

AUSPICIOUS VISION

EDWARD WALES ROOT AND

AMERICAN MODERNISM

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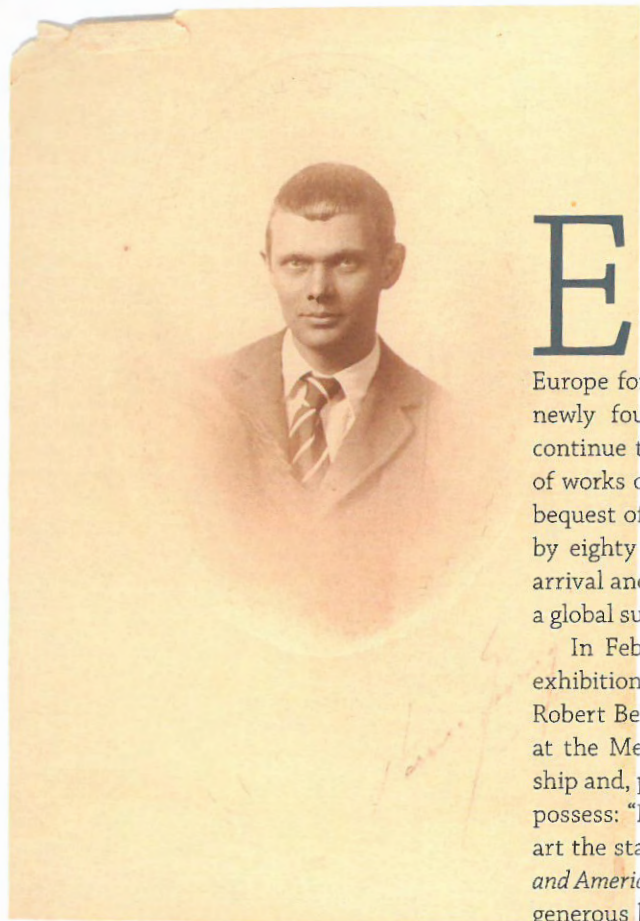


FIG. 1
Edward Wales Root, ca. 1930

EDWARD WALES ROOT (1884–1956) was a pioneering collector of contemporary American art during the first half of the twentieth century (FIG. 1) a period when many patrons looked instead to Europe for validation in the visual arts. He began his association with the newly founded Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in 1938, and would continue to share his expertise by serving as consultant, lender, and donor of works of art from his collection. His crowning gift to the Institute was a bequest of 227 twentieth-century American paintings and drawings created by eighty different artists during the five decades between the century's arrival and the post-World War II period when the United States emerged as a global superpower.

In February 1953, when The Metropolitan Museum of Art opened an exhibition of 132 paintings, watercolors, and drawings from Root's holdings, Robert Beverly Hale (1901–85), curator of American Painting and Sculpture at the Metropolitan, noted the adventurous spirit, acuity, serious scholarship and, perhaps, good fortune the collector of contemporary material must possess: "Indeed, for the successful creation of a collection of contemporary art the stars must be most auspicious."¹ *Auspicious Vision: Edward Wales Root and American Modernism* documents the fiftieth anniversary of Edward Root's generous bequest, pays homage to one of the Institute's great patrons, and celebrates the vital legacy of his advocacy for new art.

Although he was enthusiastic about what he called the "rather strange developments" of European avant-garde art, Root believed it was his duty to collect works by American artists.² He purchased nearly half of the works in the bequest within two years of their creation and, because Root consistently patronized the galleries that featured contemporary art, his collection is a cross section of the major movements in American art during the first half of the twentieth century. He acquired signature pieces by many of the artists whose achievements helped to define the history of this era.

Root's aesthetic taste is characterized by a respect for formal properties, humanistic themes, and a special appreciation for nature-based subjects. In the first decades of the twentieth century he bought paintings and drawings from a group of progressive and avant-garde American artists whose works reflected the dynamic vitality of modern urban American life or the more radical European styles of Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism. In the

1930s, with money inherited from his parents, Root could afford to collect more ambitiously. During this decade he acquired major paintings by a number of American Scene artists who exploited native subjects during the country's darkest periods of the Depression and early years of World War II. In the post-War era, as American artists explored abstract and non-objective art, Root primarily acquired paintings and drawings by artists of the New York School and those who worked in the Pacific Northwest.

The style and subject matter of many of the works that Root bequeathed to the Museum reflect the artistic self-inquiry of an exciting, if unsettled era. And though much of the art work that Root collected was untested at the time of purchase, he remained steadfast in his patronage through several artistic generations. When he was a professor of art appreciation at Hamilton College, Root explained in a paper he delivered to his fellow teachers why knowledge and a belief in contemporary art was an intellectual imperative. "To show youth only what the past has discovered," he noted, "is to suggest that emotional and mental growth are over, that we of today have become spiritually unproductive, capable only of receiving from the past, incapable of giving to the future."³

THE ROOT FAMILY

Edward Root was the youngest child of Clara Wales (1853–1928) and Elihu Root, Sr. (1845–1937), who distinguished himself as a New York City lawyer before President William McKinley (1843–1901) appointed him Secretary of War in 1899. Elihu later served as Secretary of State for Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919), was United States Senator representing New York and received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1912. In 1909 he was, moreover, a founder of the American Federation of Arts, an agency that he believed—through national tours of original works of art—would promote a cultivated and educated populace. In addition to a term as President of the American Federation of Arts, Elihu introduced legislation in the Senate in 1910 that led to the creation of the U.S. Fine Arts Commission.⁴ Elihu's aesthetic sensibility is revealed in his description of the landscape surrounding what the Root family called the Homestead (FIG. 2) in Clinton, New York, now on the campus of Hamilton College:

In planting a picture of trees, there are two things to look out for—contrasting shades of green alongside each other, and variety of outline. We say there are colors in autumn, but look at that ginkgo, the hemlock and the butternut together now. What variety there is.... One of the most beautiful sights I ever saw was on a winter's day over in the pasture. I came upon a group of witch hazel with the sun shining full on their golden bloom as it stood out against the white of the snow and the blue of the sky.⁵

Elihu attributed this aspect of his personality to his own father, Oren Root (1803–85), whom he described as having "a Renaissance of culture."⁶ Elihu's sensitivity to the visual pleasures of the natural world was an important model for his younger son, Edward, who similarly developed profound feeling for beauty in art and nature.

As a child, Edward lived in New York City and Washington, D. C. He (FIG. 3) spent summers at the Homestead in Clinton, which is eight miles southeast of Utica. (As an adult, he and his wife, Grace Cogswell Root [1891–1975] lived



FIG. 2
The Homestead, Clinton, New York
Richard Carver Wood (1902–89), photographer

"Much has been written, and more will be written in the future, of the importance of Edward Root as a patron of American art, and particularly of his encouragement and support of younger artists before they had achieved much of a reputation."

—Charles E. Burchfield, 1957



FIG. 3
Edward Wales Root, ca. 1900



FIG. 4
Grace Cogswell Root, ca. 1920

seasonally at the Homestead and in New York City.) After graduating from Hamilton College in 1905, Edward searched for his calling in life but, because he was deaf from early childhood, he did not cultivate a career in law and public service like his father and elder brother, Elihu Root, Jr. (1881–1967). After testing his mettle as a cowboy in Texas, Edward turned to journalism in New York. It was as a newspaperman that he became acquainted with contemporary painting, which intrigued the young Root, who began to visit galleries, meet artists, and generally find his path in life.⁷ Root taught art appreciation at Hamilton College between 1920–40, which helped focus the direction of his life's work. His self-image during his twenty-year tenure evolved from a 1928 description as a teacher and son of Elihu to a 1947 statement in which he called himself a “collector of modern pictures... not a writer or lecturer.”⁸ Perhaps because he was deaf, Edward developed a more acute visual compass than a hearing person might have; Grace (FIG. 4) once noted that her husband had been frustrated by his deafness and, as a result, turned his “emotional life into eyes as the one way out.”⁹

Root's biographer, Aline B. Saarinen (1914–72), considered Root's condition a significant enough factor of his life to make it a central thesis around which she wove her 1958 biography of him and, as early as a 1953 *New York Times* review of the exhibition of his collection at the Metropolitan Museum, she made the connection between Root's deafness and his involvement with the visual arts.¹⁰ Certainly Grace was sympathetic with Edward's condition because one of her ancestors also had been deaf, a circumstance that may have been one of the factors that led him to feel a special kinship for her when they met in 1916.¹¹ Two years before this, Root ruminated about the valuable lessons he learned from his deafness:

[People] who from infancy have been damaged... have... been able to learn the supreme lesson of life. While still children we have been privileged... to discover that the ultimate glory of the individual must inevitably consist in the pride of indifference to individual defeat... To die on the high tide of vigorous and fair seeming youth without yet experienced the limitation of mortality... is to graduate from existence without yet having acquired that tragic nobility of patience which is, in my estimation, the most distinguishing characteristic of the gods themselves.¹²

Root's comments in a 1922 article, “Pictures and the College”—on teaching art appreciation to college students—about Laura Bridgman (1829–89), the first deaf-mute and blind woman to be educated in the United States, are equally significant in a number of ways to his deafness.¹³ Most importantly, Charles Dickens's (1812–70) description in *American Notes* (1842) of how Bridgman transcended her handicap was a story with which Root doubtless personally identified. Additionally, Dickens's description of how Bridgman's innate intelligence was exposed to the facts and experiences of the world may have confirmed or clarified some of Root's own thoughts about the meaning and nature of culture. It is also easy to imagine that Root identified with Bridgman's teachers who, as Dickens noted, in approximate terms, helped the blind to see; Root alluded to such an idea in his 1922 article. It probably reflected, as well, Root's feelings about his own teachers and the view he had of what he hoped to achieve as an instructor of art appreciation at Hamilton College. Dickens's remarks about Bridgman's growing awareness of the world

might also have resonated with Root. His successful college career, capped by the academic honor of graduating Phi Beta Kappa was, like Bridgman's, achieved in spite of his deafness.¹⁴

FRIEND OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN ARTISTS

In her book, *The Proud Possessors: The Lives, Times and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors* (1958), Saarinen included Root with more legendary American collectors like J. Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913), Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840–1924), John Quinn (1870–1924), and Peggy Guggenheim (1898–1974). In an insightful comment about Root's self-effacing ways and studious nature, she noted that he, by contrast, had "very little pride in possession. He was always, even in his personal relationships, the observer. He collected things in order to observe them intimately, study them, analyze them, understand them."¹⁵

Root began collecting art in the first decade of the twentieth century. He was living in New York City and working in the editorial office of the *New York Evening Sun* where he witnessed heated arguments about modern art between the critics in his office, Charles FitzGerald and Frederick James Gregg (d. 1928).¹⁶ This was a life-altering experience for Root, then in his early twenties. Edward soon gravitated to a circle of artists known as The Eight, whose artistic ambitions and bohemian lifestyles challenged the genteel values of the waning Gilded Age.

Root met one of the artists of this group, Ernest Lawson (1873–1939) late in 1909 after learning that the artist was destitute. In her chapter on Root, Saarinen described this now legendary encounter, an event that established Root's modus operandi as an art collector and friend of contemporary American artists.¹⁷ Motivated by intellectual curiosity and a concern for Lawson's welfare, rather than by any ambition on his part to begin building an art collection, Root gave Lawson

\$250 for his landscape painting, *Winter, Spuyten Duyvil* (FIG. 5), a work that was included in the notorious exhibition of The Eight that took place at the Macbeth Galleries nearly two years earlier.¹⁸ This was a watershed experience for Root and an important milestone in the story of American art patronage. Additionally, for Root personally, as he remarked later in life, this picture taught him that art was something that "appealed primarily to the emotions."¹⁹

Root's best friend among The Eight was George B. Luks (1866–1933), who was as ebullient as Root was reserved. A close camaraderie developed between the two when Root studied painting and drawing with the artist. Together they tramped around New York, from the zoo to vaudeville shows, to sketch everything they saw, and Root became a steady patron of Luks's



FIG. 5
Ernest Lawson
Winter, Spuyten Duyvil, ca. 1908
Oil on canvas, 25 1/8 x 30 in.
Museum purchase, 58.41

work. Around 1909–10 the artist painted Root's portrait (coll. John B. Root) and in 1917, when Edward and Grace were married, Luks gave them his watercolor, *Dyckman Street Church* (FIG. 6), which Root described as the first picture of the couple's "mutual collection."²⁰ Although Edward later tried to sell this watercolor to purchase something else, this remark suggests that he considered Grace a collaborator in the contemporary American collection they assembled over the next nearly forty years.²¹ Luks, Edward, and Grace traveled together for fishing trips and, from time to time, Luks visited the Roots in Clinton. The artist gave spirited painting demonstrations to the students enrolled in the art appreciation course Root taught at Hamilton College, and he also had "drying out" sessions at the Homestead to palliate bouts of hard drinking.²² Until Luks's death in 1933, he and Edward exchanged witty letters on a variety of topics including the development of a "new hearing instrument."²³ There is a letter from the artist dated Sunday, June 8, 1924, on which Luks sketched a charming drawing of God blessing Edward and Grace.²⁴ Root was very cognizant of the life-enhancing pleasures that someone like himself, a "would-be student of pictures," derived from the "friendship and companionship of an artist of the better sort." He probably had Luks in mind when he wrote in 1922:

To share one's experience with such a man, even occasionally; to have him observe what you only see and to be... conducted through the living world by a living being, vital, observant, reflective, sympathetic, expressive—is in itself a liberal education.²⁵

It is probable that Luks' opinions helped to shape the younger Root's attitude about supporting American contemporary artists. Luks's feeling about this matter is reflected in a 1923 interview with the *New York Tribune*, where he was quoted as saying, "Americans should patronize their own artists. Why should an American home be full of English portraits... we should encourage contemporary American art. When you have done that, then you are building a country."²⁶

Root's assistance to artists included the generous loan of works from his collection to public exhibitions. He has the distinction of being one of a very small group of individuals who both loaned to and purchased from the landmark 1913 Armory Show (International Exhibition of Modern Art). He lent ten Luks drawings depicting animals in the Bronx Zoo.²⁷ Although Root was attracted to the work of some of the European modernists in the exhibition—especially the expressive Fauve paintings of Henri Matisse (1869–1954) and Marcel Duchamp's (1887–1968) notorious Cubist figure composition, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912, Philadelphia Museum of Art)—Root felt a patriotic responsibility to support American artists. This led him to purchase for \$800 the most expensive of the three paintings that Maurice B. Prendergast (1858–1924) included in the exhibition, the festive, multi-figured composition, *Landscape with Figures* (FIG. 7). In buying this work, Root joined an elite group of adventurous collectors like Arthur Jerome Eddy (1859–1920), Lillie P. Bliss (1864–1931), John Quinn, and Walter C. Arensberg (1878–1954), who also patronized this show. Although the amount that Root paid for this work was less than what some of Prendergast's colleagues, like George Bellows (1882–1925), Arthur B. Davies (1862–1928), Robert Henri (1865–1929), and Luks asked for their paintings at the Armory Show, it was comparable to what other artists, like William J. Glackens (1870–1938), Marsden Hartley



FIG. 6
George B. Luks
Dyckman Street Church, ca. 1915
Watercolor and graphite on wove
paper, 15 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{5}{16}$ in.
Museum purchase, 58.293



(1877–1943), Lawson, and John Sloan (1871–1951) were asking.²⁸ A year earlier, with Luks's encouragement, Root had purchased Prendergast's Venetian watercolor, *Canal* (cat. no. 158) from the 1912 American Watercolor Society exhibition. Prendergast (who, like Root, suffered from deafness) was the most radical member of The Eight.²⁹ The decorative shapes and jewel-like colors he used in his pictures are stylistically related to progressive tendencies in European Post-Impressionist painting.

Luks's riotous lifestyle and bumptious personality seem far removed from the patrician environment in which Edward was raised. On the other hand, one does not get the impression that Edward was slumming with his artist-colleagues. Root consistently befriended painters of immigrant and blue-collar backgrounds, many of whom held leftist or Socialist political views, because he always connected with them through their art. When he had his name removed from the Social Register Root quipped that it was because he had more friends in the telephone directory.³⁰ This anecdote presents Edward as an interesting character, someone who was, perhaps, quietly rebellious. The Root and Wales families were long-established members of New York City's cultural elite, and Edward's commitment to the art of his time occasionally put him at odds with established institutions.³¹

Another member of The Eight whom Root held in high regard but did not know very well because of his reserved demeanor was Davies. He was a prin-

FIG. 7
Maurice B. Prendergast
Landscape with Figures
Ca. 1912
Oil on canvas
29 5/8 x 42 7/8 in.
Cat. no. 159

facing page

FIG. 8

Edward Hopper

The Camel's Hump, 1931

Oil on canvas

32 ¾ x 50 ½ in.

Cat. no. 105

FIG. 9

Jo Hopper

Map of South Truro, Cape Cod

Ca. 1936

Graphite and colored pencil

on wove paper

5 ¼ x 16 ½ in.

R.G. 13, F. 29, Edward Wales

Root Papers, Munson-

Williams-Proctor Arts

Institute Archives

cial organizer of the Armory Show and for several years thereafter experimented in his own art with faceted geometric forms that were based, however naively, on the Cubism of Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and others. His true genius, however, was his pastoral sensibility, which, as Root noted, was shaped by the formative years he spent in the Mohawk Valley of central New York State, a region to which Root himself was passionately attracted and described in the following terms: “It is a country to be born in,” Root noted, “to live in; to die in; to arouse indeterminable desires and bestow sensuous delights—a proper nursery for the poet, the artist and the man of thought.”³² Two years after the Armory Show, in 1915, Root purchased for \$2,000 Davies’s landscape, *Refluent Season* (before 1911, Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute). Root’s willingness to pay such a large amount for this work was grounded in his conviction that Davies was the “most comprehensive artistic intelligence that has as yet, in America, attempted to express itself in paint.”³³ Despite the high opinion Root had for Davies, he nevertheless, assessed the artist’s oeuvre with cool discernment. In the margin of his copy of the Armory Show catalog, Root had nothing good to say about the three oil paintings that Davies displayed in the exhibition. He remarked that *Hill Wind* (not dated, ex. coll. Duncan Phillips) was a “failure,” that *A Line of Mountains* (ca. 1911, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts) was “too contrasted,” and that *Seadrift* (date and whereabouts unknown) was “too subjective.”³⁴

After receiving an inheritance from his mother, who died in 1928, Root was able to collect art on a more ambitious scale as well as build a private art gallery adjacent to the Homestead in Clinton to display and store his growing collection.³⁵ A number of the most important pictures that Root acquired during the 1930s came from Frank K. M. Rehn (1886–1956), who was a leading art dealer in New York during these years. Rehn’s eponymous gallery played a key role promoting the work of several artists who shaped the history of early twentieth-century art in the United States, a group that was critically acclaimed in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* as a “choice little symposium of contemporary American painting.”³⁶

One of the greatest purchases Root made at the Rehn Galleries during this decade—and one of the most important works in his entire bequest to the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute—is Edward Hopper’s *The Camel’s Hump* (FIG. 8). The picture depicts the grass-covered dunes on Cape Cod where Hopper (1882–1967) and his wife, Jo (1883–1968), spent their summers for nearly forty years (FIG. 9). In a manner typical of his relationship with many other artists, Root became an early supporter of Hopper; his patronage provided moral support at a time when Hopper was receiving little critical recognition and had to make a living as a commercial artist. Root’s enthusiasm for Hopper’s work predates by nearly a decade his purchase of *The Camel’s Hump*. In 1927 he bought Hopper’s watercolor, *Skyline Near Washington Square (Self Portrait)* (cat. no. 106) and then, the same year it was painted, his oil painting, *Freight Cars, Gloucester* (1928, Addison Gallery of American Art).³⁷ In May 1928 Root also published a complimentary review of an exhibition of Hopper’s watercolors and etchings that was organized by the Utica Art Society. Root remarked, “painting of this kind is something of which one never grows tired,” and added that it was a sign of “the renaissance of American taste” that some of the watercolors in the exhibition were already owned by America’s great museums.³⁸

While Root did not acquire as many works by Hopper as he did by other artists, Root praised what he described as Hopper’s classicism, identifying

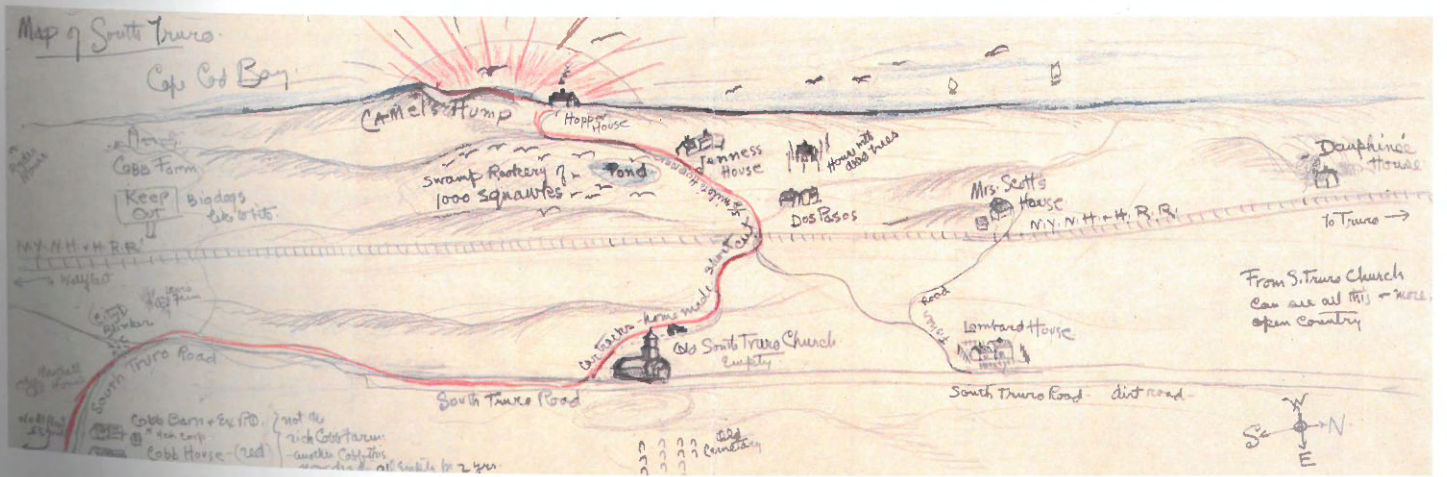




FIG. 10
 Reginald Marsh
Texas Guinan and Her Gang, 1931
 Tempera on linen
 36 ¼ x 48 ¼ in.
 Cat. no. 140

“three purely formal motives . . . sparkling color, mass, and space: three of the most everlasting and potent motives known to art.” Root noted, too, the profundity of feeling in Hopper’s paintings, an “almost agonizing sense of loneliness or even a kind of romantic feeling for the remote and strange.”³⁹ And, when Thomas Brown Rudd (1898–1955), an administrator at Hamilton College (as well as a Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute trustee and senior executive during its formative years), asked Root around 1948 to which American artist the college might consider awarding an honorary degree, Root confidently replied: “If I were giving a degree to the man whom I thought posterity would acclaim as the greatest American painter of my generation I should give it to Edward Hopper. But I doubt if Hopper would accept a degree and if he did it would be a social agony for him to appear and receive it.”⁴⁰

Rehn’s gallery also represented Reginald Marsh (1898–1954), an artist whose paintings have the opposite emotional tenor of those by Hopper. Like George Luks in an earlier era, Marsh celebrated New York at its most colorful. He trekked all over to capture the city’s vitality because it had everything he liked to paint: “girls, bums, athletes, muscles, tugs and ocean liners, clouds, and movement, all in one.”⁴¹ At this stage in Root’s life, twenty years after he had befriended Luks and with whom he had roamed around town, Root was a husband, father, and college professor, so he did not join the younger Marsh on his excursions, but nevertheless vicariously enjoyed the artist’s urban adventures: over a three-year period in the early 1930s Root acquired from Rehn in quick succession Marsh’s *Lower Manhattan (New York Skyline)* (cat.

no. 139), and then two humorous figure paintings: *Zeke Youngblood's Dance Marathon* (cat. no. 141), followed by *Texas Guinan and Her Gang* (FIG. 10).⁴²

Rehn also played a key role in promoting the work of Charles E. Burchfield (1893–1967), the artist with whom Root is most closely associated. In 1928, the year that Root convinced the Metropolitan Museum to purchase one of Burchfield's watercolors, he acquired for himself *Country Blacksmith Shop* (*Blacksmith Shop*) (cat. no. 28), from the Montross Gallery.⁴³ This was Root's first purchase for what would ultimately be a significant collection of Burchfield watercolors, twenty-one of which he gave to the Museum, the largest group of works by any artist in the bequest.

Edward and Grace met Burchfield for the first time in late January 1929, on a visit to their friend Harry D. Yates (1903–96), who lived in Buffalo. In his studio, Burchfield showed them watercolor sketches he had made as a young artist in 1916–18. Root described them as “joyful and unpremeditated” and was so impressed with their vivid colors and decorative forms that he urged Rehn to show them at his gallery.⁴⁴ He even purchased ten of these early watercolors at this time for himself (cat. nos. 29–32, 34, 39, 40, 43, 44, 46). Such was the affinity between artist and patron that Root continued to acquire Burchfield's work for the next two decades (cat. nos. 26, 27, 33, 35–38, 41, 42, 45), which was somewhat unusual for him—more typically Root supported an artist at the beginning of his or her career. His gift to the Museum, therefore, includes important examples of Burchfield's early, middle, and later stylistic phases.

Because Root endorsed Burchfield so avidly, he readily forgave any artistic lapses as “almost proofs of his great gifts. Is it much to be wondered at that anyone who... is so interested in so many things should sometimes use too many points of emphasis, that anyone who is so sensitive to both the pathos and magnificence of life should sometimes become sentimental or rhetorical?”⁴⁵ Root's unreserved admiration for Burchfield was based on his acute understanding of the artist's subject matter, as well as his extremely close observation of his paintings, as revealed in this statement:

The number and range of his emotional reactions to luminous effects is prodigious. He reacts equally to the light of winter and summer, of autumn and spring, of days that are overcast and days that are bright, of rain storms and snow storms, of night and evening, of morning and noon. He is moved by and impelled to record the subtlest and most unusual effects of illumination, natural and unnatural—the color of the air before a storm, the white flash of lightning beyond the trees, the glow of flames, the play of electric radiance on pavements and walls, the sheen on stagnant pools and wet asphalt (FIG. 11).⁴⁶

The kinship that Root and Burchfield had for each other also produced an exchange of letters that went on for twenty years, documenting one of the great artist-patron relationships in American art. Their early, more formal correspondence quickly gave way to letters that are heartfelt, trusting, gracious, and respectful. In April 1932, for example, Burchfield wrote to Root expressing discomfort at being classified as an American Scene artist:

What do you think of the so-called American wave? People like yourselves who have always believed in American painting, must feel like chuckling over the sudden discovery that there are artists in America,



FIG. 11
Charles E. Burchfield
House and Tree by Arc Light (Shooting Star; House At Night; House and Tree)
July 28, 1916
Transparent watercolor and graphite
on white watercolor paper
19 7/8 x 13 7/8 in.
Cat. no. 34



SVB
1948

a little patronage wouldn't come amiss to many worthwhile artists... I wish they would quit talking about the American Scene. The American Scene is no better or worse than any other scene, and the worthwhile artist doesn't care about a subject for its national character. I have been spoken of as one of the exponents of "American Scenism" [sic], which I consider a libel. The scene itself has never been [the] main motive that impelled me to paint.⁴⁷

Root's letter in reply to Burchfield's question about the American Scene has not survived but the artist's feeling about this matter can be discerned in a thoughtful article Root published about Burchfield several years later, in which he introduced the artist to his readers with the statement:

It is of little importance if any particular American artist sometimes depicts objects of unmistakably American appearance; it is of much greater importance if his interpretation of these objects endows them with some sort of general significance. If, then, we are to do justice to Charles Burchfield as an artist we must avoid supposing that he paints America because it is American. He would be the first to deny having any such intention. He paints because he likes to paint and because through painting he can express a philosophy based on nature.⁴⁸

Both Burchfield's philosophy of nature—his abiding subject that surpasses restricting nationalistic characterizations—and Root's appreciation of landscape imagery are evoked in the last Burchfield that the Roots bought, *Flame of Spring* (FIG. 12). The artist wrote that he was so pleased the work had found the right home, "I have a special fondness for this picture for in it I seemed to find the means to express something for which I had been searching for years... something elemental, expressive of the immanence of spring."⁴⁹ When Burchfield received an honorary degree from Hamilton College, Edward wrote, "This college admires... your incomparable feeling for the floral and faunal aspects of our landscapes.... No other American artist has done more to remind men of their fundamental and inescapable relation to nature."⁵⁰

Root also befriended Peppino ("Gino") Mangravite (1896–1978), another artist represented by Rehn with whom he corresponded for twenty years.⁵¹ Root and Mangravite discussed subjects as wide-ranging as creating a college-level curriculum for studio art, the question of limiting civil liberties during wartime, and the role of the government in arts funding. On a personal level, Root offered encouragement for the Mangravite family's health and well-being, financial assistance, and moral support for Peppino's balancing act of teaching and painting full time. And, not surprisingly, he writes sensitively and with praise about Mangravite's paintings, commenting in particular on *Young Couple Drinking* (FIG. 13):

I have a sentimental weakness for the girl and note with approval her classical pallor as compared with the attenuated flush of the young gent in the background. I wish you were not almost the only living American painter who can handle such a subject with a little human tenderness but that's the fact.⁵²

The representational painting style of Hopper, Marsh, Mangravite, and

facing page

FIG. 12

Charles E. Burchfield

Flame of Spring, 1948

Transparent watercolor on watercolor paper, two sheets vertically joined on the left side

40 x 29 ¾ in.

Cat. no. 33



FIG. 13

Peppino Mangravite

Young Couple Drinking, 1937

Oil on linen

24 x 20 in.

Cat. no. 136

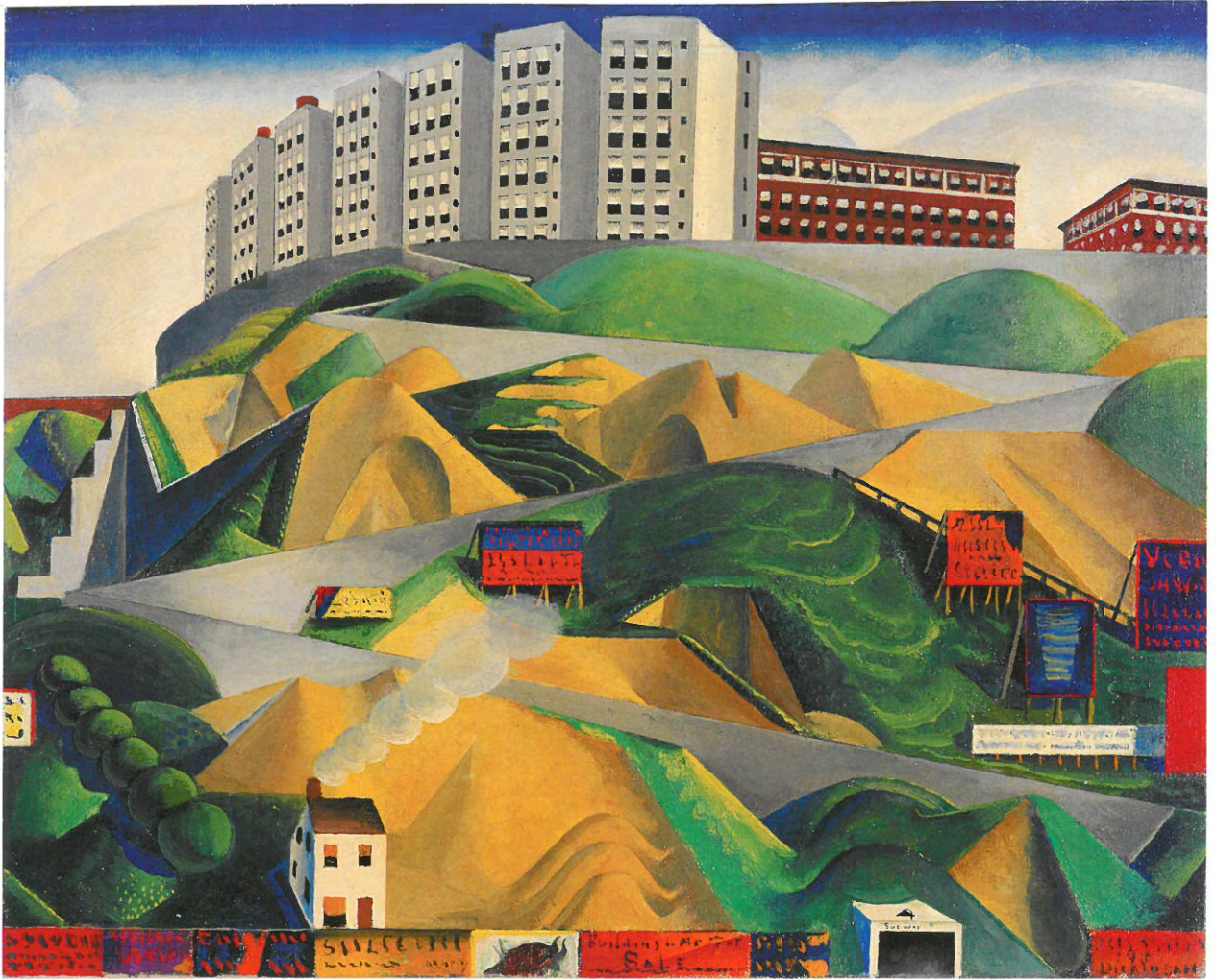


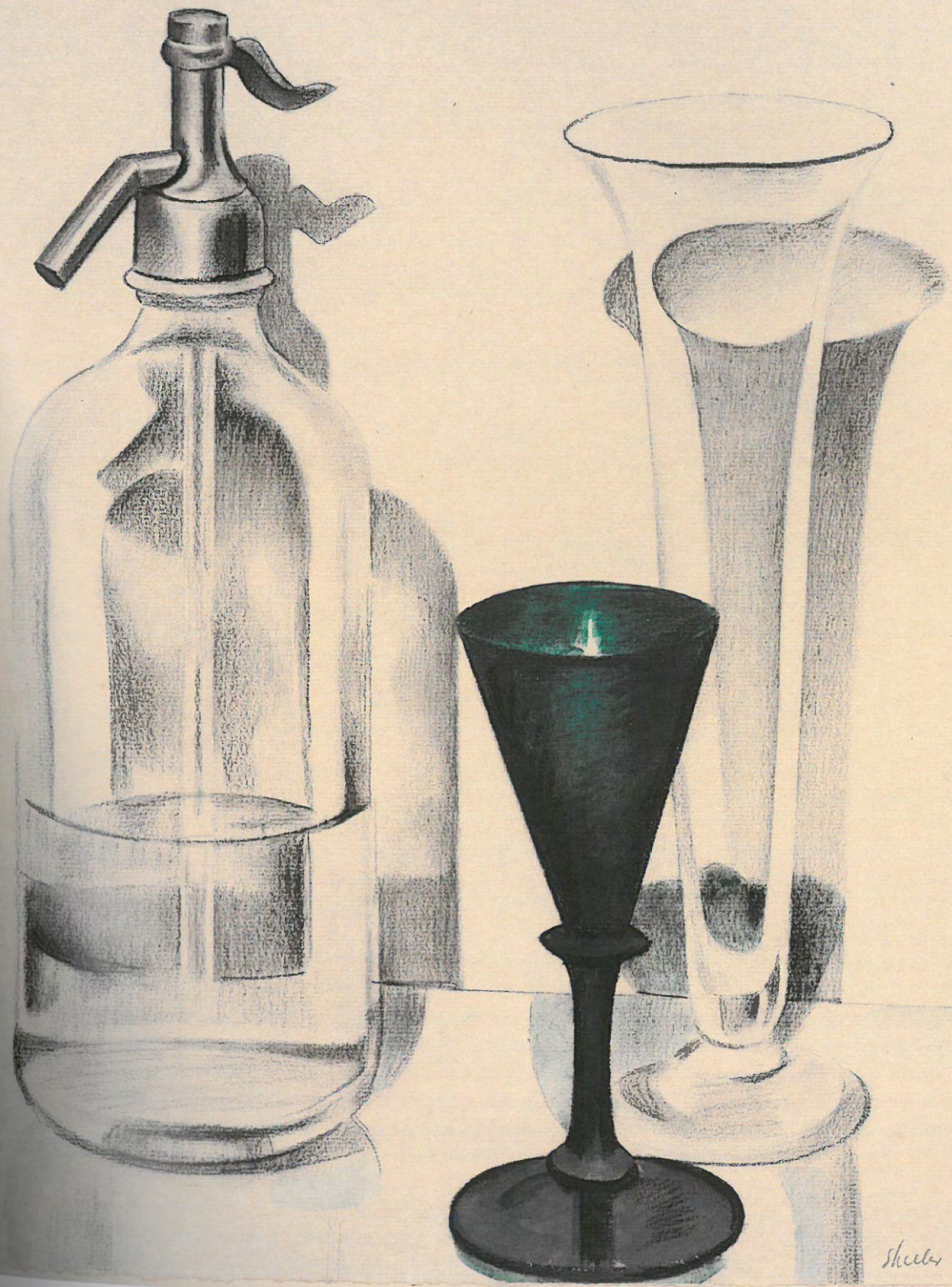
FIG. 14
 Preston Dickinson
Fort George Hill, 1915
 Oil on linen
 14 x 17 in.
 Cat. no. 71

facing page

FIG. 15
 Charles Sheeler
Siphon, 1923
 Charcoal and watercolor
 on white paper
 16 ⁷/₁₆ x 12 ¹/₂ in.
 Cat. no. 181

the other artists Rehn represented—which bears no trace of what some conservative critics at the time believed was the corrupting influence of European modernist art—is the hallmark of Root's taste from the time of his early his association with The Eight until the 1940s. A notable exception to this tendency in Root's collection, however, is Preston Dickinson's (1891–1930) *Fort George Hill* (FIG. 14), a work Root purchased from the Charles Daniel Gallery the same year Dickinson painted it. The artist made this picture shortly after a sojourn in Paris, where he saw radical paintings by artists such as Picasso and Matisse. The rich, expressive colors and geometric forms of *Fort George Hill* easily make this the most stylistically advanced picture Root owned at that time. During the 1920s Root also purchased from the Daniel Gallery works by three other progressive young American artists, Charles Demuth (1883–1935, cat. nos. 68–70), Elsie Driggs (1898–1992, cat. nos. 76–77), and Charles Sheeler (1883–1965, cat. nos. 180–81), who similarly combined recognizable subject matter with a modernist sensibility (FIG. 15).

The story of Root's first Demuth watercolor purchase is an especially poignant example of how his concern for an artist's welfare motivated him to buy. In the spring of 1923, more than a decade after easing Lawson's difficult financial circumstances by purchasing one of his paintings, Root received a letter from Charles Daniel (1878–1971) asking if he would be willing to pur-







chase one of the artist's pictures because Demuth, "whose exquisite watercolors you have admired... is seriously ill with diabetes." Root responded shortly thereafter by sending Daniel two checks totaling \$175. Root gave Daniel an additional \$75 check in the fall of 1926 and received, in exchange, Demuth's watercolor, *Cyclamen (Flower Study)* (FIG. 16).⁵³

During the 1930s, in addition to his extensive patronage of the Rehn Gallery, Root also frequented Edith G. Halpert's (1900–70) legendary Downtown Gallery. Early in 1931 Root acquired from her Demuth's *Purple Iris* (cat. no. 70). Several months later he remarked to his wife Grace that Demuth's watercolor reminded him "of a Chinese poem, unfinished, yet complete."⁵⁴ In 1937 he also acquired from Halpert a watercolor by John Marin (1870–1953), despite his reservations that Marin was "deeply moving but does not satisfy."⁵⁵ Years later Halpert recounted to Saarinen that she finally succeeded in selling Marin's watercolor, *White Mountain Country, The Rapids (The Rapids, New Hampshire)* (FIG. 17) to Root, after sending him to examine the watercolors in the *Winslow Homer Centenary Exhibition*, on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art.⁵⁶ After seeing the show, Root returned to the Downtown Gallery and said to Halpert, "All right, how much is this Marin, I know what you [now] mean—the continuity."⁵⁷

Early in 1946 Root purchased another painting from Halpert, *Colors of Spring in the Harbor*, by Stuart Davis (1894–1964, FIG. 18). In this work Davis's semi-abstract imagery floats in a cubist grid of flat, overlapping, boldly colored

facing page

FIG. 16

Charles Demuth

Cyclamen (Flower Study)

Ca. 1921

Watercolor and graphite on

white laid watercolor paper

13 7/8 x 11 7/8 in.

Cat. no. 68

above

FIG. 17

John Marin

White Mountain Country, The Rapids (The Rapids, New Hampshire), 1927

Watercolor, graphite, crayon and colored pencil on heavy watercolor paper

13 7/16 x 17 1/8 in.

Cat. no. 138



FIG. 18
 Stuart Davis
Colors of Spring in the Harbor, 1939
 Gouache on watercolor board
 12 x 16 in.
 Cat. no. 65

planes. In a lecture on modern art at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in April 1947, Root noted that Davis composed pictures in the “abstract Cubist tradition,” and that he was “not greatly concerned to associate these sensations and ideas with their natural source.”⁵⁸

A month before this lecture Root purchased from Halpert *No Feather Pillow* (FIG. 19), one of the four paintings by Arthur G. Dove (1880–1946) that Root bequeathed to the Institute. A true pioneer of modernism, Dove was one of the very first artists in Europe or the United States to paint abstract imagery at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵⁹ It is unclear how much contact Root had with Dove’s long-time dealer, the sometimes-acerbic photographer Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946). Halpert knew that Root resented strong-arm salesmanship and that he probably was not comfortable with Stieglitz’s hectoring manner.⁶⁰ She succeeded in selling *No Feather Pillow* to him because of her skills as a dealer, of course, but also because Root was deeply moved by Dove’s pictures. He noted that Dove’s imagery was based on a “feeling for nature” but that he transformed it into “something rich and strange.”⁶¹ This idea is a central tenet of Root’s worldview. The ameliorating benefit of a picture that used nature as its source of inspiration was articulated by Root in 1920 when, at thirty-six years of age, he noted that nature “was not merely a heartless, terrifying mystery” but, instead, served as a bond between mankind and the “source of our origin.”⁶²

Root’s four Dove paintings can be seen as a bridge linking his acquisitions of early American modernists and the group of younger artists he collected during the last decade of his life. Artist and Munson-Williams-Proctor

Institute School of Art director William C. Palmer (1906–87) remembered that Root told him in the mid-1940s “new things are happening. I don’t know that I understand them or that I like them. But I must find out. I must buy them and try to find out.”⁶³ Root reflected on this watershed period in his career as a collector:

When I went back to New York to live during the winter of 1944–45 the production of abstractions by American artists was just beginning to be general. During that winter I became acquainted with the work of Tobey, Gatch, Baziotes, Stamos and Bertoia. These artists, several of them very young, seemed to me to have a special feeling for their medium and to be making a serious effort to develop new modes of expression. Therefore I have their pictures, and the pictures of certain other modern American artists, sympathetic attention.⁶⁴

In the 1940s, Root had less money with which to purchase art so he began, as he had earlier in life, to collect the work of emerging artists. At this time, because of their mutual interest in art and nature, he developed a close friendship with Theodoros Stamos (1922–97), who started exhibiting in the early 1940s at commercial galleries and in 1946 at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Stamos vividly recalled that

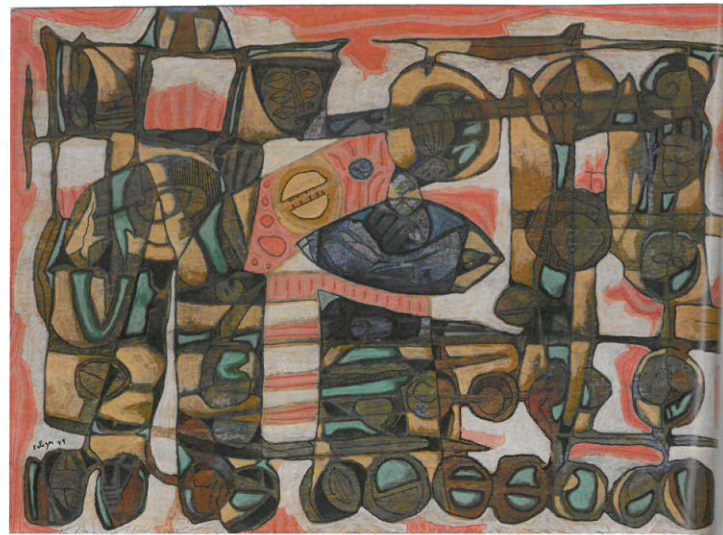
Edward Root and I met many years ago during my first showing at the old Whitney Museum. He liked that painting and purchased it.

FIG. 19
Arthur G. Dove
No Feather Pillow, 1940
Oil and wax emulsion on linen
16 x 22 in.
Cat. no. 73





above
 FIG. 20
 Theodoros Stamos
Movement of Plants, 1945
 Oil on Masonite
 16 x 20 in.
 Cat. no. 199



above right
 FIG. 21
 Charles Seliger
Cross-Section: Plant Life, 1949
 Oil, tempera, and ink on thin
 cardboard
 7 7/8 x 11 1/4 in.
 Cat. no. 174

He came to the gallery that handles my work, saw several more, and bought three of them—it was that day that I met Edward. He liked the paintings because... they had roots in Nature, about which I think Edward was one of the most learned of men.⁶⁵

The paintings to which Stamos refers are *Movement of Plants* (FIG. 20), *Blue Fish*, *Bone*, and *Cosmological Battle (Formlings)* (cat. nos. 190, 191, 193). Root in fact was one of Stamos's first patrons, acquiring numerous paintings between 1945 and 1953. Stamos later recollected, "Edward visited me in my studio quite often, where I left him to go through the paintings which were stacked along the walls. He would sit by himself, going through them and... arriving at three or four which he would buy at once, outright."⁶⁶ The sixteen Stamos paintings that Root bequeathed to the Museum follow only the larger group of watercolors by Burchfield that Root donated.

The earliest works by Stamos in Root's bequest, such as the charming *Blue Fish*, 1944, are representational, but by the next year, he began painting more abstractly, so that in *Seedling (The Embryo; Vortex and Spiral)* (cat. no. 201), *Movement of Plants*, and *Cosmological Battle (Formlings)*, all painted in 1945, Stamos used earth-toned colors as well as forms resembling leaves, pine cones, or similar organic material that float in an undefined space. The compositions suggest pulsating cycles of seasonal change at an essential level. In the mid-1940s Stamos also created paintings with a predominately blue-green palette, as if he were evoking oceanic realms.

At several venues during the 1950s, Stamos presented a lecture entitled "Why Nature in Art," in which he outlined his influences, of which Arthur Dove is noteworthy for this essay:

For me Dove is one of our most original painters whether he worked in a semi-abstract or totally abstract vein... in the 1930s Dove's forms loosened and became more organic with color patterns related to flames and amorphous growths of woods of which he was so fond. But his canvases always built into beautiful compositions that at times resemble the expressive glory of Chinese calligraphic characters while never deviating from their base in a physical world. He responded openly to farmlands, the wind, the rain and the sea.⁷⁶

Stamos also lauded "Oriental" picture making and recommended it as a model of understanding contemporary abstraction. He noted that Pacific

Northwest artists Mark Tobey (1890–1976) and Morris Graves (1910–2001) openly subscribed to Asian philosophy while the paintings of Mark Rothko (1903–1970) and Jackson Pollock (1912–56) emulated Eastern sources in their evocation of the infinite. All of these artists are represented in Root's collection.

Root was similarly attracted to nature-based imagery by Charles Seliger (b. 1926), who was an adolescent when he showed at Peggy Guggenheim's (1898–1979) *Art of This Century*, a showcase for artists of the emerging New York School. Seliger's paintings of organic form reflected the artist's belief that life was a renewing, organic process, in which "things were always becoming... developing [into] the mysterious and beautiful."⁶⁸ By 1948, after the Carlebach Gallery in New York began representing the artist, Root acquired eight of his recent paintings and drawings (cat. nos. 172–79), which he subsequently bequeathed to the Museum. In contrast to Stamos's vision of nature, Seliger's compositions are tiny, jewel-toned obsessive renderings of plants and insects (FIGS. 20, 21). But like Stamos, Seliger was fascinated by natural history. The

small fanciful insect pictures he made at this time were based on the artist's readings of books by entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre (1823–1915). Seliger recalled that Root liked these paintings very much and called them "my little beasties."⁶⁹ Indeed, Seliger's recollections of Root are very warm: "Edward Root was probably one of the most superior art collectors. I mean just a remarkable, sensitive man. He followed your work with such devotion it was unbelievable."⁷⁰

Jimmy Ernst (1920–84), son of artist Max Ernst (1891–1976), emigrated to the United States in 1938 and worked briefly at *Art of This Century*. When the young Ernst launched himself as a professional artist, showing with increasing success at the Norlyst, Laurel, and Grace Borgenicht Galleries, Root bought five of his works on paper (FIG. 22). It should be noted, however, that when Root purchased three of these works from Ernst's 1950 Laurel Gallery show he wasn't exactly a voice crying in the wilderness; other buyers included The Museum of Modern Art, Nelson Rockefeller (1908–79), and the Toledo Museum of Art.⁷¹

The Ernsts that Root purchased were among the scores of drawings he acquired by New York's young, emerging artists. His friend Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr. (1904–88), Director of the Addison Gallery of American Art, recalled Root's opinions about drawings:

It was he who one time called my attention to the fact that a draw-

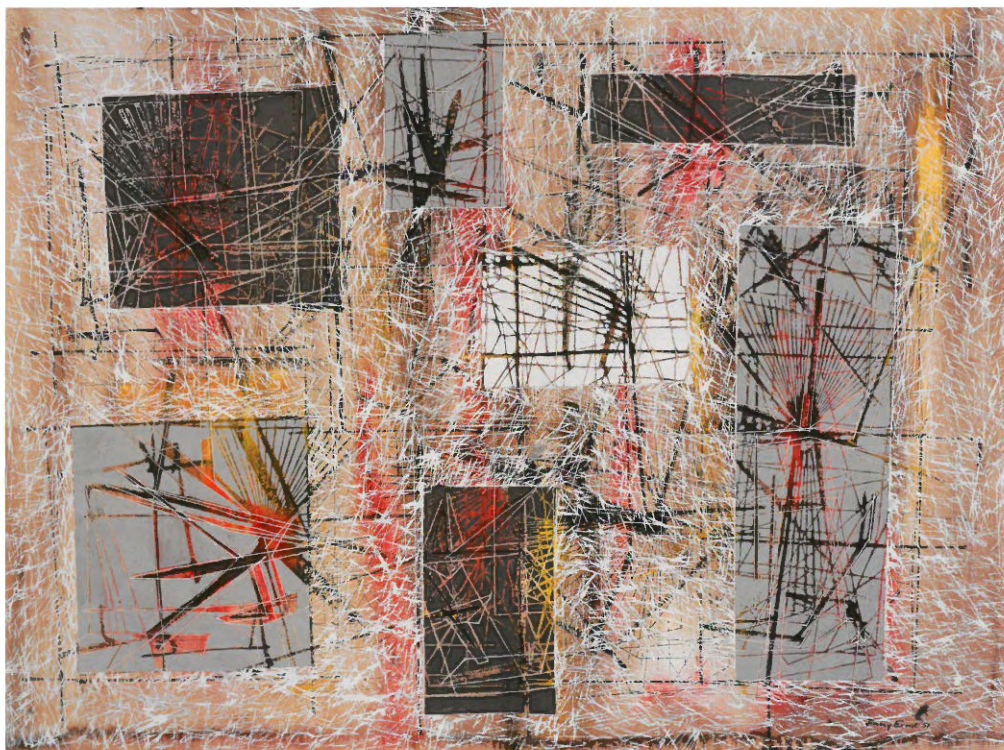


FIG. 22
Jimmy Ernst
Honky Tonk, 1951
Gouache on heavy white paper
22 3/8 x 30 in.
Cat. no. 80



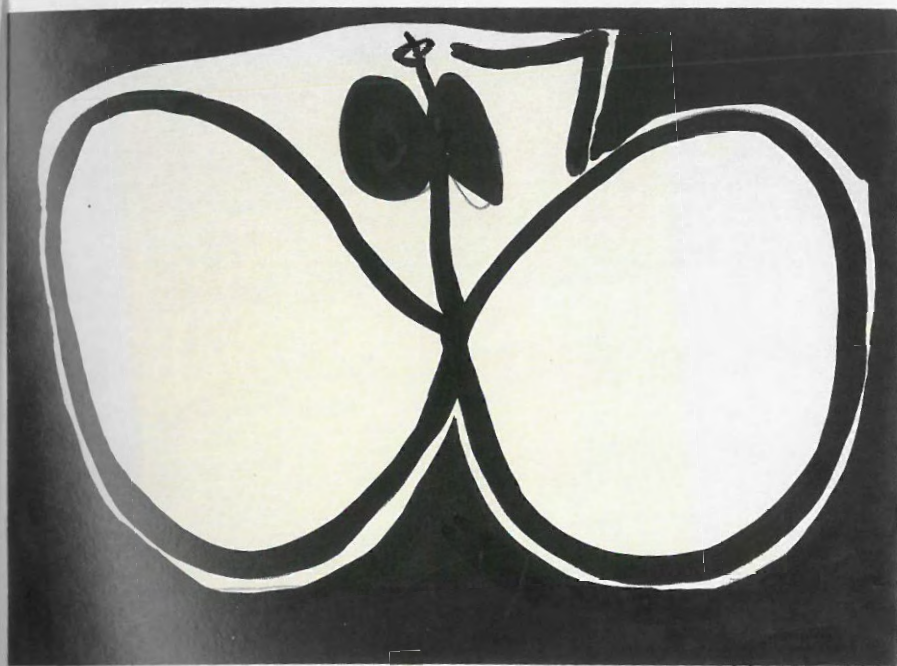
FIG. 23
Boardman Robinson
Bathers Wrestling, before 1928
Ink and wash with crayon on white
paper
19 x 13 in., irregular
Cat. no. 161



ing is no more than the trace left by the hand, the record of a gesture, and that the human quality in the drawing arises from the relation between the emotional and rational guidance of the muscles and the changes in them of which the drawing is the brief historical chart.⁷²

Root collected works on paper by two artists, William Harris (active 1940s), and Don Manfredi (b. 1930) who are ciphers because so little information can be found about them sixty years after they exhibited in New York galleries (cat. nos. 103, 134). Others, however, enjoyed renown. Federico Castellón (1914–71) was championed by both the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera (1886–1957) and the Weyhe Gallery, where Root purchased graphic arts for many years. Root bought twelve Castellón works on paper that depict the young man's Daliesque dreamscapes. He donated five of his works to the Institute in the early 1950s and included the remaining seven in his bequest (cat. nos. 52–58). From Weyhe Root also bought decoratively patterned images by Edward J. Stevens, Jr. (1923–88, cat. no. 210), whose photograph graced the cover of a 1950 *Life* magazine article entitled “Nineteen Young American Artists.”⁷³ The *Life* article also featured Stephen Greene (1918–99, cat. no. 101), a Prix de Rome recipient whose sensitively wrought vegetable still life Root acquired in 1949.

Root's eclectic taste at this unsettled artistic moment is demonstrated by other acquisitions of the period. His friendships with writers included contributors to *The New Yorker*, and his art collection had ink drawings by cartoonists William Steig (1907–2003, cat. nos. 204–06)—selections of whose series “Small Fry,” “Lonely Ones,” “All Embarrassed,” and “About People” were shown at Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in February 1947—and Saul Steinberg (1914–99, cat. nos. 207–08).⁷⁴ Root had, in fact, a long-standing appreciation for cartooning. On January 21, 1928 he wrote to the editors of the *Utica Daily Press* praising the “powerful, living line-draftsmanship” of Boardman Robinson's (1876–1952) youthful drawings; the letter was occasioned by a



Robinson exhibition at the Utica Art Society, from which Root purchased the drawing, *Bathers Wrestling* (FIG. 23). Root recollected that, as a young newspaperman at the *New York Evening Sun*, he was "deeply impressed by the series of cartoons by... [Robinson] which appeared on the editorial page of the *Tribune* about 1910 or, perhaps, a little earlier... Their wit and the breadth and ease with which they were drawn gave them...the unique distinction of being executed by a man who was not only a journalist but an artist."⁷⁵ Root's admiration for Robinson's drawings coincided with his friendships with members of The Eight who began their careers as artist-reporters and whose training demanded the telling narrative gesture by minimal drawing means.

Root collected works on paper created with a wide variety of materials and an equally wide range of emotional content. The polar opposite of cartoons are the expressionist, semi-figurative pieces by John Edward Heliker (1909–2000, cat. no. 104), and Joseph Glasco (1925–96, cat. nos. 93–95). These complement the drawings and small paintings that Root was simultaneously buying from older or better-known artists such as William A. Baziotes (1912–63, cat. nos. 2–6), Willem de Kooning (1904–97), Arshile Gorky (1904–48, cat. no. 96), Robert Motherwell (1915–91), Jackson Pollock (1912–56, cat. nos. 151–52), and Mark Rothko (1903–70, cat. no. 162). Root's drawings by de Kooning and Motherwell make an interesting comparison in that they are both figurative studies in the tradition of nude studio models, and tradition in contemporary art was a quality Root admired (FIG. 24, 25).⁷⁶ Beyond the drawings' subjects, though, they are poles apart: in tone: the former is all scraped pigment (or flesh) while the other is sensual.⁷⁷

The expressionist style of this era was initially difficult to comprehend, even by artworld insiders such as critics, gallery owners, and museum trustees, who struggled to find meaning in and give explanations for abstractions' seemingly random marks of paint. Root was a true leader among collectors because, even with reservations, he had faith in artists' sincerity. He patronized galleries run by Betty Parsons (1900–82)—The Wakefield Bookshop,

-facing page

FIG. 24

Willem de Kooning

Abstract Drawing, 1951

Oil and enamel on heavy wove paper

24 ⁵/₁₆ x 30 ¹/₂ in.

Cat. no. 67

above

FIG. 25

Robert Motherwell

Nude, 1952

Brush-applied black ink over graphite on wove paper, mounted on illustration board

21 ⁷/₈ x 29 ³/₄ in.

Cat. no. 147



FIG. 26
 Jackson Pollock
Number 34, 1949, 1949
 Oil and enamel paint on white paper-board mounted on Masonite
 22 x 30 ½ in.
 Cat. no. 152

facing page

FIG. 27
 Mark Rothko
Number 11 (Untitled: Abstraction), 1947
 Oil on linen
 39 ¾ x 38 ¾ in.
 Cat. no. 162

Mortimer Brandt, and finally, the Betty Parsons Gallery. He also bought Abstract Expressionist paintings and drawings from New York dealers such as the Willard, Kootz, and Egan Galleries. It is surmised that he first encountered the work of Pollock at Art of This Century, but waited until the artist broke through to his pour paintings before acquiring anything by him. In January 1949 Root bought Pollock's dense and discretely colored *Number 20, 1948* (cat. no. 151) from Parsons. Root purchased a more baroque, colorful, and slightly larger picture, *Number 34, 1949* from a second exhibition that Parsons held for Pollock in 1949 (FIG. 26). A week after that show closed, Root wrote in a letter to the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute's Community Arts Program Director, Harris K. Prior (1911–75), about "the small under glass Pollock which you liked when you saw it in the [Parsons] exhibition." Root marveled that "the more I look at... [it] the more it seems to me to be extraordinary as an example of almost explosive vitality kept within the bounds of a complex and orderly form."⁷⁸

Root bought Rothko's *Omens of Gods and Birds* (1944–45, coll. Christopher Rothko), but in the months between his two Pollock purchases he traded it for Rothko's *Number 11 (Untitled Abstraction)* (FIG. 27).⁷⁹ This painterly abstraction reveals the artist at an interesting moment, when he abandoned representational, symbolic imagery in search of a more universal visual communication that would convey the most profound human emotional content. As with his Marin purchase from Halpert in 1937, Root equivocated about the works he had bought from Parsons. In a May 12, 1949 letter to his friend Bartlett Hayes





he confessed, "Pollock and Rothko still seem to me to be brilliant executants, but unsatisfying companions."⁸⁰ Root nevertheless acquired the paintings the better to understand them.

Two years after buying the Rothko, Root also purchased from the Betty Parsons Gallery two of Bradley Walker Tomlin's (1899–1953) "calligraphic"-style pictures, *Number 11* (FIG. 28), and the largest picture among the works he bequeathed to the Museum, Tomlin's *Number 1*, 1951 (cat. no. 220). In the mid-1940s when the Rehn Gallery represented Tomlin, Root bought the artist's Synthetic Cubist-inspired composition, *Watermelon* (FIG. 29). After meeting a number of the young Abstract Expressionists, however, Tomlin's style underwent a radical transformation and, in 1950, he began exhibiting with Parsons. Two years later, when Tomlin was included in The Museum of Modern Art's epochal *15 Americans* exhibition, Root wrote a short statement about the artist for the catalog. For those "who enjoy sensitively manipulated pigment and linear suggestions of movement," Root remarked about Tomlin's pictures, the "complex arrangements of bands, pot-hooks, boomerangs, letters, dots, rectangles, zigzags and so forth [are] a sort of pictorial equivalent of ballet, in which the many figures shimmy, gyrate, contort or drift at two or more levels with stimulating spontaneity and with an over-all coordination which is as satisfying as it is unobtrusive."⁸¹ Root's colorful description of Tomlin's marks, which he insightfully compared to a dance, was published several months before the art critic Harold Rosenberg (1906–78) used a similar kinetic trope in his famous article, "American Action Painting," to describe the art of the Abstract Expressionists. Rosenberg wrote

At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one painter after another as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze, or "express" an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.⁸²

Root's comments about dance may also be an extension of his growing interest in music during the later years of his life, as improvements in hearing aid technology made it possible for him to overcome the deafness that handicapped his younger years. In his struggle to formulate critical standards by which he could understand and judge thoroughly abstract compositions such as those by Tomlin, Root thought that their appeal lay in their ability to evoke a feeling for "organized sensations" while, simultaneously conveying—like the music he was discovering—"spiritual overtones." The boundary between these two realms perplexed him. Echoing the European abstract painter, Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), Root noted: "I think that perhaps Kandinsky was right. Where does sensation end and spirituality begin? Who can say?"⁸³

Root could ponder this question as he reflected on the work of Pacific Northwest artists, Graves and Tobey. Graves, who was inspired by Zen Buddhism, sought to be in the moment when he painted. He believed that "painting is a way of knowledge" that might reveal a reality beyond the material world. The works by Graves that Root bequeathed to the Museum can be described as meditations in which the artist made simple but mindful brushstrokes for a flower, a bird, or water (cat. nos. 97–100, FIG. 30).

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FIG. 28

Bradley Walker Tomlin

Number 11, ca. 1949

Oil on linen

44 1/8 x 29 in.

Cat. no. 221



FIG. 29

Bradley Walker Tomlin

Watermelon, 1942

Oil on linen

37 x 48 1/8 in.

Cat. no. 222



FIG. 30
Morris Graves
Nestling (Fledgling), 1950
Watercolor and pastel on
laid watercolor paper
18 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.
Cat. no. 99

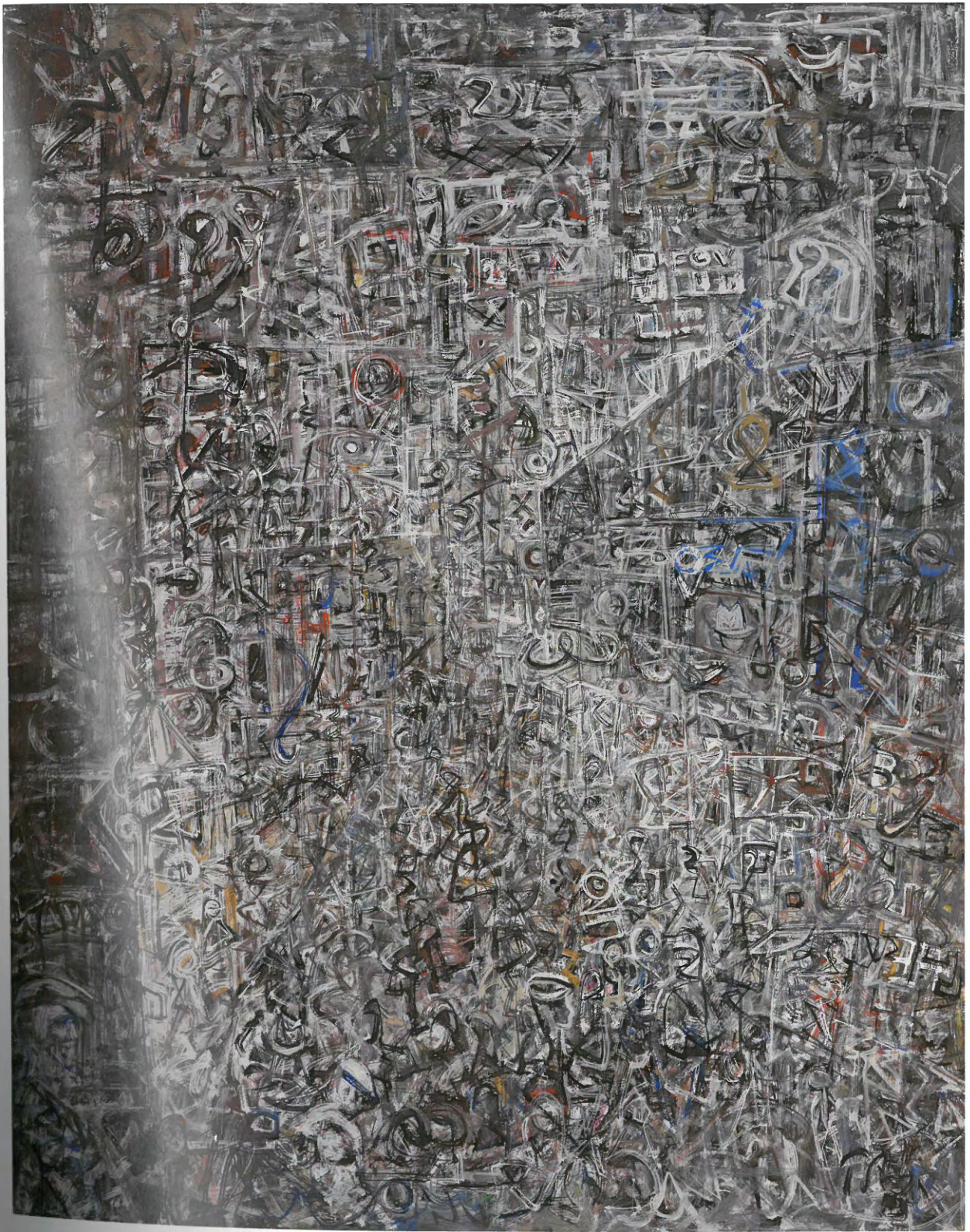
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FIG. 31
Mark Tobey
Partitions of the City, 1945
Tempera and opaque
watercolor on Masonite
30 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 23 $\frac{7}{8}$ in.
Cat. no. 216

Tobey similarly was inspired by spiritual impulses based on his Bahá'í faith, as signaled in a work such as *Vita Nova* (cat. no. 218) or *Voyage of the Saints* (cat. no. 219), a later picture in which Tobey's modulated line creates a unified composition reflecting the artist's beliefs that "our minds and hearts must be unlocked [to a] vision of unity between all persons." Many of Tobey's paintings in the Root collection, however, are animated with a dazzling line that depicts in abstract terms the vitality of New York City. *Partitions of the City* (FIG. 31)—which Root purchased directly from the artist in 1951—and *Awakening Night* (cat. no. 214), are cityscapes abstracted into overall patterns of pulsating figures, traffic, electric signs, and buildings. In *New York Tablet* (FIG. 38), Tobey formed a monolith that suggests the glass façade of a skyscraper; critic Robert M. Coates (1897–1973) described the painting as suggesting "a window view over a multitude of glittering buildings."⁸⁴

Root believed that Tobey was the "most original of all American painters, but his pictures are so different in every respect from our accepted ideas of what a picture should be."⁸⁵ The difference in Root's mind may have been Tobey's calligraphic painting style, called "white writing," that was consonant with similar experiments by other artists of the Abstract Expressionist era. Root studied his Tobeyes carefully, as demonstrated by some notes he made on scrap paper remarking that "each picture is built up out of lines of a certain type" and with diagrams of the paintings' basic linear structure.⁸⁶

When Graves and Tobey began exhibiting their work at commercial galleries and museums in New York City, Root was an early patron. Art dealer Marian Willard Johnson (1904–85), who was instrumental in promoting them on the East Coast, recollected that Edward began visiting her New York gallery around 1941 or 1942. Later, in 1950, Root and Willard traveled together to the West Coast.⁸⁸ Root's interest in the contemporary artists of this region may have been encouraged by Harris Prior who, when he assumed the directorship of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute's Community Arts Program (the forerunner of today's Museum of Art) in 1947, was an authority on painting in the Pacific Northwest and, less than a year after his arrival in Utica, organized the traveling exhibition, *Ten Painters of the Pacific Northwest*.⁸⁹ It should be noted, though, that Root had acquired his first Graves drawing in 1945, before he met Prior. Nevertheless, between 1945 and 1951, Root confidently purchased from Willard four more Graves drawings, three of which within a year of their creation. Between 1946 and 1953 Root also bought from the Willard Gallery five of the six Tobeyes he gave the Museum. As with Graves, Root acquired each of them within a year of their being made.

Root's loyalty to his artist-friends was reciprocated. When he died in December 1956, the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute quickly organized an exhibition to honor him the following spring.⁹⁰ One painting each by thirty-six artists whom Root had supported was included.⁹¹ While fourteen had predeceased Root, many of the others personally selected their work for the show. Several artists wrote glowing testimonies to Root for the exhibition catalog. Charles Burchfield admired Root's "complete independence and his uncompromising honesty." Morris Kantor (1896–1974) "was impressed with Root's sincere devotion to American art and his understanding and kindness to artists." William Palmer noted that Root "believed in the growth and development of art and its contribution to life," while Mark Tobey found Root, "never preaching but showing in his choice of paintings a discrimination without pretense of any kind."⁹² A few years later, Harris Prior authored the article, "Edward Root: Talent Scout," in which he noted significant purchases Root made by artists



when they still qualified as emerging.⁹³ Prior believed that Root's promotion of new talent in his lifetime held up well because Root acquired art "with love, humility and perceptiveness... not in order to carry out any museum concept of general completeness or even of individual importance, but simply to provide visual nourishment for an acquisitive eye and mind, and occasionally to help an artist over a difficult period in his life."⁹⁴

MODERNISM AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

In the spring of 1953, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York presented a large exhibition of 132 of Root's paintings, watercolors, and drawings (FIG. 32).⁹⁵ The show featured the work of sixty-seven American and six British artists. Only nine of these artists were deceased when it took place. Among those who did not have the satisfaction of seeing their pictures included in the exhibition were some of Root's oldest and closest friends: Luks, Prendergast, Davies, and Demuth. Chronologically, the works in the show spanned the first six decades of the twentieth century, and ranged in date from Louis M. Eilshemius' (1864–1941) watercolor, *Black Hills, Delaware Water Gap*, 1896–97 (cat no. 78), to Glasco's *Boy* (cat. no. 93), and Motherwell's *Nude* (cat. no. 147), both executed in 1952 and, as such, the most contemporary pieces in the show. Root acquired more than half of the works in the exhibition during the fertile period that began in New York in the winter of 1944–45 when he became aware of the young American artists who, as he noted, were "making a serious effort to develop new modes of expression."⁹⁶ Root subsequently bequeathed ninety of the American pictures in the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition to the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute. The sixteen English and Irish pictures in the show, all from the 1940s and early 1950s, reflect the interest Edward and his wife Grace developed for contemporary British art in the post-War years.⁹⁷



FIG. 32
Edward W. Root collection installed in
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1953

This exhibition marked the first time a private collection of contemporary art was ever shown at the Metropolitan Museum.⁹⁸ It came into being, frankly, because of nepotism. Edward's family had long-standing ties to the museum. His maternal grandfather, Salem H. Wales (1825–1902) helped found the museum in 1870 and for many years was a trustee.⁹⁹ Edward's father, Elihu, also served as a trustee, and eventually was First Vice President. He stepped down from the board on May 11, 1931, six years before his death.¹⁰⁰ Edward's older brother, Elihu Jr. (1881–1967) served on the board with his father for many years, and was Vice President at the time of his brother's exhibition.¹⁰¹

At the same time, however, showcasing Root's collection was a public relations boon for the Metropolitan, which had come under fire from American artists for the institution's resistance to avant-garde art. In 1950 twenty-eight artists signed an open letter to Director Francis Henry Taylor (1903–57), protesting the reactionary tastes of the jurors who had selected a recent exhibition for the museum that did not include Abstract Expressionist paintings. The Metropolitan in fact was long-resistant to new art but this incident accrued more notoriety than others when *Life* magazine published a story, "The Metropolitan and Modernism," that featured photographer Nina Leen's (1909–95) portrait of fourteen of the signatories who were dubbed "The Irascibles."¹⁰² Nine of the pictured artists had work in Root's collection—Bazilotes, de Kooning, Ernst, Motherwell, Pollock, Richard Pousette-Dart (1916–92), Rothko, Stamos, Tomlin—and all but Pousette-Dart were featured in the 1953 Root show.

The 1953 exhibition was not, in fact, the first time Root had lent works to

the Metropolitan. In 1920 he placed on long-term loan three paintings from his collection, Davies's *Refluent Season* (before 1911, Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute), Luks's *The Pawnbroker's Daughter* (1905, Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute), and Prendergast's *Landscape with Figures* (FIG. 7).¹⁰³ A January 15, 1920 letter from Metropolitan Museum Director, Edward Robinson (1858–1931), to Root thanking him for the loan of the Prendergast and the two other pictures is revealing inasmuch as Robinson gets two of the three names wrong: "I have the honor to inform you that your offer to lend to the Museum three paintings: *The Park*, by W. B. Prendergast; *The Pawnbroker's Daughter*, by George Luks; and *Refluent Season*, by Albert B. Davies has been accepted."¹⁰⁴ It would appear, however, that Root's generosity, at least with respect to the Prendergast painting, created a certain amount of controversy at the museum. He confided years later to Hermon More (1887–1968), Curator at the Whitney Museum of Art, that the Metropolitan's curator, Bryson Burroughs (1869–1934) simply did not like the Prendergast and, therefore, while it was on loan "skied it over the doorway of the long American School gallery."¹⁰⁵ Resentment among some individuals at the museum about Prendergast's painting—presumably because its bright colors and painterly *facture* challenged conventional notions of artistic propriety and craftsmanship—may have been even stronger than Root realized. Walter Pach (1883–1958), the well-connected chronicler of early twentieth-century American art world politics, shed some light on this matter in his gossipy retelling of Burroughs's behind-the-scenes explanation about why the Metropolitan Museum would not undertake Pach's suggestion to organize a retrospective exhibition of Prendergast's work. "It's no use for you to try any more," Burroughs explained to Pach, "there is still too much bitterness here about that work of his hanging out in the gallery."¹⁰⁶

Root's family connections at the Metropolitan Museum gave him access and social standing among the museum's elite. He used these connections on occasion to forward the careers of artists in whom he had faith. He sent a letter dated February 14, 1928 to President Robert W. de Forest (1848–1931) urging him to allow curator Burroughs to buy several modern American paintings.¹⁰⁷ The eighty-one year old de Forest was a socially prominent New Yorker who was also President of the American Federation of Arts—the organization Edward's father helped to found.¹⁰⁸ Root's letter to de Forest is lost, but the reply he received two days later invited Root to recommend "whatever he liked," and that "any pictures you send to the Museum for inspection will be addressed" to Bryson Burroughs.¹⁰⁹ Despite whatever lingering resentment there might still have been at the museum about Root's Prendergast loan, he played an instrumental role in the Metropolitan Museum's purchase, that spring, of Burchfield's 1927 watercolor, *August Afternoon*.¹¹⁰ Root was not successful the following year when he suggested to de Forest that the museum should purchase Hopper's recently completed oil painting, *Blackwell's Island* (1928, collection Robert and Soledad Hurst). In a letter dated January 30, 1929, de Forest's assistant asked Root to have the Rehn Galleries send *Blackwell's Island* "to the Museum for consideration."¹¹¹ Ultimately, however, Root's effort to encourage the Metropolitan to buy this work was unsuccessful. Grace Root recollected that her husband visited de Forest at his home on Washington Square to advocate for the Hopper purchase. According to Grace's notes, "Mr. de Forest told answer by showing him his Impressionists."¹¹² The museum's unwillingness to buy *Blackwell's Island* still vexed Root two decades later. Reminiscing in the early 1950s about this, Root sardonically commented that "the average age of the [museum's acquisition] committee was seventy-

two... and none of them like liked anything more modern than the Barbizon School... they'd never seen a Hopper before."¹¹³

By 1953, with Root's own good provenance, the Metropolitan could afford to be somewhat more daring. Curator Robert Beverly Hale, writing in the February 1953 issue of *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, applauded the adventurous spirit that the collector of contemporary material must possess, because "values are uncrystallized and the books have not been written."¹¹⁴ According to Hale, the collector must have a "wide acquaintance with artists" who can be good judges of others' work; have an understanding of art of the past, but not be bound by that; have "sympathy with the experiments and aspirations of youth," and delight in the contemporary moment. Hale wrote nearly in wonder (if not skepticism) about the ascendancy of non-objective painting and the temerity that a collector of such art must exhibit: "It takes an extraordinary flair to move surely in this unsettled phase of contemporary art.... Edward Root is one of the few American collectors who has had the courage to enter this field."¹¹⁵

Root's exhibition elicited generally favorable critical response from the New York press, national art journals, and Utica's daily newspaper, which noted: "In a reversal of a time-honored policy, The Metropolitan Museum of Art...is for the first time offering a public exhibition of a private collection of modern art—that of Root."¹¹⁶

Venerable art critic Henry McBride (1867–1962) described the collection as "all of one piece," noting that it demonstrated

honesty of judgment, the complete absence of anything resembling snobbism, the intelligent comprehension of what painting is and a sympathy with the problems of the artist, and finally, an effect of patriotism build upon the belief that art is at the base of culture and that it is a good citizen's duty to patronize it to the best of his ability.¹¹⁷

And while McBride found some infelicitous pieces, he applauded works by Davies, Burchfield, Prendergast, Hopper, Luks, Kantor, Eilshemius and John Piper (1903–92), as well as the younger generation painters, Tobey, Ernst, Stamos, Pollock, Motherwell, and Norman Lewis (1909–79) as "represented by their very best" or "discerningly represented."

Aline B. Louchheim (later Saarinen) wrote two pieces about the show for the *New York Times*. In the first she was complimentary: "Collected over the last fifty years, the works illuminate the taste and courage of a collector who moved with his times—understanding, enjoying, and buying the advanced art of each period." But, like McBride, Louchheim described the collection as "unpretentious," so much so that it sometimes struggled to hold the spaces of the Metropolitan's galleries. She diplomatically noted that "in so personal a collection and one for which expenditures were of necessity never astronomic, not all the artists are represented at their best....But the astonishing thing is that quality does remain high throughout the long panorama of years and through so many different visions and styles."¹¹⁸

In her second piece, published three days later, Louchheim offered an opinion about the special significance of Prendergast's *Landscape with Figures*:

This Prendergast is, in a way, a key to Mr. Root's taste and a clue to the reason he has been able to accept the advanced art of each decade. He is far more interested in a sense of creativity, in design and formal quali-



ties and in expression of emotion than in subject matter. He recognizes how in harsh visual terms Hopper makes his statement about loneliness; but he also sees how Tobey's threading line creates a cosmos.¹¹⁹

Louchheim characterized Root's collection as intimate, personal, and consistent from start to finish, noting connections in the bravura, painterly style of Luks with the new abstraction, as well as the continuum of nature-based subjects from Demuth, Burchfield, and Stamos. In Root's collection, she found "no abrupt shock."¹²⁰

The critic at the *New York Herald Tribune* praised Root's distinguished taste and inquiring mind but ultimately determined that Root's collection was overly refined and emotionally aloof, lacking in its detachment the expressive fire found in works by Abraham Rattner (1893–1978), Rico Lebrun (1900–64), or Jack Levine (b. 1915).¹²¹ And he was further disappointed in the works by artists such as Luks and Stuart Davis, who "do stand for dynamism" because the Root collection harbored "uniquely placid examples... [and] the tortured Gorky is here actually elegant."¹²²

Sidney Geist (1914–2005), whose review appeared in *Art Digest*, more favorably described Root's collection as "distinguished, catholic, and, in view of the changes that a half century have brought to American art, amazingly elastic."¹²³ About individual works, Geist commented respectfully on Prendergast's *Armory Show* painting but noted insightfully that, while "it is easy to be impressed by large works, Root's perceptiveness is evident in his happy choices of small pieces." In particular he praised Davies's *La Bella Range* (FIG. 33), Luks's *Closing the Café* (FIG. 34), and "two excellent flower pieces by Demuth" (FIG. 16, and cat. no. 69). Geist further praised Root's mid-century holdings by Gorky (cat. no. 96), Pollock (FIG. 26, and cat. no. 151), and Rothko (FIG. 27), making special mention of de Kooning's *Abstract Drawing* (FIG. 24) as "one of the very best things in the show."¹²⁴ In closing, Geist commended Root for trusting his own taste in buying contemporary art, before artists' reputations were established and when artists most needed patronage. This remark echoes Root's perception of himself as a collector; he preferred to cultivate younger talents rather than assemble a collection of known, and therefore safe, artworks that flattered him.

FIG. 33

Arthur B. Davies

La Bella Range, ca. 1928

Watercolor on gray-toned laid paper

9 ½ x 24 ¾ in.

Cat. no. 63



FIG. 34
George B. Luks
Closing the Café, 1904
Oil on hardwood panel
8 ½ x 10 ⅝ in.
Cat. no. 129

In the twenty-five or so years that elapsed between the late 1920s when Root tried to persuade the Metropolitan Museum to purchase modern American paintings and the early 1950s when he was invited to exhibit his collection there, Root's stature as an advocate and collector of modern art had grown. His collection had expanded, augmented by the adventurous American and British pictures he acquired after World War II. He enjoyed the respect and collegiality of a distinguished group of artists, educators, and museum professionals who shared his views about the need to incorporate studio-based courses in college art classes so students could learn the "fundamental motives of art," and the "thought and feeling of particular artists."¹²⁵ In 1944 he began serving as a respected and valued member of the Addison Gallery of American Art's art committee.¹²⁶ In 1948 Root had the satisfaction of seeing that he owned works by seven of the eleven artists *Look* magazine declared were America's best contemporary painters.¹²⁷ The same year The Museum of Modern Art borrowed seven pictures from him for a summer exhibition, *New York Private Collections*.¹²⁸ A year later the trustees of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute invited him to become the Museum's Consultant in Art, a position he retained for the remainder of his life.¹²⁹ Shortly thereafter the Museum of Modern Art's brilliant and influential curator, Dorothy C. Miller (1904–2003), invited Root to write about Tomlin for the landmark exhibition, *15 Americans*, a show to which Root also lent Baziotes' *Mummy*.¹³⁰

The attention and esteem that Root received in the late 1940s from his art-

ist friends and museum colleagues nevertheless were tempered by the coronary artery disease that he developed at this time, an event that led him to begin thinking about the ultimate disposition of his collections.¹³¹ His brother's position at this time as a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum doubtless contributed in some important but possibly intangible way to the exhibition of his collection there, an event that cast him more prominently in the public eye than he otherwise would have allowed himself to be.¹³²

ROOT'S AESTHETIC POINTS OF VIEW

The paintings and drawings Root purchased over five decades are the most important measure of his taste, but valuable insights about his modernist aesthetic also can be gleaned from his writings and lectures. The articles and catalog forewords he published about nine contemporary artists, and his lectures and more personal musings represent an effort similar to that achieved by other early twentieth-century American collectors who wrote about American modernism such as Arthur Jerome Eddy (1859–1920), Albert C. Barnes (1872–1951), Katherine S. Dreier (1877–1952), and Duncan Phillips (1886–1966).¹³³ Additionally, however, Root wrote and lectured thoughtfully about teaching art appreciation to college students, a discipline that emerged during his adult life, and about which there was considerable discussion about its methodologies, not to mention its very legitimacy in the college curriculum.

Many of Root's thoughts on these two subjects exist in his extensive archive of unpublished notes, memoranda, and letters. This unpublished material survived because Root was fastidious by nature, as Saarinen noted, but also because he may have harbored a closely guarded view of its importance.¹³⁴ Additional insights can be gathered from the notations and comments he wrote in the margins of some of his books, which are now in the Institute's Art Reference Library. All of this unpublished material provides a more textured picture of Root's aesthetic taste and his ideas about art education, than his published writings otherwise would provide.

The following summary of some of the leading aspects of Root's modernist aesthetic, drawn from his published and unpublished sources dating from 1913 to 1955, includes an examination of Root's definition of art, a discussion of his interest in formalism, and a review of the evolution of his taste from figurative to abstract art. Among the sources under consideration here are Root's 1922 article, "Pictures and the College," his review of the book *The American Renaissance* (1928), by R. L. Duffus (1888–1972), Root's 1936 essay titled "Charles E. Burchfield," and several drafts he prepared for the talk, "Some Characteristics of Modern Art," he presented at the opening of an American Federation of Arts touring show, *Pioneers of Modern Art in America*, which was on view at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute April 13–30, 1947. Root speaks for himself as much as possible in this summary. Even though his language is sometimes obscure, his writing reveals the workings of a keenly analytical mind, one that struggled to understand the art of his time. Collectively, Root's papers reveal a carefully reasoned, highly personal, and unmistakably original point of view.

Root's Definition of Art

An early indication of what Root considered art to be appeared in an article that announced the special course he began teaching at Hamilton College in the fall of 1920. Presumably written by him, the article lists the course's aims and methods. Students would learn about "interpretative" pictures as well

as “decorative pictures, pure design, household furnishings and objects d’art [sic] of all kinds.” What is significant about this description is the implication that certain works of art would be considered to contain meaning while other, decorative, artworks presumably would not. This suggests that Root defined art at this time as something that could be interpreted.³³⁵ He had more to say about this matter several years later in his review of R. L. Duffus’ 1928 book, *The American Renaissance*. The focus of Root’s comments was the author’s prediction that the dominant art form in America would be industrial design, not “interpretative” art. Root argued that even if this transpired, the industrial objects that would be produced did not have to be devoid of interpretive possibilities. He cited Henry Varnum Poor’s (1888–1970) pottery, Rockwell Kent’s (1882–1971) commercial advertisements, and Burchfield’s watercolors as examples of the kind of art that could “vitalize the standards of our designing profession.”³³⁶

The Human Element

In 1922, two years after he started teaching at Hamilton College, Root published his thoughtful article, “Pictures and the College.” This essay, which addressed some of the pedagogical challenges that teaching art appreciation to college students presented, is an important, early expression of Root’s aesthetic thinking and contains a number of comments that reveal his thoughts about the role of art in the larger public sphere. He proposed that art was something that satisfies a person’s spiritual need to feel connected to the world. Such a need is prompted by “profound sensations of loneliness, incompleteness and mental and emotional sterility.” A work of art can ameliorate these feelings of alienation when it enables the viewer “to apprehend the significance of visible phenomena connected with his own experience.”³³⁷ These sentiments reveal a lot about the melancholic side of Root’s personality. Wouldn’t another type of person interpret art more joyously?

This connection between art and human feeling appeared in several writings by Root, the earliest of which dates to February 16, 1913, when he commented in a notebook that certain works of art in the Armory Show were failures because their forms were empty and lifeless, devoid of human meaning. He believed the artists who created such works tried to express themselves in (abstract?) forms that were “beyond their capacities to fill with significant thought.”³³⁸ Six years later, in a letter expressing concern that architect Philip Hooker’s (1766–1836) Second Presbyterian Church in Albany, New York, was threatened with partial demolition, Root further noted that buildings manifest “the divine sense of order which lived in the hearts and minds of those that designed them.”³³⁹ In his review of *The American Renaissance*, Root argued that art schools could help to humanize industrial design by teaching students about the “emotional quality of style.”³⁴⁰ And, in a 1930 Hamilton College lecture on Italian Renaissance art, he suggested that artists were not concerned with “visual facts as such, but only with those visual facts that have emotional significance.”³⁴¹ He reiterated these beliefs in notes for a ca. 1935 lecture: “Art is the communicating agent of emotions more or less agreeable in that they have resulted from the artist’s perception of his actual or possible accordance with life.”³⁴² In other words, art conveys to the viewer the pleasant sensations an artist experiences when his spirit is in harmony with nature, or when he perceives the possibility that it can be so. Root included similar sentiments in an inspired essay he published in 1936 about Burchfield. In this case, however, Root acknowledged the possibility that the definition of



FIG. 35
Charles E. Burchfield
Pussy Willows, 1936
Watercolor on paper
32 ¹⁵/₁₆ x 25 ¹/₄ in.
Cat. no. 41

art might change sometime in the future because of the increasing amount of non-representational art being created. He made a distinction in this article between two kinds of paintings, a Burchfield (FIG. 35), that demonstrates “the legitimacy of the connection between art and experience,” and an “abstraction” by Picasso. Root marveled that the latter picture had “so sensitive and vital a feeling for design,” but cautioned that the “message of this Picasso is not one to be easily associated with the fundamental experiences of life.” The formal qualities of this artwork are “an experience by itself. Perhaps only this sort of experience will in the future be called art.”¹⁴³ In the text for his April 1947 lecture at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Root made a similar assessment of Stuart Davis’s “abstract Cubist” forms in *Colors of Spring in the Harbor* (FIG. 18), deeming them “less applicable to everyday life.”¹⁴⁴ In this lecture, Root nevertheless favorably commented on the effect that the abstract pictorial elements in Baziotès’ *Three Forms* (1946, Addison Gallery of American Art) had on him. The picture’s “varied surface, subdued color, subtle balance, simplicity and horizontal drift,” Root noted, “have a remarkably tranquilizing effect.”¹⁴⁵ He similarly admired paintings by André Masson (1896–1987) and Louis Schanker (1903–81, cat. no. 168), finding them “moving in both form and content.”¹⁴⁶

Several years later Root recollected that when, as a young man, he purchased Lawson’s painting, *Winter, Spuyten Duyvil* (FIG. 5), he learned “that art was something which appealed primarily to the emotions.”¹⁴⁷ Therefore, for Root, British critic Clive Bell’s (1881–1964) assertion that in order “to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing but a sense of form and colour [sic] and a knowledge of three-dimensional space” was too radical and impersonal a separation between art and life.¹⁴⁹ Bell’s opinion that the contemplation of a work of art was “unrelated to the significance of life” ran counter to Root’s belief that an innate connection existed between art and life. Root may have had Bell in mind when he remarked in his 1930 Hamilton College lecture on Italian art, “there is a school of modern criticism which deplores this [humanistic?] contribution in so far as it affected Renaissance painting. In the opinion of this school, painting should be divorced in so far as possible from association with the real and should therefore employ an abstract symbolism.”¹⁵⁰ Root countered Bell in a December 27, 1940 letter to Hamilton College President William H. Cowley (1899–1978), in which Root eloquently articulated his humanistic definition of art in his report about fine arts educational practices at several New England colleges: “Art, as I understand it, is essentially the expression of various attitudes toward life.” As World War II raged in Europe, Root stated that art could serve as a barometer of larger cultural forces because it “records the development—or decline—of the human understanding and is in part to be explained by and in part explanatory of the conditions amidst which it is created.”¹⁵¹

Root and Formalism

While Root sought a connection to the human experience in the visual arts, he also had gained a firsthand knowledge of the formal elements—lines, shapes, forms, space, texture, light, and color—that contribute to the style and visual impact of a work of art when he began taking private art classes with Luks around 1909–10. There are numerous instances in Root’s writings in which he addressed these formal properties.¹⁵² Root’s sensitivity to them mirrors, surprisingly, perhaps, an approach to art appreciation advocated by Bell and his fellow British critic Roger Fry (1866–1934). Marginal notes that appear

throughout Root's personal copy of Fry's *Vision and Design* (1920) suggest that he read the twenty-five essays in this important book very carefully, and that he had what might be described as a personal dialogue with the author. Root even prepared summaries of some of the key points Fry discussed in the book's first two essays, "Art and Life," and "An Essay in Aesthetics."¹⁵³

In "Art and Life" Fry presented a telescopic view of art and history and then asserted from this evidence that the "usual assumption of a direct and decisive connection between life and art is by no means correct." Root's checkmark in the margin adjacent to the next sentence, where Fry noted that art is sometimes influenced by life, but "much more by its own internal forces,"¹⁵⁴ indicates that this idea attracted his attention. Several paragraphs later, after noting how Impressionism marked the climax of a kind of representational art that had evolved since the thirteenth century, Fry observed, and Root emphasized with another checkmark, that "once representation had been pushed to this point where further development was impossible, it was inevitable that artists should . . . question the validity of the fundamental assumption that art aimed at representation."¹⁵⁵ Root also marked Fry's statement that the "new movement" led to the "re-establishment of purely aesthetic criteria in place of the criterion of conformity to appearance," and that the emergence of these new aesthetic criteria paved the way for an appreciation of "a great deal of barbaric and primitive art the very meaning of which escaped the understanding of those who demanded a certain standard of skill in representation before they could give serious consideration to a work of art."¹⁵⁶ Another comment by Fry that similarly caught Root's attention is that modern art "appeals only to the aesthetic sensibility, and that in most men it is comparatively weak." In the margin next to this sentence Root wrote, "or undeveloped."¹⁵⁷ The idea that the general public had little knowledge or appreciation of art is a subject Root wrote thoughtfully about several times.

The second chapter of *Vision and Design*, "An Essay in Aesthetics," is Fry's most important theoretical expression that the merits of a work of art should be based on a consideration of its formal elements, not on its ability to reproduce natural appearances. Fry's ideas here prompted Root to make numerous marginal comments. When, for example, Fry argued that art, being an expression of the "imaginative life," does not require the same kind of morally "responsive action" that a similar event in real life would require, Root, instead of commenting on the distinction Fry made here between art and morality, focused instead on the reflexive aspect of Fry's sentence and countered that "the creation of a work of art in itself is a responsive action."¹⁵⁸

Later, when Fry commented that the "average business man" would be more "admirable" and "respectable" if his "imaginative life were not so squalid and incoherent," Root wrote sarcastically, "I suppose the Rotary Club is looking after his morals."¹⁵⁹ When Fry remarked that the "imaginative life," no matter how interesting, would not be of "profound importance to mankind" without an "emotional aspect," Root wrote, "apparently the author, unlike Clive Bell, is willing to consider the emotions of life, as proper to artistic expression."

When Fry sought to make a distinction between two kinds of artistic beauty—one being "sensuous charm" and the other in which objects have "extreme ugliness"—Root, slightly annoyed with the opacity of Fry's language, wrote at the bottom of the page:

a design—an arrangement of different reflections of light. If it expresses no idea must be beautiful of itself; but if it expresses an idea it may have to be comparatively ugly in order to express the idea. In that case

the beauty of the design derives from its likeness to or harmony with the idea. Isn't this what Fry is trying to say?¹⁶⁰

Near the end of his essay Fry identified the various methods an artist has at his disposal, what he called "the emotional elements of design," to arouse the viewer. The first of these, according to Fry, is "the rhythm of the line." In the margin Root wrote his own term, "movement," to describe this formal element of a work of art. Next to Fry's following sentence, "the second element is mass," Root wrote, "substance." Root wrote "space" next to Fry's next statement, "the third element is space." Adjacent to Fry's sentence, "the fourth element is that of light and shade," Root wrote, "illumination." He took exception to Fry's fifth and final design element, "colour [sic]," writing, "color is merely illumination and ought not to be separately listed." Therefore, with Fry as his guide but in three cases using different words, Root listed four formal elements in a work of art: movement, substance, space, and illumination.¹⁶¹ When Fry noted shortly thereafter, "these emotional elements of design are connected with essential conditions of our physical existence," Root wrote approvingly in the margin, "they are the genetic motives."¹⁶² What this final comment by Root suggests is that he and Fry held similar beliefs about humankind's innate ability to empathize with the formal elements of a work of art. The formal analysis of art was not, therefore, merely one of a several different methodologies that could be used to analyze and discuss a work of art. It was, instead, the *sine qua non* of art appreciation.

Considered in this light, Root's comments—that artists are concerned with visual facts that have emotional significance; that certain works in his collection were "moving in both form and content"; or that his Lawson painting taught him "that art was something which appealed primarily to the emotions"—take on added significance. His ruminations about the nature of art and about man's aptitude to appreciate art were not based on an impersonal, intellectual construct but, instead, on his belief in a hereditary link between art and humankind.

The Evolution of Root's Taste from Figurative to Abstract Art

The paintings that Root purchased at the advent of his collecting career by Lawson, Luks, Prendergast, Dickinson, and Davies fairly represent his liberal [REDACTED] nevertheless conventional taste for figurative imagery. Despite Louchheim's [REDACTED] that Root was not interested in subject matter per se, it was not until around 1944–45 with the acquisition of monotypes by Harry Bertoia (1915–78, FIG. 36) that Root bought his first abstract or non-representational picture.¹⁶³ Although Root's burgeoning interest in abstract art in the mid-1940s parallels the historical record, it was not inevitable that he would follow this trend. A more conservative collector might have shunned these works because the relatively radical set of principles that abstract American art embodied represented a repudiation of the figurative works he collected up to this point. Root's embrace of abstract art at this time is all the more striking when one considers that he was approaching sixty, his health was declining, and the artists who created these works were considerably younger than he.

Several of Root's writings show the evolution of his thinking about figurative and abstract art. In his 1930 Hamilton College lecture, for example, Root mentioned the bias he then had for figurative imagery. Framing his remarks in terms reminiscent of the Renaissance era's *Paragone*, or debate about the



FIG. 36
Harry Bertoia
Descending Force, 1944
Ink on white paper-faced board
41 ¼ x 30 ⅝ in.
Cat. no. 11

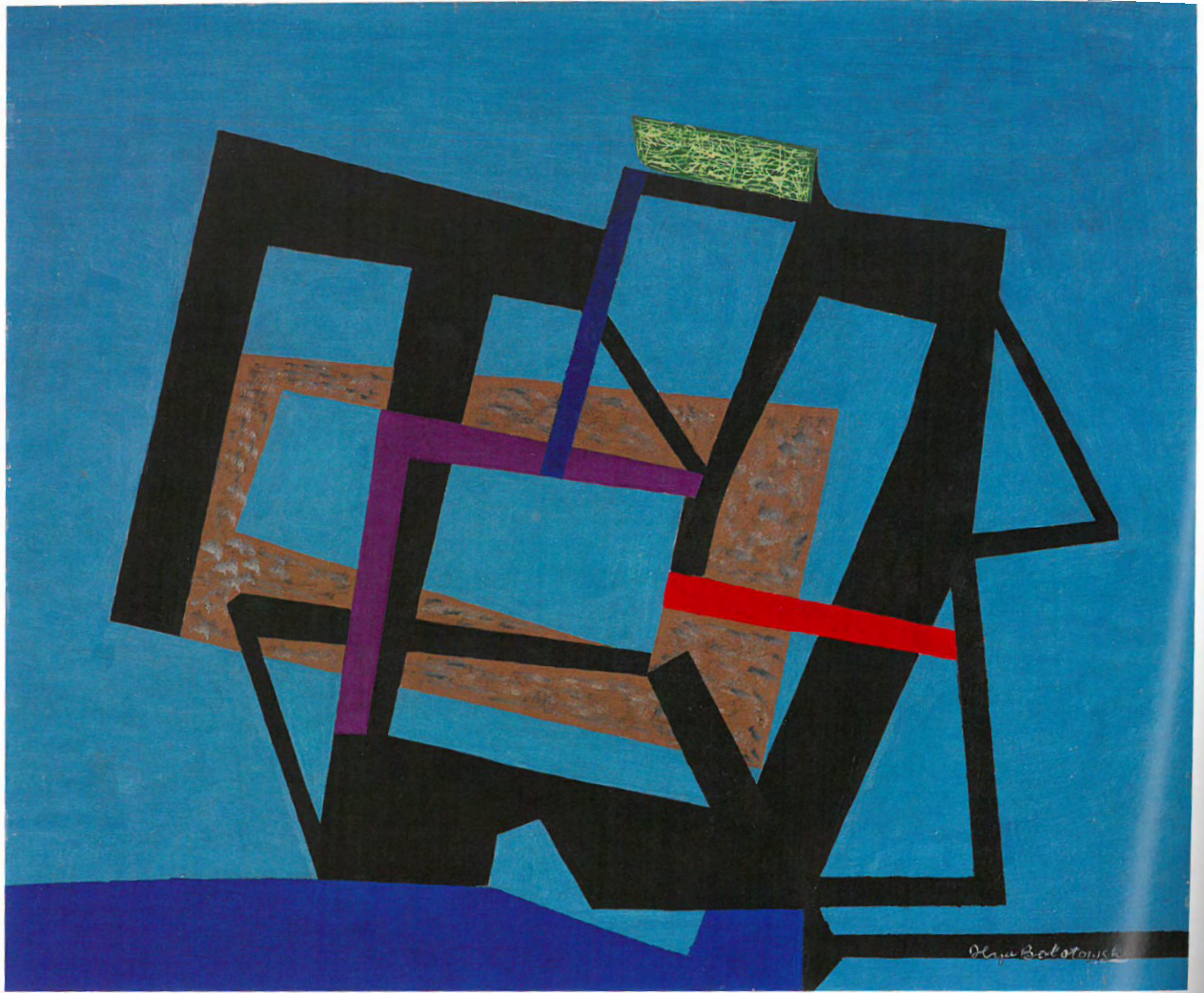


FIG. 37
 Ilya Bolotowsky
Marine Variation No. 2
 Ca. 1940-42
 Oil on Masonite
 11 x 13 ¼ in.
 Cat. no. 18

relative merits of painting, sculpture, and architecture, Root described what he believed was the appropriate form of expression for music, architecture, and painting. "I am content," he noted, "to leave music and architecture their traditional function of moving mankind by abstract means, and to ask of painting no more than that it shall continue to communicate as heretofore the poignancy and beauty of the world we see." He had a sympathetic interest in abstract art and believed it to be as equally grounded in humanistic values as was figurative art and, therefore, not necessary. "Personally I enjoy abstract painting, but I cannot help suspecting that its motives derive largely from life."¹⁶⁴ Root also worried that modern artists sought to eliminate "the dramatic, psychological, and characteristic, and even the realistically formal from art," and that they take "liberties with natural appearance to a degree undreamed of during the High Renaissance."¹⁶⁵

Root's first, significant exposure to the work of America's younger generation of abstract artists took place fifteen years later. His lexicographic mind led him to organize and classify the various kinds of abstract art that he encountered during these years. The script for his April 1947 Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute lecture (for which he prepared more conscientiously than his audience had a right to expect, given that the Institute's *Bulletin* noted that Root would "speak informally"¹⁶⁶) is an articulate and carefully reasoned explanation of what he believed certain modern artists were trying to achieve in their works. He noted that the European avant-garde artists who exhib-

ited at the 1913 Armory Show planted the seed of the abstract tendencies found in the works of the young American artists he was beginning to collect.¹⁶⁷ Looking back from a nearly thirty-five year perspective, Root declared that Odilon Redon (1840–1916) and Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) were the “precursors of the two modern schools of painting which have flowered [in the United States] since.” He described Redon as the forerunner of the European Surrealists as well as those American artists who displayed surrealist tendencies in their pictures. Kandinsky influenced the work of those modern artists who “show an increasing tendency to use a non-objective symbolism to express subject states.” Root illustrated this latter point by showing his audience Ilya Bolotowsky’s (1907–81) *Marine Variation No. 2* (FIG. 37), a small painting he acquired about a year earlier. In an effort to describe Bolotowsky’s intentions, Root insightfully noted that the picture represents the effort of an artist “who responds emotionally to sensations and ideas which originate within himself and which he does not wish to associate with natural objects. He has not made a picture of something outside himself which he finds agreeable; he has made a picture of something inside himself which he finds agreeable.”¹⁶⁸ Root also discussed in this lecture a class of modern American pictures that reflect in varying degrees the influence of Paul Klee (1879–1940). “If you visit the New York galleries this spring or next winter,” Root observed, “you will notice quite often non-objective paintings which are not primarily concerned with sensations but which try to present symbols which are the equivalent of general ideas.” He illustrated this trend with three artworks in his collection: Bertoi’s *Quadrilaterals* (cat. no. 13) and two paintings he purchased several months earlier, Tobey’s *New York Tablet* (FIG. 38), and Stamos’s *Ancestral Construction* (FIG. 39). On the thorny question about the meaning and legitimacy of an abstract picture, Root remarked about the Stamos, “metamorphic pictures of this sort invariably arouse speculation as to what they

below left

FIG. 38

Mark Tobey

New York Tablet, 1946

Tempera and chalk on laid paper
mounted on wood panel

24 7/8 x 19 in.

Cat. no. 215

below

FIG. 39

Theodoros Stamos

Ancestral Construction, 1946

Oil on Masonite

30 x 24 in.

Cat. no. 188



represent, and I think that because of this they have a value which we are apt to overlook." In his opinion, the meaning of Stamos's picture derived from its generalized forms, which "summon up in the observer's mind a number of images." Root's use of the word "metamorphic" to describe the picture's nature-based imagery is noteworthy. This type of picture's ability to represent a "class of things," and to "arouse speculation" helps to explain his interpretation of Stamos's pictures, as well as why he bought so many of them.¹⁶⁹

Another, even more methodical effort by Root to classify various kinds of mid-century American abstraction, appeared in the Institute's 1950 exhibition brochure, *Current Trends in British and American Painting from the Collection of Mr. Edward W. Root*. In his introductory notes about abstract pictures in the exhibition that he had acquired over the past five or so years, Root commented:

In some of the paintings abstraction seems to be used as a means of expressing the artist's feelings for organization (Nicholson) or construction (Ernst, Tobey); in other paintings, as a means of expressing the artist's feeling for nature (Sutherland, Stamos); in yet other paintings, as a means of expressing the artist's feeling for ideas (Gorky, Tobey, Matta). Finally, there are some pictures in which the abstraction combines very noticeably the expression of a feeling for organization with the expression of a feeling for either nature or ideas (Dove, Gatch, Conolly, Heliker).¹⁷⁰

What is most significant about this scheme is Root's struggle to create some kind of intellectual framework and therefore, achieve a better understanding of the most recent contemporary art.¹⁷¹

Root's Search for Critical Standards to Judge Art

One of Root's earliest official associations with the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute was a series of "picture criticism" classes he conducted for three small groups of adult students in 1944 and 1945.¹⁷² Root adapted the methodology described by the English literary critic I. A. Richards (1893-1979) in his influential book *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (1929), which was notorious because it outlined an experiment Richards conducted with students who criticized unattributed poems by the likes of John Donne (1572-1631), Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), and Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950).¹⁷³ At this pivotal moment in American art history, when mimesis as a critical standard could not be used to judge the abstract pictorial language emerging at mid-century, it comes as no surprise that Root would be drawn to the ideas in Richards' text, which provided an example for developing critical language to organize, as Richards noted, the world "of abstract opinion and disputation about matters of feeling."¹⁷⁴ Richards outlined his aims:

First, to introduce a new kind of documentation to those who are interested in the contemporary state of culture.... Secondly, to provide a new technique for those who wish to discover for themselves what they think and feel about poetry (and cognate matters) and why they should like or dislike it. Thirdly, to prepare the way for educational methods more efficient than those we use now in developing discrimination and the power to understand what we hear and read.¹⁷⁵



Root modified Richards' method for his visual analysis class, stating that the purpose "is to give participants a definite and objective approach to pictorial art and afford them the opportunity of enjoying the use of their own minds." He installed four artworks for his students to examine in terms of the following elements:

- (a) Its subject (i.e. what it represents).
- (b) Its motive (i.e. the aspect of the subject which has moved the artist and been emphasized in the work).
- (c) Its expressiveness (i.e. the suitability of its medium, execution and composition to the expression of motive).
- (d) Its special appeal (i.e. the particular kind of people, if any, for whom it has been made. Children? Other artists? etc.).
- (e) Its non-artistic intention (i.e. does it seek to achieve anything beyond the expression of the motive? Does it consciously seek to achieve social or political reform, etc.?).
- (f) Its value (i.e. potential value to others besides the artist).²⁷⁶

Root asked his students to apply this methodology to works of art in his collection including graphic arts by Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828), Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), and George Grosz (1893–1959) and paintings by Davies, *Inland Tempest* (FIG. 40), and Tomlin, *Watermelon* (FIG. 29).

The strength of Root's method is that it encouraged careful looking. For example, in Root's reading of Goya, *And There Is No Remedy*, from the series, *The Disasters of War*, he described the print's motive as "the horror and inhuman cruelty of war,"²⁷⁷ its forms: "its rough execution, unmitigated realism, perfect legibility, and strongly contrasted values, all seem to help the expression of the violent theme;" and its value as "[causing] an intelligent sensitive person to have a revulsion against war." About Grosz's lithograph, *Street Scene*, from his *Ecce Homo* portfolio, Root described the form as well-suited to the subject matter: "The lack of perspective, the lack of horizontality and vertical-

FIG. 40
Arthur B. Davies
Inland Tempest (Inland Storm)
Not dated
Oil on linen
18 x 40 in.
Cat. no. 62

ity in the architecture and the lack of balance in the composition suggest an unfamiliar, unnatural, unstable world and by so doing enhance the suggestion of moral disorganization." Root believed that the audience for this work was limited to viewers "who are used to modern methods of pictorial expression" which would be, unfortunately, too small to "induce repulsion in other individuals who would impel them to seek reform and regeneration."¹⁷⁸

If his descriptions are careful and his appreciation for form relative to expression apt, Root occasionally wrote the odd or incomprehensible interpretation, as, for example, the "associated ideas" of Tomlin's *Watermelon*: "I should say that this picture unlike most School of Paris cubist pictures showed a feeling for the mystery of the universe."¹⁷⁹

One must ask what Root's effort to systematize visual analysis tells us about his cast of mind, even as it appears Root was keenly aware of the *limitations* a systematized method of visual analysis had on the interpretation of a work of art—as revealed in the statement he wrote about Tomlin in which Root stated unequivocally that pictorial meaning derived from a human quality that transcended any kind of rigid methodology.¹⁸⁰

Why Abstraction?

In response to the question he posed to himself, "Why Abstraction," Root compiled a list on the back of a calendar page dated "July 4, 1946":

- The urge to be original.
- Desire to avoid competition with camera.
- Reaction against the formlessness of Impressionism.
- Desire to approximate musical form.
- Discovery of art forms (say African or Polynesian) which do not stress likeness (also El Greco, Byzantines, Blake).
- Reaction against scientific materialism. Fear of life. The Eastern spirit. Hatred of mankind. Liking for machine.¹⁸¹

Shortly thereafter, in a four-page outline of notes for his 1947 lecture at the Institute, Root struggled to understand why so many contemporary artists were exploring this new idiom:

- Why has this tendency persisted and increased? Is it merely because abstraction satisfies our desire for change? The answer to that is that it has been going on for nearly forty years. Its novelty value disappeared years ago. Is it because it is easier to do? Even the more traditional artists admit that it is harder to do good abstractions than good figurative works. Why then do so many artists tend to abstraction?
- A. Some paint abstractions because other artists do, just as some paint realistically for the same reason.
 - B. Some use an abstract method to communicate genuinely felt motives that might be as well or better communicated by more concrete traditional means.
 - C. Finally some by means of abstraction achieve a stronger suggestion of the motives which appeal to them than they could by the accepted figurative method.¹⁸²

In the final draft for the lecture, Root invoked the authority of the Greek philosopher Plato as justification for the rise of abstraction. Pointing out

that Plato spoke about the absolute beauty of simple geometric shapes, Root speculated that the philosopher would be interested in modern art because the "drift of modern art is away from imitation and toward geometry." Root saw a certain philosophical inevitability in the emergence of abstraction, even though, if his words are narrowly interpreted, this development would only take place in the realm of "geometric" pictures.¹⁸³ At the conclusion of this lecture, Root asked his audience why they thought so many contemporary artists "use a non-objective symbolism and paint what they imagine rather than what they see." He considered the answer to this question a key to understanding the momentous cultural changes that were taking place in America in the post-World War II era. "If you can answer this question," Root noted, "you will be in a fair way to explain the change that is coming over western thought." This statement is significant because it suggests that Root considered art to be a part of larger cultural or societal tendencies. "Art is only one straw in the wind," Root added, "no queerer than politics, economics or sociology."¹⁸⁴

While Root believed that abstract painting was flourishing in the United States, he wisely refrained from commenting on the significance of its popularity. In the penultimate draft he prepared for his 1947 lecture at the Institute, Root noted that

the practice of non-objective painting by men of talent seems to be growing. It is particularly favored at present by delvers into the sub-conscious. What this portends I do not know. Leonardo da Vinci would certainly consider non-objective painting to be the final descent into decadence; many objective [representational] painters living today consider it to be so. Whether they are right or wrong only the future can determine.¹⁸⁵

Some of Root's last thoughts about the idea of pictorial abstraction appeared in the Munson-William-Proctor Institute's 1950 exhibition brochure, *Current Trends in British and American Painting From the Collection of Mr. Edward W. Root*. At this moment of his life, as his health was beginning to deteriorate, Root waxed nostalgically about one of the most influential artistic experiences of his youth, and how the seeds that were planted by that event had, nearly four decades later, come full circle. "As far back as 1913... [at] the celebrated Armory Show... I became convinced at that time that representation was not an inevitable or even desirable concomitant of every kind of painting." Root added, almost apologetically, that if he "collected representational painting between the wars it was because that was the kind of painting which I saw in the galleries devoted to the exhibition of American pictures." This is not an entirely accurate representation of the American art scene between the wars, of course, considering that he could have purchased abstract pictures in the 1930s by, among others, Arthur Dove, who was desperate for enlightened patronage during these years.

EDWARD WALES ROOT AND

MUNSON-WILLIAMS-PROCTOR ARTS INSTITUTE

Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute was founded in 1935 by members of the last generation of the family whose names it bears. The family left a substantial endowment to create and maintain the arts institution, but its personal collections of fine and decorative arts had not been developed methodically, so it is a felicitous coincidence of timing that Root—with his knowledge of art, museums, and collecting practices—was approaching retirement from Hamilton College at approximately the same time. Unlike some of his contemporaries such as Duncan Phillips, John Ringling (1866–1936), Ralph Hubbard Norton (1875–1953), Marion Koogler McNay (1883–1950) or Sterling Clark (1877–1956), Root was not a wealthy industrialist or financier, and he seems never to have aspired to establish a museum bearing his name, as these other collectors had. The origins, therefore, of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute present the more unusual union of financing from one party and expertise from another.¹⁸⁶

In the first decade of his relationship with the new Institute, and particularly after his 1940 retirement from teaching at Hamilton College, Root's participation grew incrementally but steadily.¹⁸⁷ From as early as 1938, the Institute benefited from Root's attention; in the fall of that year, it hosted "Exhibition of Watercolors and Pastels by Eleven American Moderns from a Distinguished Private Collection." Eight years later, from September 29 to October 19, 1946, the Community Arts Program (precursor to the Museum of Art) featured "Paintings from the Collection of Edward W. Root," with thirty-two pieces presented in the Main Gallery. In the intervening eight years, Root's profile had risen considerably and he was no longer anonymous. In addition to lending art, Root taught his art appreciation seminar for adults and was an occasional guest speaker.

The year 1949 was red-letter in the Root and Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute association. On November 2, 1949 the Board of Trustees invited Root to serve as an advisor to the Community Arts program, specifically to assist Harris K. Prior, its Director from 1947 to late 1956, as an advisor on acquisitions. It was also in 1949 that Root began thinking about donating the major portion of his collection to the Institute.¹⁸⁸ Perhaps because of this commitment, Root made his first gift of artwork, the first of hundreds, to the Institute also in 1949. It was an anonymous donation of an oil painting by Luigi Lucioni (1900–88), *Vermont Landscape*, dated ca. 1944.¹⁸⁹ Root made a public donation of fourteen paintings and drawings by American artists the following year. In 1953 he gave 167 Old Master prints, dating from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries, and twenty-two drawings and small paintings, as well as 154 prints by American artists.¹⁹⁰ The following year, he donated fifty-eight eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Japanese woodcuts.¹⁹¹ When he passed away in late 1956, Root bequeathed 227 paintings and drawings, the material of *Auspicious Vision*, to the Museum of Art.

Root's gifts of art were an important consideration when Prior and Root drafted the Museum's first acquisition policy in early 1950. The two men created lists of artists whom they believed would form the best representation of American art. Root's list of artists' names included his annotations such as "adequately represented in the Root Collection"—meaning that that artist was not given priority on the acquisition list—or "represented by a minor work in the Root Collection." Root understood that his own collection was personal and domestically scaled, so even though he owned a small Rothko

from 1947 (cat. no. 162), in 1953 the Museum acquired *No. 18, 1951*, which represents the artist in his most glorious signature style. And, in 1954, the Museum purchased the monumental frieze, *Number 2, 1949*, by Jackson Pollock.¹⁹² Root also supported the acquisition of work by painters on Prior's list, artists not represented in the Root collection, whose work may not have matched his personal taste—Isabel Bishop (1902–88) and Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), for example.¹⁹³ Prior sought to expand the collection historically by including artists such as John Singleton Copley (1738–1815), William S. Mount (1807–68), Winslow Homer (1836–1910), Thomas Eakins (1844–1916), Albert Pinkham Ryder (1847–1917), and Hudson River School painters, but the acquisition policy itself states: "Except for unusually advantageous opportunities, collecting in this area should be postponed for the time being."¹⁹⁴ Interestingly, Root recommended no sculpture, though Prior listed thirteen names, several of which are now represented in the collection, including Alexander Calder (1898–1976), José de Creeft (1884–1982), Gaston Lachaise (1882–1935), and David Smith (1906–65). Between 1952 and 1956, Root and Prior also actively acquired European twentieth-century paintings and sculptures, so that the Institute's twentieth-century American holdings would have stylistic context.¹⁹⁵

Root and Prior collaborated successfully, with the full support of the Institute's Board of Trustees, until 1955 when illness prevented Root from touring New York City galleries as frequently as he once had.¹⁹⁶ In late 1956 Harris Prior departed Utica for the directorship of the American Federation of Arts and Root passed away.

Edward Root's contribution to Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute was instrumental in establishing the organization as a professional entity. This was achieved because Root's relationship with the administration of the Institute was one of mutual high regard: it trusted his taste to form the collection and he entrusted to it the perpetual care of his lifetime's work. Therefore, while his name does not grace the institution, Root's vision infuses Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute and his legacy has permeated considerations both pragmatic and philosophical.

After the Museum's collections, the most tangible manifestation of the **Root-Munson-Williams-Proctor** Institute partnership was the building campaign the Board of Trustees undertook in 1954. This venture was based in some measure on Root's intention to bequeath his holdings to the Institute. The exhibition program during Root's lifetime was limited to renovated spaces in Fountain Elms, the 1850 Italianate mansion that was the founders' home, and it was not, understandably, ideal for the display of contemporary art. When Harris Prior saw Root's collection installed at the Metropolitan Museum, he commented, "I realized how inadequate our Institute lighting is when I saw colors I never knew were present in the works I had seen before."¹⁹⁷

In the spring of 1954 Prior and the Institute Trustees contacted architectural historian Henry Russell Hitchcock (1903–87) for advice about selecting an architect for the new Museum building. That summer and autumn, candidates visited Utica: Pietro Belluschi (1899–1994), Philip Johnson (1906–2005), Eero Saarinen (1910–61), and Edward Durrell Stone (1902–78). In a May 23, 1955 memorandum to the Board, Prior expressed doubt about Belluschi's busy schedule but otherwise emphasized that "any one... would give us a good design... it is very difficult to choose among them."¹⁹⁸ In spite of his declining health, Root participated in the search. He and Grace hosted visiting architects Belluschi, Johnson, and Saarinen at the Homestead and met Stone in

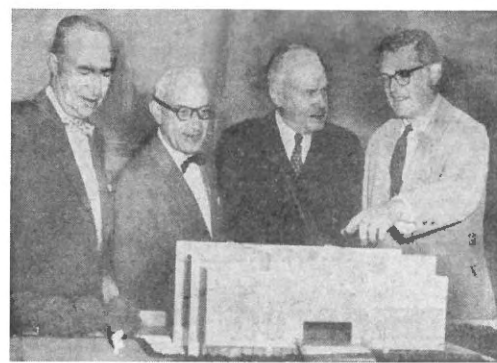


FIG. 41
Philip Johnson's model for the Museum of Art, examined by William C. Murray, President; William C. Palmer, Director of the School of Art; Clement R. Newkirk, consultant; and Richard B. McLanathan, Director of the Community Arts Program. Reproduced from the *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, October 31, 1957.

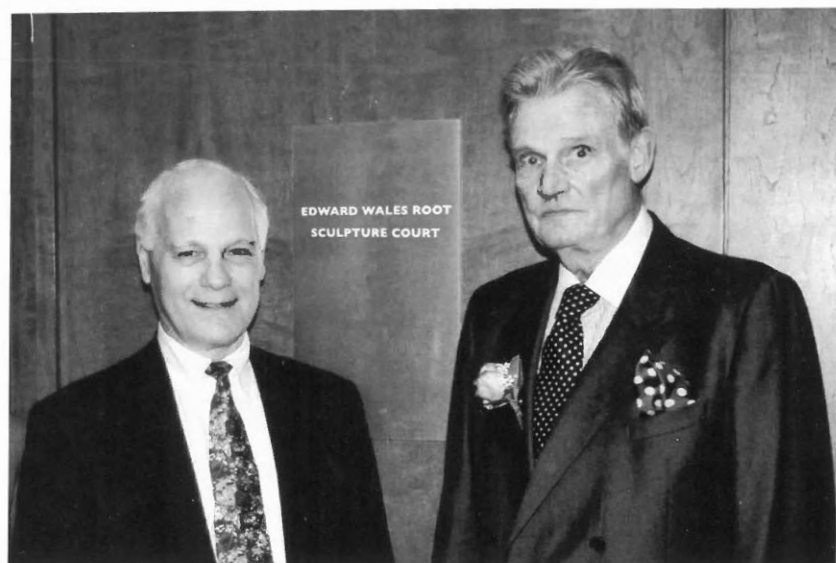


FIG. 42
Milton J. Bloch, Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute President, and John B. Root at the dedication of the Edward Wales Root Sculpture Court, May 3, 2001

New York.¹⁹⁹ By fall 1955 the Institute awarded the commission to Johnson (FIG. 41) and his simple, elegant structure was inaugurated to critical acclaim in October 1960.²⁰⁰

After the Johnson building opened, the Institute organized the exhibition *Edward Wales Root Bequest*, on view from November 5, 1961 to February 24, 1962, in a fitting tribute to a great benefactor. Before *Auspicious Vision*, this was the only instance that the entire bequest has been exhibited in toto. And forty years later, another generation at Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute sought to pay homage to Root when, on May 3, 2001, it dedicated the Museum of Art's grandest gallery as the Edward Wales Root Sculpture Court (FIG. 42). This dedication clearly demonstrates that Root's multivalent contributions to the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute continue to benefit staff, scholars, students and other patrons fifty years hence. One means to measure the extent of Root's importance is the long list of exhibitions to which his pictures have been included; during his lifetime and later, with Institute loans, paintings and drawings from the Root collection have been available to venues as diverse as Venice *Biennales* and small university galleries.

The Museum runs the risk, however, of institutionalizing and historicizing Root's vision. For Root, his collection was not so precious (though the artists who created the work were). Root did not expect the Institute to be compelled to keep everything he had donated, but should monitor the collection to see how artworks age: "The small part that doesn't date should be held and the remainder sold. I should add that it might be as well not to be in too great a hurry to make up one's mind about what is valid and what is not."²⁰¹ Root's mission, from his first art purchase, was to encourage contemporary artists in their work, but his opinion expressed here indicates that he envisioned a museum of contemporary art as a living entity. As it happens, the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute Museum of Art has retained all of Root's pieces, but his model has enabled subsequent generations of Museum personnel to collect with a similar conviction in support of contemporary art and that may be his most important gift of all.

1. Robert B. Hale, "The Growth of a Collection," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 11, no. 6 (February 1953): 153–55.
2. In an April 1952 letter from Root to the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute's President Thomas Brown Rudd (1898–1955), Root used the expression "rather strange developments." Record Group 4.21, Folder 139, Joseph S. Trovato Papers, Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute Archives. (Subsequent references to documents in the Institute's archives are abbreviated: R[ecord] G[rroup] [number], F[older] [number].)
3. Edward W. Root, "College Teaching and Contemporary Pictures," College Art Association Conference, March 30, 1932, unpublished paper, 3–4. R. G. 13, F. 260, Edward Wales Root Papers, Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute Archives. (Subsequent references to documents in the Institute's Root archives are abbreviated: "Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.")
4. Royal Cortissoz, "Address by Royal Cortissoz," *Elihu Root: President of the Century Association, 1918–1927* (New York: The Century Association, 1937), 11–18.
5. Philip C. Jessup, *Elihu Root*, vol. 2 (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1938), 501.
6. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 3. See also, Aline B. Saarinen, "The Quiet World: Edward Wales Root," *The Proud Possessors: The Lives, Times and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors* (New York: Random House, 1958), 261. For Edward Root's comment to Saarinen about his father's "latent taste," see her February 8, 1956 interview with Root, 4, in the Aline Saarinen Professional Papers, 1906–1969, 2.2: Research Material for *The Proud Possessors*, Box 6, Folders 48–51, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. (Subsequent references to documents in Saarinen's research material for *The Proud Possessors* are abbreviated, "Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.")
7. In an October 9, 1938 letter to Hamilton College's President, William H. Cowley (1899–1978), Root explained that his acquaintance with The Eight, from 1909, taught him that the study of art should begin with art and not with books or photographs. R. G. 13, F. 156, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
8. For the 1928 description of Root as a lecturer and son of Elihu Root, see "Who's Who in the December Bulletin," *Association of American Colleges Bulletin* 14, no. 6 (December 1928): 547. For Root's remark in 1947 that he was a collector, see Edward W. Root, "Some Characteristics of Modern Art," 1, R. G. 13, F. 242, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
9. Grace Root to Saarinen, ca. 1957, frame 886, microfilm reel 2070, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.
10. Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 251–52, 260; and Aline B. Louchheim (later, Saarinen), "A Collector with Personal Vision," *New York Times*, February 15, 1953, 12.
11. For Grace Root's family's experience with deafness, see Susanna White, "The Best Kind of Life: Edward W. Root as Teacher, Collector, and Naturalist," in *The Best Kind of Life: Edward W. Root as Teacher, Collector, and Naturalist* (Clinton, N.Y.: Emerson Gallery, Hamilton College, 2007), 8–9, 16n18. Grace's correspondence with Louis M. Balfour (1908–2007), an authority on the history of deaf education, is in the Gallaudet University Archives.
12. Edward W. Root, "If I Had My Life to Live Over Again," November 25, 1914, 1–2, R. G. 13, F. 255, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
13. Edward W. Root, "Pictures and the College," *American Magazine of Art* 13, no. 5 (May 1922): 144.
14. Charles Dickens, *American Notes and Pictures from Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 29–45.
15. Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 261.
16. John Loughery, "The New York Sun and Modern Art in America: Charles FitzGerald, Frederick James Gregg, James Gibbons Huneker, Henry McBride," *Arts Magazine* 59, no. 4 (December 1984): 77–82.
17. Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 255. Saarinen does not indicate when Root first met Lawson but this probably occurred in early December 1909, several weeks after he received a letter from Lawson indicating that he was "trying to sell a picture or two for 'half price' as I am hard up." Root wrote across the top of Lawson's at some later date: "I think this was the letter which made me buy Spuyten Duyvil for \$250." Lawson to Root, November 30, 1909, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.
18. Root's personal copy of the catalog the Macbeth Galleries published for this February 1908 exhibition is filed in R. G. 13, F. 73, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives. Root's picture is reproduced opposite four Lawson titles, none of which is *Winter, Spuyten Duyvil*.
19. Edward W. Root, "I Remember Quite Clearly How I Came to Buy My First Painting," ca. 1950, 5, R. G. 13, F. 255, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
20. Luks's portrait of Edward Root, ca. 1909–10, is illustrated in White, *The Best Kind of Life: Edward W. Root as Teacher, Collector, and Naturalist*, 23. For Edward's comment to Saarinen that the Luks watercolor was the first picture in his and his wife's collection, see her February 8, 1956 interview with Root, 3, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.
21. For *Dyckman Street Church* see Mary E. Murray, *American 20th-Century Watercolors from the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute* (Utica, N.Y.: Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, 2000), 28–29, cat. no. 6.
22. John Buttrick Root (b. 1922), Edward's son, to Mary E. Murray, April 2002, characterized Luks's visits to Clinton as drying out.
23. Luks to Root, April 30, 1933, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.
24. Luks to Root, June 8, 1924, R. G. 13, F. 33, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
25. Root, "Pictures and the College," 148.
26. "Young Boswell Interviews George Luks," *New York Tribune*, February 16, 1923.
27. See Milton W. Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 89 (illus.), 287, cat. no. 917. See also, George B. Luks, *Bronx Park, May 8, 1904: Thirty-three Drawings of Animals in the Bronx Zoo* (Andover, Mass.: Addison Gallery of American Art, 1990).
28. For the Prendergast painting that Root purchased at the Armory Show, see Brown, *Story of the Armory Show*, 303, cat. no. 895. For Root's recollections about the appearance of the picture's paint surface when he purchased it, the frame he commissioned for it, and how the work was displayed when he loaned it during the 1920s to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, see his ca. 1933 letter to the Whitney Museum of American Art's curator, Hermon More (1887–1968) in R. G. 13, F. 48A, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives. For the prices of the works by the other American artists who exhibited at the Armory Show, see Brown, *Story of the Armory Show*, 244–327.
29. For Edward's comment to Saarinen about Prendergast's deafness, see her February 8, 1956 interview with Root, 2, in the Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.
30. Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 264.
31. Saarinen, in *The Proud Possessors*, 259, remarked that Root "felt protective and grateful to the struggling American artists who had released him into the visual world and to men like Luks who had introduced him to a boisterous Bohemia so unlike the polished world in which he grew up."
32. Edward W. Root, "An Appreciation," in Duncan Phillips, *Arthur B. Davies: Essays on the Man and His Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside, 1924), 61.

33. *Ibid.*, 65. See also Edward W. Root: *Collector and Teacher*, introductory essay by Joseph S. Trovato (Clinton, N.Y.: Fred L. Emerson Gallery, Hamilton College, 1982), 42, for the following undated comment by Root about Davies: "Perhaps some future generation will agree with the writer's opinion that Arthur B. Davies is the greatest master of the landscape with figure that the occident has yet produced."
34. Root's annotated Armory Show catalog is filed in R. G. 13, F. 72, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives. For the three paintings that Davies exhibited at the Armory Show, see Bennard B. Perlman, *The Lives, Loves and Art of Arthur B. Davies* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1998), 223–26.
35. For about a ten-year period between 1915 and the mid-1920s Root purchased very few works of art. In a 1924 letter to the Macbeth Galleries, regarding the possible purchase of a Davies canvas, *Flood* (location unknown), Root explained: "I would buy the picture gladly, but I have no more loose money to invest in paintings and have not had for a number of years. All my buying was done while I was a young man without a family to support." R. G. 13, F. 17, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
36. Helen Appleton Read, untitled article, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 5, 1935, quoted in Edna M. Lindemann, *The Art Triangle: Artist, Dealer, Collector* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Burchfield Art Center, 1989), 321–70.
37. Root donated Hopper's *Freight Cars, Gloucester* to the Addison Gallery of American Art in 1956 in honor of the gallery's 25th anniversary. See Susan C. Faxon et al., *Addison Gallery of American Art, 65 Years: A Selective Catalogue* (Andover, Mass.: Addison Gallery of American Art, 1996), 403, cat. no. 146.
38. Edward W. Root, "Hopper's Works Now on Exhibition Here," *Utica Daily Press*, March 3, 1928, 9.
39. Edward W. Root, untitled comments on Hopper, in Joseph S. Trovato, ed., *Learning About Pictures from Mr. Root* (Clinton, N.Y.: The Edward W. Root Art Center, Hamilton College, 1965), unpaginated.
40. Additional research in Rudd's papers at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute and at Hamilton College may shed light on how Rudd's positions at both institutions contributed to Root's decision to give his collection to the Institute. Rudd, apparently, was persuaded by Root's comments that Hopper would be unwilling to accept an honorary degree; so, instead, the college awarded one to Burchfield. For Root's comments to Rudd about Hopper, see the research notes, 3, Saarinen compiled during her May 1957 visit to Root's home in Clinton, N.Y., in the Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.
41. Marsh to the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy (Albright-Knox Art Gallery), ca. 1944, quoted in Steven A. Nash et al., *Albright-Knox Art Gallery: Painting and Sculpture from Antiquity to 1942* (New York: Rizzoli, 1979), 560.
42. Prior to his bequest, Root donated to Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute two conté crayon drawings, a gouache, an etching, and a lithograph by Marsh.
43. The dates of the Montross show were March 26 to April 7, 1928; see Joseph S. Trovato, *Charles Burchfield: Catalogue of Paintings in Public and Private Collections* (Utica, N.Y.: Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, 1970), 321. Marina Libel of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, in an August 8, 2007 email message to Michael D. Somple of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, noted that the accession card for the watercolor in the Montross show that the Metropolitan Museum acquired at this time, *August Afternoon*, 1927, indicates that the museum purchased it "from Edward W. Root in April of 1928."
44. Edward W. Root, "Charles E. Burchfield," *American Art Portfolios (Series One)* (New York: Raymond and Raymond, 1936), 65. Slightly different accounts of how Burchfield and Rehn became associated were published, successively, by Hale, "The Growth of a Collection," 154; Burchfield in *Edward Wales Root, 1884–1956: An American Collector*, prologue by Aline B. Saarinen (Utica, N.Y.: Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, 1957), unpaginated; Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 262; Grace Root in Trovato, *Charles Burchfield*, 345; and Harry Yates, as recounted in Lindemann, *The Art Triangle*, 36. An alternative interpretation of the significance of the role Root played in bringing the artist and dealer together was proposed by M. Sue Kendall, "Serendipity at the Sunwise Turn: Mary Mowbray-Clark and the Early Patronage of Charles Burchfield," in Nannette V. Maciejunes and Michael D. Hall et al., *The Paintings of Charles Burchfield: North by Midwest* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 89–90.
45. Root, "Charles E. Burchfield," 67.
46. Root, untitled comments on Burchfield, *Learning about Pictures from Mr. Root*, unpaginated.
47. Burchfield to "Friends" (Edward and Grace Root), April 25, 1932, R. G. 13, F. 8, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives
48. Root, "Charles E. Burchfield," 65.
49. Burchfield to Root, May 22, 1950 letter, R. G. 13, F. 8, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
50. For the statement Root wrote about Burchfield for the Doctor of Fine Arts degree Hamilton College awarded him in 1948, see the research notes, 3 (verso), Saarinen compiled during her May 1957 visit to Root's home in Clinton, N.Y., in the Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.
51. See R. G. 13, F. 38, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives. Thanks to Mangravite's generosity, the Institute owns copies of Root's letters to the artist, which is not typical—Root's papers in the Institute's archives generally only include artists' responses to him.
52. Root to Mangravite, July 7, 1938, R. G. 13, F. 38, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
53. Charles Daniel to Root, May 8, 1923, quoted in *Edward W. Root: Collector and Teacher*, 26.
54. Grace Root, "Perceptions of Edward Wales Root: May 1931 through October 1949," Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.
55. Duncan Phillips to Root, April 15, 1927, frame 938, microfilm reel 2070, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI. Grace Root revealed what Edward thought of Marin in a letter she wrote to her close friend, Louise S. B. Saunders (1870–1961): "Edward doesn't like Marin as much as Demuth but saw one recently of distant water at Weyhe's which he liked immensely" (Grace Root to Louise Saunders [July 1925], Saunders Family Papers [0000.61], Hamilton College Library Archives, Clinton, N.Y.).
56. *Winslow Homer Centenary Exhibition* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1936), 23–28. The exhibition was held from December 15, 1936 to January 15, 1937. In the exhibition catalog's introductory essay, 11, Lloyd Goodrich (1897–1987) remarked, in terms that might have influenced Root's thinking about Marin, "Homer was a master of the watercolor medium. His characteristic boldness and swiftness were the very qualities required for it."
57. Halpert, in an October 1956 interview with Saarinen, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI. Halpert mentioned the respect she had for Root four years later when she told Joseph S. Trovato (1912–83), the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute's Assistant to the Museum Director: "I would be delighted to have a part of any plans relating to Edward Root. As you know, I had great respect for him." Joseph S. Trovato, "Foreword," *Selections from the Edith Gregor Halpert Collection* (Clinton, N.Y.: The Edward W. Root Art Center, Hamilton College, 1960), unpaginated.
58. Root, "Some Characteristics of Modern Art," 5, R. G. 13, F. 242, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
59. Root's interest in Dove dates back to at least 1930–31. In his personal copy of the checklist for The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition, *Painting and Sculpture by Living Americans: Ninth Loan Exhibition*, December 2, 1930 to January 20, 1931, Root wrote next to the three Dove entries that the artist was "interesting disciple of Kandinskyism." Root's copy of this checklist is filed in R. G. 13, F. 74, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.

60. Halpert, in an October 1956 interview with Saarinen, noted that Root "resented if he thought 'You want to sell me that picture,'" see Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI. For Root's relationship with art dealers, see also White, "The Best Kind of Life: Edward W. Root as Teacher, Collector, and Naturalist," in *The Best Kind of Life: Edward W. Root as Teacher, Collector, and Naturalist*, 11.
61. Edward W. Root, "Foreword," *Current Trends in British and American Painting from the Collection of Mr. Edward W. Root*, Clinton, New York (Utica, N.Y.: Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, 1950), unpaginated.
62. See Grace Root's ca. 1957 transcription of part of Edward's 1920–21 lecture on the "The Italian School," 1, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.
63. For Root's remark to Palmer about his interest in the new art that was emerging in the mid-1940s, see research notes, 8, Saarinen compiled during her May 1957 visit to Root's home in Clinton, N.Y., Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.
64. Root, "Foreword," *Current Trends in British and American Painting*, unpaginated.
65. Theodoros Stamos, in *Edward Wales Root, 1884–1956: An American Collector*, unpaginated.
66. *Ibid.*
67. Stamos, "Why Nature In Art," in *Theodoros Stamos, 1922–1997: A Retrospective* (Athens, Greece: National Gallery and Alexander Soutzos Museum, 1997), 462.
68. Paul Cummings' May 14, 1968 interview with Charles Seliger, transcript, 88, AAA-SI.
69. *Ibid.*, 55. Root's whimsical use of this term "beasties" is of a kind with his ca. 1950 recollection, "I Remember Quite Clearly How I Came to Buy My First Painting," 3, about the fateful day late in 1909 when he visited Lawson's studio for the first time. There he found Lawson's friend, artist Walt Kuhn (1877–1949) busying himself "making drawings... ladybugs and other insects wearing large boots and carrying umbrellas... Kuhn's little bugs dressed in the garments of humanity have always seemed to me to be the heralds of the great anthropomorphic menagerie of Walt Disney."
70. Cummings' May 14, 1968 interview with Seliger, transcript, 53, AAA-SI.
71. See microfilm reel 2423, frame 315, Laurel Gallery Papers, AAA-SI.
72. See Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr., "Address at Opening of Exhibition to Honor the Memory of Edward Wales Root," Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, April 28, 1957, 8, R. G. 4.21, F. 164, Trovato Papers, MWPAI Archives. See also, Hayes's "The Root of American Painting," *ARTnews* 56, no. 9 (January 1958): 29. Root's remark that a drawing is the "record of a gesture" echoes the English art critic Roger Fry's (1866–1934) statement: "The drawn line is the record of a gesture, and that gesture is modified by the artist's feeling which is thus communicated to us directly," in Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (New York: Brentano's, 1924), 22. Root owned a copy of *Vision and Design* (see Appendix 4) and made extensive marginal notations on the page of Fry's book where this statement appears. Also, in 1922, Root wrote ("Pictures and the College," 148) that drawings were very useful for the professor of art appreciation because "they offer a wealth of illustration for the lecturer—movement, construction, design, composition, the poetry of light and shade, the dramatic, the psychological, the fantastic, the humorous, the satiric—almost every kind of pictorial motive is to be discovered in them."
73. "Nineteen Young American Artists," *Life* (March 20, 1950): 82–93.
74. See "Community Arts: Print Room," *MWPI Bulletin* (February 1947): unpaginated. The subject of Root and his associations with literati has yet to be explored. Alexander H. Woollcott (1887–1943) was a fellow Hamilton College graduate, Class of 1909, and the Roots were frequent hosts to visiting writers, including E. M. Forster (1879–1970), whom Root mentioned to artist Peppino Mangravite in an April 27, 1947 letter. See R. G. 13, F. 38, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives. Edmund Wilson (1895–1972) also mentions visiting with the Roots in *Upstate* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), 121–22.
75. Edward W. Root, "Clinton Man Comments on Art Exhibit," *Utica Daily Press*, January 21, 1928, 9.
76. A theme that consistently appears in Root's writings is the link between modern art and the pictorial traditions of the past. This might seem, on the surface, to contradict Root's aversion to "book learning" and his often-professed allegiance to the "artists' point of view" but, in fact, as his published and unpublished writings indicate, Root was extraordinarily well read in a variety of subjects including art history (see Appendix 4). This served him well when he discussed the similarities between the work of a certain modern artist and a specific art-historical tradition. He wisely recognized, however, that it would defeat the goals he was attempting to achieve with his undergraduate students if he flaunted this kind of knowl-
- edge in a classroom setting. Nevertheless, the connections Root made between modern and historical art—an effort he shared with many of his contemporaries—seems like an attempt to soften the doctrinaire radicalism of some of the avant-garde's ideology. Moreover, for people who wrote about, collected, or sold modern art, the effort they made to discuss this material in terms similar to those used by the dealer Edith Halpert when she described to Root the "continuity" between the work of Marin and Winslow Homer (see note 57), represented an earnest attempt to blunt the vitriolic criticism leveled at modernism, and to reassure its advocates that modern art had lasting aesthetic merits.
77. For the de Kooning, see Judith Wolfe, in Paul D. Schweizer et al., *Masterworks of American Art from the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 190–91, cat. no. 87; for the Motherwell, see Mary E. Murray, in Mary E. Murray and Paul D. Schweizer, *Life Lines: American Master Drawings, 1788–1963, from the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute* (Utica, N.Y.: Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, 1994), 130–31, cat. no. 57.
78. Edward W. Root to Harris K. Prior, December 17, 1949, quoted in *Edward W. Root: Collector and Teacher*, 56.
79. For an illustration of Rothko's *Omens of Gods and Birds*, see David Anfam, *Mark Rothko, The Works on Canvas: Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 226.
80. Faxon, "Portraits of Patronage: The History of the Addison Gallery's Collection and Its Donors," 58.
81. Edward W. Root, "Bradley Walker Tomlin," in Dorothy C. Miller, ed., *15 Americans* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1952), 24.
82. Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *ARTnews* 51, no. 8 (December 1952): 22.
83. Root, "Some Characteristics of Modern Art," 7, R. G. 13, F. 242, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
84. Robert M. Coates, "The Art Galleries, Mazes and Planes," *The New Yorker* (October 13, 1951): 98.
85. Root to Thomas B. Rudd, ca. 1948, 3 (recto and verso), research notes Saarinen compiled during her May 1957 visit to Root's home in Clinton, N.Y., in the Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.
86. R. G. 13, F. 66, Edward W. Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
87. Grace Root to Saarinen, ca. 1957, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.
88. Grace Root to Saarinen, December 4, 1957, 2, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.

89. Harris K. Prior, "Ten Painters of the Pacific Northwest," in *Ten Painters of the Pacific Northwest* (Utica, N.Y.: Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, October 1947–March 1948), 3–6. See also, Harris K. Prior, "The Pacific Northwest," *The League Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (Winter 1949): 18–23. At the time of his appointment Prior was also named director of the Institute's Cultural Program, the forerunner of what is now the Institute's separately directed Performing Arts Division. See "Trustees Appoint Harris K. Prior Director of Community Arts Program," *MWPI Year Book* (1945–46): 10; and "Harris K. Prior," *MWPI Bulletin* (January 1947): unpaginated.

90. *Edward Wales Root, 1884–1956: An American Collector*. The exhibition took place from April 28 through May 26, 1957.

91. Only two works in the exhibition were in the Institute's permanent collection: Dove's painting, *The Other Side* (1944), and Everett Shinn's (1876–1953) pastel, *The Docks*, New York City (1901).

92. *Edward Wales Root, 1884–1956: An American Collector*, unpaginated.

93. Harris K. Prior, "Edward Root, Talent Scout," *Art in America* 50, no. 1 (1962): 70–73.

94. *Ibid.*, 71. The significance of Root's achievement as a collector takes on added meaning relative to the argument made by Deirdre Robson ("The Avant-Garde and the On-Guard: Some Influences on the Potential Market for the First Generation Abstract Expressionists in the 1940s and Early 1950s," *Art Journal* 47, no. 3 [Autumn 1988]: 215–21), that the principal early collectors of post-War American modernism were a class of the "newly prosperous," such as Roy R. Neuberger (b. 1903), which Root was not. And even though Robson does not consider Root part of this new class of collector, her remark, 216, that he "began to collect seriously in 1929" (because of the money he inherited at this time when his mother died in June 1928), overlooks the intent with which he collected modern American art during the previous three decades. One-third of the works Root bequeathed to the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, for example, were acquired by him before January 1944.

While most of the Root literature written by his peers is complimentary, there is one serious exception, the autobiography of Karl With (1891–1980). In autumn 1941 World War II refugee With was invited by Hamilton College President William H. Cowley to teach art history and to consult at the Institute's fledgling art museum. With's account of his tenure ran toward the histrionic in his description of Root: "a wealthy most influential trustee and frustrated amateur painter; a modest collector of modern Americana paintings, who considered himself a foremost authority on art and art education. He was so

convinced of himself and his superiority that he blandly told me that my educational principles and approach would never work." See Roland Jaeger, ed., *Karl With. Autobiography of Ideas: Memoirs of an Extraordinary Art Scholar* (Berlin: Mann, 1997), 231.

95. *The Edward Root Collection: Exhibited at The Metropolitan Museum* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, February 12–April 12, 1953).

96. Root, "Foreword," *Current Trends in British and American Painting*, unpaginated.

97. Grace Root to Saarinen, December 17, 1956, 3, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI. Root developed an interest in British art because of one his students. See White, "The Best Kind of Life: Edward W. Root as Teacher, Collector, and Naturalist," in *The Best Kind of Life: Edward W. Root as Teacher, Collector, and Naturalist*, 15.

98. Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 265–66.

99. Wales was also the grandfather of the wife of the great collector, Henry Francis du Pont (1880–1969). Louchheim noted ("A Collector with Personal Vision," *New York Times*, February 15, 1953, 12) that Root's "uncle" appointed him a "Fellow in Perpetuity" of the Metropolitan Museum.

100. "The Board of Trustees," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 26, no. 6 (June 1931): 138.

101. Louchheim, "A Collector with Personal Vision," 12. See also, Deborah Pokinski, David Nathans et al., "Elihu Root, Jr., Class of 1903: Lawyer-Painter," *Elihu Root Jr., Class of 1903: Lawyer-Painter* (Clinton, N.Y.: Emerson Gallery, Hamilton College, 2004), 7–17. Root was apparently not interested in this kind of public service. Saarinen wrote (*The Proud Possessors*, 260) that he was distressed by the spectacle of people, "diseased by dutifulness."

102. "The Metropolitan and Modernism," *Life* (January 15, 1951): 34.

103. For Root's loan to the Metropolitan of the Luks and Prendergast pictures, see Hale, "The Growth of a Collection," 153–54. In February 1943 Root bought McFee's ca. 1941 oil, *Still Life—Knife* (cat. no. 144), from the Metropolitan's *Artists for Victory* exhibition. In fall 1944, he loaned Kuniyoshi's 1943 oil, *Empty Town in Desert* (cat. no. 114), to another *Artists for Victory* exhibition sponsored by the Metropolitan.

104. Edward Robinson to Root, January 15, 1920, R. G. 13, F. 76, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.

105. Root to More, ca. 1933, R. G. 13, F. 48A, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.

106. Walter Pach, *Queer Thing, Painting: Forty Years in the World of Art* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1938), 228.

107. Louchheim, "A Collector with Personal Vision," 12, noted that Root asked de Forest "if the curator might not have two or three thousand dollars to spend independently of the purchasing committee."

108. Robert de Forest's enthusiasm for early American decorative art led him and his wife to donate the funds that enabled the Metropolitan to build the American Wing, which opened in 1924. See Amelia Peck, "Robert de Forest and the Founding of the American Wing," *The Magazine Antiques* 157, no. 1 (January 2000): 176–81. See also, "Robert W. de Forest," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 26, no. 6 (June 1931): 140.

109. Robert de Forest to Root, February 16, 1928, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI. See also, Louchheim, "A Collector with Personal Vision," 12.

110. See note 43.

111. Margaret N. Hogan to Root, January 30, 1929, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.

112. Grace Root to Saarinen, ca. 1957, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.

113. Louchheim, "A Collector with Personal Vision," 12. Five years later Saarinen narrated a slightly more elaborate version of Root's effort to convince the Metropolitan to purchase Hopper's *Blackwell's Island* in *The Proud Possessors*, 265–66.

114. Hale, "The Growth of a Collection," 153.

115. *Ibid.*, 153–54.

116. "Root Collections Feature Utica, New York Exhibits," *Utica Observer-Dispatch* March 1, 1953, 2A. The Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute's Community Arts Program Director, Harris K. Prior, generously commented to Root in a March 3, 1953 letter: "I was amazed by the scope of the collection, for I had not known there were so many good 'realist' works... even the very small paintings all have something very big about them." R. G. 13, F. 76, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.

117. Henry McBride, "Patriotism and Art," *ARTnews* 52, no. 1 (March 1953): 40.

118. Aline B. Louchheim, "Root's Collection of Art Displayed," 21. Less than a year after Root's death, Grace Root confided to Saarinen that when Edward's collection was exhibited at the Metropolitan, she "neither knew nor cared what the individual pictures had cost." Grace Root to Saarinen, July 8, 1953 (verso), Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI.

119. Louchheim, "A Collector with Personal Vision," *New York Times*, February 15, 1953, 12.
120. *Ibid.*
121. "Root's U.S. Pictures at the Met," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 15, 1953, 4:7. Saarinen (*Proud Possessors*, 263), underscored this point: "He did not care for expressionist paintings; and the 'social consciousness' canvases of the thirties, which ignited a collector like Joseph Hirshhorn [1899–1981], interested him not at all." Root's friend Bartlett Hayes similarly wrote ("The Root of American Painting," 30) that Root bought "pictures from the modern avant-garde, always preferring a gentle, lyric image to the more violent forms that were emerging."
122. "Root's U.S. Pictures at the Met," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 15, 1953, 4:7.
123. Sidney Geist, "One Man's Collection," *Art Digest* 27, no. 11 (March 1, 1953): 13.
124. *Ibid.*
125. Committee of the College Art Association, "A Statement on the Practice of Art Courses," *College Art Journal* 4, no. 1 (November 1944): 34.
126. Faxon, "Portraits of Patronage: The History of the Addison Gallery's Collection and Its Donors," 56.
127. "Are These Men The Best Painters in America Today?" *Look*, February 3, 1948, 44–48.
128. The Museum of Modern Art, *New York Private Collections* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, July 21–September 12, 1948). Root had similarly lent to MoMA's summer 1946 collectors' show, *Paintings from New York Private Collections*, July 2–September 22, 1946.
129. The Minutes of MWPI's Board of Trustees record that on November 1, 1949 "Mr. Rudd reported that he believed it would be of great service to the Institute if Mr. Edward W. Root might be appointed Consultant in Art to the Institute... to advise with the Trustees, Officers and Directors... in regard to various art matters from time to time." See also the correspondence between Root and Rudd, R. G. 4.21, Box 6, F. 139, Trovato Papers, MWPAI Archives.
130. Miller, ed., *25 Americans*, 24, 45.
131. Grace Root to Saarinen, August 30, 1957, 3A, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI. Faxon has noted ("Portraits of Patronage: The History of the Addison Gallery's Collection and Its Donors," 56) that in 1949 Root had discussions with Bartlett Hayes about the pictures he would bequeath to the Addison Gallery of American Art and the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute. Lindemann noted (*The Art Triangle*, 40) that in 1951 Root discussed his estate with Harris K. Prior. He began donating large parts of his collection to MWPI in the early 1950s (see Appendix 1).
132. Louchheim (later Saarinen) noted in 1953 ("A Collector with Personal Vision," 12) and again in 1958 (*The Proud Possessors*, 266) that Edward's brother was a trustee at the Metropolitan at the time the exhibition took place. Deirdre Robson wrote more emphatically about this connection when she noted that the "unusual presentation of... [Root's] relatively avant-garde collection at the Metropolitan... was most probably due to the fact that the then Vice President of the Museum, Elihu Root, Jr., was Edward Root's brother." See Robson, "The Avant-Garde and the On-Guard: Some Influences on the Potential Market for the First Generation Abstract Expressionists in the 1940s and Early 1950s," 221n48.
133. Abraham A. Davidson, *Early American Modernist Painting, 1910–1935* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 175.
134. Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 262.
135. [Edward W. Root?], "Special Course in Art to be Conducted by Edward W. Root, '05," *Hamilton Life*, November 23, 1920, 8.
136. Edward W. Root, review of *The American Renaissance*, by R. L. Duffus, *Association of American Colleges Bulletin* 14, no. 6 (December 1928): 503.
137. Root, "Pictures and the College," 145.
138. Quoted in *Edward W. Root: Collector and Teacher*, 7.
139. Root to the editor of the *Albany Knickerbocker Press*, August 1, 1919, R. G. 13, F. 261, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives. In the fourth draft for his 1947 MWPI lecture, Root regretted that "Manet, Cézanne and many later artists have ignored again and again the spiritual aspects of life in order to concentrate on the sensuous." See Edward W. Root, "Some of the Characteristics of Contemporary Painting," 16, R. G. 13, F. 242, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
140. Root, review of *The American Renaissance*, by R. L. Duffus, 503.
141. Edward W. Root, "Art Club Paper," 7, Edward W. Root '05 Folders. Hamilton College Alumni Biographical Materials (0000.182). Hamilton College Library Archives, Clinton, N.Y.
142. Edward W. Root, "A Statement Introductory to a Course in Appreciation of Painting," ca. 1935, 2, R. G. 13, F. 191, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
143. Root, "Charles E. Burchfield," 68. Root expressed similar sentiments to one of his students: "About 'modern' art I remember his saying, in effect, every painting is a fresh experience. We should not quibble over the fact that a Picasso lady does not look quite like a lady. We don't complain that an elm tree is not an oak. A picture is itself." See William G. Roehrick, Jr., "Edward W. Root as a Teacher," *MWPI Bulletin* (March 1957): unpaginated.
144. Root, "Some Characteristics of Modern Art," 6, R. G. 13, F. 242, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
145. Root, "Some Characteristics of Modern Art," 7, R. G. 13, F. 242, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives. For an illustration of this painting, see Faxon et al., *Addison Gallery of American Art, 65 Years: A Selective Catalogue*, 322, cat. no. 25.
146. Root, "Some Characteristics of Modern Art," 13, R. G. 13, F. 242, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
147. Root, "I Remember Quite Clearly How I Came to Buy My First Painting," ca. 1950, 4–5, R. G. 13, F. 255, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
148. Clive Bell, *Art* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, [1913]), 27.
149. *Ibid.*, 28.
150. Root, "Art Club Paper," 5, Edward W. Root '05 Folders. Hamilton College Alumni Biographical Materials (0000.182). Hamilton College Library Archives, Clinton, N.Y.
151. Root to William H. Cowley, December 27, 1940, 12–13, Edward W. Root '05 Folders. Hamilton College Alumni Biographical Materials (0000.182). Hamilton College Library Archives, Clinton, N.Y.
152. By way of example, see Root's discussion of the "three purely formal motives" in Hopper's watercolor, *Skyline Near Washington Square*, 1925 (cat. no. 106) quoted in Trovato, ed., *Learning About Pictures from Mr. Root*, unpaginated. In the fourth draft for his April 13, 1947 lecture at MWPI, Root described "form" as "organized sensations." See Root, "Some of the Characteristics of Contemporary Painting," 15, R. G. 13, F. 242, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
153. The first chapter was prepared from notes for a 1917 lecture; the second was originally published in 1909. Root's summaries of these two chapters are in R. G. 13, F. 249, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
154. Fry, "Art and Life," *Vision and Design*, 6.
155. *Ibid.*, 7.
156. *Ibid.*, 8.
157. *Ibid.*, 10.
158. Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics," *Vision and Design*, 14.
159. *Ibid.*, 15.

160. *Ibid.*, 20.
161. *Ibid.*, 22.
162. *Ibid.*, 23. The word "motive" frequently appears in Root's writings. What he meant by this term appears in his earliest published article, "Pictures and the College" (1922) where, in a discussion of drawings, 148, he remarked about the wealth of information they provide "on the side of motive... movement, construction, design, composition, the poetry of light and shade, the dramatic, the psychological, the fantastic, the humorous, the satiric—almost every kind of pictorial motive is to be discovered in them." He expanded on this definition in a memorandum, "To be Considered by the Critic of Painting," ca. 1944-45, where he noted, 1, that "motives" were "moving experiences which the artist has attempted to communicate by means of his work." See R. G. 13, F. 254, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
163. Louchheim, "A Collector with Personal Vision," 12.
164. Root, "Art Club Paper," 5, Edward W. Root '05 Folders. Hamilton College Alumni Biographical Materials (0000.182). Hamilton College Library Archives, Clinton, N.Y.
165. *Ibid.*, 6-7.
166. "Pioneers of Modern Art in America," MWPI *Bulletin* (April 1947): unpaginated.
167. Additional thoughts Root had about the European Expressionists, Fauves, Cubists, and Futurists who exhibited at the Armory Show appear in the four pages of notes he prepared for his April 13, 1947 lecture at MWPI. See, "Modern Art Introduced to America at the Armory Show, N. Y., in 1913," R. G. 13, F. 254, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
168. Root, "Some Characteristics of Modern Art," 6, R. G. 13, F. 242, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
169. *Ibid.*, 7-8.
170. Root, "Foreword," *Current Trends in British and American Painting*, unpaginated.
171. Another example of Root's effort to categorize the various currents of modern American art can be seen in an untitled and undated memorandum in which he arranged the figurative and abstract works in his collection into five categories: "Objective Realism," "Objective Distortions," "Objective Abstractions," "Non-Objective Compositions," and "Mixed Combinations." He created subsets under each of these categories as well. See R. G. 13, F. 241, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
172. For these classes, see Trovato, ed., "Foreword," *Learning About Pictures from Mr. Root*, unpaginated. The November 7, 1944 Minutes of MWPI's Board of Trustees note that "Mr. Root gave an interesting series of five lessons on art in the summer and is giving another series now. When Mr. [Thomas B.] Rudd asked him about remuneration he said he did not wish to be paid. Later he said he would like to make these talks a gift to the Future Development Fund." The trustees therefore allocated \$500 to the fund that was used more than a decade later for a new museum building, designed by Philip Johnson (1906-2005).
173. Root co-taught an extracurricular version of this class at Hamilton College in 1940. He described its methods and goals to President William H. Cowley: "In this course groups of poems and groups of pictures are considered alternately for their sense, motive, form, tone, intention and value. The procedure for the course derives largely from I. A. Richards' book, *Practical Criticism*. In this course Mr. [Robert B.] Rudd [1887-1971] and I hope to give the undergraduates a simple critical approach to poetry and pictures, a realization of the extent to which the motives of art and literature are similar or dissimilar, and an informal cooperative method of study with each other and ourselves." Root to William H. Cowley, December 27, 1940, 16, Edward W. Root '05 Folders. Hamilton College Alumni Biographical Materials (0000.182). Hamilton College Library Archives, Clinton, N.Y.
174. I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, n.d.), 5. Root sought to develop critical standards even before the rise of mid-century abstraction. In 1918, when he was thirty-four years old, he noted in a letter to his father that he was using his time to "hunt for social, political and economic principles with a view to getting standards of criticism. I know there are such things and that if you can really arrive at them out of your reading and experience they are of immense help." Root to Elihu Root, Sr., December 30, 1918, Aline Saanen Papers, AAA-SI.
175. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment*, 3.
176. Trovato, ed., "Foreword," *Learning About Pictures from Mr. Root*, unpaginated. For Root's handwritten outline of this procedure, see "To be Considered by the Critic of Painting," R. G. 13, F. 254, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
177. Edward W. Root, "[Goya] *The Disasters of War (Los Desastres de la Guerra)*," in Trovato, ed., *Learning About Pictures from Mr. Root*, no. 2.
178. *Ibid.*, "[Grosz] *Street Scene (Vorstadt)*," no. 4.
179. *Ibid.*, "[Tomlin] *Watermelon*," no. 7.
180. Root, "Bradley Walker Tomlin," in Miller, ed., 15 *Americans*, 24.
181. Edward W. Root, "Why Abstraction," R. G. 13, F. 241, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
182. Root, "Modern Art Introduced to America at the Armory Show, N. Y., in 1913," 2-3, R. G. 13, F. 254, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
183. Root, "Some Characteristics of Modern Art," 1, R. G. 13, F. 242, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
184. *Ibid.*, 14.
185. Root, "Some of the Characteristics of Contemporary Painting," 19-20, R. G. 13, F. 242, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
186. In this respect, Root is more often compared to Ferdinand Howald (1856-1934), a coal tycoon who sold his business after seventy-one of his miners died in an accident. He largely patronized the Charles Daniel Gallery and in 1931 gave 271 works to the Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio and about one hundred more to his family. Because Root continued to collect for twenty more years after Howald died, it is difficult to compare the Howald and Root collections for, as Saarinen pointed out, "Root's more personal collection uniquely spanned the whole period up to the avant-garde present of the fifties," *The Proud Possessors*, 267. See also, Karl J. Bolander, "Ferdinand Howald and His Collection," *Bulletin of the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts* 1, no. 1 (January 1931): 7-12; Edgar P. Richardson, "The Ferdinand Howald Collection," in Marcia Tucker and Kasha Linville, *American Paintings in the Ferdinand Howald Collection* (Columbus, Ohio: Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, 1969), 1-6; Mahonri Sharp Young, "Ferdinand Howald and His Artists," *American Art Journal* 1, no. 2 (Autumn 1969): 119-28; Kasha Linville, "Howald's American Line," *ARTnews* 69 (Summer 1970): 52-55 and "The Howald Collection at Wildenstein," *Arts Magazine* 44 (Summer 1970): 16-18.
187. It is possible that the onset of World War II precipitated Root's retirement from Hamilton College, for which "enrollments plummeted, and resources were redirected to support the war effort," according to William Salzillo and Susanna White, in "A Century of Curiosities: The Story of the Hamilton College Collection," in *Hamilton Collects: A Century of Curiosities: The Story of the Hamilton College Collection* (Clinton, N.Y.: Emerson Gallery, Hamilton College, 2005), 24.

188. The December 6, 1949 Minutes of MWPI's Board of Trustees note that "Mr. [Thomas B.] Rudd... conveyed the invitation of the Board to Mr. Root to become Consultant in Art... and that Mr. Root had accepted and was now working with Mr. Prior on various matters in that area." For the acquisition policy that Prior and Root subsequently wrote, see the Minutes of MWPI's Board of Trustees for December 6, 1949, April 4, 1950, and August 3, 1954. For Root's May 12, 1949 letter to Bartlett Hayes about the works he was planning to donate to the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute and the Addison Gallery of American Art, see Faxon, "Portraits of Patronage: The History of the Addison Gallery's Collection and Its Donors," 56, 58.
189. The Lucioni had played an amusing role for Root; he hung it in his guest room and measured his visitors' sense of aesthetic adventure by their responses to it. See Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 263.
190. See Appendix 1, and "The Edward W. Root Collection of Prints," *MWPI Bulletin* (March 1953): unpaginated, and "Another Root Gift," *MWPI Bulletin* (January 1954): unpaginated.
191. "Root Gift of Japanese Prints," *MWPI Bulletin* (January 1955): unpaginated.
192. See Schweizer et al., *Masterworks of American Art from the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute*, 178-83, cat. no. 83 (Pollock); 186-87, cat. no. 85 (Rothko).
193. *Ibid.*, 164-65, cat. no. 76 (O'Keeffe); 176-77, cat. no. 82 (Bishop).
194. "Community Arts Program / Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute / Additions to the Collection," R. G. 4.21, Box 6, F. 139, Trovato Papers, MWPAI Archives. See also Root-Prior correspondence, R. G. 13, Box 5, F. 233, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
195. See Mary E. Murray, "Rather Strange Developments: Collecting European Sources for American Painting at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute," in Mary E. Murray, ed., *Collecting Modernism: European Masterworks from the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute* (Utica, N.Y.: Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, 2005), 6-12.
196. Grace Root to Saarinen, August 8, 1957, 3, Aline Saarinen Papers, AAA-SI. Grace Root noted in this letter, "when his arterial condition worsened sharply in '52 we gave away the fishing rods, [and] golf sticks and settled into living quietly and entirely between Clinton and N.Y."
197. Harris K. Prior to Root, March 3, 1953, R. G. 13, F. 76, Root Papers, MWPAI Archives.
198. R. G. 9.51, F. 44. Physical Plant Papers, Johnson Building, MWPAI Archives.
199. See Rand Carter, *Philip Johnson, Museum of Art Building: An Anniversary Exhibition* (Utica, N.Y.: Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, 1985) for a review of the commission and construction of the building.
200. See "Art: The Little League," *Time* (October 31, 1960): 64; Richard B. K. McLanathan, "Elegant Practicality in Utica," *Museum News* 39, no. 3 (November 1960): 14-19; "The Perfect, Professional Museum," *Architectural Forum* (December 1960): 91-97; and Nancy Vars, "Utica Museum Receives International Renown," *Syracuse Post-Standard*, May 6, 1962, 19.
201. Lindemann, *The Art Triangle*, 40.