GATECRASHERS: THE RISE OF THE SELF-TAUGHT ARTIST IN AMERICA

Nearly one hundred years ago, artists without formal training "crashed the gates" of the elite art world, as the newspapers of their day put it. Their paintings of American life, as well as fantastical scenes derived from their imaginations, began appearing in major museums. Their styles and subject matter aligned with trends in contemporary realistic painting, but their backgrounds brought something new to the table. As Alfred Barr Jr., founding director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), put it in 1938, these artists "appear from the ranks

of the people and sometimes put the professional to shame."

The three artists represented on the wall as you first enter the gallery, John Kane, Horace Pippin, and Anna Mary Robertson "Grandma" Moses, were the most celebrated self-taught artists of this period. Their work was featured in solo exhibitions at galleries and museums, as well as in the first group exhibitions to survey the remarkable achievements of self-taught artists.

Those exhibitions, including *Masters of Popular Painting: Modern Primitives of Europe and America* (1938), *Contemporary*

Unknown American Painters (1939), and *They Taught Themselves* (1942), introduced to American audiences the work of dozens of artists, many of whom have fallen into obscurity and are revisited here.

These early "gatecrashers" are remarkable for how they defied life circumstances that limited their access to art training and, in so doing, redefined who could be an artist in America.

Anna Mary Robertson “Grandma” Moses

American, 1860-1961

Hoosick Falls in Winter, 1944

Oil on Masonite

The Phillips Collection, acquired

Grandma Moses’s work was first discovered hanging in a drugstore window in Hoosick Falls, a scenic New York town

whose snowy river valley she depicts here. After stopping at the pharmacy to treat a stomachache, collector Louis Caldor purchased Moses's work and brought it home to New York City, where he showed it to Otto Kallir, the gallerist who would facilitate her meteoric rise. By the time pioneering modern art collector Duncan Phillips purchased this painting in 1949, she was so familiar to the American public, she was known simply as "Grandma" Moses.

Horace Pippin

American, 1888-1946

The Ending of the War, Starting Home, 1930-1933

Oil on canvas

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Robert Carlen

In 1937 Horace Pippin began showing

his work in art exhibitions in nearby West Chester, where he made his home after serving in World War I. He had served in France as part of the all-Black 369th Infantry Regiment, nicknamed the Harlem Rattlers and the Harlem Hellfighters. Pippin had been honorably discharged from the unit after he was injured in the Battle of Meuse-Argonne in October 1918. He therefore was not present to witness the German surrender in November, but he imagines it here in what became the most widely exhibited work of his lifetime. Pippin pays tribute to his fellow soldiers, here shown overtaking a group of Germans

while burning fuselage fills the sky, illuminating the desolation and chaos of battle.

This is Pippin's first known oil painting, demonstrating the artist's early method of building layer upon layer of pigment in an almost sculptural manner. To mark further the horror of modern warfare, Pippin crudely carved the accessories of battle—guns, grenades, helmets and tanks—into a handmade frame. Unique in Pippin's oeuvre, the carvings magnify the power of Pippin's magnum opus on war.

John Kane

American, born Scotland, 1860-1934

Scene From The Scottish Highlands, ca. 1927

Oil on canvas

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, gift of G. David Thompson

John Kane frequently painted scenes

from the Scottish American festivals that he attended in Kennywood Park, located just outside of Pittsburgh. Cast in the dusty green palette of the city's rolling hills and smoke-filled skies, this painting of two jigging children charmed the artist Andrew Dasburg, who served on the jury of the 1927 Carnegie International and swore to vote every other painting out of the show if Kane's was not accepted. Kane's appearance shocked the local press who covered the event with headlines like, "Only Pittsburgher Admitted to International is a House Painter."

American Mythologies

Despite the generations of distinguished artists who emerged from the United States during its first 150 years, American art was still criticized during the 1930s for being too close to European traditions. In the context of this ongoing search for what artist Georgia O'Keeffe called "the Great American Thing," self-taught artists were praised for their originality and national character.

In the Museum of Modern Art's 1938 exhibition *Masters of Popular Painting,* which featured many of the artists on view in this gallery, curator Holger Cahill

emphasized how by virtue of their lack of formal training, these artists embodied the nation's democratic spirit and provided "a better understanding of the American tradition in the arts and a richer interpretation of the cultural history of our country.”

The wilder scenes shown here evidence how some work by self-taught artists was perceived as breaking the yoke of European or any other influence outside of the artist's imagination, but this notion was more myth than truth. Other works show how many artists were aware of art historical categories of painting such as still life, self-

portraiture, and even religious scenes.

The artists' choices to put their own spin on these established ways of painting demonstrate their determination to be taken seriously despite their lack of formal training. This perseverance, which led to late-in-life prosperity for some, also made them living examples of the American Dream.

Lawrence Lebduska

American, 1894-1966

Untitled (Horses and Snakes), 1936

Oil on canvas

Collection of Carl and Marian Mullis

Horses were a recurring subject for Lawrence Lebduska, who lived for some time on a cousin's horse farm in Baltimore.

His mixing of natural elements such as cacti, red rocks, green grass, and a snake patterned like a giraffe, as well as the scene's staged wildness, also evidence his interest in dioramas from New York's American Natural History Museum, which he visited frequently later in life. Lebduska was, like his father, trained as a stained-glass maker, a trade that may have influenced his experimental use of color, especially in the neon pastels he chose for the horses' bodies.

John Kane

American, born Scotland, 1860-1934

Pietà, 1933

Oil on canvas

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, bequest of Paul J. Winschel in memory of Jean Mertz Winschel

When Kane copied this religious scene

from a fifteenth-century painting that he saw at his local museum, the Carnegie Museum of Art, he added Pittsburgh's most famous landmarks: Christ lies prone in his mother's arms beneath the skyline of Schenley Park, which includes the spires of St. Paul's Cathedral as well as the Cathedral of Learning—the forty-two-story Gothic Revival tower of the University of Pittsburgh that began construction during Kane's lifetime. The first paintings that Kane entered into the Carnegie's annual Internationals were copies of religious scenes that were rejected for being unoriginal.

George Edwin Lothrop

American, 1867-1939

The Revelers, 1920s

Mixed Media

Collection of Josh Feldstein

The textured surface of this painting, which curator Sidney Janis described as "a dish of pigment," beholds the aftermath of

a decadent celebration, as a group of women appear to discard the heads of dozens of men into the sea. Little is known about its maker, George Lothrop, an artist who lived near Fenway Park in Boston and promoted himself as the "Poet King." The back of this painting once included an advertisement (reproduced below) he created visualizing himself in that role, bedecked in jewels yet scantily clad and surrounded by collaged fragments of alluring women.

Newspaper clipping illustrating George Lothrop as the Poet King, attached to the back of Lothrop's painting *The Revelers*. Image: Sidney Janis, *They Taught Themselves: American Primitive Painters of the 20th Century* (New York: The Dial Press, 1942), 216.

Patrick J. Sullivan

American, 1894-1967

The First Law of Nature—Not Self-Preservation but Love, 1939

Oil on canvas

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC, Museum purchase

Patrick Sullivan spent so much time on

both the details and complex narratives of his paintings that he completed very few in his lifetime. This religious work— set in the rocky, forested terrain of Wheeling, West Virginia, where he raised his family— chronicles many examples of self-sacrifice: God presides over the scene, emerging from the solar system to behold the sacrifice of His Son, whose crucifixion is foretold by the three crosses that hover above Adam and Eve and other episodes of self-sacrifice from a soldier, mothers (human and animal), and a missionary.

Emile Branchard

American, 1881-1938

Untitled (Trees), 1920s

Oil on canvas

Collection of Carl and Marian Mullis

Emile Branchard lived in New York City, but he painted landscapes of the countryside where his family summered and

which he passed through as a truck driver. His family's downtown boarding house became known as the "house of genius" because of the way it attracted artists. Branchard exhibited his work through the Society of Independent Artists, which modeled itself after the salons that emerged in Europe at the end of the 1800s and had less stringent rules for admission, often resulting in very large shows. The inaugural 1917 show that debuted Branchard's work included more than two thousand artworks.

William Doriani

American, born Ukraine, 1891-1958

Self-Portrait at the Easel, 1933

Oil on canvas

Collection of Carl and Marian Mullis

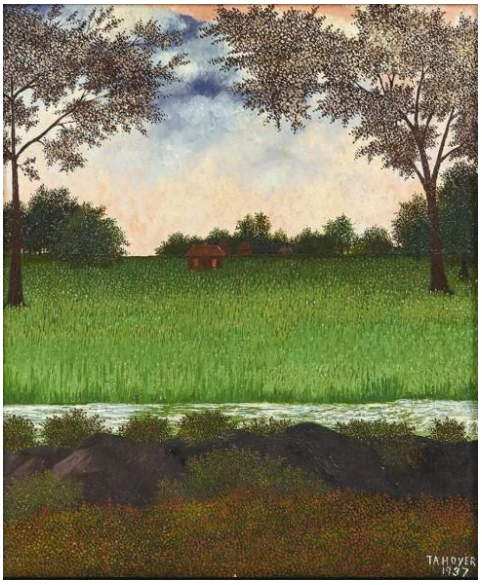
Thorvald Arnst Hoyer

American, born Denmark, 1872-1949

Awakening, 1937

Oil on canvas

Collection of Carl and Marian Mullis



Victor Gatto

American, 1893-1965

Tigers in the Jungle, undated

Oil on canvas

Collection of Carl and Marian Mullis

Victor Joseph Gatto was a war veteran, featherweight boxing champion, and holder of many odd jobs. Gatto painted a wide

variety of subjects, but his jungle scenes prompted many comparisons to Henri Rousseau, the untrained French painter who was cherished by avant-garde circles before he died in 1910. When Gatto's artist friends brought him to see work like Rousseau's *The Dream* at the Museum of Modern Art in the 1940s (reproduced below), he criticized the way the artist painted the noses on his lions. He was more receptive to Grandma Moses, signing the guestbook of one of her gallery exhibitions, "Joe Gatto—very good."

Henri Rousseau (French, 1844–1910), *The Dream*, 1910, oil on canvas, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller. Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York.

Horace Pippin

American, 1888-1946

Potted Plant in a Window, 1943

Oil on canvas

Brandywine River Museum of Art

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Scott, 1981

Horace Pippin briefly attended Philadelphia art collector Albert Barnes's

(1872–1951) art foundation, where he encountered masterpieces of world art. The strong colors and bold forms of this small still life bear the influence of the French painters in Barnes's collection, including Paul Cezanne, who Pippin admired, saying, "I'm going to take colors out of that man's painting and get them into mine." A friend of the artist remembered how Pippin also resisted influence at the Foundation, especially from Barnes, ultimately telling him, "Do I tell you how to run your foundation? Don't tell me how to paint."

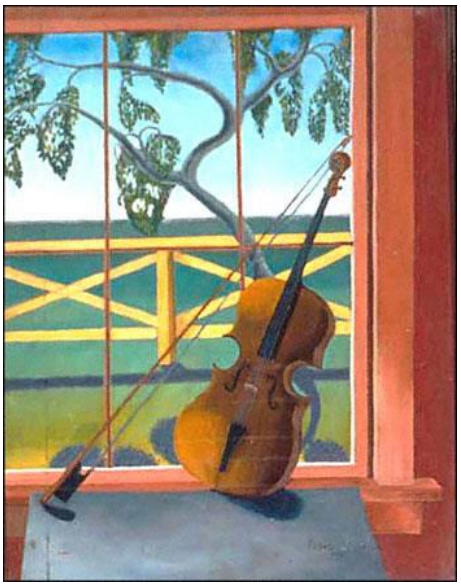
Pedro López Cervántez

American, 1914-1987

Violín/Violin, 1934

Gouache on Masonite

On loan courtesy of The Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas



These works by Pedro López Cervántez (*Violín*), Horace Pippin (*Potted Plant in*

Window), and Thorvald Ernst Hoyer (*Awakening*, displayed on adjoining wall) use the pictorial device of a window to frame their views of nature intermingled with the manmade world. Whereas the window is explicit in the work of Cervántez and Pippin, it is only implied in Hoyer's painting of a house as it may have appeared through the window of a passing vehicle. Hoyer was frequently in transit, traveling the world performing as an acrobat in vaudeville shows.

Negotiating National Identity

Self-taught artists often looked to American places, symbols, and history to establish national identity in their work. Many of the artists on view here were recent immigrants who painted memories and customs from their homelands. The Museum of Modern Art's 1938 exhibition *Masters of Popular Painting* presented them as "artists of the people" showing how immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe were increasingly considered American, although they were among those who had been the targets of racism and restrictive immigration policies just a

decade earlier.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt reinforced a multicultural portrait of America when he told Daughters of the American Revolution in 1938: "Remember always that all of us ... are descended from immigrants and revolutionists."

World War II enlisted the service of more than a million African American soldiers who fought in segregated forces and returned home to a climate of continued racial terror. Memories of war were a major inspiration for Horace Pippin, who began making art to rehabilitate an injury he suffered while serving in the

trenches of World War I. Though he and Pedro López Cérvantez, a soldier in World War II, were among the few artists of color to be represented in exhibitions like *Masters*, their presence at a time when few exhibitions of American art were integrated across race further evidences how self-taught artists have always pushed the art world's boundaries of inclusiveness.

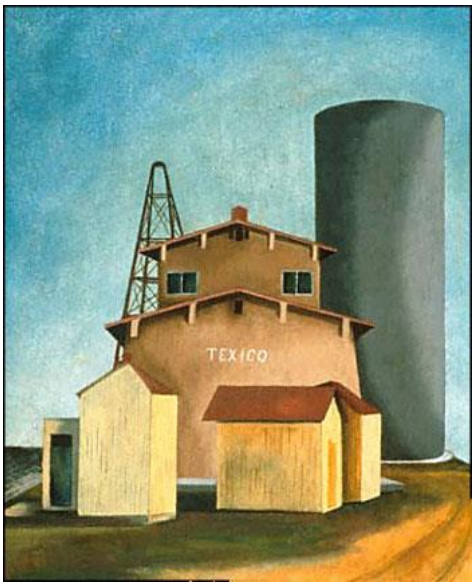
Pedro López Cervántez

American, 1914-1987

Almacen en Téxico/Téxico Depot, 1934

Gouache on Masonite

The Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas



Pedro López Cervántez painted buildings with smooth texture, earth tones, and

implied volume that echo his artistic inheritance. Before his family immigrated to Arizona during the Mexican Revolution, his maternal grandparents ran a kiln and pottery shop in Durango, Mexico. Cervántez tried to advance his career as an artist, including through university training with the G.I. Bill he earned from his service in World War II. Despite many exhibitions in the 1930s, Cervántez spent his later years working as a custodian—a testament to how limited opportunities for artists of color remained in this period.

Vincent Canadé

American, born Italy, 1879-1961

Self-Portrait, 1935-1945

Oil on canvas

Collection of Carl and Marian Mullis

Vincent Canadé's family was among the millions of Italians who left their country around the turn of the century after losing

their land to famine or natural disasters. Known as the Second Wave of immigration, this diaspora also included many people from Eastern Europe and present-day Russia. The way that Canadé casts his face in shadows, contrasting his complexion with paler depictions of whiteness seen elsewhere in this gallery, alludes to the challenge of assimilating in a society where racist views against Second Wave immigrants led to the highly restrictive Johnson–Reed Act of 1924.

William Doriani

American, born Ukraine, 1891-1958

Untitled (The Letter), 1920s

Oil on canvas

Collection of Carl and Marian Mullis

George Aulont

American, born Greece, 1888-after 1951

On Mount Smolikas, 1941

Oil on canvas

Collection of Josh Feldstein

After Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas refused to cede territory to Mussolini in October 1940, Italy invaded Greece, leading to the scene memorialized here by George

Aulont, a Greek American who served in the U.S. Army during World War I. A group of Greek soldiers ascend Mount Smolikas, vigilantly surveilling their surroundings in the moments before a battle that they would ultimately win. Aulont's thickly applied black and white paint creates momentum that seems to carry the soldiers forward and also represents the craggy, muddy terrain whose challenges—along with the valor of the underestimated Greek forces— contributed to the retreat of the Italian Army the following spring.

Morris Hirshfield

American, born Poland, 1872-1946

Opera Girl, 1941

Oil on canvas

Collection of Josh Feldstein

The luxurious red cloak and structured corset of this woman dressed for a night (or a performance) at the opera hint at the

professional background of its maker. Morris Hirshfield rose through the ranks of the New York garment industry, eventually founding a women's slipper factory that became the city's largest. Although he made art as a youth in his native country of Poland, including a memorable Purim festival noisemaker and Torah ark for his synagogue, he did not begin painting until an illness forced him to step away from his successful business in 1937.

William Doriani

American, born Ukraine, 1891-1958

Flag Day, 1935

Oil on canvas

Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection

William Doriani paid tribute to his adopted country with this panoramic view of a patriotic procession that he witnessed supposedly the very day he returned to the

United States after thirteen years away. As Sidney Janis noted, when he included this work in his 1942 book and exhibition *They Taught Themselves*, Doriani took pains to represent all thirty-three flags with the correct numbers of stars and stripes. The strong presence of red, white, and blue is echoed in his much smaller painting on view nearby, *The Letter*, which shows a woman missing her lover, a dedicated naval officer.

Lawrence Lebduska

American, 1894-1966

Mother and Child, 1946

Oil on panel

Collection of Thomas E. Scanlin

Lawrence Lebduska was born in Baltimore, Maryland, but spent much of his youth in Germany. He painted memories of his homeland often, celebrating traditional

dress, food, and decoration in works like *Bohemian Kitchen* (shown nearby). He expresses less fondness for Germany in *End of Bohemia* (shown nearby) which he made at the outset of World War II and which shows two women mourning a dying child, perhaps a metaphor for his mother country's former glory. Lebduska completed *Mother and Child*, a much sunnier vision of the future, a year after the war's end. Although Lebduska's adulthood in the United States was plagued with health and money troubles, the painting's nurturing mother suggests a common view held by people seeking a better life in a new

country—that those sacrifices are made to ensure the success of the next generation.

Lawrence Lebduska

American, 1894-1966

The End of Bohemia, 1939

Oil on canvas

Collection of Carl and Marian Mullis

Lawrence Lebduska

American, 1894-1966

Bohemian Kitchen, 1936

Oil on composition board

Collection of Carl and Marian Mullis

John Kane

American, born Scotland, 1860-1934

Brother Patrick, ca. 1928-1929

Oil on canvas

Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia, gift of Walter P. Chrysler, Jr.

Millions of Celtic people immigrated to the United States in the second half of the

1800s. John Kane and his brother Patrick, seen here wearing the uniform of the Black Watch, were among those recruited to work across the Atlantic in the steel boom associated with Scottish American magnate Andrew Carnegie. Although they initially faced bigotry, their social standing rose as subsequent waves of immigrants arrived from other countries. By the 1930s, Kane was thus able to paint his Scottish heritage and still be called “the most truly American” artist of his day by some critics.

Horace Pippin

American, 1888-1946

The Barracks, 1945

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

Pippin returned to his World War I memories in *The Barracks*—this time underscoring the fragility and loneliness of soldiers far from home. The men in the

barracks each inhabit cell-like bunks that are separated by bedposts and by their own preoccupations. There is a progression upward to each of the bunk levels with a corresponding diminution of strength at each stage. The two men on the lower bunks are naked to the waist—they are robust yet vulnerable. On the middle bunks, one man reads what appears to be a letter, bringing the comforting memory of home to this hermetic scene. In contrast, the man on the right covers himself with a blanket and wears a grimace that suggests he is in pain, either physical or psychological. The empty bunks above, each with an

extinguished candle, are potent symbols of absence that introduce the reality of death to the valiant myth of war.

Horace Pippin

American, 1888-1946

Gas Alarm Outpost, Argonne, ca. 1931-37

Oil on canvas

Brandywine River Museum of Art

Purchased with funds given by The Davenport Family Foundation in loving memory of

Peter D. Davenport, 2021

In late 1917, Pippin's regiment was deployed overseas where—because American white soldiers refused to fight alongside Black ones—they were reassigned to assist a French military unit along the German border. One of the few Black regiments sent into active combat, the 369th would also spend a longer time at the front than any other American unit: 191 continuous days in the trenches. The Battle of Meuse-Argonne remains one of the largest offensives in American military history. Pippin was one of almost 100,000 American soldiers wounded in this battle, his shoulder being permanently injured by a

sniper at Argonne. Several years after his return to his native West Chester, Pippin—without formal training—began creating burnt wood engravings and by 1930 had turned to painting in oil.

In this haunting composition, the artist depicts three soldiers on sentry duty behind the front lines. They were assigned to sound the alarm—visible on the right portion of the partially hidden shed—whenever the hiss of a gas cylinder was heard. The men are outfitted with gas masks, contained in the canvas bags worn around their necks. Pippin reworked the color of the sky several times making it

increasingly lighter. In adopting this brilliant shade of blue, he emphasizes two ominous details painted in dark contrast: relentless strands of razor wire and a soldier parachuting from one of the military planes passing overhead.

Horace Pippin

American, 1888-1946

Outpost Raid: Champagne Sector, 1931

Oil on canvas

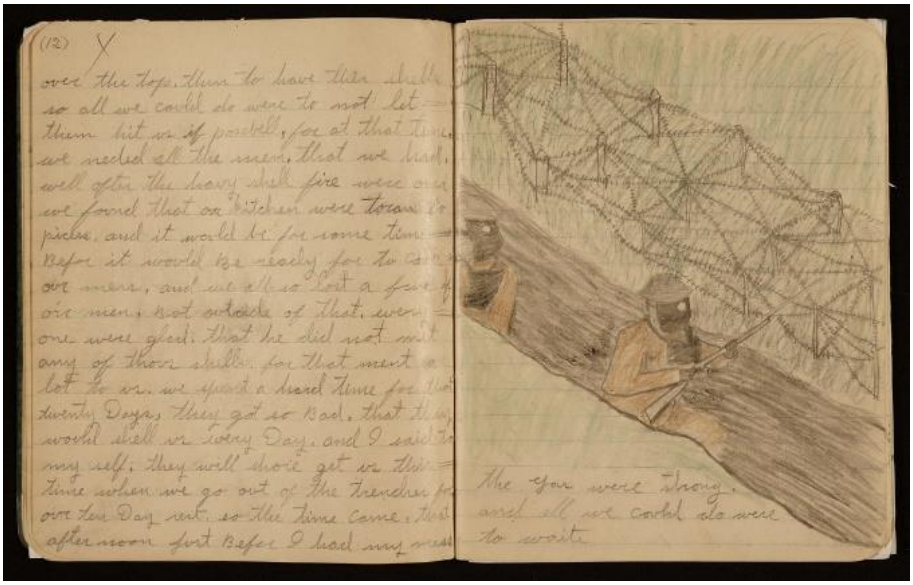
American Folk Art Museum, New York, gift of Patricia L. and Maurice C. Thompson Jr.

Outpost Raid depicts an encounter with a German soldier during the decisive Champagne-Marne campaign of 1918, in

which Pippin's regiment, the 369th, held their ground despite being under German fire for nearly two hundred days.

Toward the end of his life, Horace Pippin remarked that "World War I brought out all the art in me." He created seven paintings related to the war throughout his career, including the three shown on this wall as well as *The Ending of the War, Starting Home*, which is displayed at the entrance into this exhibition. His earliest surviving engagement with the subject, however, happened about a decade prior to his first painting in oil when he handwrote an illustrated memoir of his experiences

serving during World War I (see image reproduced below).



Pages 12 and 13 from Horace Pippin's memoir of his experiences in World War I, ca. 1920s, from Horace Pippin Notebooks and Letters, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. The entire memoir is available for viewing on the Archives of American Art website.

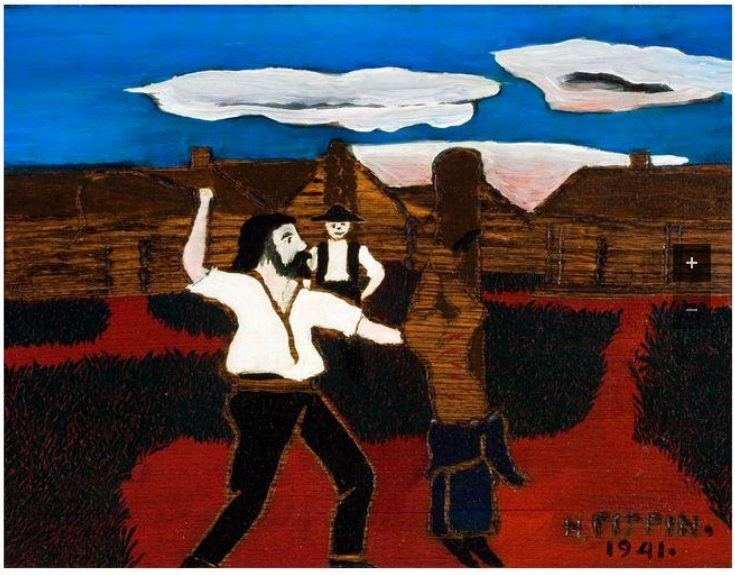
Horace Pippin

American, 1888-1946

The Whipping, 1941 (also known as *The Whipping Post*)

Oil on burnt-wood panel

Reynolda House Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina



A haunting and graphic depiction of an enslaved man being beaten by a white

overseer, *The Whipping* is an indictment of the cruelty and inhumanity of slavery. One of the last burnt-wood panels made by the artist, its power partly lies in the medium itself. Pippin's incised lines and the grain of the wood vividly portray the bound man's body and tortured flesh. Enhancing the drama are the artist's economy of shapes and the vibrant red—perhaps symbolic of spilled blood—contrasted with the white, black, and blue pigment, all of which work together to focus the viewer's attention on the central figures. Pippin made this work in 1941, at a time when Black men were again being asked to sacrifice their labor

and lives in service of a nation that did not treat them as equals.

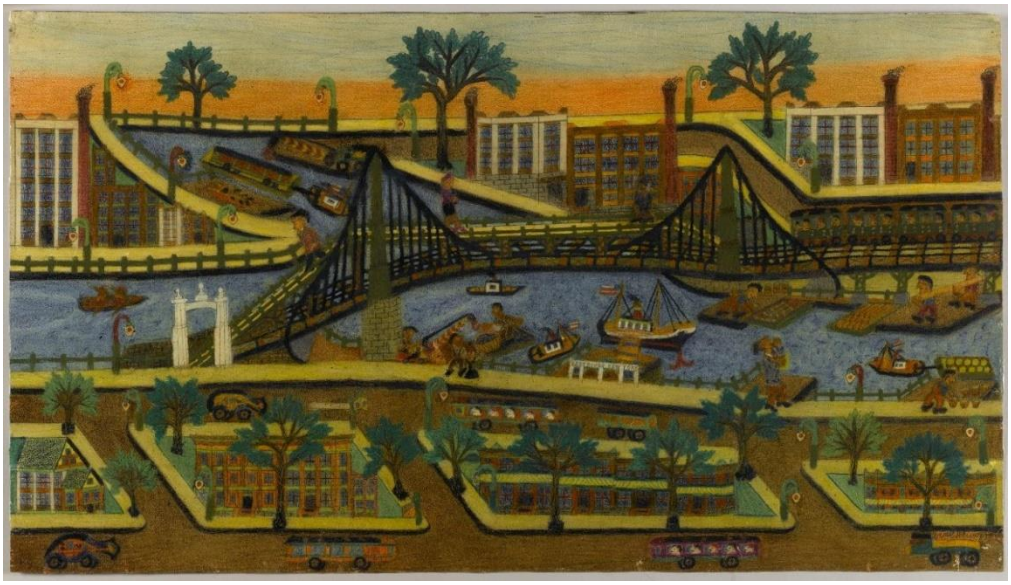
Israel Litwak

American, born Ukraine, 1867-1952

East River, ca. 1938

Crayon and graphite on paper coated with shellac

Brooklyn Museum, gift of the Artist



Israel Litwak immigrated from Odessa, Ukraine, as an adult, bringing his wife and

two children and settling in Brooklyn. He worked as a cabinetmaker but found time for art when he could. “On my day of rest and during holidays my greatest delight was to visit museums and marvel at the fine work of old masters,” he said. He gave this painting of the Brooklyn Bridge stretching over the East River to the Brooklyn Museum, whose collection he cherished as a visitor and which gave him a solo exhibition in 1939.

Josephine Joy

American, 1869-1948

CCC Camp Balboa Park, ca. 1933-1937

Oil on canvas

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC

Josephine Joy returned to her childhood love of art making in the 1930s as a painter for the Federal Art Project. She found much

of her inspiration in San Diego's 1,200-acre Balboa Park, which included the campus of the city's Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC was another Works Progress Administration relief program that employed men, like the hose-wielding crew in Joy's scene, to work on land conservation and development projects. Joy's inclusion of a prominent flag and soaring eagle represent the patriotism she felt observing this scene of American resilience in the face of the Great Depression.

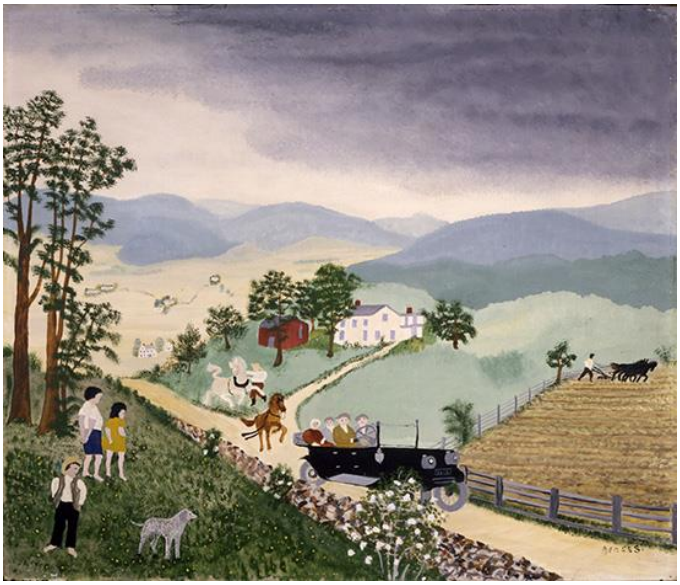
Anna Mary Robertson “Grandma” Moses

American, 1860-1961

Automobile, 1943

Oil on pressed wood

Galerie St. Etienne, New York



Even the dark clouds of a coming storm in this work cannot disrupt the soothing tranquility characteristic of Grandma Moses’s painting. This was especially

needed after the trauma of World War II. In the late 1940s, various government agencies began supporting exhibitions abroad to establish good feelings toward the United States as the Cold War began, including a 1950–1951 exhibition of Moses's work. Much to the chagrin of American critics who wished for the country to be represented by other artists, Moses provided respite for European audiences. “At last,” exclaimed one gallery goer on her show’s opening day in Paris, “a happy world!”

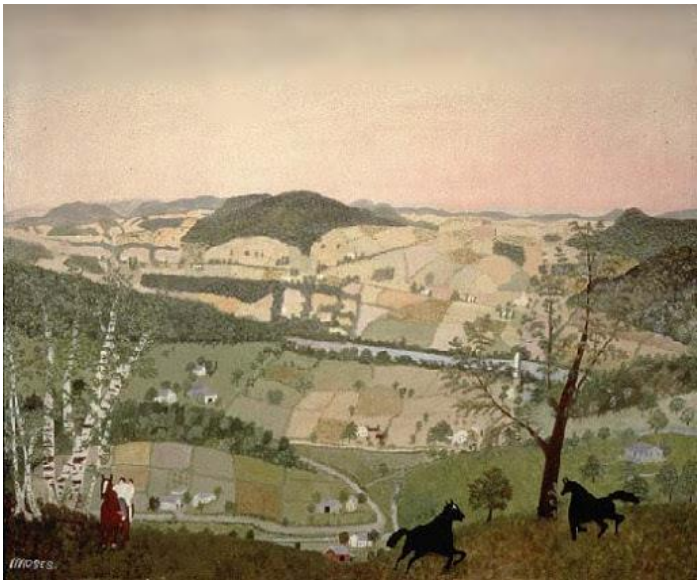
Anna Mary Robertson “Grandma” Moses

American, 1860-1961

Black Horses, 1942

Oil on Masonite

Galerie St. Etienne, New York



The gallerist Otto Kallir gave Grandma Moses her first New York show *What a Farm Wife Painted* in 1940. Two years later, upon seeing this painting, he traveled

upstate to woo Moses, ultimately becoming her exclusive representative. *Black Horses* records a memory from the Revolutionary War, when Moses's great grandfather observed the British Army coming through the woods, unhitched his two black plow horses, and rode one off to warn the colonial army. The Moses family's longstanding roots in the United States established her as a Mayflower descendent and made her a more conservative choice for representing Americanness in the postwar period.

Workers First

Many of the self-taught artists spent their lives earning money through farm, factory, construction, and other kinds of work, and their labor histories became a part of their artistic personas. In the catalogues that accompanied the first major exhibitions of self-taught artists, they were identified by their trades: The table of contents in *They Taught Themselves* reads, "Morris Hirshfield, 'Cloak and Suit Manufacturer'"; "Anna Mary Robertson Moses, 'Farm Wife'"; and "John Kane, 'House Painter.'"

Their working-class backgrounds

resonated especially strongly in the 1930s, when the world was in the grips of an economic crisis that fundamentally destabilized access to work and productivity. Jane Kallir, the granddaughter of the gallerist who gave Grandma Moses her first show, summed up how self-taught artists served as a source of inspiration during this time: "Untrained artists represented beliefs America needed in order to survive the Great Depression: democratic egalitarianism, self-made success and resilience in the face of adversity."

The U.S. government took concrete

action to help artists survive this bleak period through the Federal Art Project (FAP), which put artists to work decorating public buildings, creating an encyclopedia of American folk art, and teaching at community art centers. More than 15,000 artists were employed, and because the FAP did not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, or training, artists including Josephine Joy and Pedro López Cervántez were on its payroll.

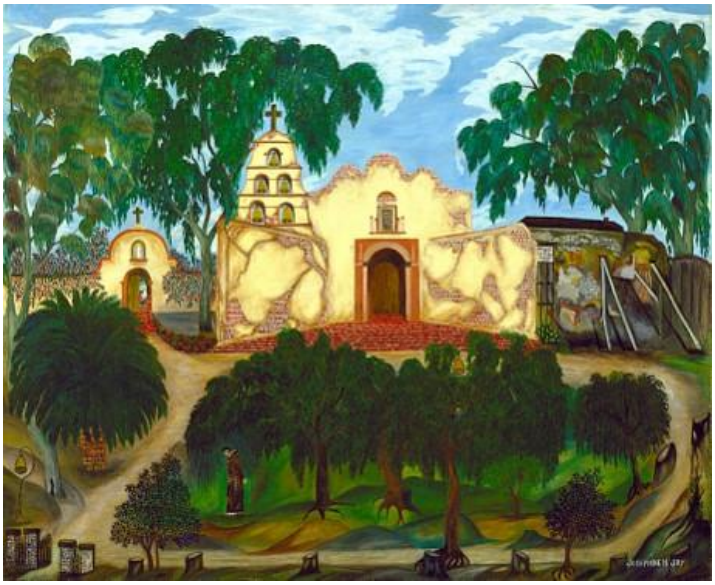
Josephine Joy

American, 1869-1948

San Diego Mission, ca. 1935-1939

Oil on fiberboard

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC, transfer from General Services Administration



In 1942, after being discovered at a show of paintings by California's Federal Art

Project artists, Josephine Joy became the first woman painter to have a solo exhibition at MoMA.

William Doriani

American, born Ukraine, 1891-1958

The Rehearsal, 1931

Oil on canvas

Collection of Josh Feldstein

Carlos Dyer

American, 1917-2016

Fish Cannery, 1937

Watercolor and pencil on paper

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC, Museum acquisition

Anna Mary Robertson “Grandma” Moses

American, 1860-1961

The Covered Bridge, 1818, ca. 1939

Worsted wool

Private collection, Galerie St. Etienne, New York

Despite the encouragement of her father, who was an amateur painter, Moses

had little time for art because she was called upon to care for her many siblings and later her own family. Only after her husband died did she spend more time making art like this worsted wool picture. Frustrated with how her embroideries were being eaten by moths, however, she began working more with paint by the 1940s. Her preference for painting on Masonite, because, as she said, “it will last many years longer than canvas,” demonstrates how farm life influenced her practical choices in art.

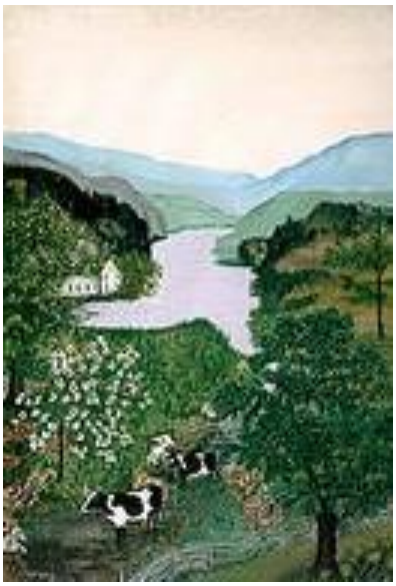
Anna Mary Robertson “Grandma” Moses

American, 1860-1961

Shenandoah, South Branch, before 1938

Oil on oilcloth

Private collection, Galerie St. Etienne, New York



Anna Mary Robertson “Grandma” Moses

American, 1860-1961

Shenandoah Valley (1861, News of the Battle), before 1938

Oil on oilcloth

Private collection, Galerie St. Etienne, New York

In the spring of 1938, Moses did not

have enough paintings to show a collector who was coming to call, so she cut one of her canvases in two, resulting in this diptych of the Shenandoah Valley. Moses was known for her New England scenes, but these paintings memorialize the twenty years that she and her family ran a string of successful dairy farms in Virginia. While the left panel depicts a pastoral scene of cows grazing, the right one marks an important point in the history of the region: the traveling party moving up the winding dirt road stops to spread word of the attack on Fort Sumter that began the Civil War in April of 1861.

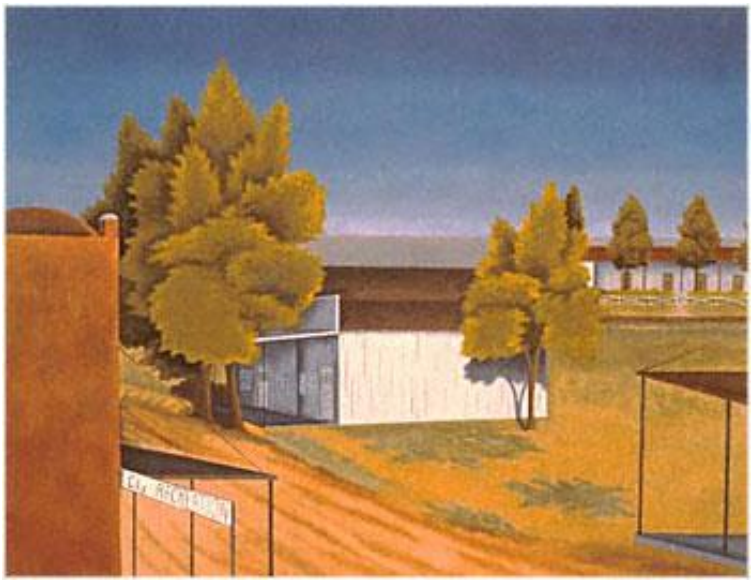
Pedro López Cervántez

American, 1914-1987

Esquina en "Taxco" (Téxico) (Streetcorner in Téxico), 1937

Gouache on Masonite

Oklahoma City Museum of Art, WPA Collection



In addition to getting artists off relief by

paying them for their work, the Federal Art Project (FAP) offered unprecedented opportunities for access and exposure. Pedro López Cervántez, who painted moody scenes of New Mexico, and Carlos Dyer, famous for his mural at a public high school in Long Beach, California—and for his love affair with dancer Martha Graham —first showed their work at the Museum of Modern Art in a 1936 exhibition of artwork commissioned by the FAP. William Doriani was an opera singer who didn't begin painting until the early 1930s. He had to stop when he could no longer afford art supplies but was able to explore his passion

thanks to FAP funds.

John Kane

American, born Scotland 1860-1934

Larimer Avenue Bridge, 1932

Oil on canvas

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh,

Patrons Art Fund

When it was completed in 1912, this Pittsburgh bridge set a record for the

longest concrete arch span in the world. It is possible that Kane worked on the early stages of the Larimer Avenue Bridge, but an accident in 1901 that cost him one leg prevented him from continuing his patterns of working in Pittsburgh's booming infrastructure, coal, and steel industries. Kane said that he became a painter during his next gig coloring railcars: "I learned the use of lead paint, the mixing of colors, the necessity of keeping colors clean and a deal else of information." One critic wrote of the way John Kane soared to fame at the end of his hard-laboring life: "It is a success story worthy of Horatio Alger and proves

the adage about truth and fiction."

John Kane

American, born Scotland, 1860-1934

Boulevard of the Allies, 1932

Oil on canvas mounted to board

Westmoreland Museum of American Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania

The hundreds of windows that John Kane included in this painting exemplify his dedication to detail. "One thing I cannot

abide is sloppy work in any form," he said. "I think a painting has a right to be as exact as a joist or a mold or any other part of building construction." His lifelong dedication to craftsmanship was celebrated in 1935 when the US Department of Labor celebrated its newly redesigned building with a show of Kane's work. Though he did not live to see this unfold, Kane's daughter believed he would have considered it his highest honor.

Folk Art Fever

Before living self-taught artists were recognized for their inventive approaches to painting, the art world embraced their predecessors—artists who had worked outside of academies in previous centuries. These untrained artists' pre-1900 paintings, as well as their once functional creations, such as hooked rugs, wood decoys, and metal weathervanes, became celebrated as American folk art beginning in the 1910s and 1920s.

An artists' colony in Ogunquit, Maine, was especially powerful in transmitting "folk art fever" to leading artists and curators

who brought it back to New York. When the Whitney Studio Club held the first major exhibition of historical folk artists in 1924, a critic responded, “The strange thing is that most of these very old-fashioned pictures give one vividly the sense of exactly the thing our most modern painters are doing.”

Historical folk artists were thus credited with anticipating the formal innovations of modern art. Living self-taught artists were seen as inheriting this quality, and museums like the Whitney and Museum of Modern Art who had begun showing folk artists from the past quickly moved to supporting living examples of intuitive

modernists.

Horace Pippin

American, 1888-1946

The Buffalo Hunt, 1933

Oil on canvas

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, purchase

Horace Pippin's breakthrough exhibition occurred in 1937 when two of his paintings were included in a juried annual art

exhibition that took place in Chester County, Pennsylvania, where he made his home after serving in World War I. Pippin became one of the most celebrated African American artists of his generation despite the fact that the art world remained very segregated at this time. In 1941, the Whitney Museum of American Art purchased this early work depicting a buffalo tumbling in the snow as a hunter looks on. Pippin would go on to show work in all of the Whitney's subsequent living artist annuals until he died in 1946.

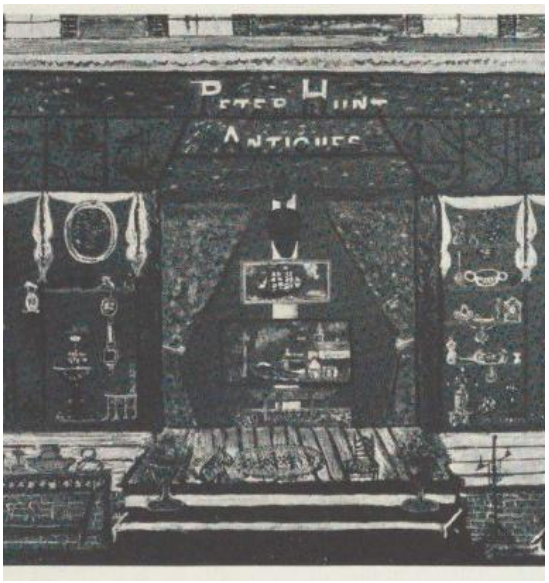
Edward C. “Pa” Hunt

American, 1870-1934

Peter Hunt’s Antique Shop, 1930-1934

Oil on canvas

Museum of Modern Art, New York, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund



Pa Hunt created this depiction of his son’s antique store in Provincetown, Massachusetts, a New England town that

was popular with artists. The green and gold tones and decorative motifs of the painting reflect Hunt's interest in restoring old furniture and folk art in the style of Pennsylvania German and French Provincial folk art, which was increasingly popular with collectors in this era. His customers included art world royalty such as cosmetics maven Helena Rubenstein, who purchased George Lothrop's *The Revelers*, seen earlier in this exhibition, from Hunt's shop.

Patsy Santo

American, born Italy, 1893-1975

Untitled (Ogunquit Coast), ca. 1946

Oil on canvas

Collection of Carl and Marian Mullis

American artists who participated in the painting school in Ogunquit, Maine, resided in old fishermen's cabins filled with American folk art that the school's founders

had collected from local antique shops. Patsy Santo was a self-taught artist who was discovered at the 1937 Vermont State Fair by the artist Walt Kuhn, who advocated for Santo to spend time in Ogunquit in the 1940s, resulting in this scenic view of the coastline.

Charles Augustus “Gus” Mager

American, 1878-1956

Circus Queen, ca. 1922

Oil on canvas

Westmoreland Museum of American Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania

Gus Mager, like Patsy Santo (whose painting is shown adjacent to this one), spent time painting in Ogunquit, Maine.

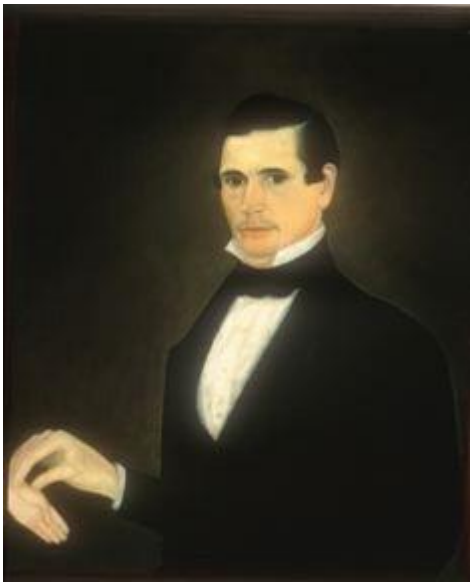
Mager was best known for his comic strips. This portrait of a circus performer reflects the glowing skin, intense gaze, and overall flatness that characterized portraits by pre-twentieth-century artists, including the likenesses of Dr. and Mrs. Matthew Woods (seen nearby).

Unidentified Artist

Portrait of Matthew Woods, M.D., 1816–1868, ca. 1858

Oil on canvas

Westmoreland Museum of American Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania



Unidentified Artist

Portrait of Catherine Spiese Woods (Mrs. Matthew Woods), 1821–1899

ca. 1858

Oil on canvas

Westmoreland Museum of American Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania

Related Trends in American Painting

As no single style dominated American art in the first half of the 1900s, John Kane, Horace Pippin, and Grandma Moses were especially successful because of how their work dovetailed with the many trends that were already afoot. Regionalism, a movement that placed emphasis on painting American places, for instance, created context for John Kane's scenes of Pittsburgh. Kane also benefited from the enthusiasm for local scenery and industrial might that had flourished among the city's painters since the turn of the century.

Pippin, meanwhile, quickly became a

part of the unprecedented visibility of African American art that was solidified in the wake of the Harlem Renaissance and which became known as the New Negro Movement. His work was featured in many of the groundbreaking exhibitions and books on Black artists created during this time by leaders such as Alain Locke, which also led Pippin to meet other increasingly prominent artists like Jacob Lawrence, even influencing their art.

Within a decade of her discovery, Moses became a major player in a space that married artists with commercial opportunities. Her work was featured on

magazine covers and reproduced as greeting cards and other merchandise. She was one of the first American artists to protect her art with copyright, and her imagery became so in demand that her gallerist Otto Kallir created Grandma Moses Properties, which still acts as a clearinghouse for reproductions of her ever-popular work.

Hale Woodruff

American, 1900-1980

Morehouse College (Sale, Graves and Robert Halls), early 1940s

Oil on canvas

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, purchase with funds from Joan N. Whitcomb, Sandra and Lloyd Baccus, George L. Howell and Mtamanika Youngblood, Arthur J. Clement, Karol Mason, Veronica and Franklin Biggins, Kathleen Clement, Dr. and Mrs. Louis W. Sullivan, Catherine Ross and Danny Boston, and Jay and Arthur Richardson, 2003.92

After training formally in Indianapolis and Paris, Hale Woodruff moved to Atlanta, where he began teaching art to students from across the Atlanta University consortium, including Morehouse College, which he captures in this painting. In addition to building the Clark Atlanta University Art Gallery collection through annual exhibitions of Black art, which in the

1940s included works by Horace Pippin, Woodruff left his legacy through his iconic *Art of the Negro* murals at Clark Atlanta. Within this mural panel (reproduced below), he includes an homage to Pippin, who appears (in the back row, fifth from the right) alongside other great artists from Africa and its diaspora, including Henry Ossawa Tanner and Jacob Lawrence.

Hale Aspacio Woodruff, *Art of the Negro: Muses*, 1952. Oil on canvas. 144 × 144 in.

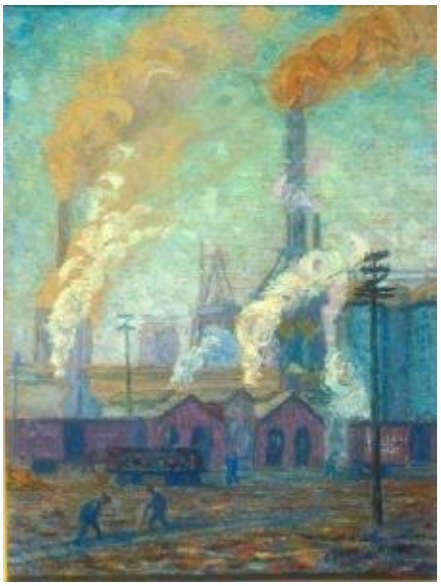
James Bonar

American, 1864-1942

View of Pittsburgh, South Side, 1915

Oil on canvas

Westmoreland Museum of American Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania



John Kane

American, born Scotland, 1860-1934

Hills and Rivers, Steamboat at Sleepy Hollow, 1929

Oil on canvas

Westmoreland Museum of American Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania

Pittsburgh is a city marked by constant

interruptions of hills and rivers, including those seen in this painting. The explosion of the steel industry after 1850 further complicated the city's chaotic topography and led one journalist to describe it in 1868 as "hell with the lid taken off." By the end of the century, however, these industrial intrusions had become a source of pride among many artists working in Pittsburgh. Kane was often singled out for his ability to accentuate the "idyllic patches of nature amidst the hell hole of smoky Pittsburgh."

Martin B. Leisser

American, 1845-1940

View of Mills on Monongahela River, Pittsburgh, undated

Oil on board

Westmoreland Museum of American Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania

Martin Leisser and James Bonar, known

for their paintings of Pittsburgh, also helped build the city's arts infrastructure. Leisser convinced Andrew Mellon to include an art department at the college that became Carnegie Mellon University. He struggled to get artistic training, though he was able to study in the studios of many artists, including in Europe. Bonar received much less training, but for many years he served as president of the Associated Artists of Pittsburgh, which held annual exhibitions that John Kane attended and participated in from the late 1920s until his death.

Jacob Lawrence

American, 1917-2000

Untitled (Woman Sewing), 1964

Oil on canvas

Watercolor and gouache on paper

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, gift of Thelma Rodbell, 1991.262

Jacob Lawrence trained at the Harlem

Art Workshop, but his intuitive style led artist and Howard University professor James Porter to classify him as naïve alongside Horace Pippin and other self-taught artists in his 1940 book *Modern Negro Art*. A year later, Lawrence and Pippin met when their work was included in a show at Edith Halpert's Downtown Gallery in New York. Lawrence reflected that Pippin's "content and his form must have made some impression on me." Pippin's influence seems visible in this painting—from the quilter's bowed head to Lawrence's homage to her handiwork—echoing Pippin's praying mother and careful

treatment of the rag rug in *Saying Prayers*.

Horace Pippin

American, 1888-1946

Saying Prayers, 1943

Oil on canvas

Brandywine River Museum of Art

Purchased with the Betsy James Wyeth Fund, 1980

Scenes of Black life by Black artists—

such as this tender moment between a mother and her children—gained unprecedented visibility during Pippin's career, thanks to increased activity from the art departments of historically Black colleges and universities. In the late 1930s, Howard University professor Alain Locke began publishing the first major surveys on African American art and included Pippin's work. In a 1946 essay, he praised Pippin as "a real and rare genius, combining folk quality with artistic maturity so uniquely as almost to defy classification."

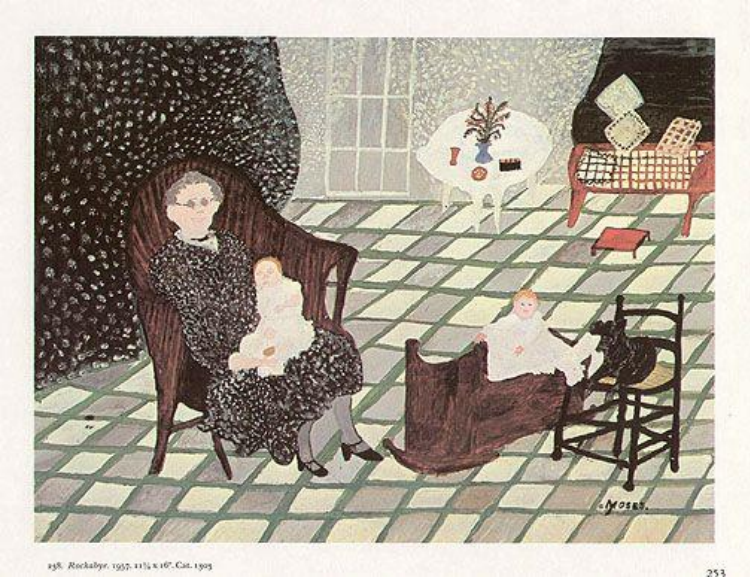
Anna Mary Robertson “Grandma” Moses

American, 1860-1961

Rockabye, 1957

Oil on Masonite

Private collection, Galerie St. Etienne, New York



Newell Convers Wyeth

American, 1882-1945

The American Mother, 1941

Oil on hardboard

Brandywine River Museum of Art

Gift of E. R. Squibb & Sons, 1977

Artists like Newell Convers Wyeth, who made their careers as illustrators, have, like

Grandma Moses, often struggled to be taken seriously as American artists. Wyeth made this work, which he called "the Madonna of the tiled room," on commission for a pharmaceutical company. While he based the figures on his daughter and grandson, Grandma Moses painted her own family in *Rockabye* (shown adjacently). Hailed as the "grandmother of the nation" by major politicians including Vermont's governor, Moses's role as matriarch was fundamental to her mass appeal, which led to many commissions and licensing deals of her own from the booming industry of midcentury American advertising.

Doris Emrick Lee

American, 1905-1983

Afternoon Train, 1948

Lithograph on paper

Brandywine River Museum of Art

Gift of Susan Linnea Sholander, 1994

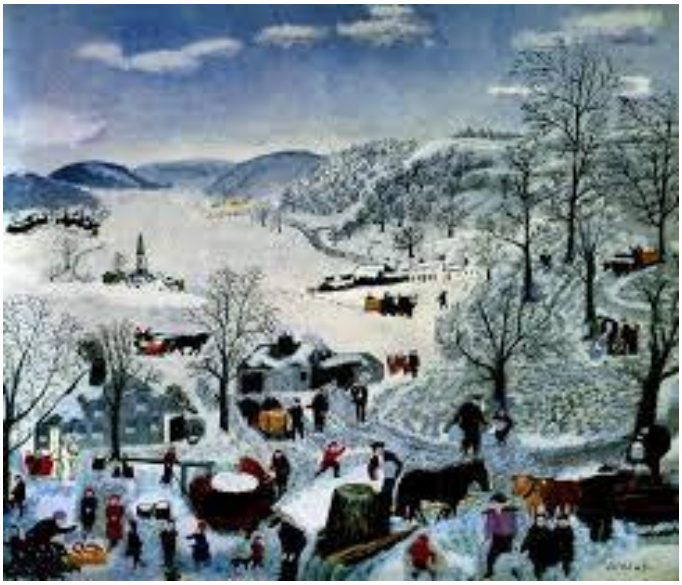
Anna Mary Robertson “Grandma” Moses

American, 1860-1961

Sugaring Off, 1943

Oil on canvas

Galerie St. Etienne, New York



The practice of tapping maple trees and boiling the sap to create syrup—known as “sugaring off”—was one of Moses’s most popular subjects. Winter scenes like this

one were first licensed by the greeting card industry, which became, as one Hallmark ad from 1953 put it, a “new art medium.” In that year, Hallmark released a special box of holiday cards featuring designs by Moses and seven other artists, including Doris Lee (whose work is shown adjacently), a trained American painter whose folksy work first became popular in the 1930s. In these works, both artists captured the winter rituals of their upstate New York towns in strikingly similar manners.

Self-Taught Artists and Modernism at MoMA

The 1938 exhibition *Masters of Popular Painting* marked the pinnacle of MoMA's interwar interest in self-taught artists, which had begun earlier in the decade. The impact of *Masters* had to do with its scale and national tour, as well as how Alfred Barr Jr., the museum's founding director, positioned the exhibition as part three in an exhibition trilogy that was "intended to present some of the major divisions or movements of modern art." Barr revealed the extent of the museum's commitment to these artists in 1941 when he organized a

permanent collection display that showed major acquisitions of their work.

The museum also gave several solo exhibitions to self-taught artists during these years. The fact that the first Black artist (William Edmondson) and the first woman painter (Josephine Joy) to have solo exhibitions at MoMA were self-taught exemplifies how these artists have always crashed through the art world's glass ceilings.

In 1943, Barr curated a survey of American painters that demonstrated how seriously he took self-taught artists, as he presented them alongside trained painters

without distinction. Later that year, however, the museum's exhibition for Morris Hirshfield produced a storm of criticism, and Barr resigned from his directorship. As MoMA's commitment to self-taught artists receded without Barr at the helm, Grandma Moses grew increasingly popular, causing many in the American art world to become critics of self-taught artists and the attention they attracted both at home and abroad.

Morris Hirshfield

American, born Poland, 1872-1946

Girl in a Mirror, 1940

Oil on canvas

Museum of Modern Art, New York

In 1943, MoMA opened an exhibition of thirty paintings by Morris Hirshfield, which included this nude portrait of a woman with

an unnaturally proportioned body perched on tiny, splayed feet. In the headline of his review, *Master of the Two Left Feet*, prominent critic Peyton Boswell poked fun at the awkwardness of Hirshfield's feet, suggesting the artist only had access to left-footed shoe forms in the slipper factory that he once ran. Boswell also complained that self-taught artists were unfairly eclipsing other American artists: "While serious, professional artists fight for the recognition that means life to them, the Modern [MoMA] fiddles away its resources building a precious cult around amateurism."

Cleo Crawford

American, ?-1961

Christmas, 1938

Oil on canvas

Collection of Josh Feldstein

This depiction of a snowless Christmas Day by Cleo Crawford was shown in *Contemporary Unknown American Painters*, a small 1939 exhibition at MoMA curated by

gallerist Sidney Janis, who also included it in 1942's *They Taught Themselves*. Crawford was one of the few self-taught African American artists apart from Horace Pippin and William Edmondson to be celebrated in this era. He made his art known by displaying it outside of his home in Haverstraw, New York, where he worked primarily in local brick yards, a skill that is reflected in the carefully laid chimneys of this painting.

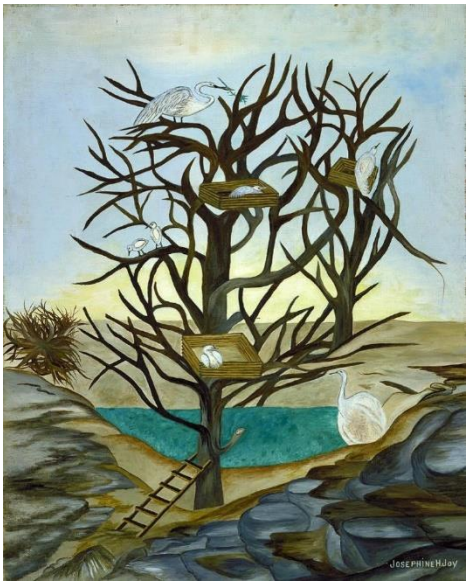
Josephine Joy

American, 1869-1948

Waterbirds Nesting, ca. 1935-1939

Oil on canvas

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC



In Josephine Joy's depiction of a manmade habitat for snowy egrets, the curvaceous yet sharp-limbed tree and the

coolness of the work's tones exemplify the air of mystery that brought her recognition in the last decade of her life. In 1942, a small exhibition of her work opened at MoMA at the same time as shows of work by German artists who had been outlawed by the Nazis and of posters made by New York City high school students—a trio of exhibitions that demonstrate the eclecticism of what was shown at MoMA in this era.

Patrick J. Sullivan

American, 1894-1967

A-Hunting He Would Go, 1940

Oil on canvas

Museum of Modern Art, New York, Museum purchase

Patrick Sullivan described the drama of this painting for the catalogue of *Americans 1943: Realists and Magic Realists* exhibition

at MoMA as an argument between a man who wishes to go hunting with friends and his girlfriend who objects. “Their meeting place denoted the moral quality of the lovers,” Sullivan said. “They meet, not in some secluded place, but right at the crossroad paths.” The trees echo the bodies of the man, his girlfriend, and his beckoning friend, both supple and stiff, and the darkness of the woods adds to the mysterious air of the scene.

Patsy Santo

American, born Italy, 1893-1975

Winter Evening, undated

Oil on canvas

Collection of Carl and Marian Mullis

Patsy Santo commented that this precise style of painting "describes my attitude toward life and also toward art." Like quite a few of the self-taught artists in

this show, including John Kane and Patrick Sullivan, Santo worked as a housepainter, a trade that facilitated his skills with paint and his attention to detail. In 1937, he exhibited his work at the Vermont State Fair, where it was discovered by Walt Kuhn, an artist who was a major influencer in the New York art world. Santo's work was subsequently shown at MoMA in *Contemporary Unknown American Painters*.

Santo, along with Patrick Sullivan and Peter Blume, whose works are shown nearby, were all included in *Americans 1943: Realists and Magic Realists*, an exhibition at MoMA that included trained

and self-taught artists together. Director Alfred Barr Jr. described the show's focus as "pictures of sharp focus and precise representation, whether the subject has been observed in the outer world—realism, or contrived by the imagination—magic realism."

Anna Mary Robertson “Grandma” Moses

American, 1860-1961

The Dead Tree, 1948

Oil on Masonite

The Centre Pompidou, Paris, France

Grandma Moses’s popularity only grew in the 1950s, stretching from the general public to the Oval Office as she became the darling of US presidents, including Harry S.

Truman, who famously rejected contemporary American painting as “ham and eggs art.” But critics became increasingly vocal about their frustration that she was considered by so many, both at home and abroad, as the pinnacle of American art. Critic Belle Krasne, for instance, was infuriated when she discovered this piece hanging as the sole representation of American art at the Musée d’art Moderne in 1953, saying, “I dislike practical jokes on an international scale.”

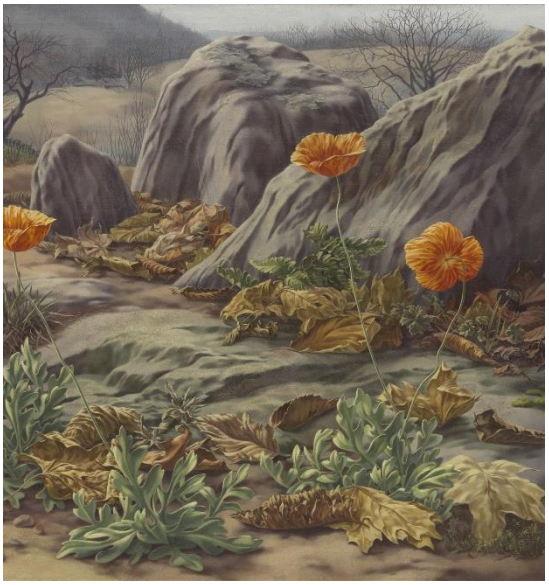
Peter Blume

American, born Belarus, 1906-1992

Landscape with Poppies, before 1938

Oil on canvas

Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller



This is a fairly tranquil scene by Peter Blume, who often reflected in his work on the rise of fascism, which he witnessed

personally while studying frescoes in Italy. His more unsettling magnum opus, *The Rock* (reproduced below), received critical acclaim when it debuted at the Carnegie International in 1950, even inspiring a *LIFE Magazine* article that noted it took him seven years to complete it. Although it has a more barren and otherworldly quality, this landscape resonates with the craggy snowscape in Patsy Santo's *Winter Evening* (on view nearby) which hung close to Blume's in MoMA's *Americans 1943: Realists and Magic Realists*.

Peter Blume (American, 1906–1992), *The Rock*, ca. 1944–1948, oil on canvas, The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., 1956.338. © Estate of Peter Blume. Digital image: The Art Institute of Chicago/Art Resource, New York.

Divergence with American Modernism

In 1950, as the Cold War created anxiety about another potentially nuclear conflict, MoMA curator James Thrall Soby feared that the public was developing an "unhealthy interest in normalcy." Soby wrote, "More and more people, revolted that their civilization should so soon again be in anguish, grow impatient when artists propose something new, strange, or troubled instead of familiar and happy. There could be no clearer indication of this state of affairs than the fame of Grandma Moses." Soby was among those who felt that artists like Peter Blume, whose work is

on view nearby, were better representatives of American art.

Eloise Barrangon

"Grandma Moses and Peter Blume"

The New Yorker, June 11, 1949, 18.

"It takes seven years for my art to bloom,"

Said Peter Blume to Grandma Moses.

"Four pictures at once uses paint in large doses,"

Said Grandma Moses to Peter Blume.

"I've symbols for sorrow and symbols for doom,"

Said Peter Blume to Grandma Moses.

"Never heard of Freud—don't believe in

neuroses,”

Said Grandma Moses to Peter Blume.

“Man gropes toward the stars from the edge of the tomb,”

Said Peter Blume to Grandma Moses.

“Man proposes but God disposes,”

Said Grandma Moses to Peter Blume.

"Grandma Moses doesn't get into a funk. Grandma Moses doesn't…,"

Cartoon from The New Yorker, October 15, 1949.

Alain/The New Yorker © Condé Nast

"Grandma Moses doesn't get into a funk. Grandma Moses doesn't have to wait for the creative yeast. Grandma Moses isn't hamstrung by the tensions of her time. Grandma Moses knocks them out one after another. Grandma Moses . . ."

This cartoon and nearby poem exemplify the tension between Moses and other American artists, which ended an era in which self-taught artists were welcomed as

part of contemporary art. But the story of self-taught artists and their game-changing presence in the mainstream art world did not end there. Since these original gatecrashers emerged on the scene, generations of self-taught artists have succeeded in making their art known and are once again well represented in the collections and exhibitions of museums from coast to coast. An example of such an artist in the Brandywine collection is Clementine Hunter, whose work is on view in the 3rd floor Brandywine Gallery.