe space like a dancing figure. In all his mobile abstract works, mechanized, wind-driven, and theatrical, Calder made movement the most essential formal element. By composing movement Calder endowed his sculptures with the ability to perform. Each mobile can be considered a mini-theatrical spectacle, rotating through time and space for its audience. As Calder said, “the mobile dances in front of you.”⁶⁵

⁶² G. di San Lazzaro, *Homage to Calder* (New York: Tudor Pub. Co., 1972), 75.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶⁴ Lipman and Wolfe, *Calder's Universe*, 175.

⁶⁵ Kuh, *The Artist's Voice*, 42.

Conclusion

Visual artists long desired to represent motion with paint, chisel, or camera. The challenge, perhaps an insurmountable one, resides in the fact that painting, sculpture, and photography all produce static images. The figures and objects in the less successful attempts to suggest movement appear as if frozen in a moment of activity. Even those artists that most effectively communicate motion with color, form, and line must rely on illusion. In the fine arts creative expression through movement traditionally belongs to the realm of the performing arts, most especially theater and dance. Of this pair, dance claims movement as its primary mode of expression. Jackson Pollock, with his poured paintings, and Alexander Calder, with his mobiles, merged that fundamental element of dance, movement through time, into their paintings and sculptures. Pollock, by placing his canvas on the floor, created a stage for himself upon which he performed the movements required to create his paintings. Calder arranged the actions of his pieces just as he arranged their colors, shapes, and lines. He treated movement as another compositional tool. One might say that Jackson Pollock painted by dancing and that Alexander Calder created sculptures that dance.

Epilogue

When dancers die there is nothing left for those of us who have never seen them dance but the memoirs and pictures of those who have. They are never very satisfactory. . . . But so intense is our pleasure in dancing that no matter how fragmentary a memory, or scrappy a sketch, we treasure it for a sacred relic. At least the memory, the drawing had some actual connection with the performance. Some pure, direct and accurate comment must remain in it no matter how weak or slight.¹

- Lincoln Kirstein, *Dance Index*, 1946

This statement by Kirstein, co-founder and general director from 1946 to 1989 of the New York City Ballet, touches on a difficult conundrum: how best to preserve in a static form a dancer's work, an art form that moves through space and time. Dance notation, as first devised by Raoul-Auger Feuillet in the 1700s, can communicate a series of steps to an informed reader, but those steps remain a mystery to all untrained in its interpretation. Furthermore, dance notation cannot convey the exuberance of a performance or the personality of the dancer.

During the first half of the twentieth century, many American artists saw modern dance as an exciting new art form with incredible potential. In many ways, modern art developed hand in hand with modern dance. Dancers, choreographers, and visual artists shared similar interests and influences. Dance, especially at this time, was about so much more than the composition of steps. The modern choreographer was engaged with the world and attempted to express ideas in new

¹ Lincoln Kirstein, "Comment," *Dance Index* 5, no. 3 (March 1946): 59.

ways. Modern dance made political and social statements, contributed to the cultural milieu, explored the inner workings of the human mind, experimented with the medium, and declared dance as a serious form of creative expression—all of which can also be said of modern art in America. Modern dancers certainly looked to modern art for inspiration and the influence was not unidirectional. Artists working in all media create in dialogue with one another, and their works are tempered by the cultural practices, images, and ideas surrounding them. Thus, intersections at conceptual, stylistic, and thematic levels emerge when considering modern dance and modern art.

Some American artists admired particular dancers for their social, political, or cultural contributions. Abraham Walkowitz celebrated Isadora Duncan as the quintessential modernist, and Paul Meltzer applauded Martha Graham's Americanism. Ruth St. Denis contributed to the popularity of the exoticism that flavored Gaston Lachaise's and Paul Manship's sculptures. Other artists adopted a style of modern art in an attempt to convey the innovative movements of modern dance. H. Lyman Sayer first experimented with cubism in order to depict the pioneering aspects of the Ballets Russes's choreography. David Smith and Louise Nevelson also used cubism to express Martha Graham's severe style while Barbara Morgan turned to surrealism to communicate the psychological components of Graham's dance. Dance helped artists make crucial transitions in their careers. Hoping to convey Nijinsky's dynamic power helped Franz Kline develop his style of gestural abstraction. Alexander Calder's wire sculptures of Josephine Baker with their dangling limbs and jewelry constitute a step toward his dancing mobiles.

As the modern dancers and choreographers created new methods of movement they influenced the aesthetic development of many of the American painters, sculptors, and photographers who were working in modern styles and who were seeking to portray motion in

their static media. But how could a visual artist convey the natural lyricism of Isadora Duncan's dance, the exoticism of Ruth St. Denis' *Radha*, the spectacular leaps of Ballets Russes star Vaslav Nijinsky, or the strident angularity of Martha Graham's deeply psychological choreography? Artists tackled these challenges in a variety of ways. In an attempt to suggest a dancer's movements Abraham Walkowitz created hundreds of drawings of Isadora Duncan in hopes of recording all of her poses, and Malvina Hoffman created a sculptural frieze depicting twenty-five moments in Anna Pavlova's "Autumn Bacchanale." H. Lyman Sajen, William Meyerowitz, and Franz Kline employed the fragmentation of cubism and the dynamic brushstrokes of gestural abstraction in order to suggest the movements of the Ballets Russes and Martha Graham. Barbara Morgan often used multiple exposures and dramatic lighting to communicate the intensity of Graham's choreography. In John Sloan's and Arnold Genthe's depictions of Isadora Duncan and Paul Manship's and Gaston Lachaise's sculptures of dancers, the artists sought to convey the dancer's movement through the depiction of a single gesture.

Yet no matter what the medium or method, the static image, as Kirstein says, only offers a "fragmentary" glimpse of the dancer's art and, like dance notation, provides an incomplete record. Painting, photography, drawing, and sculpture cannot reveal movement; they can merely suggest it. Although the visual arts may not provide a complete record of the dancer's art, in their attempts to depict the dancers' movements, artists convey some of the facets of the dance that plain notation cannot. Through color, line, shape, and the other tools of artistic composition the visual artist can reveal aspects of the dancer's personality, energy, and cultural significance. In turn, dancers granted modern artists new stylistic perspectives with their modern movements.

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