CRACKING OPEN THE SKY

HOW THE MODERNISM OF NEW YORK CITY SKYSCRAPERS PAVED THE WAY FOR A NEW AMERICAN MODERN ART

A dissertation submitted to the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies

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Pamela Klurfield

Drew University

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ABSTRACT

Cracking Open the Sky
How the Modernism of New York City Skyscrapers Paved the Way for a New American Art

Doctor of Letters Dissertation by

Pamela Klurfield

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Using a personal family history with the Woolworth Building, built in 1913, this dissertation looks at its place within the growth of skyscrapers in Chicago and New York after the Great Fire in Chicago in 1871, and argues that it was skyscraper, America's very own art form, that paved the way for American art to veer away from the representational toward modernism and abstraction. It relates the desire of major companies to build the tallest building in the world as a form of branding, and in specific, how Frank W. Woolworth amassed a fortune and decided that he wanted to build the tallest building in the world. It tells of a special time in history when a 750-foot building was unheard of, and communication across the ocean from America to Europe isolated trends from one another. Through a look at Frank W. Woolworth and architect Cass Gilbert, the paper explains how for the artist John Marin, the building came to represent the discord in New York, and led him to see the Woolworth Building as having a soul, and to paint it as an animate object. It analyzes John Marin's style as being aligned with the futurism being explored in Paris. It reveals the importance of Marin's relationship with Alfred Stieglitz who made him a part of his circle of artists at his '291' gallery and led his paintings of the Woolworth Building to be included in the 1913 Armory Show. Marin's paintings,

representative of a fourth dimension, were an example of early American abstraction and bridged the divide between the European modern entries and that which was being painted in America. Finally, the paper exhibits other examples of skyscraper imagery in poetry, literature and photography that show how important the skyscraper was to the development of American modernism.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to all of the Kraemer men, William H. Kraemer (1857-1962), W. Frank Kraemer (1908-1994) and Jeffrey Kraemer (1943-1994) who worked on the Woolworth Building, and to my loving husband Rob, who helped me to shape my thoughts on how to articulate this wonderful story.

CONTENTS

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Finally, to my family, Rob, Dewey, and Avery, who encouraged me every step of the way.

LIST OF IMAGES

INTRODUCTION

Breakers and Granite

What are these, angels or demons
Or steel and stone?
Soaring, alert,
Striped with diversified windows,
These sweep aloft
And the multitude crane their necks to them: --
Are they angels, or demons,
Or stone?
If the grey sapless people,
Moving along the street, thought them angels,
They too would be beautiful,
Erect and laughing to the sky for joy.
If as demons they feared them,
They would smite with fierce hatred
These brown haughty foreheads;
They would not suffer them to hold the sun in trust.
What, are they, then, angels or demons,
Or stone?
Deaf sightless towers
Unendowed yet with life;
Soaring vast effort
Spent in the sky till it breaks there.
You men of my country
Who shaped these proud visions,
You have yet to find godhead
Not here, but in the human heart. [1]

John Gould Fletcher

[1] John Gould Fletcher, "Breakers and Granite," American Verse Project, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/amverse/BAP5377.0001.001/1:10?rgn=div1;view=fulltext

Image 1. John Marin, *The Woolworth Building* No. 28. 1912, 49.5 x 40 cm, The Smithsonian Art Museum, Washington, DC.

This is the story of a painting and a building and how they inadvertently influenced modern art in America. The timeline is circa 1913, and the building is the Woolworth Building. The building isn't a household name today, but in 1913 it stood as the tallest building in the world and one of the first skyscrapers. The artist, John Marin, returning from painting in Paris, was struck by New York City's transformation, and painted the building as if it were in a dance. The painting was shown at the 1913 International Exhibit of Modern Art at the New York Armory as one of the American entries. At the time, the concept of a moving building was as incongruous to many as some of the paintings borrowed from Europe. Other participants in the story include business tycoon, Frank W. Woolworth, who conceived of the building: architect, Cass Gilbert, who designed it, and photographer and gallery owner, Alfred Stieglitz. Together they paint a vivid picture of the synergy of 1913.

My interest in the timeline of 1913 dates back twenty-five years ago to 1988 when I worked as an assistant to Billy Klüver and Julie Martin on *Kiki's Paris Artists and Lovers 1900-1930*. The book was a social art history of Montparnasse, using as cohesion, a model named Kiki who traversed the lives of Modigliani, Picasso and Man Ray during the 1920s. I came in on the tail end of the project and my work focused on the 1920s and artists after World War I. I wanted to discover more about the periodization *before* World War I, when the zeitgeist of modernism in art, literature, music, architecture and the social sciences took place. I wanted to learn more about the relationship between what American artists were doing as compared to what had been going on in Europe, and how American modernism took hold. I knew about the Stein's salons, and the American

collector, Dr. Albert C. Barnes who came and purchased large quantities of French art, but in the first two decades of the twentieth century, a great divide still existed between America and Europe. Communication was much slower. That's not to say that there was no evidence in the United States of the new modern art created in Paris. Many American artists spent time in Paris. Wealthy Americans bought the new art, and several collectors such as Dr. Albert C. Barnes and Paul Durand Ruel exposed Americans to the new French art. But American art was more pictorial and realist than that being painted in Paris. Even the movement known as the *Ashcan school* that was revolutionary in its subject selection, veering from the beautiful to the sordid, was realistic in its painting style.

Upon visiting the *100th Anniversary Retrospective of The Armory Show,* at the New York Historical Society in 2013, I was surprised and excited to see John Marin's 1913 painting *The Woolworth Building*. He painted a swaying Woolworth Building in watercolor. Marin had spent the years from 1906 to 1909 in Paris, where he had met Edward Steichen, and Alfred Stieglitz, but he was not known to participate in the Paris salons. When Marin returned to New York, the city had been transformed. His biographer and friend, E. M. Benson writes:

> The Woolworth Building was under construction; two new bridges had been swung across the East River; horse and cable cars were now almost entirely replaced by electric ones; there was an elevated railway rattling overhead and a subway growling underfoot. Time seemed to be moving faster and more raucously. Even the tugboats in the river were more boisterous. The city was passing through a corporate convulsion, a

> frightening and bewildering kind of high-tensioned life. It was like watching the first days of creation.[2]

Marin observed these extreme changes and was transfixed by the Woolworth Building. His series of watercolors ranged from a realistic depiction of the building, to an abstract one of it shaking in the wind.

Few things are more interdisciplinary than the study of a skyscraper. One can look at a skyscraper from the perspective of its historical building style: Is it classical, Gothic, minimalist or modern? One can view it from an engineering perspective: What were the materials and technologies available? Was it made of masonry or wood? Cast iron or steel? Terra cotta or concrete? Viewed from an economic perspective, where did the labor come from? Was it enabled by vast groups of immigrants desperate for labor? From a sociological perspective, what was the building's impact? What dictated its construction? Cass Gilbert said that a skyscraper was "the machine that made the land pay."[3] But to give it merely an economic function is to minimize its essence. Tall buildings have to do with much more than economics. F. W. Woolworth designed the Woolworth Building to announce his success. As one crossed the Brooklyn Bridge in 1913, billboards abounded articulating brands to pedestrians. A signature skyscraper was much more powerful than a sign. It shouted out that someone was important.

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[2] E. M. Benson, *John Marin Water Colors, Oil Paintings, Etchings* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 35. Quoted in Ruth Fine, *John Marin* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1990), 119.

[3] Mary Beth Betts, "Gilbert Gothic." Lecture. www.skyscrapermuseum.com.

The skyscraper represents the modern city. Today tall buildings are a fact of life, and the suspicion that they garnered in 1913 has been chipped away with time. However, in 1913, even the Eiffel Tower, beloved and respected as an icon today, was suspect to many. Author Roland Barthes wrote of Guy de Maupassant lunching at the restaurant in the tower because, "It's the only place in Paris where I don't have to see it." [4]

It stands to reason that the skyscraper, an example of American exceptionalism and the inimitable symbol of the modern city, would fascinate early twentieth century artists and become their subject matter, replacing more realistic portraits of sordid city life. The push and pull of the movement of city life, like the push and pull that Hans Hofmann described as necessary in a painting, led American artists to the new modernism. John Marin recognized the movement of the city skyscrapers and the Woolworth Building as iconic symbols representing the modern American city, and in doing so his work was significant to the inception of twentieth century modern art in America.

Like Marin, I have always been enamored with the Woolworth Building because talk of it has always been a part of my family's narrative. My great grandfather, William Frank Kraemer, was born in Germany in 1857. He served for three years in the private regiment of Empress Augusta. In 1880 he sailed to America on the *S.S. Wessland* with his six brothers and one sister. The journey took thirteen days. On board he met my great grandmother, Katherine Kollasch Schultz, and they settled in Peoria, Illinois, where he

[4] Roland Barthes, "The Eiffel Tower," *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 3.

learned to be an iron molder. His two sons, William H. Kraemer (1882-1962) (my grandfather) and Al Kraemer (1880-1958) (my great-uncle) apprenticed in the terra cotta industry in Chicago, where after the Great Fire clay-based material was widely used in building construction. When Chicago architect, Daniel Burnham, began work in New York City on contractor George Fuller's new building, the Flatiron, he offered jobs to my grandfather and my great uncle. The building utilized the new skeleton frame construction with an exterior of brick and terra cotta. According to my family's oral history, in 1900 Will and my grandmother, Frederica, boarded a train to New York from Chicago. Through a chain of misinformation, when they arrived they were told that there was no work. They did not know what to do and so they travelled to Baltimore where my grandfather found a job, and they moved into a boarding house (just as Frank Woolworth had done while apprenticing for Augsbury and Moore in Watertown, New York). When a position opened up on the Flatiron, Will and "Freda," as she was called, moved up to New York. I always remember my grandfather in a three-piece suit and ankle-high button up shoes. The shoes were worn for support, not as a fashion statement. Because in Baltimore, several men attempted to traverse a wooden board from one construction site to another. Will called out to a man coming from the opposite direction: "Don't go. Wait till I get to the other side." The message went unheeded and the board cracked. Will tumbled to the ground and broke his ankle. His leg was still in a cast when he was called to the New York job. According to family lore, he said, "Freda, get the hammer." Together they cracked off the cast so he could get back to work. As a result, the ankle troubled him for the rest of his life. Will began work for the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company and he and my grandmother moved to an

apartment in Hoboken, New Jersey. He soon became a foreman and oversaw other buildings for Atlantic Terra Cotta: Brooklyn Academy of Music (1907-08), Liberty Tower (1909-10), and the Woolworth Building (1910-13). Pictures of him, where he looks larger than life, appeared in the prospectus for the Woolworth Building, standing alongside a corner minaret on the forty-second story. Later, as the Great Depression hit, the construction of tall buildings ceased, and the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company, along with many other east coast terra cotta companies, closed. My grandfather and my father, who also found himself without a job, began a terra cotta cleaning and maintenance company called Remark Building Service, and the Woolworth Building became a major client. For more than forty years, Remark maintained an office on the 29th floor of the Woolworth Building as well as an office on West 10th Street. From the age of eight, I would, on special occasions, go to the Remark office with my father.

New York City has always been a city of extremes, albeit now or in the early twentieth century. The Woolworth Building stood as the "Cathedral of Commerce;" the Remark office on the other hand was on the street level of a turn-of-the-century building being used as a single-room-occupancy welfare hotel near the old West Side Highway.[5] The highway no longer exists, and today the area is referred to as the "Gold Coast," but at the time it was gritty. Several late-night bars were around the corner on West Street, and when we drove to work at 7:30 in the morning, some of the patrons were still loitering on

[5] The Woolworth Building was given the name "Cathedral of Commerce" by S. Parkes Cadman, Methodist clergyman and newspaperman in the forward to "The Cathedral of Commerce," a booklet given to prospective tenants upon its opening day.

the street from the night before. The warehouse nature of the area was incongruous to me when, at fifteen, I started filling in as a secretary on my vacations from school.

Image 2. Will Kraemer on 42nd floor balcony of the Woolworth Building, 1912. b/w photograph, Kraemer archive.

File cards for each job were typed with carbon paper on an IBM Model C typewriter and then cross-indexed by street address and building name in a card catalog. In the rear of the office, the tank for the commode hung from an exposed ceiling, and you pulled a chain to flush the toilet. It was a creepy, warehouse space. But that's the way New York City is. In a matter of blocks, one can drift from welfare hotels to skyscrapers; from tenements to mansions. But when we went to the Woolworth Building it was magical. I remember going on calls with my father, standing in the lobby and staring in amazement at the highly stylized grotesque of the engineer, Gunvald Aus, grasping the building's tower. Another grotesque depicted F.W. Woolworth counting his nickels and dimes. Above the outdoor entrances were bas-relief heads representing people from every continent. I learned the terms "pointing" and "patching," for that was how the terra cotta was maintained.

Image 3. *Grotesque of Gunvald Aus,* engineer, Woolworth Building lobby, photograph, Kraemer archive.

At a young age, my older brother, too, had begun working for my father part-time. "Just get him out of the house," my mother would holler, and Dad would situate him on the roofs of buildings in the Times Square area. There he learned the trade from Italian and Scandinavian bricklayers who barely spoke English. He learned some pretty bad habits as well. Later he worked on the Woolworth Building as a bricklayer and mason, riding the scaffolds to the highest heights. He was undaunted by being far above the street. Soon I saw more than the lobby. He took me out through windows onto private floors and onto the 42nd and 49th floor balconies and showed me where he worked. On those high floors, we could feel the push and pull that I later saw depicted so vividly by Marin in his paintings. For the American Bicentennial, I watched the Tall Ships cruise up the Hudson from the 49th floor balcony. We were but two family members who reveled at the building's greatness. My cousin, Donald McGeehan, wrote in his family journal:

> In the early sixties after Will Kraemer had passed on, I had a "family" key to the gate leading to the observatory, and often brought my girlfriends to the summit while pretending that I could give a lecture on the surrounding buildings. On one occasion a violent storm came in from the west, and the wind reached such ferocity that we had to crawl on all fours, laughing and crying, around the tower before reaching the exit door.[6]

In 1976, when Red Grooms and Mimi Gross created their exhibition, *Ruckus Manhattan,* my brother Jeff gave Mimi in-depth tours of the building. Their large and whimsical sculpture of the Woolworth Building featured my brother standing on a scaffold.

[6] Donald McGeehan, private papers.

The exterior of the building was maintained by Remark on a piece-by-piece basis. Beginning in 1975 however, having resisted Landmark Status for so long, the Woolworth Company realized that over the years, pollution and dirt had loosened the terra cotta from

Image 4. Red Grooms and Mimi Gross, *Ruckus Manhattan,* the Woolworth Building with Jeffrey Kraemer on a scaffold. Photo from Judd Tully, *Ruckus Manhattan,* George Braziller, 1977.

the steel frame and a major renovation was needed. Spending twenty million dollars, one-fifth of the terra cotta and 2,843 windows were replaced. [7] The renovation was merited, for the building is paralleled by none. In 1981, Pulitzer Prize winning architecture critic for *The New York Times*, Paul Goldberger reflected on the connection between architecture and music manifest in the building. As I will later discuss, music became a great influence on modern art.

> For the Woolworth Building is one of the great icons of 20th-century architecture. It has a mix of delicacy and strength that is almost Mozartian, a sense of light, graceful detail applied to a firm and self-assured structure that no later building has ever quite equaled. [8]

Today I live amongst memorabilia of the building: a gargoyle sits in my living room and a rendering of the building by Cass Gilbert's lead designer, Thomas R. Johnson, hangs in my dining room. When the Skyscraper Museum decided to curate a show on the 100th anniversary of the opening of the Woolworth Building, I was able to loan them some memorabilia from the Remark office, because in 1983, my father decided he had had enough. He gave me the key to the office and walked away, leaving me to lay the business to rest.

The Woolworth Building stands at the center of a mosaic linking so many aspects of the early twentieth century: The architectural race for supremacy and the emerging New York skyline; the American phenomenon making New York City the financial capital of the world; a city with two entirely different demographics, dependent upon one another; the

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[7] Paul Goldberger, "A Life Renewal for 'Cathedral of Commerce,'" *New York Times,* November 5, 1982.

[8] Ibid.

Horatio Alger, rags to riches nature of F. W. Woolworth's life, and his relationship with Cass Gilbert. Finally, how the skyscraper became the quintessential icon for a new American art. Good architecture gives us a personal footing. In a lecture at The Cleveland Museum of Art in 2010, entitled "Why Architecture Matters," Paul Goldberger clearly articulated the central place in time and memory that buildings inhabit:

> Architecture is about the making of place, and the making of memory. Architecture gives us joy if we are lucky, and it gives us satisfaction and comfort, but it also connects us to our neighbors, since the architecture of a town or a city is the physical expression of common ground. It is what we share, if only because the architecture of a community is one of the few forms of experience that everyone partakes in: the sharing of place. And architecture is also an expression of time in an age when we are all to often bereft of a sense of time, bereft of the feeling that some things that surround us have been there for a long time and will be there for a long time to come. And, perhaps most important of all, in an age when so many of our contacts are virtual, when we often live in the virtual world of computers, architecture is a constant reminder of the urgency, of the meaning, and of the value of the real. Buildings are not just inanimate objects; they are occasions for human contact, and they are shapers of human contact, which makes them a living part of our world. [9]

In the first decade of the twentieth century, New York City was revolutionized by steel and industrialism. Robber barons lived in sumptuous mansions uptown. Newly arrived immigrant workers clustered in tightly put together cramped tenements. The one group supported the other. All around New York City construction was going on: buildings, railways, bridges. Immigrants rushed to the city where there were opportunities for labor in construction and manufacturing. Steel was altering the face of cities, and the artists interpreted the change. A patrician class, heirs to steel fortunes, such as Duncan Phillips;

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[9] Paul Goldberger, lecture. "Why Architecture Matters," Cleveland Museum of Art, September 15, 2010. republished in *Why Architecture Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Detroit industrialist, Charles Lang Freer; Pittsburgh industrialist, Henry Clay Frick; and chemist, Albert C. Barnes, was born. They had the money to collect and underwrite new American art. We owe gratitude to them. As they became familiar with new American modernism, they purchased art, which endorsed and supported artists.

In a time when the changes occurring in modern day life were incongruous and disruptively jarring to many, the Woolworth Building was a unifying force. It enabled immigrants, familiar with the Woolworth brand, to be excited about a project in the financial district in which they would normally have little contact. The retail stores in its lobby brought local pedestrians inside the building where they could join in the revelry of the monumental lobby, a clear intention of the design ethos demanded by F. W. Woolworth. The observation deck became a tourist attraction and sparked civic pride. The building's construction attracted artist John Marin to paint it in various translations.

Although much has been written on the Armory Show and on the history of New York skyscrapers, little addresses specifically how John Marin's painting of a skyscraper came to be nestled in the exhibition. I have a unique vantage point from which to look at the Woolworth Building. Combining my personal experience with the deep research and analysis of others, I can postulate a vivid picture of what Marin might have been feeling, and a picture of the periodization of the early twentieth century, a milieu that like his painting, was very much in flux. I can't prove what Marin was thinking (one can't even trust, for example, the thoughts that he and Stieglitz shared in correspondence, because for all we know one or both of them were bluffing), but I can make a pretty good case for the zeitgeist of this period, an era during which tremendous change was unfolding. I intend to

show that there was synchronicity between our own uniquely American art form, the skyscraper, and America's emerging modern art.

The approach of this study is an historical and analytical look at art history. This paper will look at the inception of tall buildings, the Woolworth Building, Frank W. Woolworth and its architect, Cass Gilbert. It will discuss how American art was changing in the first decade of the twentieth century. It will examine John Marin, the man and the artist; how his art evolved when he returned to New York and how he was selected to be in the Armory Show. It will look at the relationship between Marin and photographer and gallery owner, Alfred Stieglitz, who was in many ways responsible for John Marin's success. From 1906 to 1915, modern art in the United States followed a trajectory influenced by the technological changes occurring here. The motion picture led artists to explore how to convey and interpret motion in their paintings. The camera and photography, initially disputed as to whether they were an art form, challenged the representational in art allowing artists to experiment with abstraction. Finally, I will look at examples of skyscraper symbolism in other artists' and writers' work. The imagery can be found in the photography of Alfred Stieglitz, Alvin Langdon Coburn, and Paul Strand, among others. The imagery of a moving Eiffel Tower can be found in paintings by Robert Delaunay. In literature, Willa Cather and John Dos Passos made allusions to tall buildings, showing a very different side of New York from the patrician city of Edith Wharton or Henry James. Skyscraper allusions are used by poets, John Gould Fletcher, John Reed and Adolph Wolff. I plan to compare and discuss this imagery with Marin's and show how architecture affected all of the arts during this periodization.

In Chapter 1, I will discuss the emerging city skyline and the architectural race for stature and supremacy: The American phenomenon making New York City the financial capital of the world and how the skyscraper became the perfect metaphor for a new American Art paralleling the emergence of the new American architecture.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the Woolworth Building owner, F. W Woolworth and architect, Cass Gilbert.

In Chapter 3, I will look at Marin's relationship with Alfred Stieglitz, Marin's place in the Stieglitz circle, and how the initial quest of Edward Steichen and Stieglitz to legitimize photography as an art form impacted modern art.

In Chapter 4, I will examine how a painting of the Woolworth Building arrived at the Armory Show.

In Chapter 5, I will analyze John Marin's style and show how it is an example of early American modernism.

In Chapter 6, I will discuss post 1913 skyscraper imagery in other poets, authors and photographers' work.

In Chapter 7, I will conclude that there was a correlation between our own American art form, the skyscraper, and America's emerging modern art.

CHAPTER 1
EMERGING SKYSCRAPERS

Image 5. Vintage Postcard of New York Harbor, 1913.

> I have always felt that architecture, painting and sculpture were so closely akin that the highest form of art would be the combination of them all. [1]
>
> Cass Gilbert

In 1909, after four years in Paris, John Marin returned to New York City, anticipating representation by Alfred Stieglitz. Edward Steichen had previously written to Stieglitz and recommended that he take a look at John Marin's work. Stieglitz was impressed and in 1908 had showcased Marin at the *Little Galleries of the Photo Secession* in a joint show with Alfred Maurer. When Marin returned, the city was very different from that which he had left. Tall buildings permeated the downtown area. Each year taller buildings were added to the city's horizon. A popular postcard from the 1900s, reproduced in Carol Willis' book, *Form Follows Finance,* shows the view of Lower Manhattan from the Hudson River waterfront, as Marin would have seen it as he sailed back from Europe.[2] Gazing down Wall Street, the Trinity Church spire was still the tallest

[1] Cindy Gilbert. www.cassgilbertsociety/architect. Cass Gilbert Society.

[2] Carol Willis, *Form Follows Finance* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), 34-35.

structure, but from the water, one could see the Park Row Building, the Manhattan Life Insurance Building, and the World Newspaper Building. The need for office space encouraged architects to build upward. A tall building represented prestige and good publicity, and newspapers competed amongst themselves to construct the tallest building. In 1875, the Tribune Building, built by Richard Morris Hunt (1827-1895), stood ten stories and 260 feet. Fifteen years later in 1890, the New York World Building rose to 309 feet.[3] What we know of today as the Flatiron Building (the Fuller Building, designed by Daniel Burnham), stood twenty-one stories high in 1903 and held the honor next. Then in 1908, the Singer Building designed by Ernest Flagg (1857-1947), stood twice as tall and gained the title. In 1909 the Metropolitan Life Insurance Building at Madison Square surpassed it. And in 1911, F. W. Woolworth, founder of the ubiquitous and highly profitable 5&10-cent stores, decided he wanted to erect a building in his own honor. He commissioned the renowned architect Cass Gilbert to design it, and he paid for it with 13 million in cash. The 750-foot tall building, finished in 1913, coupled steel with ornate terra cotta. It was neo-Gothic with one foot in the past and another in the future. Rather than honoring God, it honored commerce and consumerism.

New York City was the most prosperous city in the world, and its skyline made it more modern than the cities of Europe. In *The Future in America,* H. G. Wells recounted his first trip aboard a steamship into New York harbor. He wrote how very large the Statue of Liberty appeared, even when compared to the mammoth SS *Carmania* on

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[3] Facts regarding the newspaper buildings are from The Skyscraper Museum's permanent installation. www.skyscrapermuseum.org.

which he travelled. He wrote that his first fascination was with the crowds of people walking across the Brooklyn Bridge at rush hour.[4] He witnessed the beauty of the existing skyscrapers; the St. Paul Building, the World Building and the Manhattan Tower, and he was prescient that the race to build taller and taller buildings was inevitable.

> My first impressions of New York are impressions enormously to enhance the effect of this Progress, this material progress. That is to say, as something inevitable and inhuman as a blindly furious energy of growth that must go on. Against the broad and level gray contours of Liverpool one found the ocean liner portentously tall, but here one steams into the middle of a town that dwarfs the ocean liner. The sky-scrapers that are the New-Yorker's perpetual boast and pride rise up to greet one as one comes through the Narrows into the Upper Bay, stand out, in a clustering group of tall irregular constellations, the strangest crown that ever a city wore. They have an effect of immense incompleteness; each one seems to await some needed terminal, to be, by virtue of its woollyjets of steam, still as it were in process of eruption. As you lean and gaze from the top floors on houses below, which from those floors seem huts, it may occur to you that precisely as these huts were once regarded as supreme achievements, so, one of these days, from other and higher floors, the Flat-Iron may seem a hut itself. Evolution has not halted. Undiscernibly but indefatigable, always it is progressing. [5]

The skyscraper was inimitably American: radical and at the beginning of the twentieth century, not yet seen in other countries. In *The Tall Building Artistically Reconsidered,* architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable (1921-2013) wrote: "The

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[4] This, too, would also make a great impression on F. W. Woolworth, and he determined that he wanted pedestrians to be able to see his building and brand from the bridge.

[5] H. G. Wells, *The Future in America; a Search After Realities*, https://archive.org/stream/hgwellsfuture00wellrich/hgwellsfuture00wellrich_djvu.txt. ch 3, 31.

skyscraper is the point where art and the city meet."[6] Within the art world across the Atlantic, a rebellion against the official state-supported academy, l'École des Beaux Arts, had occurred since Impressionists began painting *en plein air*. Changes in art in New York, however, were slower. No one in America was painting anything like Pablo Picasso's 1907 *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, at least not in the mainstream. But the tall buildings were iconic and the subject of many artists and writers in New York. Alfred Stieglitz had photographed the Fuller Building in 1903, the year it was completed. He might have walked down Fifth Avenue from his gallery carrying a large wooden tripod and an 8x10 camera with perhaps three plates. In Stieglitz's photo, the building stands eerily alone. It is viewed from afar with snow on the ground. The photograph was not printed until 1910.[7] Regarding the photograph Stieglitz told his assistant Dorothy Norman,

> Watching the structure go up, I felt no desire to photograph the different stages of its development. But with the trees of Madison Square covered with fresh snow, the Flat Iron impressed me, as never before, it appeared to be moving toward me, like the bow of a monster ocean steamer – a picture of new America still in the making. While snow lay on the Square, I made snapshots of the building in various lights.[8]

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[6] Ada Louise Huxtable, *The Tall Building Artistically Reconsidered: The Search for a Skyscraper Style* (New York*:* Pantheon Books, 1982), 4.

[7] There's a chance that my grandfather, William H. Kraemer, was working on the building that day. He had been summoned from Chicago, where the terra cotta business was in full force, to come to New York to work on the Fuller Building.

[8] Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer* (New York: Aperture, 1990), 45.

Stieglitz wanted to recreate his subjective response to the motion of the building on a two-dimensional surface. His father had asked him how he could be interested in such an ugly building. He replied, "Why Pa, it is not hideous, but the new America. The Flat Iron [sic] is to the United States what the Parthenon was to Greece."[9] His father was not the only person offended by the building. Art critic, Carl Sadakishi Hartmann, commented in an article entitled, "Flat-Iron Building – An Esthetical Dissent," "Surely you don't mean to tell me that the eyesore at Twenty-third Street and Broadway has anything to do with art?"[10] In Stieglitz's photograph neither people nor any means of transportation are seen. The photo elicits a feeling of isolation. Yet this isolation was the opposite of what skyscrapers created. Throngs of people crowded the streets and into trolley cars to work together in a city that was growing in a new direction: upward. High land prices in Lower Manhattan encouraged speculation by builders. For some, the new tall buildings were a good thing; for others they posed a threat to the city's inherent design.

In her analysis of early twentieth century modern art in America, Barbara Rose states that American artists were "handmaidens of European cultures." She said, "we had a hard time distancing ourselves from our European ancestors."[11] In an essay in *America*

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Hartman wrote under the pseudonym of Sidney Allan, "Flat Iron Building – An Esthetical Dissent," *Camera Work* no. 4 (1903-1910), 36. The Modernist Journals Project, http://modjourn.org, a joint project of Brown University and the University of Tulsa.

[11] Barbara Rose, *American Art since 1900* (New York: Praeger, 1975), 9.

and Alfred Stieglitz, William Carlos Williams said the same thing.[12] Our relationship with Europe was similar to that of a parent and adolescent, requiring separation. Americans longed to be associated with European culture. Architectural historian, Carl Condit concurs that American architecture maintained a close tie to classical European structures.[13] The New York City skyline in 1910 consisted of many styles. Some architects had been classically trained, some not; for to be an architect in the late 1800s did not necessarily require a degree in architecture. Massachusetts Institute of Technology had only begun its architecture school in 1868, with four students.[14] The École Nationale et Spéciale des Beaux-Arts (hereinafter referred to as École des Beaux-Arts) merged its architecture school and its art school in 1807.[15] The state-sponsored École favored an academic system that taught romantic rationalism: the adaptation of the styles of ancient Greece, Rome, and twelfth century Gothic, to new uses.[16] Americans who did attend the École des Beaux Arts, like Richard Morris Hunt and Henry Hobson Richardson, returned to design classical buildings. Examples abound, such as

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[12] William Carlos Williams, "The American Background." in *America & Alfred Stieglitz A Collective Portrait,* ed. Waldo Frank and others (New York: Doubleday, Duran & Company, 1934), 9-32.

[13]Sarah Bradford Landau and Condit, Carl W., *Rise of the New York Skyscraper 1865 - 1913* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996), 19.

[14] Robert C. Twombly, *Louis Sullivan: His Life and Work* (New York: Viking, 1986), 29.

[15] Ibid., 60.

[16] Narciso G. Menocal, "The Bayard Building: French Paradox and American Synthesis." *Sites* 13 (1985): 4-24.

Richardson's Marshall Field Department Store in Chicago, Hunt's mansions overlooking the cliffs in Newport, Rhode Island, and the Vanderbilt's Biltmore estate in Asheville, North Carolina. But American society was changing and crying out for a new architecture. With cities more and more densely populated and land rapidly becoming more valuable, a building resembling a Greek temple was out of place.

Cass Gilbert, the architect of the Broadway Chambers Building, the Woolworth Building, and the New York Life Building, amongst others, called the skyscraper "the symbol of our national genius."[17] It was also a solution for how to maximize the usage of a limited commodity: land. Carol Willis in *Form Follows Finance*[18] comments that although the skyscraper is an American art form, a dichotomy exists, for art is not generally created to be a financial solution.[19] Skyscrapers provided a way for builders and investors to speculate and for owners to rent out floor upon floor, and have free space for their own companies.

Building owners wanted to make their buildings as profitable as possible. And as more and more immigrants chose major cities over the frontier, whether in New York or Chicago, the skyscraper was important in putting people together in a productive and cost-effective environment. It was a need-based solution made possible by the new technology. Today in the twenty-first century with our information technology at hand,

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[17]Mary Beth Betts, "Gilbert Gothic." Lecture. www.skyscrapermuseum.com.

[18] This is a play on words of the famous quote of Louis Sullivan, "Form Follows Function."

[19] Carol Willis, *Form Follows Finance, Skyscrapers and Skylines in New York and Chicago* (New York*:* Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), 15.

workers for a New York City-based firm can be located in New Jersey or even India, and still get the work done. But at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was necessary for workers to be in close proximity.

To understand the inception of the skyscraper one must look at Chicago. Although some architectural critics see forerunners in New York and Boston, the general consensus is that Chicago is where the skyscraper began, and where America began to create its own architecture independent of Europe.[20] Even before the railroads, Chicago was well suited to be the gateway to the American frontier. It was the "nation's freight handler," and "hog butcher to the world," as Carl Sandburg wrote in his poem, "Chicago."[21] Chicago is eight hundred miles inland from New York yet by no means landlocked. From the Atlantic Ocean, up the St. Lawrence River to the Erie Canal (completed in 1817), and onward through Lakes Erie, Huron, and Michigan, a steamship could take you there. In 1848, when the Illinois and Michigan canal was completed, the Illinois River and the Mississippi linked the "City of Big Shoulders" (as Sandburg named it) to the Gulf of Mexico.[22] By 1860, Chicago was a manufacturing and transportation hub connected to the east by eleven different railroad lines.[23] Author Thomas Leslie points out that because of its proximity to Lake Michigan, all major railroads were routed

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[20]Thomas Leslie, *Chicago Skyscrapers, 1871-1934* (Urbana: U of Illinois Press, 2013), xii.

[21] Carl Sandburg, "Chicago," http://carl-sandburg.com/chicago.htm.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ron Fisher, *National Geographic Historical Atlas of the United State*s (Washington D.C.: National Geographic, 2004), 196.

through Chicago.[24] Iron and coal from Pittsburgh, cotton and crops from the South and timber from the West were hauled through Chicago to sell in the East. The city was near the undeveloped wooded areas of Wisconsin and Minnesota, which later proved unfortuitous, as many of the Chicago buildings were made of wood.[25]

By the time of the Great Fire in 1871, Chicago was already being called, "The Second City." In *Lost Chicago,* David Lowe discusses the fire. Chicago had seen little rain. There had been several fires in the city that summer.[26] Then on October 8, as the widely accepted story has it, Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicked over a kerosene lamp, burning down the O'Leary barn and setting off the conflagration that destroyed much of the city. Three and one quarter square miles of the city burned to the ground, including 18,000 buildings, among them Cyrus McCormick's plant and the beautiful Palmer House Hotel (which had been touted as fireproof).[27] Poet John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) expressed many people's sentiment in his poem, "Chicago," saying, "The City of the West is dead."[28] As devastating as the fire was however, it cleared a palette from which to create a new American art form: the skyscraper. It also provided an opportunity for work during an economic downturn in the United States. Architects flocked to Chicago,

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[24] Leslie, 2.

[25] Ibid., 3.

[26] David Lowe, *Lost Chicago* (Boston: Houghton, 1975), 94.

[27] Ibid., 97.

[28] John Greenleaf Whittier, "Chicago," http://www.bartleby.com/372/438.html.

and between the Chicago Fire and the Great Depression, three hundred and thirty major buildings were rebuilt in the city.[29]

The skyscrapers' success was due to the coming together of many factors: the borrowing of steel framing from bridge building, faster and safer passenger steam elevators, centralized heating and plumbing, and, of course, electric lighting.[30] Once U.S. Electric Lighting Company and the Edison Electric Light Company placed arc lights in buildings in 1878, the world was opened for all kinds of new inventions.[31] Before the mass production of steel, a building's height needed to be supported by its walls. Terra cotta expert, Susan Tunick, explains the formula for support. At the base of a building, walls must be twelve inches thick, plus four inches for every floor. A ten-story tall building constructed of masonry would have to have a base with forty-two inch thick walls. This radically decreased the amount of usable space on floors and made window installation difficult.[32]

Using innovative steel skeleton for framing in 1885, William Lebaron Jenney built what is considered the first skyscraper, the Home Insurance Company, on Adams and LaSalle Streets in Chicago.[33] With vertical steel supports, the building stood ten

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[29] Leslie,15.

[30]Landau and Condit, 19.

[31] Ibid., 38.

[32] Susan Tunick, *Terra-Cotta Skyline* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press 1997), 210.

[33] Rumor had it that Jenney was a classmate of Gustave Eiffel at The École des Beaux Arts (see www.theguardian.com : the world's first skyscraper).

stories tall and was no longer dependent upon masonry for its fortification. As builders looked for an improved, lighter-weight brick that could also be used for ornamental purposes, the terra cotta business began to flourish in Chicago. The technology for curtain wall construction was borrowed from suspension bridges (as was the technology for the Eiffel Tower in 1889) and office space was maximized. The exterior of any building could be clad with stone or terra cotta merely as a dressing. Tunick describes the process of manufacturing terra cotta for buildings:

> The process of terra cotta production, from the architect's blueprint to the final installation, was a complex and fascinating one. Each design passed through the hands of dozens of workmen, varying in skill and background from the finest European sculptors to untrained day laborers. Except for the modelers, some whom achieved recognition because of their unique skills and the visibility of their efforts, most factory workers labored in anonymity. Although the architects are usually known, the fact that terra cotta pieces were rarely signed by individuals or stamped by manufacturers leaves us with a clay legacy produced largely by unknown craftsmen.[34]

The majestic Home Insurance Building (demolished in 1931) was comprised of a two-story stone facade. The first six stories were constructed of wrought iron. The remainder of the frame was structural steel. From the outside, the building appeared traditional, clad in brick. If one looks closely at the picture of the building, although ten stories, the eye is drawn to the horizontal lines of the building, not the vertical. The building was tall but was clad, or dressed, as if it were stout. Louis H. Sullivan, who although not the inventor, has been given the posthumous accolade, "the father of the

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[34] Tunick, 32.

skyscraper," believed that a tall building should be designed to reflect its loftiness and respected for its height. Sullivan brought the tall building into its iconic form.

In 1885, the Home Insurance Building represented the beginning of a new genre, but it would not seem anything like a skyscraper today. John Pastier, architecture critic for *The Los Angeles Times*, expresses the continual change in skyscraper status by saying: "Like the dollar, the unit of height in a skyline has been eroded by inflation."[35] At a recent exhibit at The New York Skyscraper Museum, "*10 Tops,*" photographs and miniature models of twenty-four of the world's current tallest buildings were exhibited.[36] Buildings such as the Shanghai Tower, at 128 stories and the Wuhan Greenland Center at 125 stories stand so tall that the original World Trade Center Twin Towers would have paled by comparison.[37] As technological might has improved, so has the size of the skyscraper, which begs the question: what characteristics do buildings known as skyscrapers hold in common? The buildings that were considered to be tall at the end of the nineteenth century look like miniatures when placed next to one of twenty-four buildings in the world today that are greater than 100 stories. A building must necessarily be judged based upon its time and place. In her article, "The Invention of the Skyscraper Notes on its Diverse History," architectural historian Rosemarie Haag Bletter cites criteria created by J. Carson Webster and published in his essay: "The Skyscraper Logical

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[35] John Pastier, "Postcards from the First Half Century," *Design Quarterly,* 140 (1988): 3-11. http://www.jstor.org.

[36] Carol Willis, "*Ten Tops"* www.skyscraper.org.

[37] Ibid.

and Historical Considerations."[38] These criteria were also quoted in two of architectural historian, Carl W. Condit's books. According to the standards, a skyscraper must have the following:

1. **Essential characteristics**
   a. Great height (relative to buildings).
   b. Arrangement (interior) in stories.
   c. Utmost space and light (potentially) in each story.
2. **Necessary means.**
   a. A structural system adequate to achieving the essential characteristics taken together. To date this means skeleton construction. (This must be amended to include flat-slab and box framing, which are not framing systems in the strict sense of serial column-and-beam construction.)
   b. Materials necessary to the structural system, above all steel (iron and reinforced concrete as possible alternatives), and fireproofing, heat-resisting material.
   c. Passenger elevators.
3. **Favoring conditions.**
   a. Economic – such as high value of land; availability of labor and capital; etc.
   b. Social – such as living in large groups; enterprise; organization or work; publicity; etc.
   c. Technological – such as availability of suitable tools, processes and sources of power; development of plumbing, heating, etc.: growth of engineering; development of the craft of building to a certain point; etc.
   d. Psychological – desires (conscious or unconscious) which a tall form can express;
   e. Aesthetic – liking for height; preference for the effect of towers related to lower buildings; etc.[39]

Tall buildings could not have been created without the steam-cushioned elevator, or centralized heating and plumbing; but of interest are the psychological, economic and

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[38]J. Carson Webster, "The Skyscraper: Logical and Historical Considerations," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 17, no. 4 (December 1959): 126-39, quoted in Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "The Invention of the Skyscraper: Notes on its Diverse History," *Assemblage,* no. 2 (February 1987): 112.

[39] Ibid., 127.

social conditions. The earliest skyscrapers were built for Insurance Companies. These businesses depended upon eliciting trust and enticing people to buy life insurance policies. The companies wanted to project their position of stature and security. What better way to achieve branding imagery than by naming a banner building that was taller than all others. Tall buildings gave companies bragging rights. This fed into the ego of Frank W. Woolworth, who like other earlier business magnates, had illusions of grandeur and wanted to be appreciated as a great merchant.

Another consideration to ponder is a building's purpose. Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris stands over two hundred feet tall, far taller that the Equitable Life Assurance Company. Should it, too, be considered a skyscraper? If not, is it because of its religious purpose or its Gothic design? Because if judged based up the Chicago Temple, a secular requirement does not exist. Built by Holabird and Roche in 1923, the Temple stands 569 feet tall and is considered one of the early skyscrapers. It is part sanctuary, part office building. In *Postcards from the First Half Century*, John Pastier also describes the Chicago Temple writing: "Here God meets Mammon," He continues,

> The first two floors are occupied by the sanctuary of the First Methodist Church, on this corner since 1839. The next nineteen floors are commercial office space. Above that is a "Sky Parsonage" and a "Sky Chapel" crowned by a tall steeple, creating a 569-foot extravaganza that replaced the Union Central Building as the highest outside New York. It claims to be the tallest church in the world, raising the possibility that the congregation considers office work a religion.[40]

In *Why the Skyscraper*, Jean Gottmann also shares an early definition of the term skyscraper. In 1933, when the form was still relatively new, the Oxford English

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[40] Pastier, 8.

Dictionary (O.E.D.) defined skyscraper as: "a triangular sail; a high standing horse; a bicycle with a very high wheel in the back; and exceptionally tall man; a tall story or tale, finally a high building of many stories, especially one of those characteristic of American cities."[41] Twenty-nine years later, in the O.E.D.'s 1962 edition, the definition had been changed to only one definition: "a tall building." Bicycles with tall back wheels were out of fashion and no one referred to a tall man as a skyscraper any longer, so these definitions were not relevant. What is of note is that O.E.D. no longer qualified a skyscraper as being chiefly American. The form had been copied all around the world.

William LeBaron Jenney, architect of the Home Insurance Company building, employed several draftsmen who would all go on to be known as The Chicago School of Architecture, one being Louis Sullivan. Sullivan was an iconoclast: part architect, part poet-philosopher. He had briefly attended Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, but rejected the classical styles of architecture advocated by those institutions. In 1889, Sullivan left Jenney to join in a partnership with Dankmar Adler. Together they designed the Auditorium Building in Chicago, one of the last freestanding, large masonry buildings, and at the time the largest and tallest building in the United States. The building was one of the first to implement the concept of multiple uses, as would the Woolworth Building. The Auditorium housed a hotel, a concert hall for the Chicago Symphony and an office building. An editorial in the *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean* on September 10, 1889 commented on the building:

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[41] Jean Gottmann, "Why the Skyscraper," *Geographical Review* 5, no. 2 (April 1966), 190.

> The new spirit has triumphantly asserted itself in the [A]uditorium, which is the most splendid tribute to the genius of art on the American continent. It is not a temporary affair; it was built to the ages, and it will endure with the nation, and only fall into ruin when the great principles upon which this government is based have been overwhelmed by the folly and degeneracy of men. [42]

The walls were still load bearing, but the building exemplified some of Sullivan's concepts. Sullivan believed that a building, like a painting, was the sum total of its negative and positive spaces. He believed that the interior of a building and how it was to be used were as much a part of architecture as its exterior. The concert hall was shaped like a large trumpet for superior acoustics.[43] The hall was lit by incandescent bulbs and held four thousand two hundred seats.[44] The building showcased indoor plumbing and high-speed elevators. Sullivan believed that how one planned out the building's physical plant was an integral part of the architecture and should have an influence on the building's exterior. In other words, "form followed function," as he became famous for saying.

Adler and Sullivan's next project was the Wainwright Building, a ten-story skyscraper in St. Louis in 1890-9. The building was a reflection of Sullivan's belief that a skyscraper must respect its own loftiness. Unlike Jenney's Home Insurance Building, the vertical lines of the Wainwright Building are accentuated, enhancing the feeling of

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[42]John Szarkowski, *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), 50.

[43] Joel Henning, "Form Follows Function, Elegantly." *Wall Street Journal* (New York), September 6, 2008. www.wsj.com/articles.

[44]Ibid.

height. The building is divided three parts, Sullivan's tripartite formula for a skyscraper, which would go on to become the standard for the building form. The lobby is two stories with a grand entrance. Within the lobby are retail stores and commercial space on the second floor for a bank, a design that would be utilized in the Woolworth Building as well. The next eight stories are uniform in design. The building is topped off by a third part, a working attic, which is notably different in design. Sullivan's objective was not to hide the steel construction. Instead he accentuated the vertical piers. In *Genius and the Mobocracy,* Frank Lloyd Wright, Sullivan's young draftsman, discussed the moment when Sullivan brought him the design for the Wainwright. According to Wright, Sullivan had created the design in three minutes.

> When he [Sullivan] brought the drawing board with the motive for the Wainwright outlined in profile and elevation upon it and threw the board down on my table I was perfectly aware of what had happened.
> This was a great Louis H. Sullivan moment. The tall building was born tall. His greatest effort? No. But here was the "skyscraper"; a new thing beneath the sun, entirely imperfect, but with virtue, individuality, beauty all its own. Until Louis Sullivan showed the way, high buildings lacked unity. They were built-up in layers. All were fighting height instead of gracefully and honestly accepting it. What unity those false masonry masses have that now pile up toward the big city skies is due to the master mind that first perceived the high building as a harmonious unit – its height triumphant.[45]

The New York Times architecture critic, Paul Goldberger wrote, "The Wainwright is not merely tall; it is about *being* tall – it is tall architecturally even more than it is physically."[46]

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[45] Szarkowski, 64.

[46] Twombly, 293.

It seems like a simple notion, that a tall building should embrace its loftiness. But when looking at other early skyscrapers, many look as wide as they are tall. It is not merely a matter of vertical versus horizontal dimensions, but also, critically, one of apparent mass and other visual cues. The skyscraper had not yet come into its own, and did not look anything like a New York skyscraper of the early twentieth century. Architects didn't know what to do with this tall structure. Sullivan was an early modernist, ahead of his time. In discussing Sullivan's Bayard Building, which was erected in New York City in 1899, Narciso G. Menocal stressed the importance of the rhythm of life to Sullivan, reflecting the transcendentalism of Herbert Spencer. Menocal explains:

> To Herbert Spencer, matter, motion, and force were the constants of a universe mechanically conceived. He believed that force produced motion, that motion determined the diffusion of matter, and that, conversely, the concentration of matter slowed down motion. . . . Fundamental cycles of evolution and dissolution grew out of each other, and this continuous creation of the universe was "the law that transcends proof."[47]

Sullivan, like the artist, John Marin, was a transcendentalist. They both saw motion as a constant of life. Marin articulated this in his now famous 1913 letter to Alfred Stieglitz, and preface to his 1913 Exhibition at Stieglitz's seminal '291' gallery, prior to the Armory Show:

> Shall we consider the life of a great city as confined simply to the people and animals on its streets and in its buildings? Are the buildings themselves dead? We have been told somewhere that a work of art is a thing alive. You cannot create a work of art unless the things you behold

[47] Menocal, 21.

> respond to something within you. Therefore if these buildings move me they too must have life.[48]

Sullivan was as much a philosopher-poet as an architect and far ahead of his time. His poem "Wherefore the Poet?" from *Democracy*, which first appeared in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse,* March, 1916, read: "The poet is the man who sees things rhyme. For rhyme is but the suggestion of harmony; and harmony is but the suggestion of rhythm; and rhythm is the suggestion of the superb moving equilibrium of all things." [49] In other words, "he poeticized the tall building." [50]

This transcendental quality was reflected in Sullivan's building designs. He saw everything as interconnected and organic. Like Ralph Waldo Emerson, he was against copying the past. In his essay: "Transcendental Influences on Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright," Edward H. Madden notes that both Sullivan and Wright had copies of Emerson's writings.[51] Emerson was opposed to "second handedness," as was Sullivan. Emerson had stated in his essay, *Nature*, "Why should we not have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the

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[48] John Marin, *Letters of John Marin*. The New York Historical Society Library.

[49] Louis H. Sullivan, *"*Wherefore the Poet*" Democracy,* quoted in, *Sites*, 13 (1985), 25.

[50] Alfred Frazer, *Key Monuments of the History of Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams), 51.

[51] Edward H. Madden, "Transcendental Influences on Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 286. EBSCO.

history of theirs?"[52] Sullivan agreed. He was disturbed by Gilbert's neoclassical style on his West Street Building in New York (the 1904 building which drew Frank W. Woolworth's attention to Gilbert).[53] Sullivan however would have shared John Marin's recognition of the Woolworth Building's sense of rhythm, notwithstanding its decidedly Gothic exterior.

The *World's Columbian Exhibition* of 1893 in Chicago was a herculean feat. The city of Chicago had won the bid and was given twenty-six months to design and build a World's Fair that they hoped would outdo The *1889 Exposition Universelle* in Paris. The Parisian Exposition had been held to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution and had presented the Eiffel Tower to the world. The Chicago Fair, held to honor the 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America, would show that despite the Economic Panic of 1893, Chicago had been reborn and recovered from the fire. Chicago architect, Daniel Burnham, headed the committee. A "White City" of one hundred and fifty buildings was designed by the most prominent architects in the country. Within the one square mile city the architects were given creative freedom with their designs (most of the buildings, however, were created in the Beaux Art style with columns and arches abounding). The fabricated city sat on a lagoon with man-made canals emanating from Lake Michigan. The exhibit could have been a tribute to Florence or ancient Rome. Art from all over the world was displayed. Regarding the American art

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[52] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (New York: Norton Anthology of American Literature, 1989), 903.

[53] Twombly, 387.

at the exhibition. Joseph Shiffman says, "American tastes in art were perfectly attuned to the money standard." Shiffman continues:

> It was the purpose of the White City [Chicago] to consecrate success, not to play dangerously with new forces in the world of art. . . . One emerged . . . from these five acres of floor space, these two hundred rooms under the great glass ceilings, with the conviction that the successful paintings of all countries were as much alike as the standardized products of their mills and factories.[54]

It was hoped that George Washington Gale Ferris's "Ferris Wheel" would surpass the excitement elicited by the Eiffel Tower. The one building that stood out was the Transportation Building designed by Sullivan and Adler. At its center was a two-story entrance with a circular arch. Sullivan veered away from historic ornamentation. Layer upon layer of the arch was covered with a motif of architectural ornamentation of organic life for which he became famous. There were molds of leaves, branches, vines and flowers. In looking at photos, the building has the feeling of early twentieth century Hollywood.[55] The Fair's intent was to announce and exhibit inventions of the future: time saving devices for women and new kinds of foods such as *Cracker Jacks* and *Juicy Fruit* gum; yet its architecture for the most part looked to the past for its inspiration. Author Erik Larson claims in his book, *The Devil in the White City*, that Walt Disney's father, Elias, had worked on the Fair, and that the Fair had influenced Walt's creation of

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[54] Joseph Shiffman, "The Alienation of the Artist: Alfred Stieglitz," *Johns Hopkins University Press* vol. 3 (Autumn, 1951), 245.

[55] Twombly, 387.

Disneyland.[56] Larson also claims that the Fair's extravaganza was an inspiration for Frank L. Baum's Emerald City in *The Wizard of Oz.* In spite of promoting some futuristic ideas, in *The Autobiography of an Idea*, Sullivan wrote that the Fair, "doomed America to another decade of imitation."[57] After it was over, a Gothic revival swept the country. The reversal of architectural style was perhaps a comfort to people in the face of the financial panic in the following years. The public did not want to take risks with their architecture, and as a result, Sullivan's success dwindled. It is suggested that Howard Roark in Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* is based upon Frank Lloyd Wright, and that Roark's boss, Henry Cameron, was based upon Sullivan.[58] Frank Lloyd Wright commended Sullivan stating:

> Louis Sullivan gave America the skyscraper as an organic modern work of art. While America's architects were stumbling at its height, piling one thing on top of another, foolishly denying it, Louis Sullivan seized its height as its characteristic feature and made it sing; a new thing under the sun! [59]

If the skyscraper was our own art form, it deserved its own architectural style. Yet at the beginning of the twentieth century, an eclectic assortment of architectural styles embracing neo-classicism and neo-Gothic existed in America. Sullivan appreciated the

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[56] Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair That Changed America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 373.

[57] Ibid., 376.

[58] James Trilling, "Reversal of Fortune," www.theamericanscholar.org.

[59] Frank Lloyd Wright, "Frank Lloyd Wright on Architecture." In *Sites* 13 (New York: Lumen, 1985), previously published in Frank Lloyd Wright on Architecture.

simple lines of neo classicism. His ornamentation looked to organic symbolism, not mythological creatures or Roman sculptures. It was Sullivan's influence on what is known as the Chicago School that led architectural historian Carl Condit to state, "the city's [Chicago's] skyscraper architecture of the late nineteenth century presented a "techno-aesthetic synthesis" that was a precursor to both European modernism and the early twentieth century Prairie School."[60]

Due to its "unstable" soil, Chicago would pass a zoning ordinance in 1893 limiting the height of new skyscrapers to one hundred and thirty feet.[61] New York City, with its proximity to the Palisades, sits on superior bedrock. No height limitations were enforced in New York until 1916, and so construction in New York of tall buildings soon surpassed Chicago.[62] Had F. W. Woolworth attempted to build his 750-foot tall building in Chicago in 1913, it would not have been allowed.

John Marin worked as a draftsman at an architectural firm in Philadelphia for four years before becoming an artist. In 1913, when he painted his Woolworth series, he was drawn to the building, as was everyone else. One would have to imagine that it was the skyscraper icon to which Marin was drawn, not its secular Gothic style. The Gothic style was counter to Stieglitz's ideology: the sense of the importance of modernism that he stressed with his artists at the Little Galleries of the Photo Secession. The American skyscraper represented the modern secession and revolution that Stieglitz sought. As

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[60] Leslie, xiii.

[61] Willis, *Form Follows Finance,* 52.

[62] Anthony Robbins, "Woolworth Building Tour," Sept. 21, 2014.

articulated by Gottmann, “The skyscraper is not only a landmark and an art form; it is also the expression of a social and intellectual revolution characteristic of our era.” [63] As to who was responsible for creating the first skyscraper, Chicago or New York, Bletter states in her article, “it makes as little difference who created the first skyscraper as it does asking who created the first Greek temple.” [64]

Image 6. The Home Insurance Building, Chicago, vintage postcard.

[63] Gottmann, 199.

[64] Bletter, 116.

CHAPTER 2

Woolworth and Gilbert

Image 7. Postcard of Woolworth Building, circa 1913.

> But what *is* essentially American? The skyscrapers, Jack Dempsey, the Five-and-Ten Cent Stores, Buffalo Bill, baseball, Henry Ford, and perhaps even Wall Street? These form the European conception: symbols of ingenuity, action, business, adventure, exploiting discovery.[1]
>
> Arnold Ronnebeck

Arnold Ronnebeck, modernist painter, writer, and frequent contributor to *Camera Work,* wrote this introduction for the 1925 Exhibition Catalog of "Seven Americans," held at the Anderson Gallery. Each of Ronnebeck's references: Jack Dempsey (1895-

[1] Arnold Ronnebeck, Introduction to the Catalog for Seven Americans, Monday March 9-Saturday March 28, 1925 (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1925), 5.

1983) the world heavyweight boxing champion of the world from 1919 to 1926; Buffalo Bill Cody (1846-1917) scout and entertainer; and business tycoon, Henry Ford (1863-1947), contributed to a mythology about America. Also included in this mythology were Frank W. Woolworth (1852-1919) and his five and ten-cent stores. Each represented the American vision and belief that anything was possible. The artists participating in the "Seven Americans" show: John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, Paul Strand, Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley and Alfred Stieglitz were not yet as well-known as French artists, Pablo Picasso, or Paul Cézanne, or Henri Matisse, but they would be. They would become additions to symbols of American ingenuity along with the rest of Ronnebeck's list. In the same catalog, Ronnebeck commented that America as the new world and the country that invented the skyscraper, was the ideal location for a new art. We were no longer tethered to the classicism of ancient Europe.

> European artists in their attempt to create an art to-day [sic] meet the obstacle of cultural traditions of centuries in their blood. Visible traces of Julius Caesar's campaigns stand in the middle of Paris, at the Rhine and even in England. No escape for the European from the ruins of History! Must not America, the country without Roman ruins, the country of keenest progress in mechanical, technic [sic] and invention, the continent where the spirit of all peoples meet freely, offer just the atmosphere essential for the creation of an art of today*?* [2]

In 1913, as one sailed into New York harbor and looked at downtown Manhattan, the skyscrapers too were a manifestation of America's ingenuity. The tall buildings

[2] Ibid., 5.

glowed, like "a city of mother-of pearl."[3] No building had more of a glow, from its polychromatic use of colored terra cotta, or was more recognizable, than the Woolworth Building. For seventeen years from 1913 to 1930 it was known throughout the world as the tallest building. It stood as a contradiction: modern in its functionality, old fashioned in its architectural style.[4] Other art forms in 1913, whether in art or music, had taken old forms and reinvented them. Igor Stravinsky used pagan ritual and conceptualized modern music in *Le Sacré du Printemps*; Pablo Picasso took primitive African masks and invented a new way of seeing with Cubism. The architects of tall buildings also had looked to the past for inspiration. Robert A. M. Stern, Dean of Yale School of Architecture states, "New York was too cosmopolitan, too sensitive to international traditions and trends, especially those of Europe, to produce anything distinctly American."[5] The tall buildings seen from the harbor: the Singer Building, the Manhattan Life Building and Cass Gilbert's West Street Building were Gothic reinterpretations.

The Woolworth Building was the combined effort of Frank W. Woolworth and architect Cass Gilbert. It is doubtful that Woolworth, a merchandising genius with a sporadic school education and one semester of business college, had ever read Samuel

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[3] Howard Rossiter, "Impressions of a Returned Wanderer," *Arts and Progress*, (June 1915), 278-281. Rossiter describes this after living in Europe from 1908-1907 and returning by steamship.

[4] Both Carl Condit and Gail Fenske use the term "vertical city" in describing the building.

[5] Robert A. M. Stern, Introduction to *Cass Gilbert Life and Works: Architect of the Public Domain,* by Barbara S. Christen and Steve Flanders (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 15.

Coleridge's poem "Xanadu." Nevertheless, the excesses and money that he poured into his building were worthy of a poem. One wonders what John Marin thought of the building as he positioned his easel and drew the 750-foot tall building as if engaged in a dance. Was it due to his disaffection with city life, with the shadowy caverns that tall edifices created? Was he already aware of the so-called "skyscraper problem, or did he actually witness tall buildings as having a life of their own?

The skyscraper, whether a remedy or a problem, was a manifestation of one of many innovative ideas of the early twentieth century. One cannot deny its zeitgeist, for amidst the competition to integrate the new technologies and construct the world's tallest skyscraper, the beginning of the twentieth century, and 1913 in particular, represented a succession of innovations in all areas. In architecture, Grand Central Terminal was designed by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White. For labor, it was the time of the Patterson Mill strike. In music, Vaslav Nijinsky performed Claude Debussy's *L'Après Midi d'un Faune* in Paris in 1912. Igor Stravinsky's *The Rites of Spring* debuted in 1913. It was a time of optimism and the beginning of mass culture. Charles Pathé presented his first newsreel in 1908. Perhaps it was Marin's fascination with the moving image that had influenced him. People were going to movies, amusement parks, and baseball games. Vernon and Irene Castle created a ballroom dancing sensation. Two popular songs that were sold as sheet music were: "Danny Boy" by Fred E. Weatherly and "You Made Me Love You (I Didn't Want to Do It)" by James V. Monaco and Joseph

McCarthy.[6] As the second decade of the twentieth century began, a powerful synchronicity in the arts was felt. The Woolworth Building and its opening were emblematic of the change.

In 1910, Frank W. Woolworth decided that he wanted a signature building to honor his 5 and 10-cent empire. Each day from 1888 to 1890 he commuted to work from his Brooklyn home by walking across the Brooklyn Bridge. As he walked, he could see the 30-story Park Row Building designed by R. H. Robertson, the 10-story Tribune Building, built in 1875 by Richard Morris Hunt, and the 20-story New York World Building, erected to a height of 309 feet and designed by George Brown Post. Woolworth wanted his building to be in direct line with the bridge so that pedestrians could always have his brand in mind.[7] He had learned the value of a good location early on with the opening of his stores in upstate New York, and wanted nothing less for his signature building. His corporate office across from City Hall in lower Manhattan had enabled him to evaluate the location.[8] The site he chose on Broadway between Park Place and Barclay Street was advantageous. City Hall sat at the north end, and on the south end was the main New York Post Office. It was a bit north of Wall Street but its proximity to City

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[6] Vincent Tompkins and others, *1910-1919* (Detroit: Gale Research, 2011). These statistics are culminated from various chapters.

[7]Gail Fenske, "Cass Gilbert's Skyscrapers in New York." In *Inventing the Skyline: The Architecture of Cass Gilbert,* edited by Margaret Heilbrun (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 57.

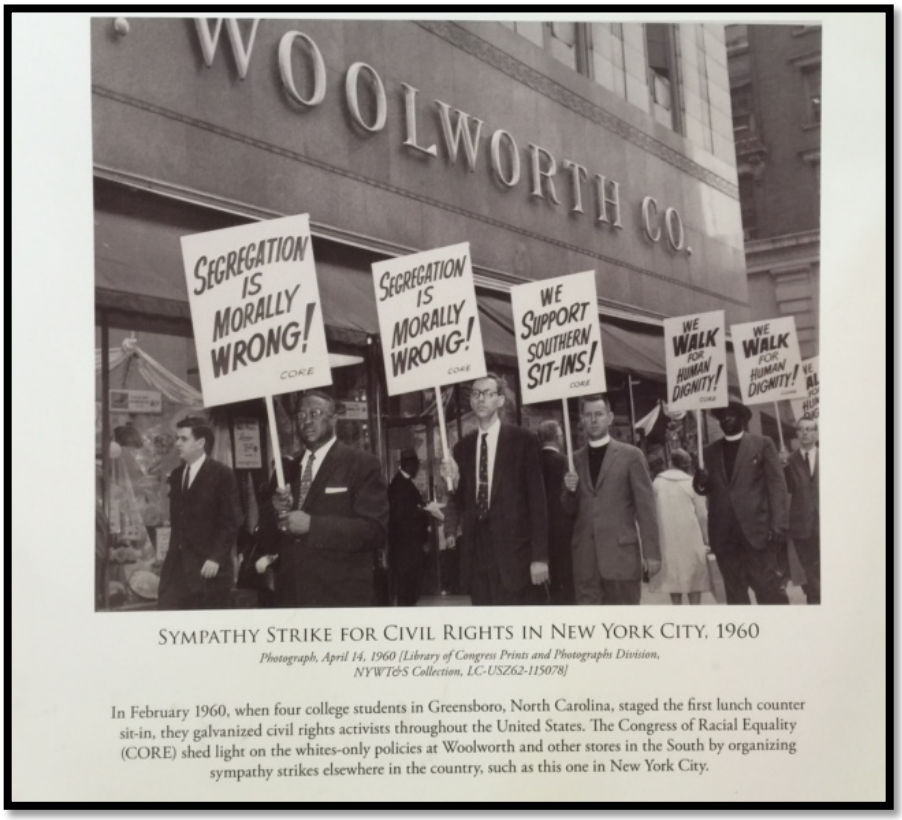
[8] Robins, "Woolworth Tour."

Hall Park gave his new building a civic image. The park had had an important role in the history of New York since colonial times.

Image 8. Postcard, F. W. Woolworth Store, Staten Island, circa 1950.

Anyone born before 1960 probably has a story about Woolworths. By 1920 there was a Woolworth's store in any city greater than 8,000 people in the United States. Many people might just remember Woolworth's from the Greensboro, North Carolina 1960s sit-ins, igniting the civil rights movement. For me, growing up in the 1950s, it probably wasn't that different than for people at the beginning of the twentieth century: it was a destination. It was a place to buy notions and fasteners; hooks and eyes for blouses and Hollywood Sani-White liquid shoe polish for my saddle shoes. It was a destination for my grandmother and me on bus trips to downtown Cliffside Park or Union City for hard peppermint candies to put in the candy dish in the vestibule (for a great part of Woolworth's fortune came from selling candy), or safety pins to use when my grandmother would create a dolly out of old wash cloths. As I got older, it was a place to

have a piece of fabric cut from a bolt or buy a pattern from the McCall's catalogue. Woolworth's stocked America, similar to Wal-Mart today. There was something special about it because everything was within reach. F. W. Woolworth had been on to something. He placed customers in a proverbial candy store with myriad choices. In the 1960s many Woolworth stores in small towns closed and the company tried to stay afloat by investing in Kinney Shoes (purchased in 1963).[9] By the 1980s, cheap imports from Mexico, along with the decline of the downtown areas of small towns in favor of malls put the retail company out of business.



SYMPATHY STRIKE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS IN NEW YORK CITY, 1960

Photograph, April 14, 1960 [Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, NYWT&S Collection, LC-USZ62-115078]

In February 1960, when four college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, staged the first lunch counter sit-in, they galvanized civil rights activists throughout the United States. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) shed light on the whites-only policies at Woolworth and other stores in the South by organizing sympathy strikes elsewhere in the country, such as this one in New York City.

Image 9. *Protesting Segregation at Woolworth lunch counters*, 1960, Library of Congress.

[9] Jean Maddern Pitrone, *F. W. Woolworth and the American Five and Dime: a Social History* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2003), 165.

Frank W. Woolworth was a man whose life took on mythic proportions and upon whom F. Scott Fitzgerald might have based *The Great Gatsby*, or Orson Welles might have based *Citizen Kane*. He was often called the personification of a Horatio Alger story, making his way from rags to riches, for he had marketing perspicuity never before seen. Woolworth was born in 1852 to Fanny (McBrier) Woolworth and John Woolworth in the town of Rodman in northeastern New York. His parents were dairy farmers and led a modest life. Neither farm life nor school appealed to Frank. In 1873, he convinced a local dry good store in Watertown, Augsbury & Moore, to hire him as an unpaid intern. Woolworth swept the floor, and kept the place clean.[10] But what appealed to Frank most was creating window displays and assembling similarly priced items together for customers to examine. Each of his biographers tells the story of how one day he set up a window display of like-items placed on a table at the customer's eye level and priced at five cents. In dry goods stores, items were usually kept behind a counter and the clerk would retrieve wares when asked. The items on Woolworth's display sold quickly and he was praised for his ingenuity. He soon (1876) married a young seamstress named Jennie Creighton from Nova Scotia. Three years later, borrowing three hundred dollars of inventory from his boss, Woolworth opened a store in Utica, New York and sold all items at the price of five cents.[11] The store failed, yet Woolworth blamed the failure on a poor location. Over and over he was undaunted. Through a process of trial and error,

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[10] Ibid., 7.

[11] This would be the only time that Woolworth borrowed money, as he even financed his building with cash.

Woolworth tried out locations for new stores that sold odd-lots of goods, expanding throughout Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. A store in Newark would fail, but nine years later he would reopen it and try again. Soon he had a syndicate.[12]

In The *Skyscraper and the City: The Woolworth Building and the Making of Modern New York*, Gail Fenske, professor of architecture at Cornell University, discusses some of the reasons for Woolworth's success. As he became a successful businessman, Woolworth standardized the appearance of each new store as a way of identifying the brand. The stores were uniform in style, incorporating a look that customers would come to recognize and trust. Each store had the same emblematic gold "W" above the door and a red painted façade. The glass front retail establishment, with a red banner and the logo, *FW Woolworth 5 and 10-cent store*, was shared by each store in the chain. This strengthened the store's "visual identity." People became familiar and comfortable shopping with a brand they trusted. Despite his lack of education, Woolworth had a far reaching understanding of marketing and what caused consumers to make purchases, leading other large store chains to adopt this marketing strategy in the twentieth century.[13] In an article entitled, "A Millionaire's Opinion of Education," in *Outlook Magazine* in 1919 Woolworth was quoted as saying: "The education I got in two terms in

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[12] John K.Winkler, *Five and Ten: the Fabulous Life of F. W. Woolworth* (New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1940), 73.

[13] Fenske, *The Skyscraper and the City: The Woolworth Building and the Making of Modern New York* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 27.

a business college at Watertown, New York, did me more good than any classical education I might have got."[14]

One of Woolworth's first innovations was giving customers access to the merchandise. He also believed in a single price strategy. As the buyer for his stores, he first travelled around the country to find odd lots of like items that he could purchase at an attractive price. Later he would visit factories in Europe. All items were to be sold for five cents. As his retail stores succeeded he expanded to a higher priced 10-cent line. He was a harbinger of the odd-lot discount stores of today, and not that different from the pushcarts one might have found at the time on Hester Street on the Lower East Side of New York. His customer base consisted of the twenty-three million immigrants who came to the United States between 1880 and 1919 with little expendable income.[15] Within his stores, customers were able to purchase housewares, as well as mementos from their home countries. Woolworth sold dreams. Being able to purchase something for five or ten cents made new Americans feel like the consumer class.

Woolworth depended upon immigrants both for his sales force and his customer base. He had a handbook of strict rules not only for a store's appearance, but also for the demeanor and attire of the sales staff.[16] According to *The Value of a Dollar: Prices and Incomes in the United States 1860-2014,* the average retail worker between 1900 and

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[14] "A Millionaire's Opinion of Education," *Outlook* April 30, 1919, quoted in Gail Fenske, *The Skyscraper and the City,* 34.

[15] Fenske, *The Skyscraper,* 27.

[16] Ibid, 29.

1904 earned $508-551 a year.[17] At the higher end, this equated to ten dollars and fifty-nine cents per week. In 1902, the average weekly salary for Woolworth's sales girls was three dollars.[18] To put this in perspective, in 1899 the price of shoes was sixty cents; A man's suit cost two dollars; a hotel for a night in New York, one dollar.[19]

In 1940, biographer, John K. Winkler conducted interviews with people who had originally worked with Woolworth. Alvin Edgar Ivie, a former employee who started working for the company at the age of sixteen, declared:

> I had been used to hard work but I'd never seen a worker like Mr. Woolworth. He seemed able to keep going all the time. He made decisions quickly, then stuck by them.[20]

Prior to 1893, the merchandise for Woolworth's stores was purchased in the United States. But in 1893 Woolworth embarked on his maiden voyage to Europe and discovered that he could ship merchandise with a lower cost index directly from factories overseas.[21] The trip provided a cultural education as well. Woolworth was a prolific letter writer with some letters as lengthy as thirty-five pages. His secretaries at home reproduced and distributed the letters to his store managers.[22] When he arrived in

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[17] *The Value of a Dollar: Prices and Incomes in the United States 1860-2014* (Michigan, Farmington Hills: 2014) culminated from various pages.

[18] Fenske, 43.

[19] *The Value of a Dollar.*

[20] Winkler, 72.

[21] Ibid., 88.

[22] Pitrone, 24.

London, he wrote home: "We then visited the House of Parliament, or at least looked at it from the outside, and Westminster Abbey which I consider the greatest sight in London."[23] Fifteen years later, Victoria Hall would become the structure upon which he would model his building. From Vienna, Woolworth wrote: "Today I went to the Belvidere Picture Gallery owned by the Emperor and saw the works of Rubens, Rembrandt, Michael Angelo [sic], Raphael, Durer and many other old masters."[24] As he did sightseeing, he admired the Gothic cathedrals, Louis XIV furnishings, German Rathskellers, and Beaux Art official buildings. He took particular note and appreciation of the recently erected Eiffel Tower in Paris. He recognized the tower's importance as a Parisian icon: Seeing the Eiffel Tower and going up in the elevator was one of first things a traveler wanted to experience in Paris. This was an experience he replicated with a public observation deck atop the Woolworth Building where tourists could pay to visit.[25] Winkler comments on Woolworth's obsession with immigrant trends in the United States:

> The great tide of immigration to the United States was just setting in, and during more than a quarter of a century thereafter the growth of population was a study which absorbed Woolworth as a hobby. He maintained elaborate charts, which revealed to him how towns and cities were growing. As the curve of immigration rose, so did the curve of his ambition. The immigrants would be his customers! All those millions with

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[23] Winkler, 84.

[24] Ibid., 93.

[25] Woolworth graciously "waived" the admission fee for Cass Gilbert and presented him with an annual pass to the Observation deck which can be seen in the Cass Gilbert archive at The New York Historical Society.

> very little money could afford to trade at the five and tens, even the poorest.[26]

Soon F. W. Woolworth was the largest importer of foreign goods in the United States.[27] In 1901, as the number of his stores approached several hundred, Woolworth commissioned a mansion for his family at 808 Fifth Avenue at 62nd Street in New York. The home was designed by C.P.H. Gilbert (no relations to Cass Gilbert) in the style of a French chateau and was adjacent to other homes of wealthy industrialists such as the Astors, the Vanderbilts and the Carnegies. Woolworth replicated rooms he had seen in Europe, incorporating many different styles; a motif he would use again in other homes and in his "Cathedral of Commerce." By constructing lavish homes, both on Fifth Avenue and later in a country home on the Gold Coast of Long Island, Woolworth strove for acceptance as a moneyed member of the upper class. He found he was snubbed by many of the New York families with "older" money, money derived from what they perceived to be more "noble" endeavors. They saw him as a merchant to immigrants, and one lacking a formal education. Woolworth belonged to "the Hardware Club," but his Gilded Age neighbors were members of the Century and the Union Clubs, as well as on the list of "The 400".[28] Networking at social clubs was important for business and architectural purposes, an opportunity from which Woolworth was deprived. [29]

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[26] Winkler, 102.

[27] Fenske, *The Skyscraper and the City,* 35.

[28] Ibid., 71.

[29] Thomas R. Blanck and Charles Locks, "Launching a Career," in *Cass Gilbert Life and Work: Architect of the Public Domain* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 47.

Woolworth had discovered a formula with his Lancaster, Pennsylvania store that he would repeat in New York. The store's Beaux Art building resided in the center of the city. The first floor consisted of his store and restaurant as well as other retail stores. The upper floors were rented to tenants thereby absorbing the building's costs. Contemplating his New York building, Woolworth was unsure what he wanted but he knew he wanted to model it after the Victoria Tower in London. Woolworth knew of Cass Gilbert from his United States Customs House designed in 1899, his Broadway Chambers Building erected in 1900 and his West Street Building completed in 1907. The Broadway Chambers Building stood across the street from Woolworth's office. He approached Gilbert with his idea. Gilbert brought Woolworth twenty drawings. While they sat together, Gilbert penciled a list of itemized construction costs on one of his architectural renderings. This bookkeeper's sense of detail appealed to Woolworth's business acumen, and cinched the deal.[30] Underneath it all, Gilbert, like Woolworth, was a salesman.

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[30] Fenske, *The Skyscraper*, 74.

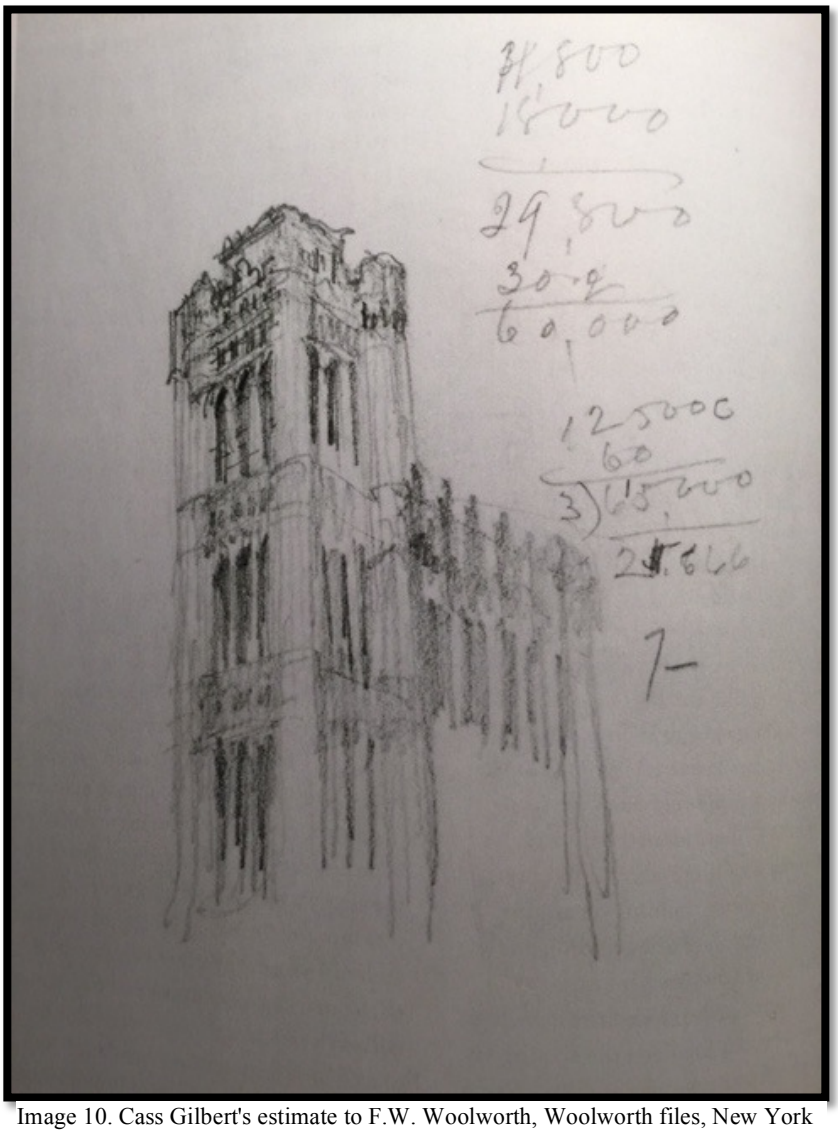

Image 10. Cass Gilbert's estimate to F.W. Woolworth, Woolworth files, New York Historical Society Library.

Cass Gilbert believed that architecture should reflect an historical continuum. Sharon Irish calls him "an art architect, though a conservative one."[31] He was conservative with his source of inspiration and with his political ideology. Where he was

[31] Sharon Irish, "Cass Gilbert in Practice, 1882-1934" in *The Architecture of Cass Gilbert: Inventing the Skyline.* ed. Margaret Heilbrun (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 27.

progressive however was in his melding of styles. He represented a later generation from Louis Sullivan, yet there is evidence that he aligned himself with Sullivan's ideals. In a letter written to architecture critic, Montgomery Schuyler in 1902 Gilbert stated: "You must not make . . . too obviously a criticism on what Sullivan calls 'retrospective architecture.' Someday we may speak a new language of creative art, but until then let us speak a language that we all can understand."[32] That language was based upon an architecture inspired and driven by European Gothic, Italian Renaissance, and Ancient Greece. His European sketchbooks from trips abroad in 1880 and again in 1897 reflect his skill at watercolor, a medium he used to present drawings to a client.[33] On any given page, he would sketch compilations of gargoyles, campaniles and cornices. He studied classical architecture visually, sketching what he saw. Later when he had his own practice in New York City, Gilbert would advise his young draftsmen, "Sketch everything in sight. Sketch from pictures, from published designs, from buildings and monuments. No matter how badly you draw, continue to draw."[34] This was advice that Stanford White also gave to new architects saying: "Architecture depend on

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[32] Cass Gilbert to Montgomery Schuyler, October 2, 1902, quoted in Sharon Irish, 27.

[33] Paul Clifford Larson, *Cass Gilbert Abroad: The Young Architect's European Journey* (Afton, MN: Afton Historical Society Press, 2003). Many of Gilbert's early watercolors are reproduced here.

[34] Letter from Cass Gilbert to A. Lawrence Kocher quoted in Mary Beth Betts, "From Sketch to Architecture: Drawings in the Cass Gilbert Office," in *The Architecture of Cass Gilbert: Inventing the Skyline,* ed. Margaret Heilbrun, 36

draftsmanship more than anything else…"[35] Fenske states: "Gilbert's method of sketching mirrored his way of seeing – sculpturally vigorous, ornamentally rich and colorful exteriors accounted for architecture's beauty."[36] This emotionalism was evident in the thirty different renditions done by his master draftsman, Thomas R. Johnson, that he presented to Woolworth reflecting various Gothic and classical designs. [37] The designs had the richness and depth of a building that already existed, not just from the mind's eye. Gilbert's work prior to his design of the Woolworth Building reflected an incorporation of a variety of styles. The Minnesota Capitol Building, completed in 1899, was designed in an American Renaissance style with a dome similar to Saint Peter's Cathedral in Rome.[38] The U. S. Customs House, won by competition in 1899, was influenced by the Paris Palais de Justice,[39] while the New York County Lawyers Association tended toward the classical. Gilbert was aware of his ambivalence toward design but readily justified it. He did not want to be tied down to any one style. In a letter to city planner, George Dudley Seymour, Gilbert wrote:

> My friends have sometimes wondered why I do not always work in one style, but my response to this is that I find beauty in so many different

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[35] Ibid*., 36*

[36] Fenske, 85.

[37] Betts, 44.

[38] Mary Beth Betts, "Cass Gilbert Twelve Projects*,"* in *The Architecture of Cass Gilbert: Inventing the Skyline, 85.*

[39] Ibid., 108.

> things that I like to develop a subject in the style which seems best adapted to the purpose.[40]

For the design of the West Street Building, and later the Woolworth Building, Gilbert used a tripartite formula that had been recommended by Sullivan, modeling a tall office building upon a Greek column, where the building would have a base, a shaft and a capital. This formula, along with his use of graduated color, enhanced a building's height.[41] While other arts were moving in a forward, progressive direction, Gilbert's roots lay in finding inspiration from antiquity. He ventured away from the tenets of the École, but where they reinterpreted old forms into new ideas, he was a neo classicist. This adherence to styles from the past seemed to reflect a desire to give the United States a stronger pedigree. He believed that civic buildings should reflect the strength of the architectural styles of ancient Greece, embellished with ornament and sculpture. Gilbert also believed that architecture influenced art. Tony Robins, Senior Preservation Specialist at the Landmarks Preservation Commission, stated in his April 1983 report, when the Woolworth Building was granted landmark status, that Gilbert, "traced the history of the arts in America, and credited much of their growth to architects."[42]

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[40] Letter from Cass Gilbert to George Dudley Seymour, quoted in Barbara Christen and Steven Flanders, *Cass Gilbert Life and Works,* 73.

[41] Betts, 7.

[42] Anthony Robins, Landmarks Preservation Commission, Report recommending The Woolworth Building for Landmark Status, April 12, 1983. N831038HKM. http://www.neighborhoodpreservationcenter.org. 7.

Image 11. U. S. Customs Building, New York, designed by Cass Gilbert.

Gilbert shared several qualities with Woolworth: Both were of Scottish descent and neither had finished high school. Gilbert was passionate about architecture and drawing and continued his studies without a high school degree. He did a two-year apprenticeship in St. Paul before enrolling in the architecture school at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he studied with French Beaux Arts professor Eugene Letang. After one year of architectural school, Gilbert embarked on an eight-month trip touring Europe. Gilbert wrote in a letter to Francis S. Swales, architect of the Selfridge Department store in London:

> I believe heartily in the general training of the École des Beaux Arts which Mr. Letang so admirably represented, but I think the training that is desirable for France is not always useable in America. . . . I believe that

> our modern problems such as the skyscraper and the railroad buildings should be wrought out in harmony with the needs and the structural materials and that out of this will grow the vital and beautiful architecture.[43]

The trip to Europe broadened Gilbert's horizons, as it had done for Woolworth. His itinerary included stops in Salisbury to sketch the cathedral, London to sketch Westminster Abbey, and Paris to sketch Notre Dame.[44] His letters home, however, reflected a greater depth of appreciation of the arts than did Woolworth's:

> I have seen the Louvre and Tuilleries, the Champs Elysees(sic), the Trocadero, and the finest of all, Notre Dame. Notre Dame is simply without exception the most majestic and the most noble work of architecture I have ever seen. Chester with its simple dignity, Salisbury with its grace and beauty, Westminster with its gloom and solemnity--all are far surpassed by this building. Its towers are wondrous, its stained glass is gorgeous, it's carvings unequalled, its tracery most varied designs, all extremely beautiful, while the interior is the most thoroughly impressive that I can imagine.[45]

Erecting a tall building that would surpass the height of all others appealed to Gilbert. As early as 1899 he had intimated this in a letter accompanied by a sketch to his young daughter, and it proved to be prescient:

> I think I shall build an office building down here somewhere. The buildings in New York are not high enough to suit me. The highest is only thirty-three stories. Now mine will look something like this. You see it is a good deal higher than the moon. It is so high that people going along the

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[43]Cass Gilbert to Francis S. Swales, September 24, 1909, quoted in Sharon Irish, "Cass Gilbert in Practice, 1882-1934" in *The Architecture of Cass Gilbert: Inventing the Skyline*, 19.

[44] Larson, 31.

[45] Ibid., 47.

> street don't look bigger than grass by comparison. You see it even goes up so high that I couldn't draw a line around it. [46]

The first drawings were for a twelve to sixteen-story office building on a corner site at Broadway and Park Place. Then as Woolworth gazed across City Hall Park, he decided he wanted his building to be taller than the Pulitzer Building, or the Singer Building. As time passed, Woolworth noticed that people in Europe raved about the magnificent 700-foot Metropolitan Life Insurance Building Tower in New York.[47] He came to realize that he wanted a building that would be as memorable as the Eiffel Tower, and he changed his mind from wanting a twelve story building to one that was 750 feet tall. Bit by bit, Woolworth secured each parcel of land that would enable his building: Numbers 233, 235 and 237 Broadway and 6 and 8 Park Place.

On January 1, 1911 *The New York Times* announced the building's inception on Page One:

> This is the romance of an idea. This is the story of how a great skyscraper, the third loftiest structure in the world may be built with dimes and nickels – if there are enough of them. The new building soon to be a landmark of New York City might be called a monument to the idea. And back of both the idea and the skyscraper is a unique personality which is, after all, the only true subject of romance.[48]

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[46] Letter to Elizabeth Gilbert, February 20, 1899, Gilbert Papers, Library of Congress, quoted in: George Blodgett, *Cass Gilbert The Early Years* (St Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2001), 135.

[47] Winkler, 186.

[48] "A Skyscraper Built By the Nickels of Millions: The Woolworth Building Tells the Romance of a Business—How a Farmer's Boy Started a Little Five and Ten Cent Store and now has 286 Big Ones," *The New York Times, (1857-1922),* Jan. 1, 1911, http://www.proquest.com.

The article stated that little was known about Frank W. Woolworth other than his rise from farm boy to retail store owner. Upon meeting him, however, the writer goes on to say: "He had the deliberate manner and slow speech of one with 9,000 employees and a five million dollar skyscraper on his shoulders."[49] The idea of the building was merely in its conception phase at that time. However, five months later on May 28, 1911. another front-page article proved more specific. "Foundation Work for Big Building," stated "New Woolworth Structure Will Rest Upon Sixty-nine Concrete Piers. Go Down Over 100 feet. Estimated Weight of Structure 136,000 tons."[50] The article reported that foundation work for the Woolworth Building would be: "the largest undertaking ever in New York in engineering history." Drawing upon the technology used to build the Brooklyn Bridge, concrete piers were constructed above ground and then sunk to a depth of 110 feet using pneumatic caissons. The article explained that men would work beneath the earth day and night setting a total of forty-three caissons.[51] As the caissons were set in place, tanks were filled with pressurized air to prevent water from seeping in. When the caissons reached the bedrock, concrete piers were sunk into them. Deadly decompression sickness was always a risk, similar to what builders experienced when erecting the Brooklyn Bridge.

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[49] Ibid.

[50] "Foundation Work for Big Building," *New York Times* (1857-1922) May 28, 1911 http://www.proquest.com.

[51] Ibid.

Every aspect of the building process wreaked of excess, evidenced by the tome of receipts for all areas of work in Cass Gilbert's files at The New York Historical Society.[52] Woolworth micromanaged the construction of the building the way he micromanaged his stores. When the building was completed, a pamphlet was handed out to prospective tenants providing many facts about its construction: The building was constructed in the shape of a U ensuring that every office had access to a window. Its weight was 223,000 tons and required 69 concrete piers dug to a depth of 110 feet. Portal braces supporting the towers enabled the building to withstand a 200 mph hurricane. The building stood sixty stories, encompassed thirty acres of floor space, and required seventeen million bricks; 7,500 tons of terra cotta, 28,000 tons of tile. 5,000 windows, 53,000 pounds of bronze and iron hardware all for a total cost of $13,500,000 paid for in cash.[53] The original prospectus stressed the architectural design and premium location of the building at 233 Broadway and Park Place. Five pages of the prospectus were dedicated to the safety of the building to ensure the public's peace of mind. The power plant in the basement had four engines working day and night, able to produce 1500 kilowatts of energy: enough to power a small city of 50,000 people. The ventilating system changed the air four times an hour. The boiler room utilizing coal produced 2,500 horsepower.[54] It added that the vaults of the Irving National Bank in the mezzanine of the building were a

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[52] Cass Gilbert Papers, Woolworth Building Project Files, Boxes 542, New York Historical Society.

[53] Charles F. Noyes, "The Story of The Woolworth Building" pamphlet, NY Historical Society.

[54] *The Cathedral of Commerce* (Baltimore, MD: Thomsen-Ellis Co. 1921).

secure place to store one's money. Most attention was given to the speed and safety of the elevator system. Elevators had been in use since the Civil War, but the elevators in the Woolworth Building were steam-powered like a train, making them what Fenske calls a "vertical train," with many electrical safety devices. In the event of a malfunction, air cushions surrounded the cars insuring a soft landing.[55]

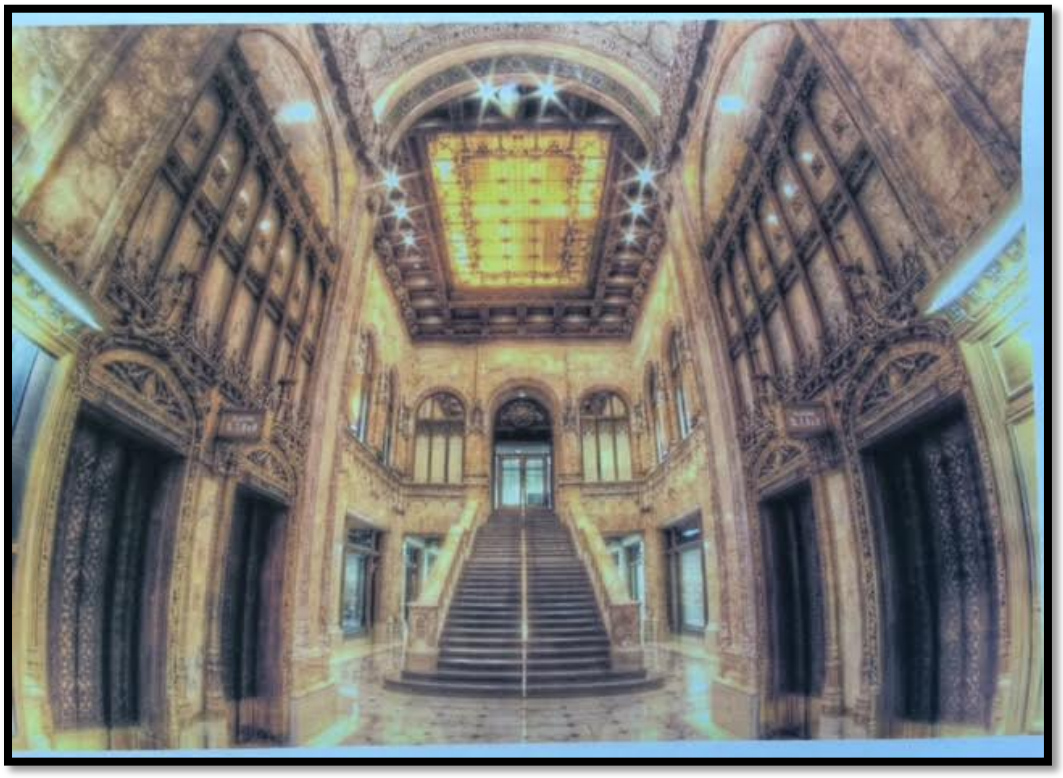

Image 12. Lobby of Woolworth Building, with stairs leading to mezzanine.

On the day of the building's inauguration, April 24, 1913, a banquet was held for nine hundred guests on the building's 27th floor to honor Cass Gilbert. Woolworth engaged a train from Washington D.C. to New York to transport more than one hundred

[55] Gail Fenske, http://www.skyscraper.org/PROGRAMS/LECTURES/FENSKE.

Congressmen to the dinner. When everyone was seated, a telegram was delivered to President Woodrow Wilson at the White House. Wilson pushed a button that initiated a signal, and the entire building was illuminated by 80,000 light bulbs. The building was open for business, and the celebratory dinner began: Cotuit oysters in a mignonette sauce, clear green turtle soup; a choice of turban of pompano, breast of guinea hen, or Baltimore style terrapin; each course with a wine as its compliment. Dessert consisted of b*ombe flambé*. Cigars, port and coffee were served as a finale.[56] News of the building's opening was not limited to the United States. Hugh McAtamney, the head of public relations for the building, transmitted a cable to the spire of the Eiffel Tower and the information that the world's tallest building had opened was disseminated throughout Europe.[57] Frank W. Woolworth had put himself at the helm and conceived of a way to create a media event giving his brand more publicity than could ever have been facilitated through the newspapers.

[56] Frank W. Woolworth, *Dinner Given for Cass Gilbert* (New York: Munder-Thompsen Press, 1913).

[57] Fenske, *The Skyscraper and the City,* 220.

Image 13. Copper Roof of Woolworth Building, family archive.

The Reverend S. Parks Cadman, a Methodist minister in New York City wrote the foreword to the prospectus and coined the phrase, "Cathedral of Commerce."[58] Cadman compared the building of a skyscraper to the building of the Parthenon in Athens or the Coliseum in Rome. He praised Woolworth saying he exemplified "the best possibilities in human nature."

The construction was the culmination of many factors. It showcased our technological expertise at the time; it satisfied a tangible need for office space; it provided a headquarters for a corporation that was large even by today's standards and it was populist in that it became a tourist destination that people would want to visit. Ultimately it was a paean to capitalism and the result of Woolworth's tremendous ego.

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[58] S. Parkes Cadman, Foreword, *The Cathedral of Commerce* (Baltimore, MD: Thomsen-Ellis Co.), 1921.

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After the building was finished, Woolworth took credit for its design, and Gilbert graciously allowed it stating at the inaugural dinner, "the real architect of the building is Frank W. Woolworth. He has hitched us to his car."[59] Gilbert's humility was corroborated by Barbara Christen and Steve Flanders who wrote in their biography: "Gilbert's special genius lay in his capacity to identify and embody the dreams of clients, not an easy task in his day and even harder today."[60] Gilbert's wife, Mrs. Julia Finch Gilbert, however was more outspoken. After inviting Woolworth to their home in Palm Beach, Florida, she wrote:

> Mr. Woolworth as the possessor of an inventive brain is interesting and he was always scrupulously clean and well groomed, to my never-ending thankfulness, but from the standpoint of a polished gentleman, heaven protect us! I would stand it as long as I could and then I would fly to my room. [61]

Twenty years later, "For his outstanding contribution to the sky-line of New York in the design of the Woolworth Building," Cass Gilbert was given *The Gold Medal for Architecture*. Upon accepting the award, Gilbert recited a verse from *The Song of the Dead* by Rudyard Kipling:

> We were dreamers dreaming greatly in the man-stifled town
> And we yearned beyond the skyline where strange roads go down,
> Came the whisper, came the vision, came the power with the need,

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[59] Cass Gilbert, April 24, 1913 address in "Dinner for Cass Gilbert" (New York: Munder-Thomsen Press, 1913), 46. Woolworth Building Project Files, Box 542, New York Historical Society.

[60] Christen and Flanders, 12.

[61] Julia Finch Gilbert, *Reminiscences and Addresses* (New York: privately printed, 1935).

Till the soul that was not man's soul was lent to us to lead.[62]

The poem, written in 1893, exalted the imperialism of the British Empire and its conquest of foreign lands. But it was a perfect metaphor for Cass Gilbert and Frank W. Woolworth who each possessed a desire for immortality.

Eighty years hence, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Woolworth Building, a story was told by architectural historian Gail Fenske about Cass Gilbert and an encounter he had with Alfred Stieglitz. One day in 1913, Gilbert visited Stieglitz's '291' Gallery to the one-man exhibit of John Marin's watercolors. Marin had shared a show with Albert Maurer at '291,'between March 30 and April 17, 1909. Then in February 1910, he had his first one-man show. In 1913, Marin's painting of the Woolworth Building was shown at '291' prior to the 1913 Armory Show. Gilbert had undoubtedly drawn and painted the Woolworth building in watercolor himself so many times that he could sketch it with his eyes closed, but he had never painted the building engaged in a dance. Marin's painting had been widely publicized in the press, and Gilbert stood before the painting for a long time, pondering it. Stieglitz, uncannily quiet, watched him.

"So this is the Woolworth Building," Gilbert asked rhetorically.

"Yes. . . . in all of its moods," Stieglitz replied.

Gilbert then turned and left. Someone said to Stieglitz,

"Do you know who that was?"

"No," Stieglitz replied, "but he seemed like a very sad man."

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[62] Rudyard Kipling, *The Song of the Dead* http://www.online-literature.com/kipling/849/, quoted in Julia Finch Gilbert, The New York Historical Society.

"That was Cass Gilbert, F. W. Woolworth's architect."[63]

Not everyone was ready for Marin's futuristic depiction. In selecting the Woolworth Building as the subject for the painting, Marin had chosen the iconic building that was not only the tallest in the world, but identifiable everywhere. My grandfather loved the building and recognized how skyscrapers were changing the city. His love of the building was from the perspective of a laborer, not an art lover. He recognized the beauty of Cass Gilbert's design, yet he more than likely had never heard of John Marin. He would have appreciated his shared ancestry with Alfred Stieglitz, but wondered what Stieglitz was talking about (as had Cass Gilbert) had he set foot in '291'.

[63] This story was told by Gail Fenske on the occasion of The Skyscraper Museum's exhibition: The Woolworth Building @ 100, on June 14, 2013. http://www.skyscraper.org/PROGRAMS/MEDIEVAL_OR_MODERN/symposium.php This story is retold in Fine 126-127, and Mellquist, "Marin: Painter from the Palisades," 61.

Chapter 3

Stieglitz Sponsors Marin

"The doors have swung open to me by my friend Alfred Stieglitz." [1]

John Marin

Image 14. John Marin, Woolworth Building No.1. etching with monotype of japan paper, 30.1 x 25.2 cm. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

[1] Cleve Gray, ed. *Marin by Marin* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston), 21.

As Cass Gilbert stood quietly in front of John Marin's painting of the Woolworth Building, Alfred Stieglitz peppered him with questions and prodded his comments.

> Possibly this work startles you. But if you have acquaintance with Chinese or Japanese art, this should not be so very strange—even though it is not directly related to either. These Marins are inspired by the Woolworth Building—It's a passion of his.[2]

John Marin (1870-1953), like Cass Gilbert, was passionate about the Woolworth Building, and the two men shared several characteristics in common. Marin had briefly practiced as an architect. After studying mechanical engineering at Stevens Institute in Hoboken, New Jersey, he maintained his own architectural firm in New York from 1892 to 1897.[3] Both men excelled at sketching and watercolor and looked to antiquity for foundation. And each had respect for the vertical line. Gilbert's U.S. Customs House, Woolworth Building, Newark Courthouse, and Oberlin College, to name but a few, are masterpieces that look to the past for inspiration. Gilbert incorporated neoclassicism in his designs. Marin, too, looked to the past for grounding. "It's the ancients who verify," he told his biographer and friend, E. M. Benson.[4] Each man's creations were vast. Gilbert designed some of our nation's most iconic buildings. Marin, beginning with his first one-man show at Stieglitz's gallery in 1910, held a one-man show thereafter annually for fifty years. Gilbert's masterpieces came at a time of accessibility to all sorts of cutting-edge technology: steam elevators, centralized heating, plumbing, and electric lighting. Both

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[2]Ruth E. Fine, *John Marin* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1990), 127.

[3] Ibid., 24. This was at a time when one did not need a degree in architecture to practice. Marin only spent one half year at Stevens Institute.

[4] This is from E.M. Benson's papers, as quoted in Fine, 76.

men's work unfolded as styles in their field were experiencing new influences. However, Gilbert is seen as a classicist not an innovator. In twentieth century architecture, one is more likely to recognize the names of Frank Lloyd Wright or Mies van der Rohe. Marin's paintings depict abstract representations of lyricism, a style favored earlier by James McNeil Whistler and by the nineteenth century symbolist poets.[5] Marin led art beyond the realism of the Ashcan school: artists who focused on the gritty life of the city and often depicted a continuation of Jacob Riis' photojournalistic "battle with the slum." Yet even though Marin is credited with leading American art towards abstraction, his watercolors, averaging 19" by 16" in size, would be dwarfed in an installation with the larger canvasses of the Abstract Expressionists. America was ripe for the birth of its own modern art at the beginning of the twentieth century. Yet the Museum of Modern Art did not open until 1929, and the Whitney Museum in 1931, only after the Metropolitan Museum of Art expressed no interest in Gertrude Whitney's donation of five hundred paintings by contemporary American artists.[6] It took until 1948 for a poll to be published in *Look* magazine naming John Marin the best American painter.[7]And until 1948, for Clement Greenberg to state: "If it is not beyond all doubt that [Marin] is the best painter alive in America at this moment, he assuredly has to be taken into consideration when we ask who

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[5] Howard Risatti, "Music and the Development of Abstraction in America: The Decade Surrounding the Armory Show," *Art Journal*, 39, no. 1 (1979): 9, http://www.jstor.org.

[6] Susan Behrends Frank, "From Ryder to Rothko, the Quest for the Best of American Art," in Susan Behrends Frank, *Made In the U.S.A.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 3.

[7] Ibid., 4.

is." [8] When a travelling exhibit of Marin's work was organized by the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1954, a year after he died, critic Robert Rosenblum wrote:

> He stands in full center of the major currents of American art . . . he parallels, even prophesies, abstract-expressionist trends. . . . [T]he formal analogies with, say, de Kooning or Tomlin, are striking, and one is again pressed to pay homage to this master, who, throughout an artistic career of 50 active years, could continue to investigate pictorial problems with such experimental daring.[9]

Notwithstanding this, a generation of young people growing up in the 1950s or 1960s, even including those attuned to art, were more familiar with the names of Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. Marin nevertheless stands on the cusp of American modernism. It was his relationship with Alfred Stieglitz, the yearly shows and life-long correspondence between the two men, that gave him exposure as the great artist that he was.

A patronage system has always enabled artists to pursue their craft. From Leonardo da Vinci and the Medicis to Jackson Pollack and Peggy Guggenheim, a sponsor or patron has usually underwritten and helped artists to succeed. In America, modern art would never have been as readily accepted without Alfred Stieglitz's guidance and ardent promotion. His passion for photography, modern European art and subsequently American art, as well as his persistence that America indeed had artists of equal merit to

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[8] John O'Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism,* vol. *2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1986), 268 as quoted in Ruth Fine, *John Marin* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1990), 9.

[9] Robert Rosenblum, "Marin's Dynamism," *Art Digest* 28 (1954); as quoted in Fine 18. Fine also states in her footnote: "Artists, too, admired Marin. For example, Dorothy Norman recounts a conversation with Jackson Pollock in which the painter indicated, 'I admire Marin greatly and for a while was even influenced by him.'"

the moderns artists in Paris, gave legitimacy to the new American art. Based upon correspondence between Alfred Stieglitz and Duncan Phillips, art patron and founder of The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., Stieglitz was difficult to deal with. He was considered opinionated and arrogant by many who visited '291.'[10] But from an artist's perspective, he was a guardian.[11] John Marin was taken under Stieglitz's wing and became a part of his stable of artists, and '291' became a haven where he was encouraged to experiment artistically. This was the time period in which Marin produced the Woolworth series that shows the effect that the skyscraper had upon artists. Sheldon Reich writes:

> In this hothouse atmosphere of avant-garde experimentation, Marin produced, during the winter of 1912-13 among the most advanced works being done by any American on this side of the Atlantic.[12]

John Marin was born December 23, 1870 in Rutherford, New Jersey to John Cheri Marin and Anne Louise Currey Marin. He grew up with his maternal grandmother and two maiden aunts, as his mother passed away several days after his birth, and his father frequently travelled for work. One aunt was a school principal and the other an artist and piano teacher. Marin would later claim that he had no aptitude for music, yet musical tonality and rhythm enhanced his paintings of New York with elements of

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[10] *The Little Galleries of the Photo Secession* at 291 Fifth Avenue was commonly known as '291'.

[11] This is based upon various letters read in the Marin vertical files at The Phillips Gallery Research Library.

[12] Sheldon Reich, *John Marin Drawings 1886-1951 A Retrospective Exhibition Honoring John Marin's Centennial*, Organized by the University of Utah Museum of Fine Art (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1969), 12.

staccato. Stieglitz saw evidence of the transcendental poet in Marin. In their correspondence Marin displays a New England Yankee nature, reminiscent of Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau. His writing is filled with the imagery of music, a theory of art being explored at the time both in the United States and internationally as Synchromism. Marin wrote:

> Leave it to the true creative artist—he'll find a place for the stones and weeds of life in his picture and all so arranged that each takes its place and part in that rhythmic whole—that balanced whole—to wing its music with color, line and spacing upon its keyboard.[13]

Marin's artistic aptitude was evident from the start, but he was steered towards a study of draftsmanship and architecture by his father. Although he pursued architecture for only six years, the draftsmanship required of the profession would be an influence throughout his painting career. Prior to becoming an artist, Marin summed up his career:

> 1 year business—not much chance at the game bag—Believe I was fired.
> 4 years architects' offices—not much class otherwise they'd have discovered my Wondership.
> 2 years blank
> 2 years Philadelphia Academy—could draw all the rabbits I wanted to therefore didn't draw any—While there shot at and captured prize for some sketches
> 1 year blank
> 1 year Art Students League N.Y.
> Saw KENYON COX[14]
> 2 years blank
> 4 years abroad—Played some billiards—Incidentally knocked out some batches of etchings which people rave over everywhere. At this period the

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[13] John Marin, "Marin Writes," quoted in Fine, 18.

[14] Artist and critic, Kenyon Cox (1856-1919) studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, was a professor at the Arts Students League in New York, a member of the National Academy of Design, and an art critic for several magazines. He was critical of the new modernism.

> French Government was going to give me the *Legion d'Honor* I refused—They then insisted on buying one of my oils—I ran away to Venice. . . . [S]ince then I have taken up Fishing and Hunting and with some spare time knocked out a few water colors for which in former years I had had a leaning. [15]

In 1905, when Marin decided to travel to Paris to study art, he was met by his father, and his stepbrother, Charles Bittinger, and they helped him find an apartment.[16] Bittinger was experienced with printing and etching and provided engraving equipment for Marin who soon learned the etching process. Marin made sketches of Notre Dame, St. Germaine-des-Près, and the Pont Neuf, drawing his picture onto a copper plate. Later he would return to his apartment, ink the etching, and run it through a press. Once printed, he applied his watercolor. He explored Europe, as Cass Gilbert had done, painting the Rouen Cathedral and, in 1907 spending six weeks in Venice where he painted the Cathedral at St. Mark. After seeing Marin's work at the 1908 *Salon d'Automne,* artist and photographer, Edward Steichen, became enthusiastic about Marin's watercolors. A mutual friend and artist, Arthur B. Carles, with whom Marin had studied at the Pennsylvania Academy, arranged for the two to meet. The meeting was set at the New Society of American Artists, a group that Steichen had formed to promote American avant-garde artists in Paris.[17] Steichen, a friend of Alfred

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[15] Gray, ed., 20.

[16] Fine, 32.

[17] Lisa Mintz Messinger and Magdalena Dabrowski. *Stieglitz and his Artists: Matisse to O'Keeffe: The Alfred Stieglitz Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011),156.

Stieglitz, spent time scouting Europe for new art and artists. He wrote to Stieglitz about Marin and in March 1909, Steichen arranged for twenty-five of Marin's watercolors to be shipped to New York. Stieglitz sponsored a show of Marin's watercolors together with a group of oil paintings by Alfred Maurer. Charles H. Caffin, a frequent writer and art critic in *Camera Work*, described the work as influenced by *Japonisme*, writing in the exhibition catalog that they depicted, "harmonies of indescribable tonalities wrought on the Japanese principle of the *Notan*, a balance of dark and light, of the intimate relationship of contrasted values."[18] The following fall, Stieglitz travelled to Paris to meet Marin for the first time.

Alfred Stieglitz, six years Marin's senior, had begun his interest in art with photography. While studying mechanical engineering in Germany, he purchased his first camera and was almost immediately taken with the medium. Photography experienced major innovations during the nineteenth century as a result of new inventions that changed the light recording medium and facilitated the picture-making process. The original Daguerreotype photograph had required an eight-hour exposure to create one photograph that could not be duplicated. By the 1850s, the collodion process, or wet plate technology, allowed for multiple reproductions of an image and less exposure time. Photographs were printed on paper coated with an albumen emulsion and were capable of exhibiting greater detail. Enlargements of the photographs were not yet possible, and

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[18] Charles H. Caffin, *Camera Work*, no. 27, 1909, 42.

cameras that were large enough to produce an 11 by 14-inch print were very decidedly not portable.

In 1877, George Eastman, a bank clerk in Rochester, New York, invented a dry process using gelatin on glass plates as the emulsion. The dry process, as opposed to collodion wet-plate technology, was sufficiently stable and did not have to be immediately developed.[19] Within ten years Eastman developed the Kodak Camera that used roll film. Eastman had brought photography to the masses. The camera became a portable device, and fifteen thousand cameras were sold the first year. The new invention was advertised with the slogan, "You push the button, we do the rest," because anyone could go off on his or her bicycle, take snapshots, and send the film to the Kodak Company for developing and printing. And, with the invention of *Blitzlicht Pulver*, flashlight powder made from magnesium, taking photographs with little available light also became possible.

Portability, however, did not make everyone an artist, and Stieglitz argumentatively saw photography as more than a grassroots means of capturing images. He was intent that photography be seen as an art form, not just a pastime that anyone with the money to buy a Kodak box camera could casually pursue. In 1884, in England, *The Amateur Photographer Magazine,* had sponsored a contest. Stieglitz submitted photos and was awarded first prize. He hoped to find the same appreciation of photography in Germany, but when his award-winning photos were shown to artists in Berlin, one artist was quoted as saying, "Of course this is not art, but we would like to paint the way you

[19] Ibid.

photograph," to which Stieglitz tartly replied: "I don't know anything about art, but for some reason or other I have never wanted to photograph the way you paint."[20] In spite of growing up in a cultured household with parents who frequently entertained artists, saying he "knew nothing about art," proved what a great influence and mentor Edward Steichen was to Stieglitz.

Moved by the formation in England of *The Linked Ring*, whose mission statement proclaimed that photography was art, Stieglitz returned to New York in 1890, aiming to educate the public. He became editor of *The American Amateur Photographer* magazine, president of the newly formed Camera Club of New York, and in 1897, editor of the Camera Club's newly formed journal, *Camera Notes.*[21] The scholarly magazine, produced quarterly, published pictorialist photos. Pictorialism was a response to the pervasiveness of so-called "instant" photography and stressed that photography was an art form and more than a craft. Stieglitz also began to author and publish articles on modern art. This merging of art and photography would be a clear forerunner to his '291' gallery. In 1903, Stieglitz created *Camera Work*, a magazine initially dedicated to pictorial photography. Within the magazine, he and other editorialists articulated their beliefs about what photography should be. The magazine called itself: "a magazine for the more advanced photographer," and "the mouthpiece of the photo-secession." In 1901, Charles Caffin described photographers within the Camera Club:

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[20] Paul Strand, "Alfred Stieglitz and the Machine," in Frank, Waldo, Lewis Mumford, Dorothy Norman, Paul Rosenfeld, and Harold Rugg, eds. *America and Alfred Stieglitz: A Collective Portrait* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., 1934), 282.

[21] Ibid.,111.

> This group of "advanced photographers" is striving to secure in their prints the same qualities that contribute to the beauty of a picture in any other medium, and ask that their work may be judged by the same standard.[22]

Image 15. Alfred Stieglitz, *The Hand of Man,* 1902 (printed 1910), photogravure, 24.2x31.9cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The first issue of *Camera Work* was dedicated to the photographs of Gertrude Kasebier and contained an article on the history of *The Linked Ring* and an editorial on the leading characteristics of Japanese painting. Stieglitz's photograph *The Hand of Man* was printed with the commentary:

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[22] Caffin wrote this in his 1901 book, *Photography as a Fine Art* (New York: 1901), vii. quoted in Judith Katy Zilczer, *The Aesthetic Struggle in America 1913-1918: Abstract Art and Theory in the Stieglitz Circle* (PhD diss. University of Delaware 1975), 113.

> *The Hand of Man*, by Alfred Stieglitz, the last plate in this number, is an attempt to treat pictorially a subject which enters so much into our daily lives that we are apt to lose sight of the pictorial possibilities of the commonplace.[23]

The industrial, disinterested feeling emoted by the 1902 photograph can be compared to the contemporaneous paintings of Robert Henri and the Ashcan artists. To create feeling, Stieglitz utilizes a deliberate soft focus.

Many of the early pictorialist photographs published in *Camera Work*, such as Edward Steichen's photograph, *Rodin with his Sculptures,* are regarded as masterpieces. Using multiple exposures, Steichen placed Rodin in the foreground in the same position as two of his most famous sculptures, *The Thinker,* in the middle ground and *Victor Hugo* in the background. The image is carefully contrived. Rodin is nearly in chiaroscuro, while the sculptures are exposed with much longer grey scales.

[23] Camera Work, no. 1.

Image 16. Edward Steichen, *Rodin, Le Monument à Victor Hugo et le Penseur,* 1903, bichromated-gelatin print, 26cm x 32.2 cm, Le Musée Rodin.

Photographers in Europe at this time were influenced by romanticism and symbolism, creating beautiful landscapes and softened portraits. They often manipulated or scratched the negative in the development phase. Stieglitz belittled these techniques. His views on photography and art however proved to be plastic, switching from broad acceptance and use of so called dark room manipulation techniques to rejection of the process and criticism of those who used it.[24] By 1907 he began to reject pictorial

[24] It is arguable whether a photograph can be made without manipulation because a photographer in the darkroom is always making, consciously or not, choices about a broad array of variables including paper, chemicals, exposure time, development time, all of which impact the final image. Even when composing the image in the field, if Stieglitz was using a camera with the capability of tilt and twist, he was manipulating the image.

photography (any attempt by a photographer to mimic painting) in favor of "straight photography" (relying on the eye, selected shutter speed and aperture). He believed that a photograph's image, like a painting, should be an image that tells a story, representing the photographer's eye and emoting the photographer's inner feeling. Marius de Zayas, an artist and writer who was a contemporary of Stieglitz and co-founder of the Photo-Secession, later explained the dichotomy in *Camera Work*, saying:

> Photography is not art, but photography can be made to be Art…[T]he difference between photography and artistic photography is that, in the first man tries to represent something that is outside of himself; in the second he tries to represent something that is inside himself.[25]

Volume no. 2, of *Camera Work,* in 1903, was dedicated to Edward Steichen and displayed many of his prints. A reproduction of Stieglitz's photograph "The Flat-Iron" was also included. The editorial staff commented, "If such a subject were treated with any regard to detail, it would be pictorially meaningless, but treated as a mass in relation to its surroundings it presents an endless number of pictorial possibilities."[26] Essayist Sidney Allan explained the Secession's dislike of exact representation in photography writing: "the love for exactitude is the lowest form of pictorial gratification."[27] Steichen assisted Stieglitz in opening a little gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue where the two would display small exhibits of photography. Steichen said to Stieglitz: "Along with our art-in-

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[25] Peninal R. Petruck, Marius de Zayas, ed., "Photography and Artistic Photography,*" The Camera Viewed Writing on Twentieth-Century Photography* 1913, reprinted in *Camera Work* no. 42/43, 1913.

[26] *Camera Work*, no. 2., 23.

[27] *Camera Work*, no. 2., 18.

photography photographs, why not show the anti-photographic in art?"[28] What began as "The Little Gallery for the Photo Secessionists," became a major conduit for new modern art. Edward Abrahams, author of *The Lyrical Left* stated, "Stieglitz urged American modernists to adopt the photographer's struggle, to seize salient forms from objective reality."[29] The initial show at '291,' as it came to be known, was of members' photography. In 1906 Stieglitz held three different shows devoted to British photography, French photography, and a one-man show of Steichen's work. In January of 1907, he introduced his first show of artwork by Pamela Colman Smith. Smith, well known today for illustrations of the Waite Smith Tarot cards, was heavily influenced by musicality. An example of her painting style shown here, *Second Series Sonata in F Major for Violin and Piano, Mozart*, displays a landscape in the background painted in light color wash with the feeling of the Japanese *ukiyo-e*.[30]

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[28] MacKinley Helm, *John Marin: A Portrait* (New York: Pelligrini & Cuddahy: 1948), 16.

[29] Edward Abrahams, *The Lyrical Left: Randolph Bourne, Alfred Stieglitz and the Origins of Cultural Radicalism in America* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1988), 12.

[30] Pamela Colman Smith was also a book illustrator and her etchings are of an art nouveau style. She came into '291' wanting Stieglitz to critique her etchings and he thought her work would be a foil to his previous, exclusively photographic exhibits.

Image 17. Pamela Colman Smith, *Second Series Sonata in F Major for Violin and Piano, Mozart*, watercolor, 1907, 31x25 cm. Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O'Keeffe Archive, Yale University Library.

A conflict arose regarding whether the '291' mission should be just about photography. Both Caffin and Steichen supported the concept of representing art and photography. Steichen would write in *Camera Work*:

> The Secession idea is neither the servant nor the product of a medium. It is a spirit. Let us say it is the Spirit of the Lamp; the old and discolored, the too frequently despised, the too often disregarded lamp of honesty; honesty of aim, honesty of self-expression, honesty of revolt against the autocracy of convention. The Photo-Secession is not the keeper of the Lamp but lights it when it may; and when these pictures of Miss Smith's, conceived in this spirit and no other, came to us, we but tended the Lamp in tendering them hospitality.[31]

By 1908, Stieglitz was curating art shows at '291' on a regular basis. Stieglitz saw photography as having an important role in liberating artists' experimentation with

[31] *Camera Work* no. 18 (April 1907), 37. quoted in William I. Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant Garde* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977), 42.

modernism. His long-time assistant, Dorothy Norman, stated: "He believed that creative photography was rapidly releasing painters and sculptors from concern with the merely realistic or representational as previously understood. With uncanny alacrity, he called modern art, anti-photography." Nevertheless, she also states, ironically, that Stieglitz didn't always understand what he was showing. [32]

The following list details his representation of European artists.[33]

January 2-21, 1908	Drawings: Auguste Rodin
April 6-27, 1908	Etchings: Henri Matisse
May 18-June 2, 1909	Japanese Prints including Katsushika Hokusai
December 20, 1909-January 14, 1910	Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
March 1-25, 1911	Watercolors, Paul Cezanne
March 14-April 6, 1912	Sculpture, Henri Matisse

The exhibition of John Marin and Alfred Maurer's work took place March 30-April 17, 1909, beginning a relationship between Stieglitz and Marin that lasted more than forty years with Stieglitz as mentor, publicist and "surreptitious" dealer. The term dealer had a pejorative connotation of "salesman" to Stieglitz. He saw himself as much more than that and abhorred crass materialism. In a letter to Duncan Phillips, Stieglitz wrote: "I am a bit amused that you class me amongst the dealers! I have to bear it. I often wish I could be a dealer – but dealing in human souls is just a bit beyond – or above – my makeup."[34]

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[32] Norman, 61.

[33] This information comes from the appendix of Dorothy Norman's book, 200-203.

[34]Letter, Alfred Stieglitz to Duncan Phillips December 8, 1926. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

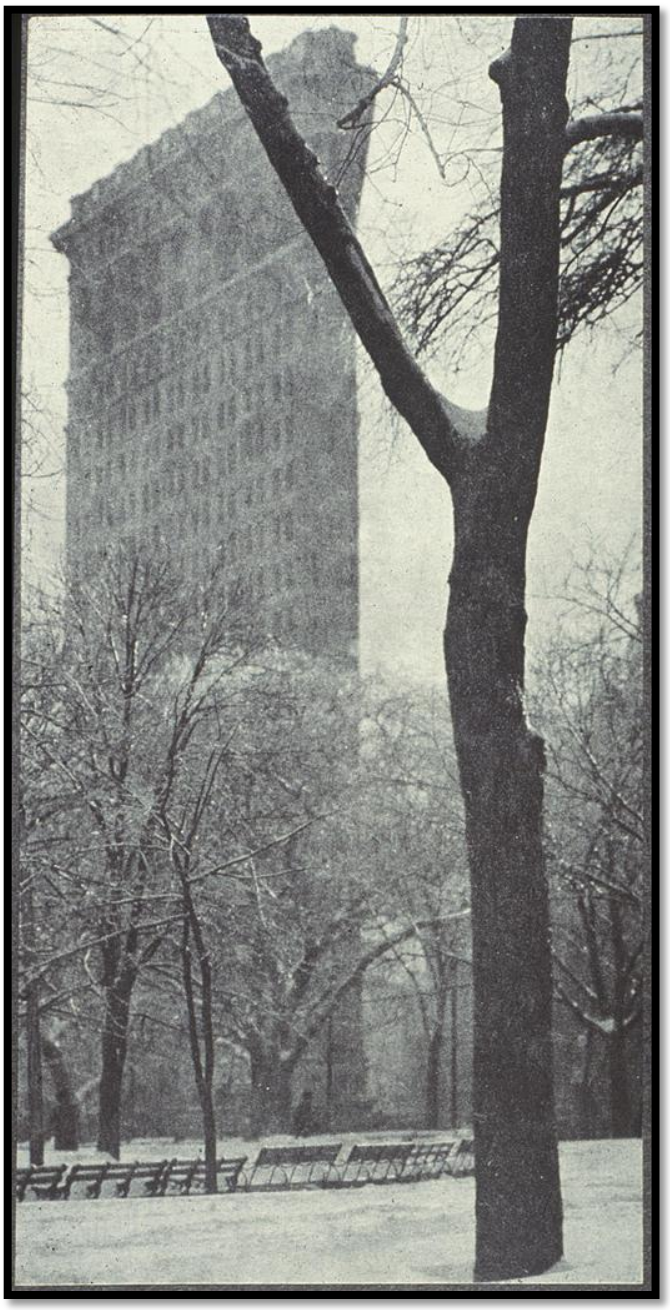

Image 18. Alfred Stieglitz, *The Flat-Iron* 1903, photogravure, printed 1909, 32.8x16.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Marin's relationship with Stieglitz came with costs, with Stieglitz playing a Svengali-like role. Marin became one of the inner stable of artists at '291.' His father was skeptical of Stieglitz's guidance. He urged his son to continue in the style he had perfected in Paris because that was what his dealer, Albert Rouillier of Chicago, was selling successfully.[35] He expressed concern about how his son could support his family if he abandoned his etchings and painted in the style that Stieglitz encouraged, and he suggested to Stieglitz that his son continue to pursue both styles: paint conservatively in the morning, and experimentally in the afternoon. Stieglitz told Marin to disregard dealers and wrote in an outspoken fashion to Marin's father: "Mr. Marin [should] ask his new wife whether a woman could be a prostitute in the morning and a virgin in the afternoon."[36]

In Paris, Edward Steichen sensed the momentous change happening in the art world. He frequented the Steins' salon at 27, rue Fleurus. and wrote to Stieglitz:

> One is conscious of unrest and seeking – a weird world hunger for something we evidently haven't got and don't understand…[I] have a vague feeling of knowing it and yet it looses [sic] itself in its vagueness. Something is being born or is going to be.[37]

The Steins' salon was a similar counterpart to '291.' The Steins were early promoters of Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso and other members of the avant-garde, and the walls of their living room were covered floor to ceiling with paintings by Francis Picabia,

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[35] Barbara Rose, *John Marin the 291 Years* (New York: Richard York Gallery, 1998). Roullier also had a profitable business in Whistler prints.

[36] Fine, 46.

[37] Abrahams,10.

Matisse, and Picasso. Leo and Gertrude were the children of German Jews who had immigrated to the United States. Raised in California, they were the youngest of five children. As brother and sister they were eccentric, intellectual and extraordinarily close. After studying at Harvard and Radcliffe, and after the death of their parents, Leo and Gertrude moved to Paris to join their brother, Michael. They drew from their monthly trust fund stipend and began to purchase art by new artists. Leo and Gertrude visited the 1905 *Salon d'Automne* and were enamored with Henri Matisse's *Woman With a Hat.*[38] The traditional art world in Paris was horrified with the many new artists at the exhibition. Matisse's painting was a picture of Madame Matisse wearing a hat, but the colors did not make sense to many because they were not representational. The woman had unnaturally red hair and wore an unusual hat of many colors. It was hard to decipher the exact color of her dress: part green, part orange, and part yellow. When Matisse was asked what color the dress was, he allegedly responded, "Black, obviously."[39] Gertrude *got* it.

The painting drew laughter from many of the visitors, but the Steins bought it, pursuing their ever expanding passion for modern art. Gertrude, Leo, and her older brother Michael, became promoters of Matisse. Word got around that it was imperative to go to 27, rue Fleurus to learn about the avant-garde.

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[38] Mellow, 79.

[39] T. J. Clark, "Madame Matisse's Hat" *London Review of Books*, vol. 30 no. 16, 14 Aug 2008. http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n16/tj-clark/madame-matisses-hat.

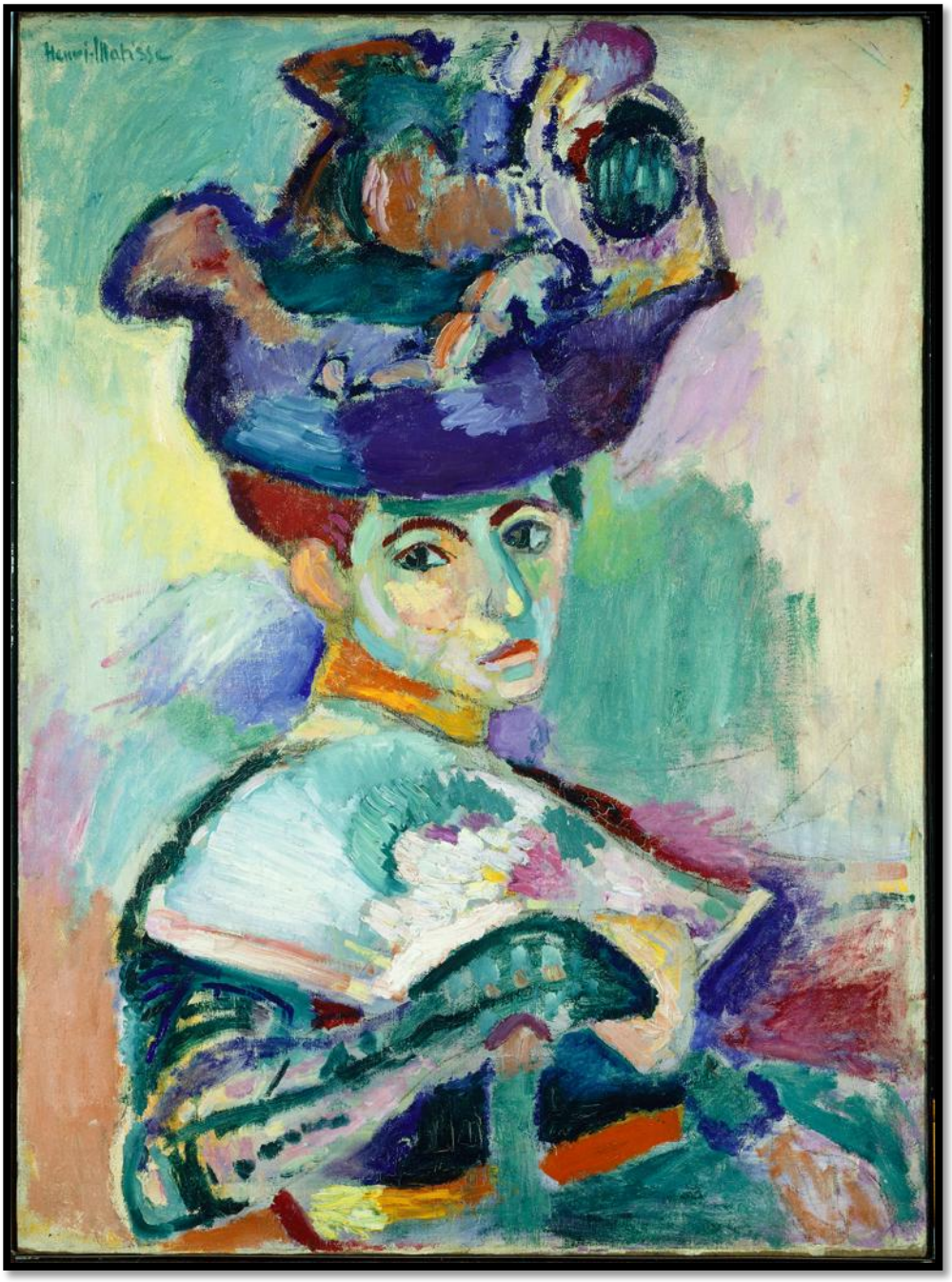

Image 19. Henri Matisse, *Woman with a Hat*, oil on canvas, 30.48 x 22.86 cm. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Leo Stein, like Stieglitz at' 291', welcomed visitors and pontificated for hours. There was a charismatic magnetism to him, and people kept coming back for more education. Agnes Ernst Meyer, a recent graduate of Barnard College and a reporter for *The New York Sun,* recounts her first impression of 27, rue Fleurus when she travelled to Paris, and of the similar role that Leo Stein and Alfred Stieglitz played.

> Most of the visitors to the Stein apartment in 1909 paid little attention to Gertrude. The center of the attraction was Leo's brilliant conversation on modern French art and the remarkable collection mostly of contemporary paintings that he made at little cost with the aid of his independent and exacting judgment.[40]

Stieglitz and the Steins had fortuitous insight of what was to come, and they avidly tried to hasten its arrival. One must not forget, however, that the true credit for the paintings lay with the artists.

John Marin wrote that he had not been a part of the salon scene in Paris; that he did not attend the Steins' salons and that he kept to himself, painting, playing billiards and frequenting *Le Dôme* in Montparnasse. He expressed resentment toward the French artists and called them, "cleverly press-agented Frenchmen."[41] This is surprising, as artistically it was a fervent time. Just two years prior to Marin's arrival in Paris, American expatriate, James McNeil Whistler, had passed away. Retrospectives of Whistler's work were held in Paris and London, as he had resided in both cities. One would expect Marin to have been aware of Whistler. Marin also exhibited in the 1908

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[40] Agnes E. Meyer, *Out of These Roots, the Autobiography of an American Woman* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1953), 81.

[41] Benson, 19.

Salon d'Automne, where thirty paintings of Henri Matisse were featured. It would therefore seem unlikely that he was unfamiliar with the avant-garde in Paris. Ruth E. Fine, curator of modern prints and drawings at The National Gallery of Art, believes that Marin deliberately fostered a feigned attitude of "naïveté."[42] Fine writes,

> Marin's view of contemporaneous studies regarding the role of the unconscious is difficult to pinpoint. His naive persona obviously masked a keen intelligence and vast knowledge; and he would undoubtedly have been aware of writings by Sigmund Freud and others on creativity and the unconscious. The unconscious was referred to by various reviewers of Marin's art, including Paul Rosenfeld: 'The unconscious mind has selected for Marin his medium. . . . He applies his wash with the directness of impulse that is supposed to be discoverable only in the work of small children. . .[43]

It is unquestionable that Marin was an individualist. His introversion reflected his Yankee sensibility. He was able to vary his painting style, at times appropriating a Cubist influence, at times Futurist.[44] Undoubtedly he visited the shows that Stieglitz curated at '291' of Cézanne's watercolors in 1911, and Matisse's sculpture in 1912. Perhaps Marin's plea of ignorance was the way in which he gave Alfred Stieglitz, his lifelong patron, credit for discovery of him as an artist. Some critics argue that Marin was too malleable, that a man with a persona as strong as Stieglitz's could only get along with people who allowed themselves to be manipulated.

In his Ph.D. dissertation: *Making the American Artist, John Marin, Alfred Stieglitz and their Critics: 1909-1936*, Timothy R. Rodgers argues that Stieglitz had an inordinate

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[42] Fine, 76.

[43] Ibid., 105.

[44] An analysis of Marin's style is forthcoming in Chapter 4.

influence upon Marin's painting style.[45] Rodgers states that Marin's paintings changed stylistically in a drastic way once he cemented his relationship with Stieglitz. He contends that Marin's paintings from Paris, prior to his "discovery," were of popular tourist destinations and were purchased by travelers. As a struggling artist in Paris, it makes sense that this kind of painting would be Marin's temporary means of support. The etchings, however, were more than mere tourist memorabilia, and some of these early etchings have been compared to those of Whistler. Were these "tourist destinations" the full extent of Marin's work, it is doubtful that he would have been included in the *Salon d'Automne*. Many believe that Cézanne must have influenced Marin's style during his time in Paris. In talking to Benson for his book, Marin insisted that he met Cézanne for the first time at the '291' Gallery, which would have been in 1911.[46] Benson corroborates this, calling Cézanne and Marin, "as different as a poet and a scientist."[47] Larry Curry of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art also supports Marin's individuality and that his style was not derivative. He writes that before Marin had even gone to Paris or heard of the *Fauves*, his Weehawken Series of 1903 resembled their brushstrokes and colors.[48] Marin, too, downplayed any influence of modern French artists, during his four years in Paris, writing:

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[45] Timothy R. Rodgers, *Making the American Artist: John Marin, Alfred Stieglitz and their Critics* (PhD Diss., Brown University, 1994), 26.

[46] Norman, 202.

[47] Benson,19.

[48] Larry Curry, ed. *Eight American Masters of Watercolor* (New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Frederick A. Praeger, 1968).

> When I was growing up I knew nothing of such men as Degas, Renoir, Lautrec, Delacroix or Forain. Even later-during the period before Stieglitz first exhibited my paintings—when I was still in Europe—I was not aware of seeing the work of even such men as Picasso, Cezanne or Van Gogh in Paris—or any of the other so-called moderns.[49]

Marin's opus stands on its own. Once American artists began living and experimenting in Paris, a confluence of stimuli occurred, each pushing styles a bit further. The impact of these influences could ripple outward in many directions and could include everything from unconscious assimilation to wholesale appropriation, as well as rejection. It seems a nonsensical argument to be challenging who might have influenced Marin. Ideas and styles are often appropriated or derivative of others to no avail. Pablo Picasso and George Braque were influenced by Cézanne's use of geometric figures as well as by African masks. Artist Peppino Mangravite wrote in 1935: "In the mechanics of art, no tariff exists."[50] There is no doubt that Marin was indebted to Stieglitz, and rightly so. Marin expressed what '291' meant to him in a poem published in *Camera Work*.

"What is 291?"
I know a place
where reason halts
in season and out of season
where something takes the place
in place of reason
a spirit there hovers roundabout
a something felt by those who feel it
here together and to those who come
a place of comfort

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[49] Dorothy Norman, *The Selected Writings of John Marin,* edited with an introduction by Dorothy Norman (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1949), viii.

[50] Peppino Mangravite, "The American Painter and His Environment", *The American Magazine of Art*, vol. 28 No. 4 (April 1935), 202.

a place electric a place alive
a place magnetic
since it started it existed
for those sincere; those thirsty ones
to live their lives
to do their do
who feel they have
yet cannot show.
The place is guarded,
well-guarded it
by He—who jealously guards
its innocence, purity, sincerity
subtly guarded it
so that—it seems—not guarded at all
no tyrant he—yet tyrant of tyranny
so shout—we who have felt it
we who are of it
its past—its future
this place
what place?
Oh Hell 291[51]

Stieglitz saw his role as a socialist advocating for the public. It is not surprising that he saw himself as "an adoption agency," opening up new generations of people to the new modern art, introducing Fauvism to America, defying conventions, employing the dialectic and always asking, "Why?"[52] He wrote again to Duncan Phillips:

> I have a passion for America and I feel, and have always felt, that if I couldn't believe in the worker in this country, not in the imitator of what is European, but in the originator, in the American himself digging from within, pictures for me would have no significance.[53]

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[51] John Marin, "What is 291?" *Camera Work,* no. 47., July 1914.

[52] Whelan, 265.

[53] Alfred Stieglitz to Duncan Phillips, Letter, February 1, 1926, Phillips Collection Library

Journalist and anarchist Hutchins Hapgood also wrote of the alliance between art and the social climate of the country:

> We are living at a most interesting moment in the art development of America. Yesterday I went to three art exhibitions . . . all of which are in line with what is vaguely called Post-Impressionism. The exhibitions I saw . . . at 291, were those of Jo Davidson, sculptor . . . Alfred Maurer, painting . . . and of John Marin. Whether in literature, plastic art, the labor movement, science, journalism, philosophy . . . we find a common quality – we find an instinct to loosen up the old forms and traditions to dynamite the baked and hardened earth so that fresh flowers can grow.[54]

Stieglitz provided a fertile ground for experimentation. Within his domain at '291,' he was in his glory. People would come to visit and be captivated by his explanations and provocative statements. Waldo Frank wrote:

> The door was always open. Perhaps Stieglitz was not in. '291' is a religious fact: like all such, a miracle. It is an altar where talk was often loud, heads never bared, but where no lie and no compromise could live."[55]

In an oral interview with William McNaught, on May 31, 1979, and conducted at the artist's home in East Hampton, New York, Dorothy Norman, long-time assistant to Alfred Stieglitz, recounts when, at age seventeen, she first met Stieglitz.[56] Norman had just moved to New York City from Merion, Pennsylvania, where she had been working at The Barnes Foundation. Dr. Albert Barnes, together with Hermann Hille, had developed and patented a chemical compound, *Argyrol*, and in 1908 founded the A C. Barnes

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[54] *Camera Work*, nos. 42-43 (April-July 1913), 43-44.

[55] Whelan, 260.

[56] Oral history interview with Dorothy Norman, May 31-June, 1, 1979 Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, quoted in Norman, 1-4.

Company. Argyrol became a precursor to antibiotics and could be found in many households to combat sore throats and flu symptoms. Drops of it were placed in newborn babies eyes to prevent infection. Barnes soon became a multimillionaire and was advised by his childhood friend, artist William Glackens, to invest in modern art. He made annual trips to Paris to purchase art and amassed a collection of Renoirs, Cézannes, and Matisses to rival any museum. In conjunction with educator and philosopher, John Dewey, he created a foundation for the education of American art students.[57] Norman worked in this creative milieu.

Upon moving to New York, Norman was distressed to find no similar facility dedicated to the pursuit of the new European art. She saw an advertisement for *The Intimate Gallery* in the back of a magazine, and went for a visit.[58] A one-man show of Marin's work was on display and she was intrigued. She had never heard of Marin and thought his name sounded French. Perhaps he was one of the new French artists. In a corner, Stieglitz lectured a group of visitors.

In a traditional gallery, if a representative senses a customer's interest, he or she is intent upon selling paintings. But Norman was unable to get Stieglitz's attention and left. On her next visit she found Stieglitz in the same place, engaged in a didactic with visitors about modern art. Marin's work was no longer displayed, but there were stacks of paintings leaning against the wall. She peered behind a stack of paintings to see if any

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[57] This information was learned from a docent tour at The new Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, February 13, 2016.

[58] After "291" closed in 1917, Alfred Stieglitz opened The Intimate Gallery to replace it.

Marins remained. Stieglitz shouted out, "Do not touch the paintings." Norman was embarrassed and left again. It wasn't until her third visit to the gallery that she gained Stieglitz's attention. He was telling a crowd that the viewer cannot be told what a painting means, he must determine it for himself by the way it makes him feel. "Do you ask what rain means . . . or the wind? Do you ask what a thunderstorm means? You might as well ask what life itself means." So began a lifelong relationship with Norman as Stieglitz's assistant.[59]

Agnes Ernst Meyer also recounted "the artistic aridity" in New York in 1909 and the first time she met Alfred Stieglitz whom she called "a truly co-operative genius."[60] She tells of some of the personalities who could be found at '291,'among them anarchist, Emma Goldman, journalist, Hutchins Hapgood, and poet, Carl Sandburg. She describes her first venture into the space:

> My zeal to discover curious people who would make good copy led me to explore a new gallery where photographs were considered art, a revolutionary thought in those days. I remember walking into a little attic room on the top floor of 291 Fifth Avenue, the door of which was marked PHOTO SECESSION. A slightly built man, with beetled eyebrows, named Stieglitz, introduced me to another young chap named Steichen. Though I was supposed to do a number of other things that day, I forgot all about them and spent six hours, from 11 am to 5 pm, discussing the future of photography versus painting with these ardent young rebels. Thereafter if life seemed too dull or too discouraging, I would repair to '291' as this famous institution was later called, and refresh my spirits with discussion of the battle that Steichen and Stieglitz had begun to wage against the academic smugness then prevalent in the American world of art.[61]

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[59] McNaught Interview, quoted in Norman, 3.

[60] Meyer, 101.

[61] Ibid., 67.

Another would call Stieglitz, "a midwife who brings out new ideas to the world."[62] His methodology did not appeal to everyone. Poet William Carlos Williams called him, "Someone who wanted to be God and in his . . . little hole of an office building he was God."[63]

Stieglitz was a pioneer in bringing French modernism to America. His frustration with the technological advances to photography that enabled anyone to go out into the field and take pictures forced him to reevaluate art. According to Stieglitz's thinking, nothing was more realist than a photograph, and this led him more and more toward an appreciation of abstraction. Ever since Edward Steichen had encouraged him to show art as well as photography at '291,' Stieglitz had been "throwing a wrench into what people recognized as art," as Arthur Dove, one of the artists in the Stieglitz circle wrote.[64] Just as Louis Sullivan can be called the father of the American skyscraper, Alfred Stieglitz can be called the father of American modern art. Artists respected his self-appointed role, and Marcel Duchamp said after Stieglitz's death:

> He was not a collector, but a teacher – a great man, with great judgment. A force. He abandoned the worldly conception of art. He helped American artists more than anyone else. He was primarily a humanist. He was not interested in aesthetic problems. He believed

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[62] Whelan, 261.

[63] Timothy Robert Rodgers, "Making the American Artist: John Marin, Alfred Stieglitz and the Their Critics. 1909-1936" (PhD. diss., Brown University, 1994), 35.

[64] Arthur Dove, "A Different One," *America and Alfred Stieglitz* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1934), 243.

passionately that America should have its own artists. He felt his influence could force the issue.[65]

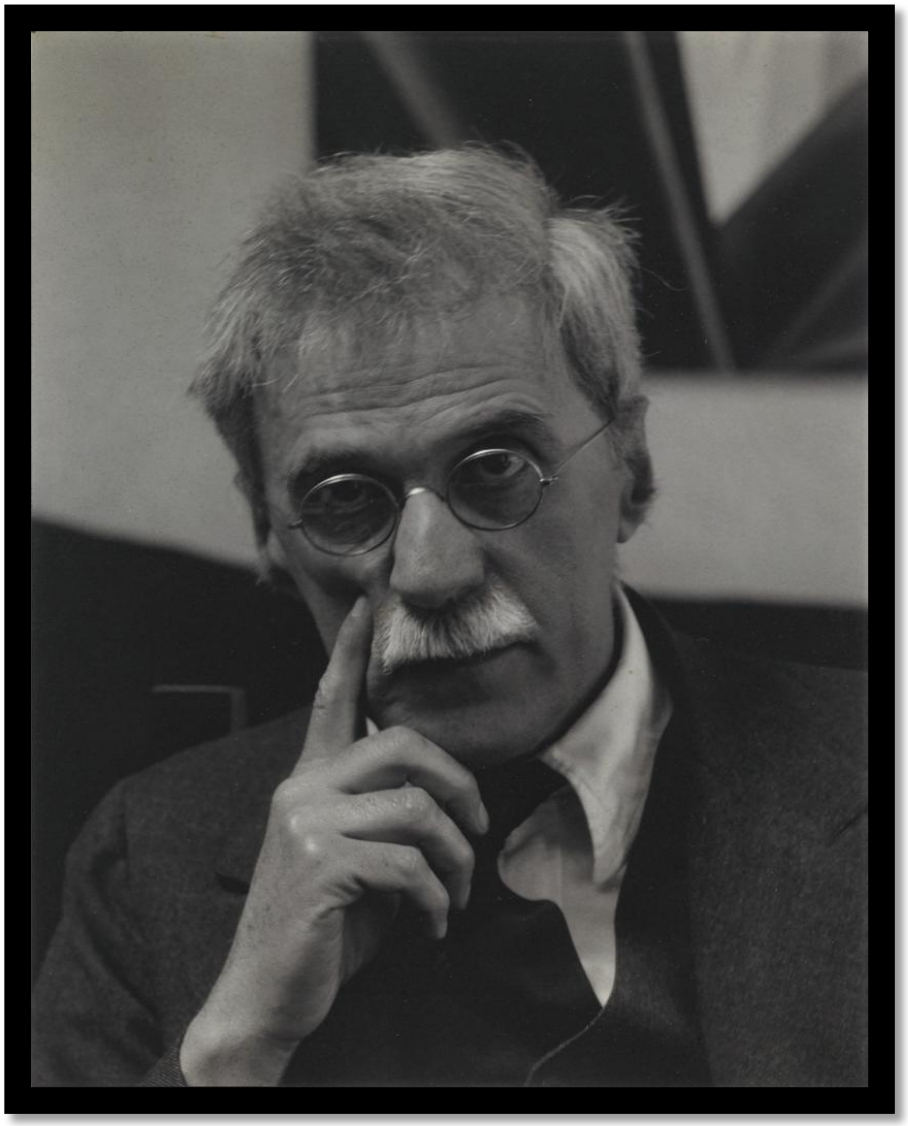

Image 20. Edward Steichen, *Alfred Stieglitz*, 1915, platinum print, 28.8 x 24 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

[65] Norman, 108. From a conversation with Duchamp after Alfred Stieglitz' death.

Chapter 4

How the Woolworth Building Arrived at the Armory Show

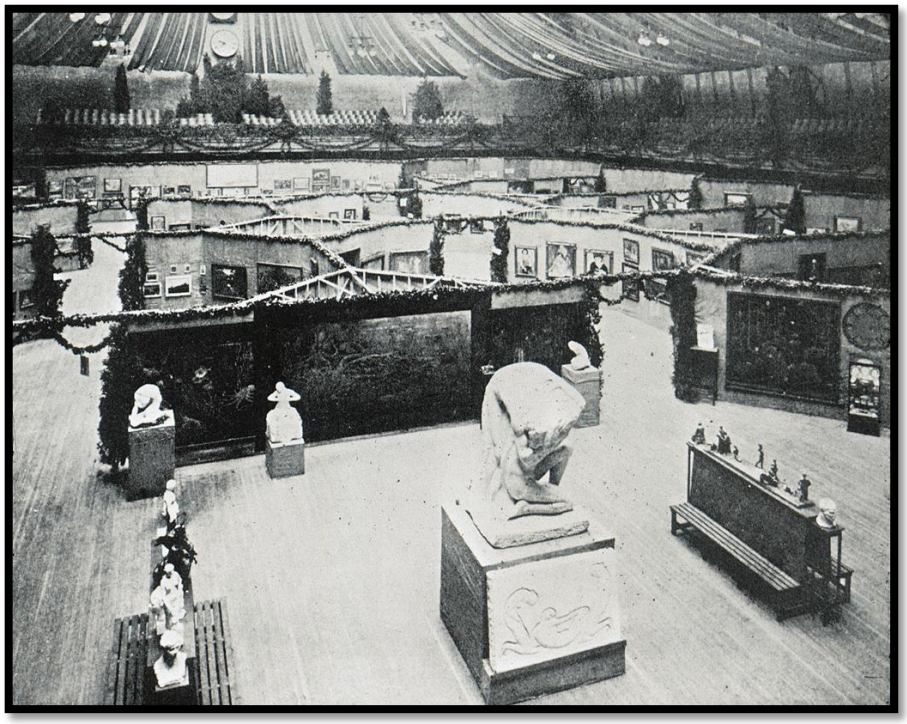

Image 21. The 1913 Armory Show, Wikimedia Commons.

Alfred Stieglitz was a crusader, intent on awakening the public to new ideas in art. After his 1907 exhibition of drawings by Pamela Colman Smith, in 1908 he showcased drawings by Auguste Rodin, watercolors and etchings by Henri Matisse, lithographs by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and in 1911 he introduced New York to watercolors by Paul Cezanne.[1] His belief that photography should not just be mimetic of other art, and his belief in straight photography helped steer the path for America's preeminence in photography. By 1911, with the emerging skyscraper, Americans were unequaled in two

[1] Judith Katy Zilczer, "The Aesthetic Struggle in America 1913-1918: Abstract Art and Theory in the Stieglitz Circle." (PhD diss., University of Delaware,1975), Appendix A. 240-242.

of the arts, architecture and photography. Although Stieglitz spearheaded American exposure to European modernism, change was slow. The Little Galleries of the Photo Secession was a tiny gallery that only a select group of the public visited. Americans reacted to modern art in the same way they had reacted to skyscrapers at the beginning of the twentieth century: they were more comfortable with what they knew and could recognize in the arts. Americans could not understand the form, lines and multiple perspectives inherent in French Post-Impressionism. What pleased most Americans were beautiful and magical landscapes with a supernatural quality inspired by the Hudson River School; romanticized landscapes of the Barbizon School; or Impressionist portraits by artists like Childe Hassam or William Merritt Chase. Of these American Impressionists, poet August Kleinzhaler wrote:

> Theirs was a bright, blurry, Francophile Impressionism that turned New York into a garden scene peopled, sparsely, by the Upper Middle Class. Fifth Avenue became the Champs Elysees and Central Park the Tuilleries. None of these paintings reflected the density and abject poverty of the Lower East Side.[2]

But New York City's composition was much more than that. Milton Brown, historian of early American modernism and of the 1913 Armory Show, stated that Americans suffered from "artistic blindness," and that "American art was led by an array of technically proficient nonentities."[3] Cruel as the criticism sounds, it is reflective of the American xenophobic style at the beginning of the twentieth century. New Yorkers had

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[2] August Kleinzahler, "Dirty Realism," *The Threepenny Review* 69 (Spring, 1977) 28. www.jstor.org.

[3] Milton W. Brown, *American Painting: From the Armory Show to the Depression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 3.

had the opportunity to explore Impressionism: Three hundred Impressionist paintings by Edward Degas, Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir had been brought to New York as early as 1886 by dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, but again with little exposure.[4] Nevertheless change was in the air. In Chicago, the industrialization after the Great Fire in 1871 would influence a new social realism in literature, drawing attention to change. Poets Carl Sandburg and Edgar Lee Masters, and authors Theodore Dreiser and Upton Sinclair, drew upon real life events, whether in narrative or poetic form, and they raised attention to the social problems caused by industrialization. In New York City, muckrakers strove for social reform. It was only a matter of time before social responsibility would pervade the arts as well. Artist Robert Henri became a leader in the quest for Realism. He believed in the power of the arts to reform. Brown concurs with Henri's great importance saying, "aside from Stieglitz, there is no more important personality in 20th century American art."[5] But it was difficult for an artist to have his work publicized when it wasn't being showcased, let alone purchased. The tedious work of Henri and his disciples led to more democratic exposure of American art. Henri's efforts were seminal in the path leading to the 1913 Armory Show that increased American awareness of new European art, and propelled other galleries to begin to showcase more of both American and European modernism.

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[4] Eliza E. Rathbone, *Made in the USA American Art From the Phillips Collection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 4.

[5] Brown, *American Art,* 10.

The International Exhibition of Modern Art, held at the 69th Regiment Armory in New York from February 17th to March 16, 1913, was sponsored by the newly formed American Association of Painters and Sculptors. It would be the only exhibition they ever launched, as the organization disbanded shortly thereafter due to disagreements in ideology amongst its leaders.[6] It is hard to imagine how quickly an art show of such proportion came together; from the initial meeting of Elmer MacCrae, Henry Fitch Taylor, Walt Kuhn and Jerome Myers at the Madison Gallery at 305 Madison Avenue on December 11, 1911, to the exhibition fourteen months later. But in 1911, the artists' intent was to create a less exclusionary art society than the National Academy of Design, one more amenable to progressive artwork. Having the pedigree "NAD" after one's name increased one's sales; however, the Academy was ruthlessly exclusive. And it was not alone in its criticism of modernism. In his Doctoral Dissertation, Howard Risatti writes that artists were also fighting against the public's "academic" attitudes. This included the attitude of New York dealers and art galleries.[7] In hindsight, timing was ripe for an artistic battle, for four years later, with Europe embroiled in the Great War, the shipping and sharing of French modernist artwork would be out of the question, and the attitude of dealers towards European modernism would become irrelevant. To be free to be more stylistically creative, many American artists and writers had abandoned the United States

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[6] The celebratory opening of The Woolworth Building occurred one month later on April 24, 1913 when a telegram was sent to President Woodrow Wilson and he pressed a switch signaling the building's illumination.

[7] Howard Anthony Risatti, *American Critical Reaction to European Modernism 1908-17* (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1978), 71.

for the more liberating atmosphere of Europe. These included James Whistler, Mary Cassatt, and writers Henry James, and T. S. Eliot. For the artists and painters remaining on our continent, The American Association of Painters and Sculptors believed they could affect change. The initial seed that grew to become the International Exhibition of Modern Art was planted by Robert Henri. Henri had begun art school at The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts under the tutelage of Thomas Anshutz, shortly after Thomas Eakins had been removed as Director. Eakins had been a pioneer in promoting realism and had a reputation for challenging the complacency of late nineteenth century art. Eakins submitted his 1875 painting, *The Gross Clinic,* for display at the 1876 Centennial Celebration in Philadelphia.[8] The realist painting depicted an operating room where a number of surgeons, some with blood on their hands, cut open a patient. The Centennial Committee deemed the painting unworthy of being one of the more than one thousand paintings they accepted, and it was relegated to the medical section of the exhibit. Eakins had had medical training before becoming an artist and infamously liked to use cadavers as models in his anatomy class. He would cut them open to display how muscles interacted, resulting in blood on the studio floor while teaching that one should construct a figure from the inside out.[9] He countered school policy by using nude models and even had male and female naked models appear together. This

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[8] Bennard B. Perlman, *The Immortal Eight American Painting From Eakins to the Armory Show (1870-1913)* (New York, NY: Exposition Press, 1962), 28. The painting is named after physician Dr. Samuel Gross.

[9] Ibid., 46. Thomas Anshutz, who had been a student of Eakins, also taught students to build from the muscles out. This method was in contrast to what was being taught under William Bouguereau at the Academie Julien in Paris.

was at a time that Mrs. John Sloan, widow of the artist, and lifelong friend of Henri called, "an age of prudity not nudity."[10] In 1886, when it was discovered that women in Eakins' class took turns posing in the nude, he was forced to resign. Thomas Anshutz replaced him and continued in Eakins' tradition with his painting of unromanticized portraits of ironworkers. This realist change in subject matter, as opposed to Impressionist scenes of Sundays spent in the park, was the first step towards American Modernism.

Image 22. Thomas Eakins, *The Gross Clinic*, 1875, oil on canvas, 2 X 183 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

[10] Ibid., 31.

Image 23. Thomas Anshutz, *The Ironworkers' Noontime*, 1880, oil on canvas, 109.7 x 168 cm. Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco.

Robert Henri, too, had come from a lurid past. In 1872, taking advantage of the Homestead Act, his family, née Cozad, moved from Ohio to Nebraska. This was four years before Little Bighorn, and the West was a wild and dangerous place. The Cozads purchased land from the railroad and gave their family name to the town where they settled. Henri's father and brother found themselves in various scuttles with the law over land rights. Ten years later, when a neighboring cattleman attempted a fight in the Cozads' General Store, Henri's father pulled out a gun, shooting the man in the head. The town rallied against Cozad and issued a warrant for his arrest. Cozad and his family quickly left town, and eventually settled in Atlantic City, New Jersey where Henri was

raised. The family assumed new names; Robert Henry Cozad became Robert Henri, and he and his brother were presented as adopted sons. [11]

Perhaps because of his rigorous former life or his encouragement from Thomas Anshutz, Henri stressed realism. He was quoted as saying, "all art that is worthwhile is a record of intense life."[12] Like the other artists who became known as "The Eight," Henri worked as a newspaper illustrator, rendering life incidents in sketches before photography was used in daily publications.[13] In the 1880s dailies relied upon artistic representations to accompany their articles. Artists were fortunate that vocations existed as illustrators for the numerous daily newspapers and magazines. But the illustrators' vocations were short lived. Beginning in November of 1889, *Harper's* published the first photograph in a magazine.[14] Years later this would lead to a rivalry with the Photo Secessionists with their realistic "straight photography," as the artists felt that photography had led to the demise of their jobs.

In 1893, dissatisfied with what he believed was the antiquated ideology of The Pennsylvania Academy, Henri followed Thomas Eakins' path and, with his lifelong

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[11] This story is told by Perlman in Chapter 2 of *The Immortal Eight.* The name Henri is pronounced "Hen-rye."

[12] Brown, *American Painting,* 11.

[13] In Philadelphia the group of newspapers illustrators included William Glackens, George Luks and Everett Shinn. Future members of "The Eight," artist George Luks worked for the *New York World*, and William Glackens for *McClure's* and *The Saturday Evening Post.*

[14] Perlman, 72.

friend John Sloan, began a series of salons which they named The Charcoal Club.[15] Henri was a natural teacher and loved to give talks, expounding upon Whitman's theme of the common man and Leo Tolstoy's "What Is Art?" saying, ". . . A work of art was not the record of beauty already existent elsewhere, but the expression of an emotion felt by the artist and conveyed to the spectator."[16] By 1903, he and many of the other Philadelphia illustrators had moved to New York. Henri began teaching at The New York School of Art, founded eight years earlier by William Merritt Chase, whose style, sensibility and ideology were very different from his.[17] Chase's portraits and landscapes were delicate and detail oriented with deference to available light. Henri, on the other hand, taught students to impress a mood upon viewers, and some of his paintings are dark. In instructing students on how to paint a portrait of his or her mother, Henri would ask them what was more important, photographic detail or relaying the essence of the person; that is to say, what one should remember about them.[18] He would say: "Stop studying water pitchers and bananas and paint everyday life."[19] Henri taught art with references to the masters: Dutch master, Rembrandt and Spanish romanticist, Francisco Goya, but also with references to Thomas Eakins. When discussing the role of a model Henri told his class:

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[15] Ibid., 57.

[16] Ibid., 63.

[17] Ibid., 114.

[18] Ibid., 116.

[19] Ibid., 120.

> The model will serve equally for a Rembrandt drawing or for anybody's magazine cover. A genius is one who can see. The others can often "draw" remarkably well. Their kind of drawing, however, is not very difficult. They can change about. They can make their sight fit the easiest way for their drawing. As their seeing is not particular it does not matter. With the seer it is different. Nothing will do but the most precise statement. He must not only bend technique to his will, but he must invent technique that will especially fit his need. He is not one who floats affably in his culture, He is the blazer of the road for what he has to bring.[20]

Philosophically "the presiding voice [of Henri] was that of Whitman, still alive across the river in Camden, a friend of Eakins, and an old newspaperman like the two of them."[21] Together with Henri's former Philadelphia contingent, the group became known as *The New York Realists*. Their paintings were often depictions of tenement life on the Lower East Side. Henri encouraged painting life, not just patrician society. He believed art was meant to be more than something aesthetically pleasing to hang on the wall, and New York was a divided city. In 1905 when George Luks painted *Hester Street,* the density of people on the Lower East Side was 1,100 persons per acre; far more than in any other area of the city.[22]

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[20] Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1930), 83.

[21] August Kleinzahler, "Dirty Realism." *The Threepenny Review* 69 (Spring 1977), http://www.jstor.org.

[22] Ibid.

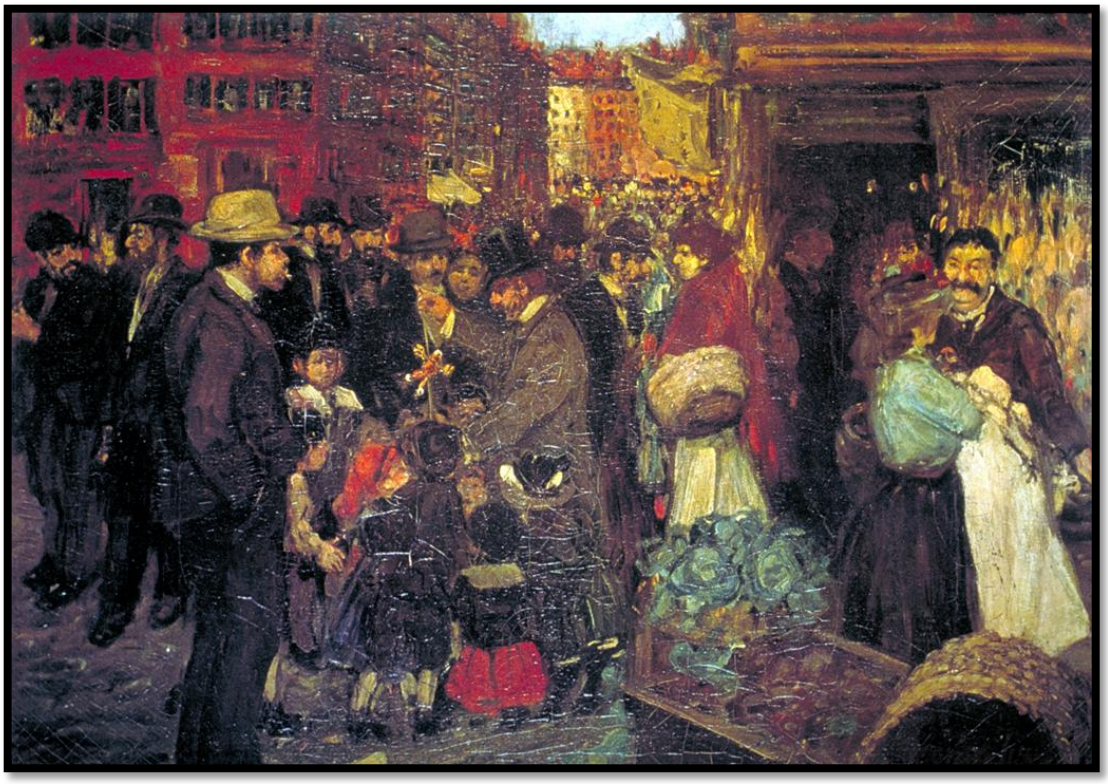

Image 24. George Luks, *Hester Street,* 1905, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 89 cm. Brooklyn Museum of Art.

In 1888,Walt Whitman's modernist poem celebrating New York, *Mannahatta* appeared in *The New York Herald*. The poem spoke optimistically of the city:

> A million people—manners free and superb—open
> Voices—hospitality—the most courageous and
> Friendly young men,
> City of hurried and sparkling waters! City of spires and
> Masts!
> City nested in bays! My city![23]

For the myriad immigrants arriving daily in New York harbor, the city, not the prairie was their new destination. New York City represented their hopes and dreams. Arriving

[23]Walt Whitman, "Mannahatta." In *Leaves of Grass* (New York: New American Library), 364.

by steamship and looking at the city from the harbor must have been like looking at Frank Baum's *City of Oz*. Jews came from Russian and Polish shtetls, skilled in sewing and looking to find piecework in the clothing industry. Rather than board a train at Castle Garden for the frontier, Italian and Scandinavians, knowledgeable in tile work, hoped for work in the construction of buildings, railways or bridges.[24] Building was booming. Steel had taken the place of the plow.[25] Between 1890 and 1910, the country's population rose from 62.9 to 92 million inhabitants.[26] In 1907 alone, 1.28 million immigrants arrived in New York.[27] Once they arrived however, the fairyland was tainted with the reality of life in the newly urbanized, industrial nation. As a newspaper reporter, Henri recognized this as did social activist Jacob Riis. Riis was police reporter for *The New York Tribune,* and began his "battle with the slums," as an exposé in the newspaper on January 25, 1888.[28] Riis had been exposed to abject poverty when he emigrated from Denmark to Castle Garden in 1870, trying a number of jobs before landing a job on a newspaper in Brooklyn. This early experience gave him the perspective of both sides: that of an impoverished immigrant and that of a civic reformer. His exposé appeared in *The New*

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[24] Prior to construction of Ellis Island, Castle Garden at Battery Park was the Immigration Processing Center.

[25] *Twentieth Century Turning Points in U.S. History 1900-1907.* Produced by William V. Ambrose. Ambrose Video Publishing, 2004.

[26] Patricia Hills, *Turn-of-the-Century America: Paintings, Graphics, Photographs 1890-1910* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1977), 9.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Jacob A. Riis, and David Leviatin. *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's, 1996), 3.

York Sun and *The New York Morning Journal.* But he also gave lectures at churches, and his book, *How the Other Half Lives,* was published in 1890.

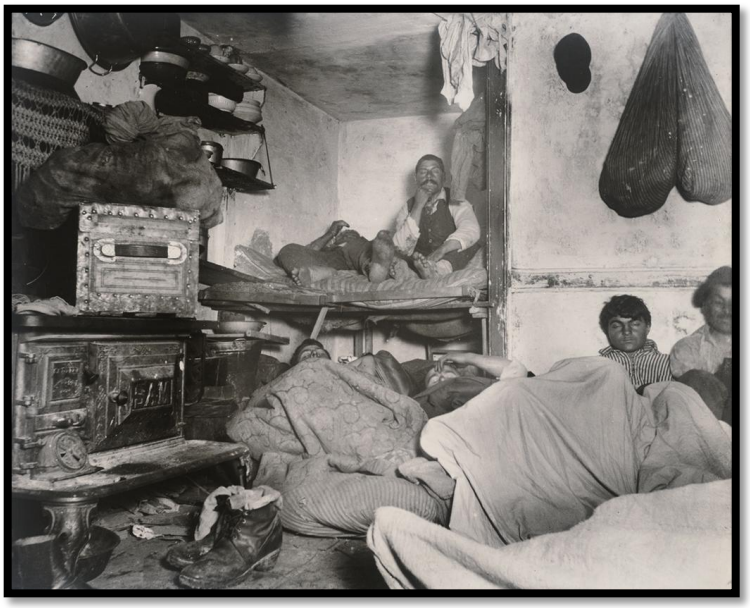

Image 25**,** Jacob Riis, *Five Cents a Spot***,** Residents in a crowded Bayard Street tenement, 1889, gelatin print, 20 x 23 cm., San Francisco Museum of Art.

The city depended on the immigrant class for labor, and landlords realized that money could be made from partitioning tenant houses into smaller apartments. They were able to convert the floor of a tenement building into twelve apartments, each having one room exposed to light, and two rooms without windows. Within this configuration would be twelve living rooms and twenty-one bedrooms, most without light. Each bedroom measured six and one-half by seven feet; the living room being ten by twelve feet.[29] Riis discovered one room, twelve foot square on Cedar Street, with five families living in it, totaling twenty persons.[30] It was a city divided in two, with the haves not interested in

[29] Riis, 66.

[30] Ibid., 65.

unfit housing conditions until the fear of a possible cholera epidemic became a reality. On one hand Social Darwinists argued that the immigrants were lazy and responsible for their own lifestyle. On the other, stood social reformers who believed the city and the public must get involved.[31] To show the discrepancy in lifestyles, *Harper's Weekly* published a montage of facts in its magazine stating: "J.P Morgan paid forty-two thousand dollars for the book *Le Morte d'Arthur*," while at the same time "Factory Girls subsist on five to seven dollars a week. "[32]

The sordid subject matter of life on the Lower East Side was not deemed a suitable subject of fine art by the exclusionary politics of The National Academy of Design. It countered traditionalism. In 1907, Henri was appointed to the jury of The National Academy to select entries for its Spring Exhibition. Fifteen hundred works had been submitted, and as each was brought forth to the jury, it became evident that the other members had no interest in the Realists' work. The following season, when the selection committee began reviewing paintings for its Fall show, Henri's painting, *Girl in Yellow Satin Dress,* was accepted, but none of the other Realists' submissions. Based upon the rejection of works by George Luks and Arthur Davies, Henri resigned. The path to the 1913 Armory Show had begun.

Henri and his colleagues began looking for a venue where they could exhibit their own works and decided on the Macbeth Gallery. Henri had had a one-man show at the

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[31] Ibid., 19.

[32] Jerry Korn, *This Fabulous Century* (Morristown, NJ: Time-Life Books, 1969), 27.

Macbeth in 1903, and the gallery was open to work by new artists. William Macbeth put together a list of outstanding artists who had been snubbed by the Academy Show. A date was set, and press releases were submitted to New York newspapers. Headlines on May 15, 1908 read, "Eight Artists Form Association in Opposition to The National Academy of Design." James Huneker of *The New York Sun* simply labeled them, "The Eight," and it stuck.[33] Because five of the eight had previously been newspapermen, the group was also referred to as "The Black Gang."[34] A member, wishing to remain anonymous, stated:

> We often are called "devotees of the ugly," well the trouble with a lot of artists so called, is that they draw an arbitrary line across God's works and say: In this half of His works He has been successful, but over here in the shadows and the misery of life, the seamy side. It's vulgar. Your portraits, for instance, must be only of the rich, and always see to it the lady is seated on a gold chair. Ever notice the gold chair in those pretty portraits? That's part of the formula.[35]

Publicity for the show was arranged in the press, and twenty-five hundred invitations were mailed. Artists among the eight included: Robert Henri, Ernest Lawson, Everett Shinn, Maurice Prendergast, George Luks, William Glackens, Arthur B. Davies, and John Sloan. When the show opened on Monday, February 3, 1908, three hundred people an hour waited to gain admission.[36] As one entered, Henri's painting, *Laughing Boy, (Jopie Van Slouten),* greeted the viewers. Was the painting making a social statement? Was the show about more than art? The Eight were a social movement as well

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[33] Perlman, 170.

[34] Ibid., 171.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 177.

as an artistic one. The art was revolutionary in its subject matter. Their style, however, still reflected realism.

The show was widely received and led to a second exhibition in 1910: The Exhibition of Independent Artists, held at 29 West 35th Street and organized by Robert Henri, Walter Kuhn, John Sloan and Arthur Davies. Five hundred artists previously rejected by juried shows of the Academy were exhibited. Concurrently, an exhibit of American Modern Artists: John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, Alfred Maurer and Max Weber was held at '291,' along with The National Academy of Design's Spring Show. The Exhibition of Independent Artists had no jury. Artists paid an admission fee depending upon how many works they submitted."[37] Henri discontinued the tradition of awarding prizes to artists, and works were hung alphabetically. Reporting on the Independents, artist Guy Pène du Bois wrote in *The American* that the exhibit would make art history in New York as the Salon des Refusés did in Paris. At the end of the Exhibition, Henri was quoted as saying:

> Freedom to think and to show what you are thinking about, that is what the exhibition stands for. . . . [A]s I see it there is only one reason for the development of art in America, and that is that the people of America learn the means of expressing themselves in their own time and in their own land. In this country, we have no need of art as a culture; no need of art for poetry's sake, or any of these things for their own sake. What we do need is art that expresses the spirit of the people of today . . . [38]

[37] As quoted in Perlman, 196.

[38] Ibid., 199-200.

Henri was the leader of The Independents Show. However, he would not be as involved in the upcoming Armory Show.

Image 26. Robert Henri, *The Laughing Boy (Jopie Van Slouten),* 1910, oil on canvas, 61 x 46 cm, Birmingham Museum of Art.

It was about this time that John Marin's style and subject matter began to change. He had returned from Paris where he had painted a series in which he experimented with abstraction, entitled *The Tyrol.*

When he returned to New York, he developed a fascination with the city, but it was different from the perspective of Henri. Marin wasn't painting portraits of down and out people. He had a fascination with skyscrapers, a subject that the Ashcan artists ignored. Marin's soft focus paintings of lower Manhattan, utilizing the light colors of the Impressionists, evoked a mood. His paintings began to show motion, implying

Image 27. John Marin, *Mountain, The Tyrol*, 1910, watercolor on paper, 46.3 x 39.3 cm. Mr. and Mrs. John Marin, Jr.

altercation, and that everything was not right with the world. Sheldon Reich believes that Stieglitz had an important influence on Marin in this regard because around the same time, Stieglitz began actively photographing pictures that captured the changes in New York, highlighting signs of industrialization within the city: *The City of Ambition, The City Across the River, Lower Manhattan,* and *The Hand of Man.*[39] Stieglitz's photographs and Marin's watercolors both comment philosophically on the future of New York, but in different ways. Marin often painted landscapes from the window at '291,' using the same vantage point as Stieglitz, and symbolically depicting the mood that the city exerted upon him.

Image 28. Alfred Stieglitz, *Lower Manhattan*, 1911, photogravure, 16 x 19 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

[39] Sheldon Reich, 46. See Stieglitz's photographs *The City of Ambition, Lower Manhattan, Old and New York,* all dated 1911 in Alfred Stieglitz, *Camera Work The Complete Photographs,* 431-34.

Marin's style, however, was the antithesis of what Stieglitz was capturing with the camera. Compare Marin's painting of Lower Manhattan, *From the Window of 291 Looking Down Fifth Avenue,* to Stieglitz's photograph*, Lower Manhattan,* both created in 1911. Each evokes the change going on in the city, but they accomplish it in different ways, comparable to the difference between direct and indirect characterization. Stieglitz's photograph was taken on a sunny day allowing great contrast. The water glistens as a tugboat bounds north in the Hudson River. Cumulus clouds float in the sky in contrast to seven images of exhaust emanating from skyscrapers, creating electricity to illuminate the buildings and power to run the elevators. Combustible steam can be seen from the tugboat. Stieglitz was showing that industrialization came with a cost. In contrast, Marin's watercolor alludes to the view down Fifth Avenue, minimally framed by the window at '291.' At the foot of Fifth Avenue, the iconic New York World Building is identifiable but all other buildings are abstractions. The painting is done on wet pre-soaked paper with colors running into each other, almost accidentally. Each rendition depicts the changing nature of Manhattan, but in different ways.

Image 29. John Marin, *From the Window at 291,* 1911, watercolor on paper, 40.6 x 33.3 cm, Museum of Modern Art.

Stieglitz's photograph, as well as a review of Marin's exhibition, appeared in *Camera Work* no. 36. A review by James Huneker of the *New York Sun*, comparing Marin's watercolors to the "new photography" was reprinted.[40]

> John Marin's color stains are still in the little Gallery of the Photo-Secession. Any one who thinks that this characteristic collection is like a chamber of horrors will be agreeably disappointed. Mr. Marin is an artist who knows how to spot paper so sincerely that the illusion of atmosphere, the illusion of a woman sitting, the illusion of a general reality, is evoked with nonessentials eliminated. If you can't understand

[40] Camera Work, no. 36 (1910-11): 47.

> his elliptical execution, take the trouble to study it. Order will soon reign where you fancied chaos; eventually you may discover that your own eyes were at fault, not the artist's. Marin has a supple talent, he makes short cuts in his statements, and while he is not as original as Max Weber, his color sense is richer, more harmonious. We fail to understand wherein is the enigma of his impressions. The lower end of the island, the harbor, the Singer Building, are admirably interpreted. Even Herr Baron von Stieglitz may admit that these swift colored views are as truthful as the "new photography," with its soft pedal vagueness and its mezzotint effects. [41]

The Armory Show's beginnings are documented by several organizers: Walt Kuhn wrote a pamphlet, *The Story of the Armory Show;* Walter Pach wrote a book, *Queer Thing, Painting*, and Guy Pène du Bois wrote *Artists Say the Silliest Things.* Each relays individual perspectives of how events ensued. It wasn't until 1958, in Cos Cob, Connecticut, when treasurer Elmer MacRae's papers were discovered, that the business dealings of the show were revealed. In 1963, when Milton Brown began working on the Armory Show's 50th anniversary celebration he also discovered that corresponding secretary, Walt Kuhn's correspondence had been posthumously donated by Kuhn's daughter to the Archives of American Art. This archival information gave a true view of what had transpired.[42] The 1988 edition of Milton W. Brown's book, *The Story of the Armory Show* reflects the important role that Walter Pach had held.

After the Independents Show, artists Robert Henri, Arthur Davies, Walt Kuhn and Walter Pach met to discuss initiating an even bigger show. Henri wanted many of the works shown to be that of his students. Walt Kuhn, who had editorial newspaper

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[41] James Huneker, Ibid.

[42] Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show.*

experience, wanted to take over the publicity for the show, but Henri objected. As a result, on December 14th, when the initial meeting of The Association of American Painters and Sculptors took place and officers were elected, Henri had not been included, and was not present.[43] At that meeting, the group's mission statement was created:

> [To organize] a society for the purpose of exhibiting the works of progressive and live painters, both American and foreign--favoring such works usually neglected by current shows and especially interesting and instructive to the public.[44]

J. Alden Weir was elected President, Walt Kuhn Secretary, and Elmer MacCrae Treasurer. At the second meeting on January 2, 1912, Henri was present. He discovered the results of the previous meeting and expressed that "it is too much of the old thing—judging others and not working to the opportunity for others to exhibit and judge themselves."[45] Disagreement occurred over how large the exhibit should be and whether it should include international works of art as well as American art. When the press began to write that the organization had been created in direct opposition to The National Academy, Weir objected and resigned, and Arthur B. Davies was elected President. Davies wanted a large exhibition to include examples of European modernism. In Walt Kuhn's letters to his wife, Vera, he admits his opposition to Henri from the very start:

> . . . [Of] course Henri and the rest will have to be let in but not until things are chained up so that they can't do any monkey business. He's so wrapped up in the MacDowell Club that he is off guard, and I'll

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[43] Gail Stavitsky, *Americans and the Armory Show* (Montclair: Montclair Art Museum, 2013), 10.

[44] Homer, 166.

[45] Henri's diary entry, as quoted in Stravitsky, 11.

> put it over before he know it, and in such a way that he can't make a single kick.[46]

Another dissenter to the idea of a large show exhibiting both European and American work was Alfred Stieglitz. John Sloan wrote in his diary that, "Stieglitz of [the] Photo Secession [Gallery] is hot under the collar about our show. . . . I imagine he thinks we have stolen his thunder in exhibiting 'independent' artists."[47] As a foil to the Armory Show, Stieglitz launched an exhibit simultaneously of photographs by Paul Strand from March 13 to April 3, 1913 at '291.'

The 69th National Guard Regiment agreed to rent the Armory on Lexington Avenue and 25th Street for t he International Exhibition of Modern Art, and the exhibit was scheduled. On September 2, 1912, Arthur Davies wrote to Walt Kuhn and asked him to travel to Germany to see the Sonderbund Show in Cologne.[48] Davies wrote, "I wish we could have as good a show as the Cologne Sonderbund. I think you would do well to see it before the close on September 30 . . . sent catalogue to you last week of Sonderbund."[49] The Sonderbund is now considered to be the model for the Armory Show. Kuhn travelled to Cologne and was amazed at the breadth of artists represented. Work by Cézanne, Picasso, Van Gogh, and Gauguin, as well as German Expressionists were displayed. In

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[46] Milton W. Brown, "Walt Kuhn's Armory Show*" Archives of American Art Journal.* 27, no 2 (1987): 5.

[47] Sloan's diary as quoted in Stravitsky, 9.

[48] It was discovered after Arthur B. Davies death in 1928 that he concurrently had two wives and two families, one in New York City and one in upstate New York, so it is understandable in hindsight why he was too busy to travel to Cologne. See Perlman.

[49] Brown, 5.

his letters to Vera, Kuhn expressed that he had little understanding of German Expressionists. As the entries in the show were dependent upon the selections of the scouting committee (Davies, Kuhn and Pach), other than several woodcuts and lithographs by Edvard Munch, the German Expressionists were not included as a result of Kuhn's unfamiliarity with their work.[50] Kuhn traveled throughout Europe asking artists to join in the exhibition. In Paris, he connected with Walter Pach.[51] In addition to being an artist, Pach had a network of connections in Paris with dealers and collectors. [52] Also a writer, Pach was philosophical about art. He did not believe in dividing art into different "isms". He didn't even like the delineation between "art" and "modern art." In a 1936 editorial for *Parnassus,* Pach expressed,

> Prophecy is nowhere more hazardous than as to art and the future of opinion of it. . . . [A]bstract art? Realistic art? French art? Modern art? The words are empty words – save the one word that recurs – art.[53]

Unlike Kuhn however, Pach did not brag about his abilities and it is only in recent study that he has been given the credit he deserves.[54] Davies had sent a letter to Pach

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[50] Milton W. Brown, revision of original catalog for The Armory Show, *The Story of the Armory Show*, 271.

[51] At the end of the Armory Show, Walter Pach was paid $1200 for his services. See Laurette E. McCarthy, "The 'Truths' about the Armory Show: Walter Pach's Side of the Story," *Archives of American Art Journal*. vol. 44. 2004. 4.

[52] Pach was fluent in French and sometimes called upon to translate articles for Davies. Ten of his paintings were included in The Armory Show (See Brown, Catalog of The Armory Show, 273).

[53] Walter Pach, "The Outlook for Modern Art," *Parnassus*, vol. 8, no. 4 (April 1936), 43.

[54] McCarthy, 4.

requesting that he help Kuhn scout for the show.[55] McCarthy states that within the course of one week, Pach accompanied Kuhn to dealers: Vollard, Kahnweiler and Bernheim-Jeune as well as to the Steins' salon. Pach and Kuhn also visited sculptor Constantin Brancusi and the Duchamp brothers.[56] By the time Kuhn returned home, Amedeo Modigliani, Constantin Brancusi, Francis Picabia, Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, and Henri Matisse had agreed to be in the show.[57] McCarthy states:

> By steering Kuhn and Davies to the artists and dealers whom he was close to or admired, and then making the final choices from Kuhn and Davies selections – Pach, in effect, chose almost all of the avant-garde Parisian art and most of the nineteenth-century French art that was sent to the exhibition, amassing a wide array of works.[58]

Pach was also responsible for procuring Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase (*No. 2*)*, the painting that was least understood and most ridiculed by the press.[59] It sold for three hundred and twenty-four dollars to Frederick Torry.[60] In New York, selections were chosen by William Glackens and the Domestic Art Committee. The artwork that they chose represented entries by twenty-three of the members of AAPS, one hundred

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[55] Ibid., 3.

[56] Ibid.

[57] William B. Scott, and Peter M. Rutkoff. *New York Modern: The Arts and the City* (New York, NY: Johns Hopkins University Press,1999), 59.

[58] McCarthy, 4.

[59] Ibid., 5.

[60] Scott, 61.

invited artists, and sixty selections chosen by jury.[61] The goal was to choose works that were progressive and none of the American submissions were more so than the ten submissions of John Marin.

Alfred Stieglitz was never directly involved with the show; however, he was named as an honorary vice president: not as a photographer or an art promoter but for what he had done to improve the social consciousness of America.[62] '291' had been the throne from which he had promoted European and American modernists since 1907. No doubt he felt the rug being ripped out from under him. He wrote some publicity pieces for the newspapers, and he lent one of his Picasso drawings and six drawings by Matisse. But he acted wily in his support of John Marin. From January 20 to February 15 (two days before the Armory Show opened), Stieglitz held a one-man show of Marin's work. The show included four of Marin's watercolors of the Woolworth Building that generated many articles in the newspapers. The paintings were described as inflicting "vertigo," and "similar to an earthquake."[63] The series of Woolworth paintings progressed from standing as an upright building to one that was at risk of collapsing. In anticipation of the public's

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[61] Virginia M. Mecklenburg, "Slouching Towards Modernism: American Art at the Armory Show." In The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution, by Marilyn S. Kushner, Kimberly Orcutt, and Casey Nelson Blake (New York: New-York Historical Society), 2013, 245.

[62] Anne McCauley, "The 'Big Show' and the Little Galleries: Alfred Stieglitz and the Search for Modern Art Photography in 1913." In *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution,* Marilyn S. Kushner, Kimberly Orcutt, and Casey Nelson Blake, 144.

[63] Martha Tedeschi, "A Pre-Emptive Strike: John Marin and the Armory Show." In *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution,* 275.

difficulty in comprehending the watercolors, Marin wrote a preface in the Exhibition Catalog: "The later pictures of New York shown in this exhibition may need the help of an explanation. These few words are written to quicken your response to my point of view." What followed could be considered a manifesto:

> I see great forces at work; great movements; the large buildings and the small buildings, the warring of the great and small; influences of one mass upon another. . . . Feelings are aroused which give me the desire to express the reaction of these "pull forces" . . . [I]n life all things come under the magnetic influence of other things . . . while these powers are at work pushing, pulling, sideways, downward, upward, I can hear the sound of their strife and there is great music being played.[64]

This was the same exhibit that Cass Gilbert visited where he stood ruefully before Marin's paintings of the building he had designed. The Armory Show opened in New York on February 17, 1913, and four thousand people anxiously waited on line. The room had been partitioned into eighteen different octagonal spaces. The paintings were assembled in lineage: Classicists, Realists, Impressionists, Post Impressionists, Fauvists and Cubists. The European painting that received the most critical publicity was Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*. Sales were not noteworthy. One hundred and seventy-four works were sold, one hundred and twenty-three by foreign artists, and fifty-one by Americans.[65] Financially the show broke even. Newspapers were critical. But the

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[64] John Marin, Photo-Secession Gallery Exhibition Catalog, 1913.

[65] Watson, 181.

crowds kept coming, estimated at ten thousand a day. [66] Some came out of curiosity, some because of the radical reviews in the press.

Even a children's ABC Primer was published that derided the show, as an attack on modern art. Its entry for "D" reflected what the public mostly thought of Duchamp:

> D is for Duchamp, the Deep-Dyed Deceiver,
> Who, drawing accordions, labels them stairs,
> With a lady that must have been done in a fever, -
> His model won't see her, we trust, it would grieve her! -
> (Should the stairway collapse. Cubie's good at repairs.)
> - D is for Duchamp, the Deep-Dyed Deceiver.

Everyone was curious about John Marin's *Woolworth Building* as well. As Martha Tedeschi writes, Stieglitz had made a "preemptive strike," increasing the public's interest in Marin and insuring the success of his career. *The Cubies* also contained an entry for Marin's painting of the Woolworth Building.

> W's for Woolworth, the building so stable,
> (erected with nickels and dimes by us all,)
> Which Cubies paint writhing from cellar to gable,
> Distinctly resembling the Tower of Babel,
> Some decades ago, just preceding its fall.
> W's for Woolworth, the building so stable.[67]

It would be just two months later, on April 24, 1913, that the Woolworth Building would have its inaugural opening.

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Mary Chase Mills Lyall, *The Cubies' A B C* (Lexington, KY: Zhingoora Books, 1913, reprinted 2013).

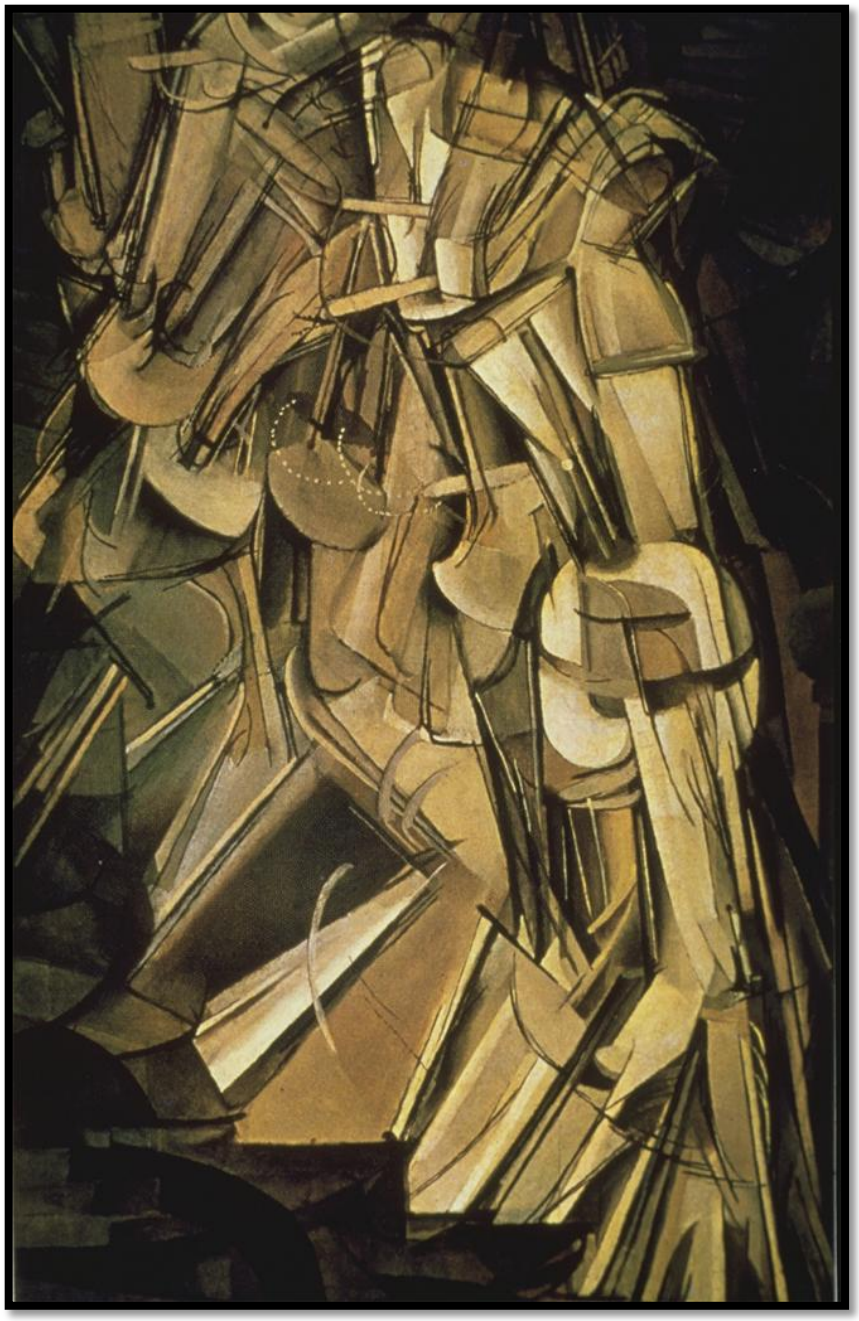

Image 30. Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase*, 1912, oil on canvas, 147.3 x 88.9 cm. The Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Chapter 5
A Look at John Marin's Style 1909-1912

> Anyway, may the man who invented barbed wire fences be eternally damned. That's my main occupation, that of going through barbed wire fences.[1]
>
> John Marin

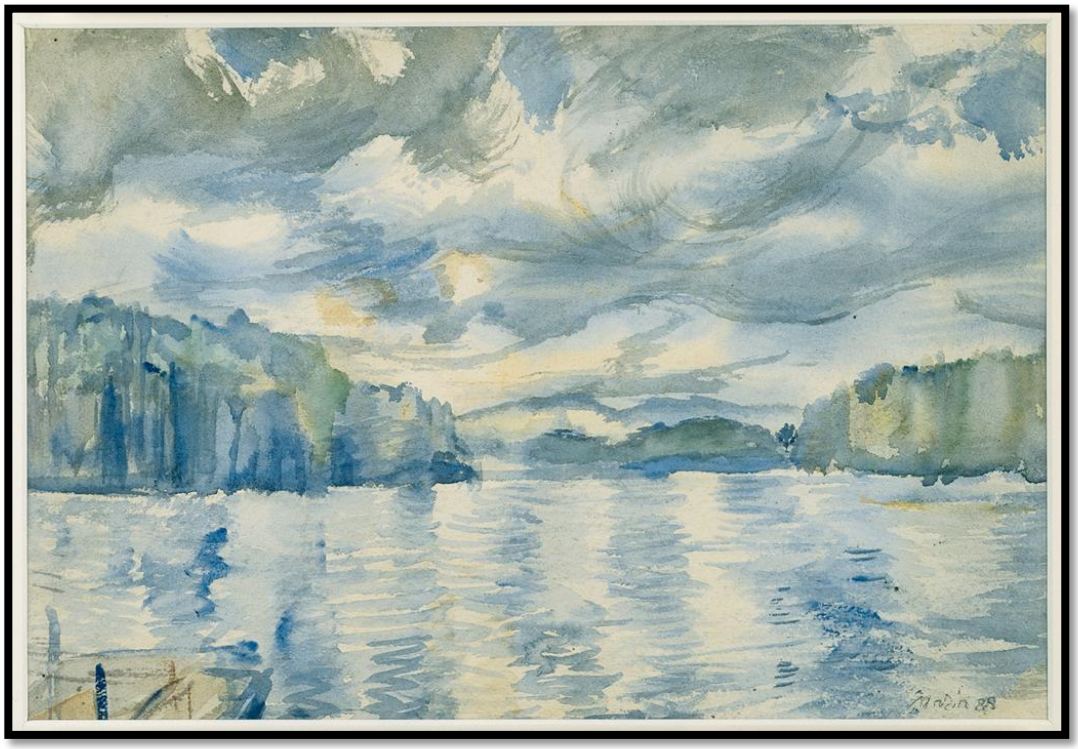

Image 31. John Marin, *White Lake Sullivan County*, 1888, watercolor, 26 x 37.5 cm., Colby College Museum of Art.

John Marin was an enigma. His painting career spanned more than fifty years, and like someone balancing on the center of a seesaw, he straddled several styles of painting. After his first exhibition, along with Alfred Maurer, at '291,' art critic, James Huneker of the *New York Sun,* noted the similarity between Marin and James McNeil Whistler,

[1] John Marin, "From Castorland, Lewis County, New York, July 1913," *The Selected Writings of John Marin* (New York: Pelligrini & Cuddahy, 1945) https://archive.org/stream/selectedwritings002200mbp/selectedwritings002200mbp_djvu.txt

calling Marin, "a master of the mists."[2] Barbara Rose also noted the comparison saying his silvery gray scale palette was similar to that of Whistler.[3] Marin's early work prior to 1910 was often compared to the watercolors of Winslow Homer, another seasoned Yankee who was self-taught in watercolor and drawn to the Maine coast. Marin's *White Lake, Sullivan County, New York No 2,* done in 1888, is light and airy and shows the influence of Impressionism. After Marin returned to New York from Paris, beginning in 1910, his style changed. He was drawn to the hustle and bustle and the sounds and congestion of the city. The watercolor medium of Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins and William Merritt Chase was associated with precision and realism, however Marin's New York series became less representational. In abstraction, with buildings shaking and dancing, he communicated the tension of the city. With his 1909-1912 scenes of buildings in New York, he became an innovator with an innate sense of physics. He seemed to possess an understanding of Einstein's theory that time and space are intertwined, and his paintings are evocative of the fourth dimension. In his writing, he often alluded to his fascination with the physics of nature, as in his preface to his *1913 Exhibition Catalog* at '291' prior to the Armory Show:

> In life, all things come under the magnetic influence of other things; the bigger assert themselves strongly, the smaller not so much, but still they assert themselves, and though hidden they strive to be seen and in so doing change their bend and direction.[4]

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[2] Fine, 103.

[3] Barbara Rose, "John Marin the 291 Years" (New York: Richard York Gallery, 1998), 17.

[4] Larry Curry, ed., *Eight American Masters of Watercolor* (New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Frederick A. Praeger, 1968). Preface.

Marin was like a sponge, and influenced by many art styles. Corollaries between his work and the style of other artists can be found, but it is doubtful that he was conscious of thinking, I'm going to paint more like Paul Cézanne, or more like Robert Delaunay. Industrialization and urbanization were forces happening on either side of the Atlantic, and by means of synergism, there was a cross pollination of art styles. In 1935, his biographer, E.M. Benson, described him as "a savvy *bouillabaisse* of Hokusai, Hiroshige, Chinese art, Tanagra figurines, Tintoretto, Rembrandt, Courbet, Impressionism, and also a great deal of Whistler."[5] Later in the 1940s, art critic Clement Greenberg would try to disassociate Marin from the influence of Alfred Stieglitz to show that he was indeed an early Abstract Expressionist.[6] In essence, one's perception of John Marin's style is dependent upon what period of his work one is studying. However, it was '291,' Stieglitz's circle of artists, and writers contributing to *Camera Work,* that had the greatest influence on him. Alfred Stieglitz provided an incubator for furtive ideas, similar to the *Bateau Lavoir* in Paris, where Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque and other French avant garde artists met and collaborated.

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[5] Benson, 51.

[6] Charles Pietraszewski and Christine Conniff-O'Shea, "Part of the Picture" in *John Marin's Watercolor: A Means for Modernism* ed. Martha Tedeschi (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2010), 59.

Regarding '291,' Sheldon Reich commented, "In this hot house atmosphere of avant garde experimentation, Marin produced, during the winter of 1912-13 among the most advanced works being done by any American on this side of the Atlantic."[7]

In 1910, excavation for of the Woolworth Building had just begun, and talk of its phenomenal construction was pervasive. Marin would comment upon "the spell I have been under," with regard to the tall skyscraper.[8] His thoughts were revealed through his lifelong correspondence with Alfred Stieglitz. Cleve Gray discovered multiple drafts of letters that Marin had sent to Stieglitz and published them in *Marin by Marin*. The letters show the artist's excitement with New York City.

> I have just started some Downtown stuff and to pile these great houses one upon another with paint as they do pile themselves up there is so beautiful, so fantastic—at times one is afraid to look at them but feels like running away.[9]

Marin's paintings are a reflection of the spontaneity of watercolor. Watercolor is fleeting and moves fast, particularly on wet paper. His paintings of the Woolworth Building capture a brief moment. He saw movement and he painted how it made him feel. He accomplished this using a watercolor palette of Windsor and Newton paints consisting of:

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[7] Sheldon Reich, *John Marin Drawings 1886-1951 A Retrospective Exhibition Honoring John Marin's Centennial* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1969), Preface.

[8] Martha Tedeschi ,"Great Forces at Work John Marin's New York" in *John Marin's Watercolors, A Medium for Modernism* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2010), 99.

[9] Cleve Gray, ed. *John Marin By John Marin* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, n.d.), 11.

Blues: French ultramarine, cerulean, cobalt.
Reds: rose madder, light red, spectrum red.
Yellows: aureolin, yellow ochre, cadmium.
Greens: viridian, oxide of chromium
Gray: Payne's gray
Black: lamp black.[10]

In addition to watercolor at this time, he worked in other mediums: crayon, colored pencil, and graphite (his later work includes oils). He played with his etching, sometimes allowing the lines to be deliberately blurred in the printing process. He experimented with spreading ink on the plate, sometimes with his fingers, sometimes blotting the interior of an image with a rag, just leaving an outline of paint, and sometimes just applying the paint with the tip of the paint tube.[11] His calligraphic symbols on the page, applied in ink, imply kinetic movement.

His oeuvre can be divided into three different subject matters. When in Maine, his subject matter consisted of the sea and the coast. Like Henry David Thoreau who walked Cape Cod and wrote about his findings, Marin would wander and paint what intrigued him. His private journal allows us to see his inner feelings. In the journal he stated how his work differed from Impressionists in his symbolical representation of light.

So—I Chose—you might
say—symbolically chose—
boat—sea—sky—placing them
dividing them—the dominant
the sky—the source of light—the white

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[10] Emmanuel M. Benson, *John Marin, The Man and his Work* (Washington, DC:1935), 111. Information on the brand of watercolor comes from Kristi Dahm,"Playing Around With Paint," in Martha Tedeschi and others, *John Marin's Watercolors: A Medium for Modernism* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2010), 44.

[11] Ruth Fine, *John Marin* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1990), 46.

paper was not enough—so I imposed
two dark disks—then immediately
the white paper took on an added whiteness
—by contrasted opposition
—yes—I would say this picture was
made to symbolize luminosity.[12]

Image 32. John Marin, *The Three Master Before the Wind, Deer Isle, Maine, 1923*, watercolor on paper, 39.4 x 49.5 cm., Estate of John Marin.

An example of "two dark disks" can be seen in *The Three Master Before the Wind, Deer Isle, Maine,* where they create an even brighter sky. Lloyd Goodrich called him, "an Expressionist, not an Impressionist. The Impressionist paints the changing aspects of the outer world, the Expressionist paints the changing emotions of the inner man."[13] Marin

[12] Larry Curry preface from a manuscript in possession of Mr. Henry Dreyfuss, Pasadena, The Phillips Collection Library.

[13] Lloyd Goodrich, *American Watercolor and Winslow Homer* (Minneapolis: The Walker Art Center, 1945), 69.

also denied he was an abstractionist saying, "The sea that I paint may not be THE SEA, but it is A sea, not an abstraction." [14]

Image 33, John Marin, *The Tyrol,* 1910, watercolor, 39.4 x 46.4 cm. Estate of the artist.

His second subject matter were mountains, wherever he found himself, in the Catskills in upstate New York, as well as the Austrian Tyrol. Just as a city dweller needs to counter life with the respite of a shore or country home, Marin alternated between a subject matter of country landscapes and city architecture. Here he pays homage to the Japanese *Ukiyo-e* woodblock prints. The viewer's focus is toward the pine trees in the shallow foreground. The background consists of a mountain peak done in lavender, a non-objective color choice that he favored, along with an abstract, moody blue and white wash. It was in his pictures of the city, however, where he allowed himself to experiment the most with a modernist style. Benson wrote: "New York was to Marin's development

[14] MacKinley Helm, *John Marin* (New York: Pelligrini & Cuddahy, 1948), 103.

as an artist what fermenting beer vats were to Pasteur."[15] His Weehawken home was a mere ferryboat ride across the Hudson River from 34th Street. While traversing the Hudson, he was privy to the harbor view of lower Manhattan which became the subject of his urban repertoire. Whether painting St. Paul's or Trinity Church, the East River or the Brooklyn Bridge, he imbued all of them with motion. Once in New York, he was within walking distance to '291,' giving him the opportunity to absorb the city around him. Marin recognized that nothing in life stands still. He painted on wet, textured paper, often with color washes, and there was movement in his technique as well as in his subject matter. His skies are sometimes blotted pools of color that run into each other. He would write: "In painting water makes the hand move the way the water moves—same thing with everything else."[16] And, he was able to take what he saw with his eyes and by painting it, imbue it with feeling. In New York, his painting style evolved. He veered between realism and abstraction, representing a city that was experiencing destabilization from all of the construction. For reasons of portability or cost, Marin chose smaller and less textured paper. The paper that he preferred was heavily textured paper from jwhatman.[17] In a letter that he wrote to an admirer, quoted in "Playing Around With Paint," Marin gave advice:

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[15] Emmanuel M. Benson, *John Marin, The Man and his Work* (Washington, DC: 1935), 65.

[16] Marin, 92.

[17] Marin would write Stieglitz that he had purchased a large quantity of jwhatman paper in 1913. As quoted in Kristi Dahm,"Playing Around With Paint," in Martha Tedeschi and others, *John Marin's Watercolors: A Medium for Modernism* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2010), 43.

> You get your paper good but not too good—say Whatmans. . . . [Y]our colors—say Windsor & Newton—and say just a few Green Viridian—Blue Cerulean and French Ultramarine—Red—Light or Indian—and Rose Madder—Yellow Ochre & Aureolin—Black—Lamp—Other colors, suit yourself.[18]

Painting allowed him to truly see an object. In his journal he wrote a sentiment with which Thomas Eakins would have agreed: "Search for the backbone—as it were—of each object, then it becomes easy to draw the object."[19] As he selected city buildings and landscapes, he identified the "backbone" of buildings, but he did it in the ever-changing medium of watercolor where he had to think and act quickly. Influences upon John Marin's work can be divided into three categories: Photography, Music, and Futurism. He was not a photo realist, like Alfred Stieglitz, or a Synchromist, drawing direct analogy between color and music like Morgan Russell; or a Futurist, like Robert Delaunay; however, all of these influences upon him cannot be denied.

The fact that photography influenced Marin is a further example of the synchronicity of the arts, for whether or not intended, the Photo Secession shaped his art. Ironically, as both crafts were available to the masses, professional watercolor and photography shared the common challenge of being taken seriously. The portability of watercolor pans allowed anyone to go out in the field and paint. Similarly, three decades earlier Kodak provided the public with accessibility to photography. To confirm

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[18] Marin to Mr. Lustberg, Apr 24, 1933 quoted Kristi Dahm,"Playing Around With Paint," in Martha Tedeschi and others, *John Marin's Watercolors: A Medium for Modernism* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2010),182.

[19] John Marin, *John Marin,* ed. Cleve Gray (New York: Holt, Rinehart Winston, 1975), 83.

professional photography's place, Stieglitz filled *Camera Work* with exemplary photographs by artists such as Paul Havilland, Gertrude Kasebier, Edward Steichen and Paul Strand.

As Stieglitz became aware of, and showcased the art of French artists, Auguste Rodin, Paul Cézanne and Pablo Picasso at '291,' he set the tone at his gallery for non-objective art as well as photography. Stieglitz was assisted by Edward Steichen in Paris. Steichen encouraged experimentation by American artists with new styles of art and in Paris founded the New Society of American Artists. Some of the artists who became members: Arthur B. Carles, Max Weber, Alfred Maurer and John Marin, would become part of Stieglitz's entourage as well. Others in Stieglitz's circle would include Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove and Georgia O'Keeffe. Stieglitz was not interested in the representational, albeit radical, works of Robert Henri and The Eight, exhibited at the Macbeth Gallery. Rather than compete with The Eight, he concurrently held exhibitions of photography at '291.' And one month prior to the 1913 Armory Show, Stieglitz published several articles in the New York press expressing his views that art should not try to mimic the realism of photography. On January 26, 1913 in *The Sunday Times*, he wrote of the upcoming Armory exhibit:

> The dry bones of dead art are rattling as they never rattled before…[A] score or more of painters and sculptors, who decline to go on doing merely what the camera does better, have united in a demonstration of independence – an exhibition of what they see and dare express in their own way – that will wring shrieks of indignation from every ordained copyist of old Masters on two continents and their adjacent islands. [20]

[20] Alfred Stieglitz, *Sunday Times*, January 26, 1913.

Reich affirms that amongst the Stieglitz circle there was competition, and Stieglitz thrust great influence upon Marin. Stieglitz was Marin's patron, providing an annual living stipend and acting as his de facto agent. He attempted to commodify and monetize Marin's work by creating a "Group of Friends," on his behalf. In a typewritten invitation to a limited number of people, Stieglitz offered them an opportunity to financially support Marin. He suggested that each person contribute six hundred dollars per year to a "Marin Fund," so that he could paint uninterruptedly. In return, the patrons were given the opportunity to purchase Marin's watercolors at prices normally offered only to dealers. [21] It is therefore no surprise that Marin would write, "The doors have swung open to me by my friend Alfred Stieglitz."[22] As Marin carved a place for himself within the circle, his style evolved. In a '291' Exhibition Catalog he expressed veering away from realism, saying:

> How am I to express, so that I may recall the spell I have been under and behold the expression of the different emotions that have been called into being. How am I to express what I feel so that its expression will bring me back under the spells? Shall I copy facts photographically?"[23]

His style moved away from direct representation. However, Marin was not completely at home in the city or with the competition at '291.' In a letter to Stieglitz dated August 2, 1928, Marin commented upon the city and the competition that he felt:

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[21] Cleve Gray, ed. *Marin by Marin,* 21.

[22] Ibid.

[23] *Camera Work*, nos. 42-43 (April-July 1913), 18.

> This living in crowds, living in herds, seems to kill fine things, fine thought. Kill the art output of a nation. Jealousies, strivings. Competing to get ahead of one another instead of keeping ahead within ourselves.[24]

Photography also had an impact upon how Marin framed his paintings. He made allusion to the importance of framing in a poem, *To My Paint Children*, explaining the boundaries that fences provide.

> Your fence now becomes a part
> Of you—I hope it won't hinder your playing—
> I trust it will serve to make you play the
> Harder within yourselves—knowing your
> Boundaries— [25]

The frame was the container that held the tension within his pictures. Regarding his framing Marin stated: "Within the frames there must be a balance, a controlling of these warring, pushing, pulling forces. This is what I am trying to realize."[26] Marin's interest in the frame extended beyond the self-created border that he often made with his watercolors, to the frame itself. Charles Pietrazewski explains that many artists such as James McNeil Whistler, Edgar Degas, and Georges Seurat were also intricately involved with the selection of their frames.[27] As a photographer, framing was important to

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[24] John Marin, personal letter to Alfred Stieglitz, August 2, 1928. New York Historical Society.

[25] Martha Tedeschi, "John Marin's Loaded Brush," in Martha Tedeschi and others, *John Marin's Watercolors: A Medium for Modernism* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2010), 37.

[26] John I. H. Baur, essay, "John Marin's New York" (New York: Kennedy Galleries, 1997) n.p..

[27] Charles Pietrakowski and Christine Conniff-O'Shea, "Part of the Picture The Power of the Frame in John Marin's Watercolors" in Martha Tedeschi and others, *John*

Stieglitz as well. Before the picture was placed in a tangible frame, Marin used several geometric framing devices, believing that framing was an integral part of the picture. An example of this can be seen in *West Forty-Second Street From Ferryboat.* One's attention is drawn to the intersection at the center of the painting, but it is the framing that creates the three dimensional depth. On the paper Marin created an irregular frame in beige. He then encased it in a mat of similar tonality, followed by a gray wooden frame. Marin played with framing, sometimes creating a jagged line around the perimeter of the painting in contrast to the rectangular shape of the paper. This gives the viewer a feeling of voyeurism as if peering through a window. Many of Marin's original frames are still on his paintings in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.[28] Reich writes that this framing technique was influenced by Cubism.

> Marin's inner frame, first used in 1921, was probably suggested to him by the Cubist's technique of isolating a compact grouping of forms against a blank field so that the outer contours of the arrangement took on a shape of its own. [29]

Marin's Watercolors: A Medium for Modernism (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2010), 61.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Reich, 257.

Image 34. John Marin, *West Forty-Second Street From Ferryboat,* 1929, 54.6 x 66.7 cm., Reference: Martha Tedeschi, *John Marin's Watercolors: A Medium for Modernism.*

Marin's work was also greatly influenced by music. From late nineteenth century, a cross-pollination of music and art terminology existed. The art forms of expressionism, modernism and tonality were equally applied in both art forms. The music of Claude Debussy and the poetic nature of his pieces such as *La Mer* (1902-05) or the earlier *Prelude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune* (1894) and the music of Maurice Ravel were considered examples of romanticism, and sometimes compared to musical impressionism. In both the musical and plastic mediums, artists were looking to break traditions. Around 1911, a confluence of music and art forms was taking place. In art, several American and French artists became interested in color theory and in representing the color spectrum in terms of the musical scale. Even the name coined for the movement, *Synchromy,* is close in sound to "symphony." In Paris, Percyval Tudor-Hart

of Canada was teaching color harmony in terms of music, stressing that, "the twelve chromatic intervals of the musical octave . . . have corresponding sensational and emotional qualities to those of the twelve chromatic colours." [30] American artists in Paris, Morgan Russell and Macdonald Wright, became advocates of synchromism along with Marin's close colleague from Philadelphia Academy, Arthur Carles. Morgan Russell wrote in his notebook that he wanted to create, "painting capable of moving people to the degree that music does."[31] The analogy in art was not new. James McNeil Whistler had used musical terminology in the titles of his works such as "Nocturne," "Arrangement," and "Harmony," and Marin's early etchings of Paris were often compared to those of Whistler. John Marin frequently articulated the musical influence he experienced. When speaking about his New York series he said,

> While these powers are at work pushing, pulling, sideways, downwards, upwards, I can hear the sound of their strife and there is a great music being played.[32]

In his kinetic watercolors of New York, there is a polytonality, or duality of style. In *Camera Work*, Charles Caffin compared Marin's work to the works of a composer who "expands a motif into elaborate harmony."[33] In Marin's obituary, Jerome Mellquist described his watercolors as "likened to notes upon a flute—they were both slight and

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[30] As quoted in Gail Levin, *Synchromism and American Color Abstraction* 1910-1925 (New York: George Braziller, 1978), 14.

[31] Ibid.,16

[32] Hilton Kramer, "Art View," *New York Times,* March 1, 1981, 27.

[33] Charles Caffin, "John Marin" *Camera Work,* no. 27, July 1909, 42.

tuneful," adding that his work, "suggests a 'music' composed upon a single pluck of the strings, thus sometime the ensemble attains a denser utterance."[34] Marin wasn't a musician. His friend Herbert Seligman stated:

> His playing altogether lacked technique. He never practiced scales nor had been taught to limber his fingers with exercises. His playing was as peculiar to himself as his painting.[35]

But Marin admitted his love of music. He said that from his earliest childhood, his aunt who taught piano had inspired him. Writing about himself in the third person in an unpublished manuscript he wrote: "It seems this Small [sic] boy without being aware of it loved music—I know that later on he could whistle about every tune he had ever heard."[36] And he often equated the power of musical instruments with the power of the canvas.

> It isn't that we are so wonderful
> That our concepts are so wonderful
> Give the canvas a chance
> Give the paint a chance
> Give the brush a chance
> Give the pencil a chance
> As in music
> Give the instruments a chance—their sounds
> Are quite beautiful. [37]

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[34] Jerome Mellquist, "John Marin: Rhapsodist of Nature (1870-1953)", *College Art Journal*, vol. 13 no. 4 (Summer 1954): 311-312.

[35] Tedeschi, 180.

[36] John Marin, manuscript, 8/26/28 as quoted in *Marin by Marin,* ed. Cleve Gray (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston), 19.

[37] Manuscript undated, as quoted in Gray, *Marin by Marin,* 70.

Image 35. John Marin, *Brooklyn Bridge* 1912, watercolor, 47 x 39.3 cm., Museum of Modern Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection

Marin recognized the confluence of music, writing and watercolor. Regarding images and marks on his canvas he wrote, “I always try to make them move back and forth from the center of the canvas—like notes leaving and going back to middle C on the

keyboard."[38] His connectedness to music can be found in the titles of his paintings as well. Within his catalogue raisonné, the titles of forty-nine paintings begin with the word: "Movement." In his paintings of New York, he sometimes applied broad slurred strokes like a legato. An example of this is *Brooklyn Bridge 1912* where the steel spandrels of the bridge are represented by dabs of lavender paint. The two people traversing the bridge might have been painted with his finger.

In *Municipal Building 1910,* Marin used fine calligraphic brush strokes, similar to riffs or eighth notes, to express windows on the building. [39] In *Weehawken, New Jersey*, 1910, calligraphic brushstrokes in the foreground allude to tree branches on the river's edge. And when he painted on drenched paper and the saturated colors of lavenders and blues run into each other, his paintings have a feeling of *melancolico*. In each picture, his colors have a rhythm of their own. Photographer, Paul Strand referred to Marin as a "conductor."[40] His writing, poetry and paintings were all interconnected, with painting being a "a sort of shorthand."[41] Even in a 1971 review of his watercolors in *Time* Magazine, art critic Robert Hughes used musical terms to describe the paintings:

> Marin loved music, especially English polyphonic composers like Purcell and Orlando Gibbons. He seems to have been the first major American painter to take the nature of music – a sequence of sound events in time – and convert it into a fugue in space.[42]

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[38] Robert Hughes "Fugues in Space," *Time Magazine*, February 22, 1971.

[39] Reich, *John Marin, Paintings of New York*, 45.

[40] Tedeschi, 22.

[41] Ibid., 84.

[42] Hughes, Ibid.

Image 36. John Marin, *Municipal Building* 1910, watercolor and charcoal on paper, 41.3 x 34.2 cm., The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Marin's endeavor to instill dynamic properties to inanimate objects also suggests an influence of Futurism. After the Armory Show, Americans were unsure how to define what they had witnessed. The various art styles that crept to the surface were categorized as a series of isms: Cubism, Post Impressionism, and Fauvism. New terminology had to be incorporated into our visual lexicon. European futurist groups such as the German Der Balue Reiter (The Blue Rider) or the Italian Futurists led by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti had been excluded from the Armory Show and yet "Futurism" became a generic label

that was placed on much that had just been seen. Former President Theodore Roosevelt used the term "Futurism" when writing about the exhibit in *Outlook* Magazine.

> It is vitally necessary to move forward and to shake off the dead hand of the reactionaries; and yet we have to face the fact there is apt to be a lunatic fringe among the votaries of any forward movement. In this recent exhibition the lunatic fringe was fully in evidence in the rooms devoted to the Cubists and the Futurists.[43]

Milton Brown clarifies that the label *futurism*, or f*uturistic,* became a misnomer applied to all modern art. Italian Futurism would not be shown in America until the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition.[44] Yet Marin's style, particular his New York series, is frequently compared to, or allied with, futurism.

Futurism began on February 20, 1909 when F. T. Marinetti published "Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism," in the Paris newspaper, *Le Figaro.* The movement began as a literary movement, but would move to encompass all of the arts with the assistance of poet, Guillauame Apollinaire, and his discourse in his 1912 Review, *Les Soirees de Paris.* Apollinaire was living with artists, Robert and Sonia Delaunay, and was fascinated with Delaunay's experimentation with color, a style that Apollinaire coined, *Orphism,* and later *Simultanism.*[45] Futurism was a reaction to the industrialization of modern times and its after effects. The Futurist Manifesto affirmed

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[43] Didier Otinger, "Off to the Armory Show," in Kushner, Marilyn and Kimberly Orcutt, *The Armory Show at 100, Modernism and Revolution* (New York: New York Historical Society, 2013), 189.

[44] Burke, 45.

[45] Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 279-280.

the beauty of speed; that there is no delineation between time and space. It eventually reflected a radical political ideology, and in revolutionary fervor called for the dissolution of museums and glorification of war. In response to the industrialization of cities it stated:

> . . .We shall sing the multicolored and polyphonic tidal waves of revolution in the modern metropolis; shall sing the vibrating nocturnal fervor of factories and shipyards burning under violent electric moons; bloated railway stations that devour smoking serpents; factories hanging from the sky by the twisting threads of spiraling smoke; bridges like gigantic gymnasts who span rivers.[46]

The manifesto was subsequently published in various international newspapers including *The New York Sun*. In an article entitled, "Futurism in America: 1909-1914," John Oliver Hand took a look at contemporary newspapers and magazines in America during this period to detect where there had been mention of futurism. He discovered a December 24, 1911 article in *The New York Herald* entitled, "The New Cult of Futurism is Here," and an interview with André Tridon who was considered "the archpriest of futurism in America." The jarring full-page article was more than likely widely read and discussed, and it explicitly showed what was meant by futurism. The article's subtitle was "Smashing the Old Idols and Burying the Bonds of Slavery to the Past, the Futurist Champions the Superiority of the Present." [47] On the page, a couple dances a Charleston, surrounded by abstract lines suggesting motion. Marin would employ similar jagged lines around his Woolworth Building series. In an upper corner of the newspaper article, a

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[46] The Futurist Manifesto as quoted in Claudia Salaris, "The Invention of the Programmatic Avant-Garde," ed.,Vivien Greene, *Italian Futurism 1909-1944* (New York: The Solomon Guggenheim Foundation, 2014), 23.

New York skyscraper is positioned next to an example of classical Greek architecture with the caption, "What Futurism Terms Triumph and American Architecture." In the interview, André Tridon explained how futurism was interpreted in art:

> In painting itself . . . futurism stands for a movement, which is the expression of life. Nature is never still; therefore in art movement is as important as form. The newspaper cartoonist who by lines indicates the progress of a brick through the air is a crude Futurist. This sense of movement the Futurist properly attempts in a more artistic manner.

Tridon continues to explain a Futurist's concept of American architecture:

> The worst phase of American architecture is that in which we copy ancient styles quite unadapted to modern uses. Think of all the banks built upon the models of Greek temples! To worship gods in, they were possibly well enough in the Greek environment. As avenues for financial conferences they are cumbersome, draughty and ridiculously out of key to the general character of surrounding architecture.[48]

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[47] John Oliver Hand, "Futurism in America: 1909-14," *Art Journal*, 41.no 4 (1981): 338.

[48] Ibid.

Image 37. New York Herald, December 24, 1911.

It is probable that Marin knew of Futurism for several reasons: T. Marinetti had published his Futurist Manifesto in *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909 while Marin was still in Paris. The 1911 *New York Herald* article was published shortly before Marin's Woolworth series was showcased at '291,' and it encompassed a full-page spread in the newspaper. Furthermore, André Tridon's New York studio was on

East 19th Street, not far from '291,' and Tridon was critical of the very basic argument regarding skyscraper design.

Image 38. John Marin, *Woolworth no. 31,* 1912, 49.5 x 40.6 cm., National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

During the course of 1912, Marin used an increasing amount of abstraction in his paintings of the Woolworth Building. In *Woolworth* No. 28,[49] the surrounding buildings seem to waver, but the Woolworth Building itself stands relatively straight. However a further indication of the influence of Futurism can be found by comparing Marin's *Woolworth Building* No 31 from 1912, with Robert Delaunay's painting from the previous year, *Champs de Mar The Red Tower*, 1911.

Image 39. Robert Delaunay, *Champs de Mar: The Red Tower,* 1911, oil on canvas, 160.6 x 128 cm., Art Institute of Chicago.

[49] See page 1.

Robert Delaunay was fascinated by The Eiffel Tower. The Tower had been designed by Gustave Eiffel for the Universal Exhibition of 1889, celebrating the centennial of the French Revolution. It was dedicated to science and intended to show that France was a leader of modern industry, soaring to a height of 984 feet. Even after the construction of the Woolworth Building twenty-four years later, the Eiffel Tower continued to be the tallest man made structure in the world. It was finally surpassed in 1930 by the art deco styled Chrysler Building in New York that stood as the world's tallest building for a mere thirty months before losing the title to the 102-story Empire State Building. The Paris landmark was the signature of Paris and influential in F. W. Woolworth's decision to construct a building as a monument to his company and himself. In a letter to Robert Delaunay's wife, artist Sonia Delaunay, modernist poet Blaise Cendrars told of Delaunay's conception of his Eiffel Tower series. He said, "During the years 1910 and 1911 Robert Delaunay and I were possibly the only people in Paris to speak of machines and art and to have the vaguest awareness of the great transformation of the modern world."[50] One day while walking near the Eiffel Tower, Cendrars broke his leg and was taken to the Hotel du Palais where he stayed for twenty-eight days to recuperate. Each morning when a waiter brought Cendrars his breakfast, he opened the window shutters. The astounding view from the window revealed the city of Paris and the Eiffel Tower. Delaunay came daily to sit with Cendrars and became transfixed by the

[50] Blaise Cendrars, "The Eiffel Tower," in *The New Art of Color: The Writings of Robert and Sonia Delaunay*, ed. Arthur A. Cohen (New York: The Viking Press, 1975), 170.

view.[51] In his letter to Sonia Delaunay, Cendrars explained Robert Delaunay's obsession with reproducing light as colors. After viewing the tower through the shutters at the Hotel du Palais, Delaunay would go home and nail all the shutters in his room closed so that light could only come in through a pinhole. Delaunay proceeded to study spectrum analysis and paint the way the light represented itself on his canvas. Gradually he enlarged the hole so that more sunlight could penetrate onto the canvas and he painted the adjacent colors. Delaunay was intrigued by the fourth dimension and was intent upon reproducing light in terms of color theory. His series began as early as 1909 and Marin may have been familiar with the paintings as he was still living in Paris and Delaunay's pictures were reproduced in the press. In *Champs de Mar*, other distorted buildings frame the tower in shades of gray. The sky is composed of geometric figures of green and beige. In Marin's painting of the *Woolworth Building*, No. 31, the distorted building also stands at the center of the page dividing the painting into quadrants. Abstract visions of small buildings frame the building here too. The sky, although not geometric, is composed of wet washes of the recessive cool hue of lavender. Marin's painting is done in watercolor, Delaunay's in oil, yet there are similarities. Each artist represents a fleeting moment of time. Marin's paintings came two years after Delaunay's, and both artists show the dynamism of the modern city. Marin's paintings of the Woolworth building progressed to more and more abstraction. *Woolworth No. 32* is barely recognizable as a skyscraper. It appears uprooted, yet the colors are light and non-threatening. Reich points out "Marin's uses of tilting perspective, shifting points of view, and multiple images is applied for ends

[51] Ibid., 171.

that more reasonably suggest Italian Futurism and its French offshoot in the works of Robert Delaunay."[52] Mark Rosenthal, former head of Twentieth Century Art at the National Gallery in Washington, also saw the connection between the two artists: "Indeed Delaunay's celebration of the Eiffel Tower could have served as an example in America, too, where John Marin glorified the Woolworth building in a 1913 series."[53] Both artists drew inspiration from the modern city and each reflected a sense of analytic cubism with a focus on geometric forms, multiple perspectives and fracturing space.

John Marin and Robert Delaunay were drawn to urban icons and represented them in Futurist style. They were banner wavers, using the Eiffel Tower and the Woolworth Building to draw attention to the complexity of the changing city. As an icon, skyscrapers would come to fascinate other early twentieth century artists in addition to John Marin, and many others artists—in photography, fiction and poetry, would follow Marin's lead.

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[52] Sheldon Reich, Introduction, *John Marin 1870-1953 A Centennial Exhibition* organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Phillips Collection Research Library Archive, Washington DC., date accessed, August 18, 2015.

[53] Mark Rosenthal, Introduction "Visions of Paris: Robert Delaunay's Series" (New York: The Solomon Guggenheim Foundation 1997).

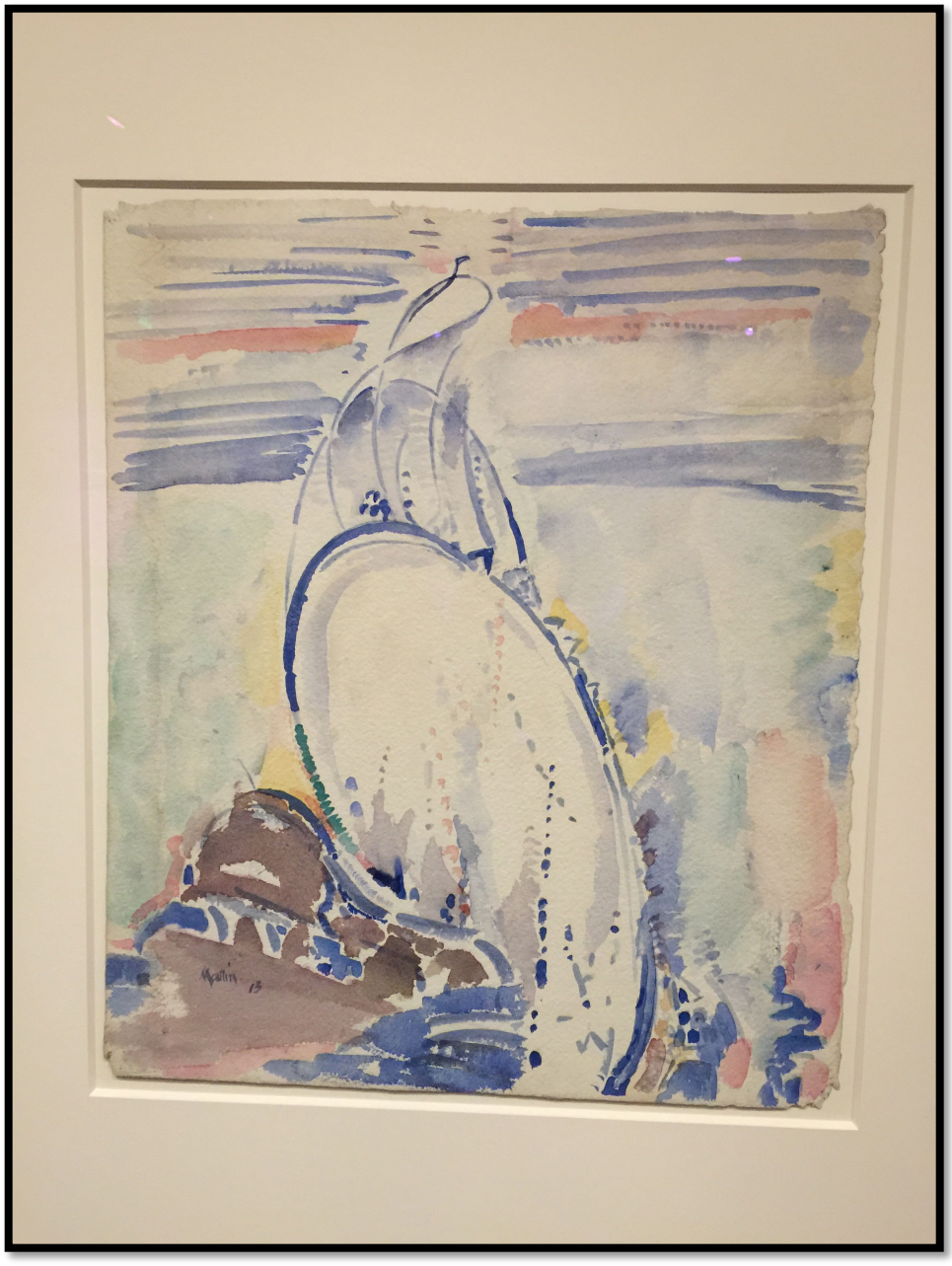

Image 40. John Marin, *Woolworth No. 32,* 49.5 x 40.6 cm., 1913, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Image 41. John Marin, *Woolworth Building, The Dance*, 1913 etching and drypoint, 33 x 26.6 cm., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection.

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Chapter 6

The Influence of Skyscrapers on American Modernism

Image 42. *Woolworth Building*, New York Historical Society, Negative 46308.

> One could believe that giants had built this city for giants, and if you walk in lower Broadway among these monsters, you get the impression of being in a deep mountain canyon. In this instance, however, the cliffs, which rise to such dizzy heights, have windows and doors, and elevators.
>
> Ludwig Fulda *Amerikanische Eindrucke, 1914*[1]

[1] John Pastier and Debora Irmas, "The Skyscraper in Literature and Art," *Design Quarterly* 140 (1988): 24.

In this historical photograph taken on opening day in April 1913, the Woolworth Building's presence towers high above the city pavement. People appear ant-like, faceless, and less than one quarter as tall as the first floor mezzanine. The enormous stature of the entrance is a reflection of Gilbert's belief that the entrance to a building be majestic, and it shows the discontinuity between Gilbert's neo Gothic style and the building's identity as the world's tallest and most modern building. One questions whether Gilbert – with one foot in the past and one in the future – wanted to be a groundbreaker. Nevertheless, the skyscraper, like American Jazz, was cutting edge. The United States had the technological prowess and the capitalistic drive to create a vertical city. Allusions to the tall buildings as cliff dwellings date from the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago where a re-creation of an American Indian cliff dwelling at Battle Rock Mountain in Colorado stood near the Anthropology Building.[2] Visitors were actually able to climb upon the fabricated cliff. And cliff dwellings represented an accurate metaphor for the new urban construction. Their imagery also appeared in Henry B. Fuller's 1893 novel, *The Cliff Dwellers*. Many artists within the Stieglitz circle, including John Marin, Paul Strand, Georgia O'Keeffe and photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn were attracted to the imagery of tall buildings and later went on to spend time in Taos, New Mexico near the pueblo ruins of original cliff dwellers.

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[2] . "The White City, Chicago, and the World Columbian Exposition." *Boundless U.S. History*. from https://www.boundless.com/u-s-history/textbooks/boundless-u-s-history-textbook/the-gilded-age-1870-1900-20/the-rise-of-the-city-145/the-white-city-chicago-and-the-world-columbian-exposition-1416-6994/

Image 43. Cliff Dweller Exhibit at 1893 Columbian Exhibition, *Illinois During the Gilded Age*, University of Illinois.

The photograph of the Woolworth Building on opening day shows white collar workers walking purposefully by the entrance. The bricklayers and builders of terra cotta, like my grandfather, who built the Woolworth Building, are mostly anonymous and not seen in the picture. But they were the people who shopped at F. W. Woolworth's stores and provided him with the trove of nickels and dimes with which to erect the building. As artists and writers were drawn to represent the tall buildings, it is their story, the story of the working men and women, that the artists and writers represent. Some of these laborers arrived from Germany, Italy, and Scandinavia with skills in terra cotta and tile, anxious to perform the daring work. A diary exists from one, belonging to E. V. Eskesen, a young Danish man of twenty-three, who longed to come to New York. In the diary he expresses his eagerness to find a job in the terra cotta industry. Several of his brothers and sisters were already in New York and he bought a ticket in steerage to join them.

Over the course of the trip, his small amount of money dwindled as he socialized, drank, and gambled with the other passengers. He described his first glimpse of the harbor.

> Close to us, from the hillsides of Staten Island, shone myriads of lights. In front of us were Manhattan and Brooklyn joined by the web-like span of the Brooklyn Bridge, all, everything wrapped in light—oceans of light all around us. Indeed, this was fairyland! Outside the gate I found my younger brother waiting for me. He had been working in a terra cotta factory. So after looking around for a couple of days we secured work as pressers in an architectural terra cotta plant in Long Island City. [3]

Whether in the Beaux Art style of Cass Gilbert, or the purist "form follows function" style of Louis Sullivan, the American skyscraper was and is a thing of beauty. The buildings put people in close proximity, enabling them to perform tasks efficiently. But on the pavement where the height of the buildings was taller than the streets were wide, pedestrians walked in their shadows. John Marin's wavering *Woolworth Building* suggests the ambivalence he felt towards the new technological advances of the first decade of the twentieth century. Marin shared this feeling of discontinuity with modernists who, both in literature and art, were no longer satisfied with old forms of representation. Artists questioned the technological leaps and bounds occurring in American cities, changing their society from an agrarian to an urban one. People flocked to the cities for jobs. New York was overcrowded by immigration from overseas and from the American south, and it was a city of haves and have-nots. Primary documentation in newspapers applauded the technological feats involved in constructing

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[3] Vincent Tompkins and others, *1900-1909* "Makers of America Hyphenated Americans," *1900-1909,* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1994), 85.

the behemoth skyscrapers.[4] And praise for the new architecture can be found in the correspondence between architects and business magnates such as Cass Gilbert and F. W. Woolworth. But it is in the visual arts, photography and modernist literature of the period that the skyscrapers' effects of destabilization were truly shown. Visual and written art has an ideological and sociological impact on society, and the years 1910 to 1913 were pivotal ones. The arts portray a nether world in the shadows of the tall buildings. In *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,* Virginia Woolf commented on the watershed year of 1910:

> On or about December 1910, human character changed. I am not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was nevertheless; and, since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910.[5]

Robert Martin Adams clarifies: "The 'human nature' that changed is not the substructure and component systems of the animal, but his way of seeing himself as expressed in works of art, literature, music."[6] Modern art was no doubt part of the equation to which Woolf refers. Her contemporary, art historian and fellow Bloomsbury member, Roger Fry curated a show at the Grafton Gallery from November 1910 to January 1911 entitled "Manet and the Post Impressionists," that brought works by Cézanne and Manet to England for the first time. Fry is given credit for coining the term, "Post Impressionism."

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[4] "Struck Sees Beauty in our Skyscrapers." *New York Times*, August 18, 1912, http://proquest.com.

[5] Virginia Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, New York: Columbia University, 1924, http://www.columbia.edu/~em36/MrBennettAndMrsBrown.pdf

[6] Robert Martin Adams, "What Was Modernism?" *The Hudson Review,* no.1 (Spring 1978) www.jstor.org/stable/3850132, 19.

Upon seeing the paintings, the public was in an uproar, and Woolf commented that the exhibit caused, "paroxysm of rage and laughter."[7] Fry's subsequent show at the Grafton was visited by Walt Kuhn. He sought Fry's help in procuring artwork for the Armory Show. This is recorded in the diaries of Pach and Walter Kuhn.

> After a frantic ten days in Paris, Davies and Kuhn departed for America and left Pach in charge of virtually all remaining work for the European section of the exhibition. Davies and Kuhn stopped briefly in London on their way back to the States to see the Grafton Gallery exhibition of Post-Impressionism art. From Queenstown, England, en route home, Kuhn sent Pack a note asking him to contact the gallery and obtain permission to borrow works for the show in America. Pach corresponded with Robert Dell, Roger Fry of the Grafton Gallery, Madame and Henri Matisse, Leo and Michael Stein, Alice B. Toklas, Bernheim-Jeune and Druet about the loans of works from the London show for the exhibition in America.[8]

While Kuhn selected Post-Impressionist art to ship to New York, John Marin, on the other side of the Atlantic, was leading the modernist wave with his watercolors of a swaying *Woolworth Building* No. 31.

American skyscraper imagery is found in the poetry of Adolf Wolff, John Reed and Imagist poet John Gould Fletcher. In literature the imagery is found in the writing of Willa Cather and John Dos Passos, amongst others. In photography, the imagery is represented by Alvin Langdon Coburn and Paul Strand. Each artist presents his or her vision of the skyscraper's darker side.

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[7] Elizabeth Berkowitz, "Roger Fry and the Origins of 'Post-Impressionism.'" https://www.artsy.net/article/user-5123b03588914a48e800011d-roger-fry-and-the-origins-of-post-impressionism.

[8] Laurette E. McCarthy, "The "Truths" about the Armory Show: Walter Pach's Side of the Story," 3. http://www.jstor.com/stable/25435091.

Frank W. Woolworth commissioned the world's tallest building to insure his immortality. In the poem, "Breakers and Granite," John Gould Fletcher intimates that there was a demonic side to the buildings. The builders of skyscrapers should have been looking inward rather than focused on their architectural legacy.

> What are these angels or demons, Or steel and stone?"
> …unendowed yet with human life…
> You men of my country who shaped these proud visions,
> You have yet to find godhead
> Not here but in the human heart.[9]

Fletcher's poem reflects ambivalence: a pride in the new American art form, yet a fear of the dehumanizing aspect of a perpendicular city. Criticism of the Woolworth Building is also found in Adolf Wolff's "Lines to the Woolworth Building." Wolff "shudders" at F.W. Woolworth and Cass Gilbert's need to construct such a monument.

> Imposing pile of pale and polished stone,
> Cathedral-like in thy solemnity,
> Thy rectilinear grandeur awes my soul,
> And makes me shudder!
> Monstrous sacrilege, O when before
> Has thing so big been made for end so small?[10]

In *Foundation of a Skyscraper,* social activist John Reed drew attention to the dangerous, backbreaking work of digging foundations for the buildings. These jobs were performed by men who were desperate for work and journeyed underground, digging until they hit bedrock. In Lower Manhattan this represented sixty-five feet and required a

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[9] John Gould Fletcher, "Breakers and Granite," American Verse Project, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/amverse/BAP5377.0001.001/1:10?rgn=div1;view=fulltext.

[10] Adolf Wolff, "Lines to the Woolworth Building." Songs, Sighs, and Curses. Ridgefield, NJ: Glebe, 1913. 29. http://hdl.handle.net/2142/30337.

battle against seeping river water that could drown out both the hole and the workers. Reed writes:

> Ghastly the pit with thousand-candle flares
> Sharp as a sword – white, cold and merciless.
> Bared to the world, the rock's swart nakedness –
> Shadows, and mouths of gloom, like dragon's lairs;
> Thunder of drills, stiff spurting plumes of steam –
> Shouts and the dip of cranes, the stench of earth –
> Blinded with sweat, men give a vision birth,
> Crawling and dim, men build a dreamer's dream. [11]

Skyscraper imagery is prevalent in modernist literature as well. Willa Cather in "Behind the Singer Tower," first published in *Collier's*, May 18, 1912, describes the danger of digging a foundation for a tall building and the callousness of business leaders toward the workers' plight. When completed in 1908, the Singer Tower held the position as the tallest building in the world. Cather comments on Americans' fixation with tall buildings, writing: "Our whole scheme of life and progress and profit was perpendicular."[12] Using the tall building as a backdrop; she illustrates the inequity of city life as well as the city's anti-Semitism. As the story begins, a thirty-five-story hotel called the Mont Blanc has just burned down. The fire was so treacherous that fire escapes melted and no one was able to escape. Earlier fires such as the Triangle Fire had victimized the immigrant workforce, but this was the first time that prominent people, a

[11] John Reed, "The Foundations of a Skyscraper," https://www.ideals.illinois.edu.

[12] Willa Cather, "Behind the Singer Tower," in *Willa Cather Collected Short Fiction 1892*-1912 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1970). 46.

whole different grouping, had perished in a high-rise fire.[13] Indeed, so many prominent people died that Wall Street shut down for the day. A newspaperman, the narrator of the story, comments that he visited the hotel after the fire, and discovered a man's detached hand dangling from a windowsill. The hand, belonging to a famous tenor, named Graziano who resided on the 32nd floor, could be identified by its pinky ring. As the story begins the narrator motors on a launch into New York Harbor with a prominent engineer named Hallet. One is able to envision Alfred Stieglitz's 1910 photograph, *The City of Ambition*.

Cather describes the harbor filled with tugs, ferries and barges. The launch passes by a steamship and the newspaperman comments on the arrival of immigrants: "It's the *Re di Napoli.* She's going to land her first cabin passengers tonight, evidently. Those people are terribly proud of their new docks in the North River; feel they've come up in the world."[14] The fact that a Jewish doctor is onboard doesn't stop another passenger from saying: "Did you ever notice what a Jewy-looking thing the Singer Tower is when it's lit up?" [15] On this night the mood is somber. Cather describes the city:

> The city itself, as we looked back at it, seemed enveloped in a tragic self-consciousness. Those incredible towers of stone and steel seemed, in the mist, to be grouped confusedly together, as if they were confronting each other with a question. They looked positively lonely, like the great trees left after a forest is cut away. One might fancy that the city was protesting,

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[13] Ibid., 45.

[14] Ibid., 44.

[15] Ibid., 46.

was asserting its helplessness, its irresponsibility for its physical conformation, for the direction it had taken.[16]

Image 44. Alfred Stieglitz, *City of Ambition,* 1910, Gelatin Silver Print, 22.2 x 16.8 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Hallet had worked on the Singer Building and speaks of the builder's lack of concern for safety. Each day an immigrant labor force would descend underground to lay the caissons. Hallet says that he "went into the hole with a gang of twenty dagos," and

[16] Ibid., 44.

became friends with a man named Caesarino.[17] He soon noticed that one of the cables was faulty, and wrote to Stanley Merryweather, the chief engineer, but nothing was ever done about it. Hallet says: "One of Stanley's maxims was that men are cheaper than machinery."[18] When a massive accident occurred, six men, including Casearino, were killed. Hallet attempted to send his deceased friend's pay home to his family in Italy but when he checked the pay envelope at the end of the week, he saw that Merryweather had only paid him for a half day, since the accident had occurred at lunch time.

Like Cather, John Dos Passos, author, artist and student of architecture, was adept at interpretation of the new city. As an artist, the 1913 Armory Show influenced him.[19] In modernist style, Dos Passos experimented with language. His writing, like Gertrude Stein's 1912 *Tender Buttons,* attempts to create in literary form, what contemporary French artists were creating with Cubism. In his novel, *Manhattan Transfer*, published in 1925, the writing is automatic, stream of consciousness, with interconnected words, multiple perspectives and often a lack of punctuation. Dos Passos presents a kaleidoscope similar to a stage play, with characters making brief entrances onto the stage. The characters emerge as snap shots as if they were tall buildings, seen from the perspective of pushing a motion camera on a dolly down a street. In his vignettes he provides rapid

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[17] Ibid., 48.

[18] Ibid.,51.

[19] Michael Spindler, "John Dos Passos and the Visual Arts," *Journal of American Studies* 15, no.3 (December 1981), 392.

Image 45. Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Broadway and the Singer Building by Night*, 1910, photogravure, The Cleveland Museum of Art.

looks into the feelings and prejudices of New Yorkers. We see a different view of the emerging modern city in the tall buildings' shadows. At the beginning of the novel one character tries to convince himself of the benefit of new technologies: "all these mechanical inventions – telephones, electricity, steel bridges, horseless vehicles – they are all leading somewhere."[20] He compares New York to Babylon and Nineveh:

> There was Babylon and Ninevah, they were built of brick. Athens was marble columns. Rome was held up by broad arches of rubble. In Constantinople the minarets flame like great candles round the Golden Horn…O there's one more river to cross. Steel glass, tile, concrete will be the materials of the skyscrapers. Crammed on the narrow island the millionwindowed buildings will jut, glittering pyramid on pyramid, white cloudsheads piled above a thunderstorm…
> And it rained forty days and it rained forty nights
> And it didn't stop till Christmas
> And the only man who survived the flood
> Was long legged Jack of the Isthmus. . .
> Kerist I wish I was a skyscraper. [21]

Dos Passos introduces people from all rungs of society: milkmen, seamen, ambulance chasers, old money (who hate the Irish and Jews) and newcomers who don't know enough be allowed to vote. Rather than tell the story in a linear fashion he piles up characters as if they were floors in a skyscraper, akin to how Marin described the buildings that "pile one up on top of another." His perception of building imagery is similar to Marin's, describing the city where: "everything was a confusion of bright intersecting planes of color, faces, legs,

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[20] John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (Cambridge: R. Bentley, 1980), 26.

[21] Ibid., 252.

shop windows, trolley cars, automobiles."[22] Dos Passos uses commercial imagery to describe the city:

> A steady wind kept sweeping coils of brown smoke and blobs of whitecotton steam off the high enormous blue indigo arch of sky. Against a sootsmudged horizon, tangled with barges, steamers, chimneys of powerplants, covered wharves, bridges, lower New York was a pink and white tapering pyramid cut slenderly out of cardboard.[23]

One can envision Max Weber's *Rush Hour.*

Image 46. Max Weber, *Rush Hour*, 1915, oil on canvas, 92 x 76.9cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

[22] Dos Passos, 333.

[23] Ibid., 276.

Image 47. Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Shadows,* photogravure *1903,* 19.2 x 23.8cm. The George Eastman House of Photography.

Many New York City buildings that garnered the title of the world's tallest building would become the iconic subject of photographers as well. Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882-1966) was a founding member of the Photo Secession and his work was exhibited at '291.' His pictorialist photograph *Shadows*, called Whistlerian by Meir Wigoder, appeared in *Camera Work* in 1903.[24]

[24] Meir Wigoder, "The 'Solar Eye' of Vision: Emergence of the Skyscraper-Viewer in the Discourse on Heights in New York City, 1890-1920." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 61, no. 2 (June 2002): 152.

But in 1907, after visiting and photographing the Grand Canyon, Coburn's interest turned to photographing New York City and tall buildings.[25] Coburn's 1912 photograph, *The Octopus,* expresses the foreboding nature of New York City. Wigoder writes that Coburn's interest in tall buildings led him from pictorialism to abstraction.[26]

Image 48. Alvin Langdon Coburn, *The Octopus,* platinum print*,* 1912, 41.8 x 31.8 cm. The George Eastman House of Photography.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

The photograph was taken as Coburn stood on the tower of the Metropolitan Life Insurance building at Madison Avenue and 23rd Street looking down onto Madison Square Park. Built in 1909, the Metropolitan Life Building seized the title of the tallest building until the completion of the Woolworth Building in 1913. The park was at the center of an area of commerce and was a popular pedestrian thoroughfare, yet in the photograph it is covered in snow, the trees are bare and no one is in sight. A giant shadow of the Metropolitan Tower looms across the park. Walking paths branch out from the center like spokes on a wheel. Only someone standing on the roof of the building could see it this way. Coburn entitled the photograph *The Octopus,* viewing the walking paths as an octopus' tendrils. He interprets the city abstractly as John Marin and Robert Delaunay did. However, for Marin and Delaunay, speed and motion, not detachment, were at the core of city life.

Photographer Paul Strand, a native New Yorker, was influenced by Coburn's work. Considerably younger than Stieglitz, he was late to join Alfred Stieglitz's band of artists. Strand studied photography under Lewis Hine at the Ethical Culture School, and visited '291' with Hine's class in 1907. Stieglitz was initially critical of Strand's work but eventually came around to seeing Strand as a visionary. He gave Strand a one man show at '291' in 1916 and devoted the entire last issue of *Camera Work* to his photographs. Strand was a street photographer with a leftist political bend. He often took photographs of people on the Lower East Side without the subject's knowledge. His photographs appear Dickensian and are a social commentary of the underclass in New

York. A blind woman begging on the Lower East Side is required to wear a sign stating "Blind," as part of her New York license to panhandle.

Image 49. Paul Strand, *Blind Woman, New York,* 1916, 22.4 x16.7 cm.
The J. P. Getty Museum.

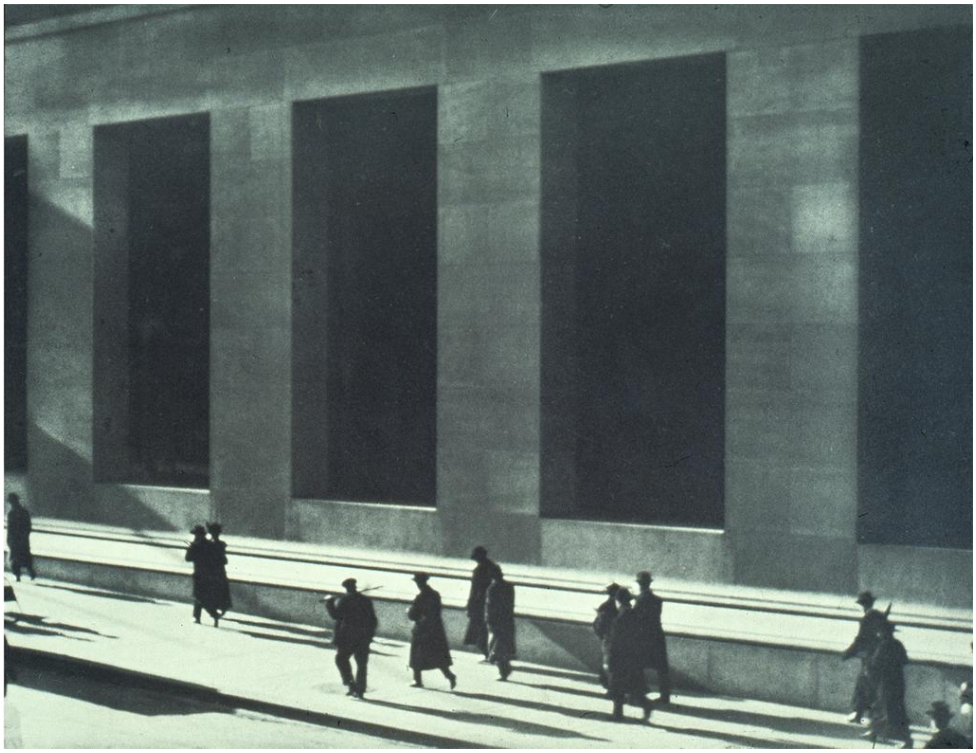

Image 50. Paul Strand, *Wall Street,* 1915, platinum palladium print, The Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Strand's photograph of bankers parading past the J. P. Morgan Building in the photograph, *Wall Street,* reflects the man-machine conflict with the pedestrians as antiheros. The photograph makes more of an impact than that of the Woolworth Building on opening day. The press photograph of the Woolworth is portrait format; Strand's photograph is landscape. His sense of geometric shapes is strong and the long cubic windows show a perception of cubism. Many more pedestrians are in the Woolworth photo. The scale of the building in the press photograph leaves one in awe and invites participation. In Strand's photograph the building is alienating and has a dehumanizing effect.

In a black and white photograph, shadows are what make the picture interesting. Photography is dependent upon the reproduction of variations of gray, or gray zones, to create a telling image. There is irony in the fact that the shadows – what make the picture interesting – are also the image that tells the story. The shadows that Stieglitz, Coburn and Strand represent in their photographs speak of the subplot in the development of the new metropolis. One could ask the artist, what are you meaning to imply by *Wall Street,* or *The Octopus?* When Stieglitz was asked that question at '291' – what does that painting of Marin's mean, he replied: "Do you ask what rain means . . . or the wind? Do you ask what a thunderstorm means? You might as well ask what life itself means."[27] In the Middle Ages, art's purpose was meant to influence. During the Enlightenment, religious art was meant to persuade. But Modernism is different. The viewer, and the reader are to come to his or her own conclusions. The viewer is left to the task of figuring out whether or not an image has meaning. And in Strand's photograph one is to judge the actual shadows of the city and the affect these capitalistic behemoths have on city life. Is Strand's *Wall Street* a fact? More likely it is an opinion wrapped around the fact that there is a building there, and people pass it. The thorny issue here is the artist, albeit a photographer, painter, poet or novelist, whether consciously or not, is always imposing his or her own perspective. For all we know, the day Strand shot that frame, he might have shot many others with a totally different ethos to them. But in the *Wall Street* photograph, Strand abstracted the pedestrians. He chose this perspective rather than the perspective of participating in the crowd, which would have portrayed the same sidewalk,

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[27] Norman, 2.

but a different message. From the perspective of Strand's leftist political stance, the building could be read as representing capital: This is the result of what a capitalist does, he turns capital into things. The humans on Wall Street are as insignificant as the blind woman begging. They are getting chewed up and spit out. More than likely, Strand wants us to interpret that for ourselves.

Image 51. Alfred Stieglitz, *The Ferry Boat,* 1910, photogravure, 20.9 x 16.3 cm.

By the 1920s the modernism of the American skyscraper began appearing in film as well. The city represented in Cather's *From the Singer Tower,* Coburn's *The Octopus*, Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer,* and Strand's *Wall Street* culminates in Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's 1921, almost ten minute film,

Manhatta,[28] considered to be the first avant-garde documentary film made in the United States.[29] Interspersed with printed lines from Walt Whitman's poem, "Mannahatta," the filmmakers tell an un-narrated story of a day in the life of downtown New York. Much of the footage resembles the iconic photography of Stieglitz and Strand. The movie begins with a live rendition of Stieglitz's 1910 photograph, *The Ferry Boat.* Thousands of men in top hats, along with a handful of women, disembark from the ferryboat on their way to work in the tall buildings. With a lack of propriety they cut through Trinity Church cemetery. Just as in Strand's photograph, *Wall Street* (actually filmed in front of the J. P. Morgan building at 23 Wall Street), there is footage shot from a high angle, of men walking past the J. P. Morgan building. The cinematography tilts up the Singer Tower, and the Woolworth Building towers above all else. Men dig foundations, the treacherous work that Cather described. The high angles that Strand and Sheeler use were likely influenced by Coburn's high angles of the city.

The contemplative use of skyscraper imagery that John Marin daringly began to use in 1912 continued on in varied dystopian media: Fritz Lang's 1927 *Metropolis* and Merian Cooper's 1931 *King Kong.* The skyscraper in question was no longer the Woolworth Building, however, but the Empire State Building which at 1,250 feet gained and held the title of World's Tallest Building until the

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[28] *Manhatta*. Directed by Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler. 1921. https://youtu.be/qduvk4zu_hs

[29] Dave Kehr, "Avant-Garde 1920's Vintage is Back in Focus: *The New York Times* (New York, NY) November 6, 2008 http://www.nytimes.

construction of the World Trade Center in 1972. [30] By then skyscrapers had become an accepted fact of life.

[30] www.skyscrapermuseum.org

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Image 52. Alfred Stieglitz, *John Marin at '291'* 1908, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm.

> Shall we consider the life of a great city as confined simply to the people and animals on its streets and in its buildings? Are the buildings themselves dead? We have been told somewhere that a work of art is a thing alive. You cannot create a work of art unless the things you behold respond to something within you. Therefore if these buildings move me they too must have life.[1]
>
> John Marin

Two years ago, inspired by my family's history with the Woolworth Building, I set out to investigate John Marin's selection of the Woolworth Building as a subject, and why he painted the building as if it were engaged in a dance. I hoped to prove that Marin

[1] John Marin, *Letters of John Marin*. The New York Historical Society.

was an early American modernist. I had no idea how organically – even with its many zigs and zags – the study would unfold. From where I stand now, it seems obvious, but it took many steps to arrive there. The skyscraper was indeed an example of American exceptionalism. As what is arguably America's first art form, the skyscraper influenced all forms of modernism. Its invention resulted from many technological innovations of the early twentieth century: steel framing, faster and safer passenger steam elevators, centralized heating and plumbing, and of course electric lighting—and even some lucky geology with the deep bedrock of Manhattan. It was a proposed solution for how to increase urban space – what Cass Gilbert called "the machine that makes the land pay." And in 1910, no other country in the world was involved in the race to create the world's tallest building.

The American skyscraper was a culmination of American ingenuity, bringing together American know-how and our insatiable quest for exploration into what was possible. Artist Robert MacCameron emphasizes the connection between architecture and modern art writing: "Great art always begins with architecture…[E]ven we who are academic realize it is a precursor of a change that is inevitable."[2] And, as a young nation, compared to continental Europe, we were not intimidated in surpassing the height of cathedrals; we dreamed of conquering space. We continually pushed our boundaries, cracking open the sky with vertical towers, but also pushing boundaries with attempts to represent motion in art.

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[2] Robert MacCameron "Great Art Always Begins With Architecture, " *New York Times*, http://timesmachine.nytimes.com.

As he stood on the ferry deck each day from his home in Weehawken, New Jersey to Manhattan, John Marin identified the buildings as having a soul. No building had more of a glow, from its polychromatic use of colored terra cotta, or was more recognizable than the Woolworth Building. For seventeen years from 1913 to 1930 it was known throughout the world as the tallest building. Marin's paintings of the Woolworth building, swaying in a dance, were described as inflicting "vertigo," and "similar to an earthquake."[3] His lavender palette seems soothing at first until one realizes that lavender, or violet, is a color of mourning. He was after all a Yankee, more at home in Maine where he spent half of his time painting nature. Alfred Stieglitz recognized the significance of Marin's paintings when he began to showcase Marin's work in 1909 and later when he preemptively exhibited the Woolworth Building series one week prior to the opening of The 1913 Armory Show. Stieglitz had always been intent upon breaking up the old order in American art and photography. His '291' gallery was pivotal in planting the seeds of European modernism. But after The 1913 Armory Show, his work of exposing European modernism to America was done, and he moved on to look for the next frontier. With artists travelling back and forth from America to Europe, a confluence of stimuli occurred in American art, each pushing styles a bit further. John Marin was representative of the zeitgeist in his interpretation of the living spirit of downtown Manhattan and Stieglitz understood this.

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[3] Martha Tedeschi, "A Pre-Emptive Strike: John Marin and the Armory Show." In *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution,* by Marilyn S. Kushner, Kimberly Orcutt, and Casey Nelson Blake, 275.

However, in 1913, life was changing rapidly in New York, and the "cathedral of commerce," like other tall buildings in New York, had a darker side in its shadows. Artists play a role in helping us understand sociological and historical context. The avant garde artists foresaw that our skyscraper race came with conditions, and the tall buildings had an influence on their art. Modernism is, after all, a reaction to the destabilization of modernization. With time, the skyscraper grew to become a recognizable icon in art, literature, photography and film. John Marin's representation of movement in his Woolworth Building paintings introduced Americans to Futurism and also made a commentary on the chaos of the city. Sheldon Reich wrote

> In this hothouse atmosphere of avant-garde experimentation, Marin produced, during the winter of 1912-13 among the most advanced works being done by any American on this side of the Atlantic.[4]

When describing the New York skyscrapers to Frenchmen, Gertrude Stein was prescient when she said:

> When I used to try to explain America to Frenchmen of course before I had gone over this time, I used to tell them you see there is no sky over there there is only air…there is no cornice up there and that is right because why end anything?[5]

There was no need for a cornice, because the race to build the tallest building is never ending. The skyscraper is no longer exclusively an American art form. We can no longer

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[4] Sheldon Reich, *John Marin Drawings 1886-1951 A retrospective Exhibition Honoring John Marin's Centennial. organized by the University of Utah Museum of Fine Art* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1969), 12.

[5] Quoted in David E. Nye, "The Sublime and the Skyline," in *The American Skyscraper Cultural Histories*, ed. Roberta Moudry (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 255.

say that we have the world's tallest building, and it is no longer uncommon for a building to have more than 100 stories. The honor of world's tallest building changes almost yearly and does not appear to be the subject of artistic inspiration as it once was in 1913. The Woolworth Building no longer even resembles a skyscraper. It looks old fashioned and out of place. But when it was erected, it caught the attention of everyone worldwide. It seized the imagination of John Marin and together they paved the way for a new American modern art.

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VITA

Full name: Pamela Kraemer Klurfield

Place and date of birth: Englewood, New Jersey September 19, 1952

Parents Name: Dorothy and W. Frank Kraemer

Educational Institutions

School	Place	Degree	Date
Secondary:			
The Ethel Walker School	Simsbury, CT	Diploma	May 1970
Collegiate:			
Barnard College	New York, NY	B.A.	May 1974
Graduate:			
College of St. Elizabeth	Convent Station, NJ	M.A.	May 2008
Caspersen School of Graduate Studies, Drew University	Madison, NJ	D.Litt.	May 2017