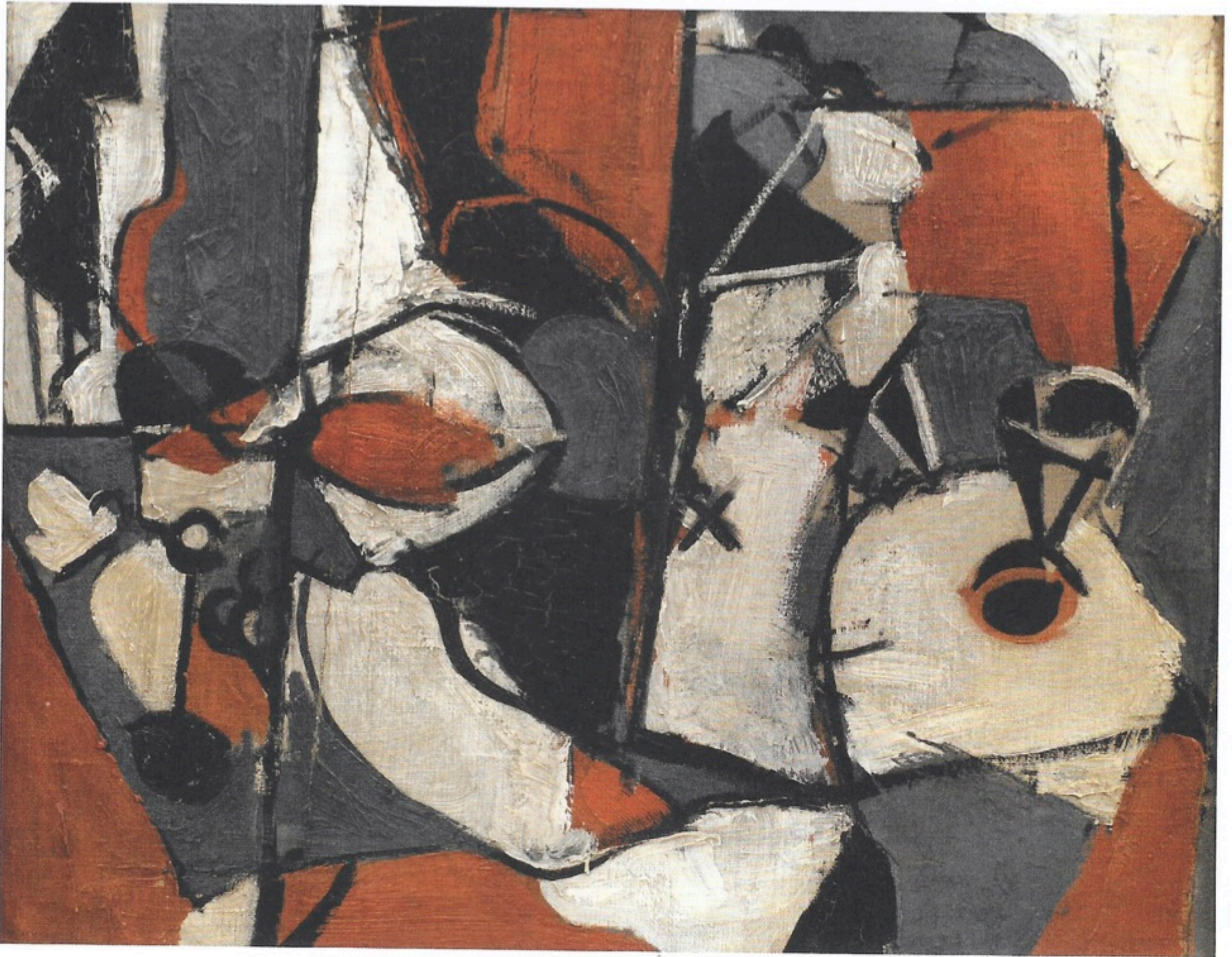


CIRCA 1945

Abstract Art in the
Renee & Chaim Gross
Foundation Collection





Arshile Gorky, *Still Life*, c. 1935. Oil on canvas, 16½ × 21½ in.

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Abstract Art in the Renee & Chaim Gross Foundation Collection

The Renee & Chaim Gross Foundation, New York
June 5—September 30, 2014

Byron Browne
Peter Busa
Sylvia Carewe
Stuart Davis
Willem de Kooning
Max Ernst
John Flannagan
Arshile Gorky
John D. Graham
Chaim Gross
Marsden Hartley
Jacob Lawrence
Fernand Léger
André Masson
Roberto Matta
Irene Rice Pereira
Pablo Picasso
Theodoros Stamos
Nahum Tschacbasov
Ruth Vodicka



Willem de Kooning, Untitled, Rome 1959. Ink on paper, 40 × 30 in.

The year 1945 has long served as a dividing line in the history of American art between pre-war and post-war art, and between the figurative painting of the Depression era and the emergence of the Abstract Expressionists in the 1940s. The works in this exhibition reconsider definitions of abstraction around the close of World War II, and embody the often-blurred lines between established categories such as figuration/abstraction, color/line, or form/content of the period. The flowing, organic still lifes of Fernand Léger; the sumptuous, Picassoesque figurative abstraction of Byron Browne; the knife-sharp, planar bodies of the history paintings of Nahum Tschachbasov and Jacob Lawrence; and the dream-like “Indian Space Painting” of Peter Busa, influenced by the surface patterns of art from Oceania and the Pacific Northwest: these works reveal varying modes of abstract painting in America during a historical period of tremendous violence, upheaval, and change.

Circa 1945 also considers the place of abstract painting in the private collection of Chaim Gross, a figurative sculptor who rose to fame in the United States in the 1930s and 40s. Given Gross’s humanist commitment to the figure in his own work, it may come as a surprise that he owned the abstract paintings in this exhibit, and had them on the walls of his home and studio. Yet Gross knew well most of these artists and many worked near him in Greenwich Village. John D. Graham had a studio next door and like Gross had a passionate interest in African art, while Willem de Kooning had a studio across the street. Gross worked for parts of the year up in Provincetown, as did Busa and Sylvia Carewe. The variation in these artists’ work demonstrates how the boundaries of art history are constructed, and why they should continually come under scrutiny and redefinition.

—Susan Greenberg Fisher

Bodies at Peace and at War

Susan Greenberg Fisher



Peter Busa, *Venus*, c. 1950. Ink on paper, 21 × 14¾ in.

Emerging out of the 1930s, the sculptures of Chaim Gross command an exuberant, full-bodied presence in the world (fig. 1). His work from this key decade, when he emerged as a major proponent of direct carving in America, showcases an imagined world of acrobats, performers, dancers, and urbanites who all deeply engage with and entertain the viewer. Gross's figures are generous and uplifting, in defiance of their Depression-era context, and a triumph over Gross's own struggles as a teenager in war-torn Eastern Europe prior to his emigration in 1921 to New York City.



Fig. 1 Chaim Gross, *Aerialist*, 1936. Sabicu wood, 20 × 55 × 7 in.

Two decades later, Gross experienced the second World War from a distance, now settled in Harlem with his wife Renee and his two children (fig. 2). He did not escape its violence, however. Two of Gross's siblings who remained in his native Austro-Hungary—a brother, Pincus, and his sister, Sarah, as well as her husband and two young children—were murdered by the Nazis. In private ink drawings begun around 1943, Gross imagined soldiers and their victims, and those ultimately responsible for the horror and destruction (fig. 3). These drawings were a visual diary that allowed Gross to express his feelings about war and his own personal loss. By 1947, he could publicly articulate this loss in the medium of sculpture, and memorialize his sister Sarah and her family in a work now in the Hirshhorn Collection (fig. 4).

In Memoriam: My Sister Sarah is an abstracted, expressive interpretation of the traditional mother and child theme—the mother's protective body now stooped in sorrow. Many of the works by Gross's friends and contemporaries that were in his own private collection share this intermingling of abstraction and figuration explored by artists working in New York

City during and after the war. How the female figure could be abstracted plays out with the same quietude and intensity of *My Sister Sarah* in a wartime work by Marsden Hartley, also in Gross's collection (fig. 5). Hartley's female subject elongates to mimic the painting's orientation and narrow dimensions. Her purplish, sickly coloration, immovable body, and severe expression give her a corpse-like aura, and she exists somewhere between life and death—as if she were forever seated still in her chair, like a sculpture, with her red cat a permanent fixture on her lap.



Fig. 2 Renee and Chaim Gross, with their children Mimi and Yehuda, New York City, 1944. Photograph by Marion Palfi.

Gross also acquired two wartime paintings by his friend John Graham (fig. 6; see also p. 20), who had introduced Gross to African art in the 1930s (Gross would go on to assemble a world-renowned collection of African art over the next 50 years). In *El Picador* Graham explores the traditional theme of the horse and rider—used in both Western art as well as the African art collected by Graham and Gross—through an abstract lens borrowed from Pablo Picasso and the visual language of African carvings. Here man and animal intermingle, morphing into a surface pattern, as the realms of rationality and irrationality intersect, pushing the imagery beyond the edges of the image's frame. In a drawing also owned by Gross by Peter Busa (see essay frontispiece, p. 6), the mythological figure of Venus undergoes a similar metamorphosis from figure to surface pattern, also extending beyond the edges of the drawn frame.



Fig. 3 Chaim Gross, *Untitled*, March 5, 1945. Ink on paper, 13 × 9½ in.



Fig. 4 Chaim Gross, *In Memoriam: My Sister Sarah, Victim of Nazi Atrocities*, 1947. Cocobolo wood, 67 × 13⅝ × 20⅝ in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC



Fig. 5 Marsden Hartley, *Rest Period*, 1942-43. Oil on board, 30 × 9 in.

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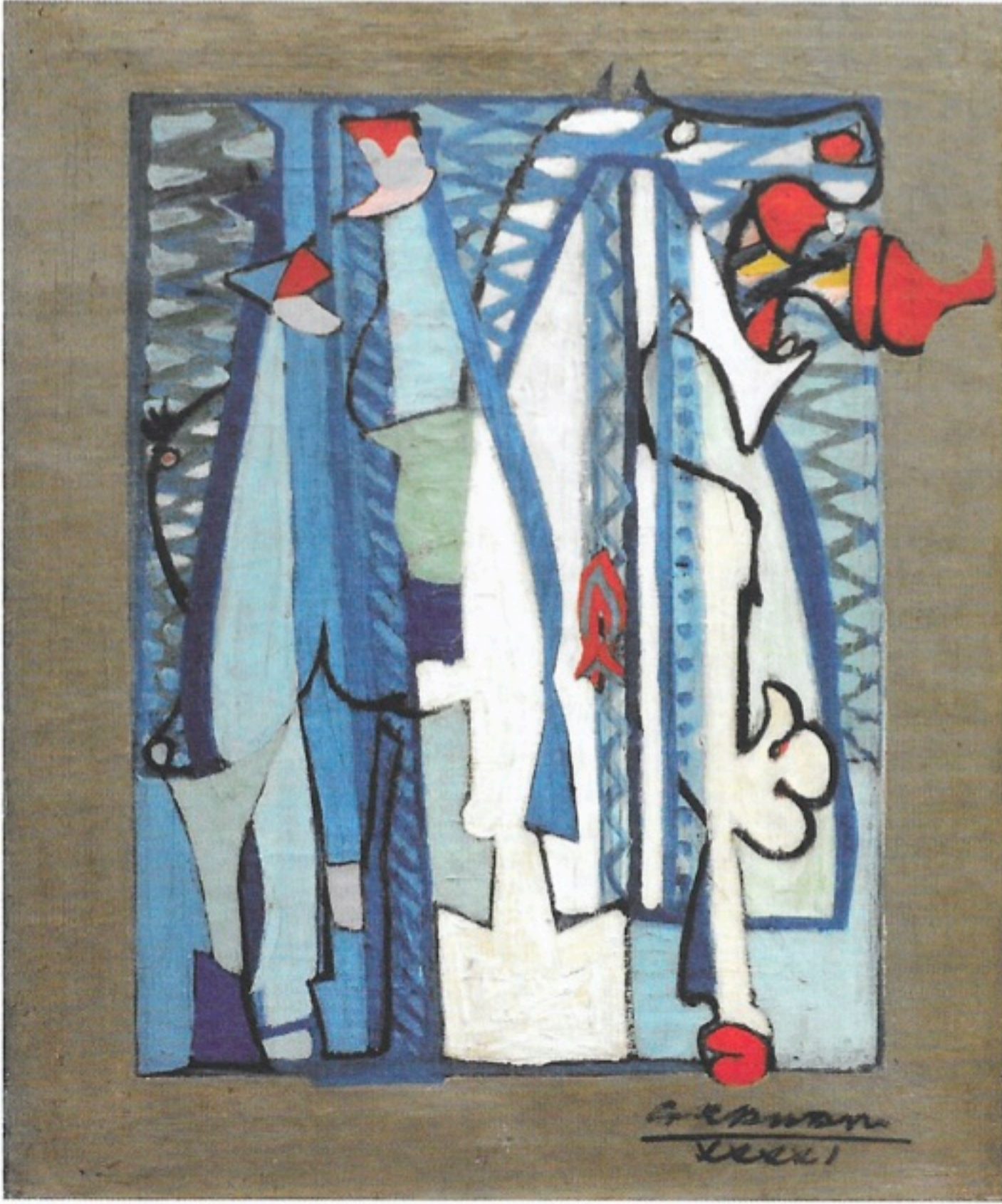


Fig. 6 John D. Graham, *El Picador*, 1941. Oil on canvas, 24 × 19½ in.



Fig. 7 Jacob Lawrence, *Valley Forge* (from *Struggle: From the History of the American People*), 1954. Tempera on board, 12 × 16 in.

The categories of figuration and abstraction, body and pattern, as well as the rational and irrational, that are blurred in these paintings are likewise at play in a masterpiece from Gross's collection, *Valley Forge*, by Jacob Lawrence (fig. 7). Lawrence's scene from the American Revolution is from his 1954 series of thirty paintings, titled *Struggle: From the History of the American People*. Valley Forge in Pennsylvania was the famous site where George Washington's army endured the hardship of winter in a steadfast commitment to their cause. Lawrence re-imagines the scene in a group of soldiers now silent, still, and bandaged, their thin bayonets piercing the clear blue sky. They appear frozen in their solitude and exhaustion from war. They are each like rocks, or blocks of ice—or like sculptures—cut with the sharpest of blades. The cut of the knife was a trope that had surfaced in Gross's wartime drawings and it continued into the ensuing decades. In a drawing from 1950 (fig. 8), Gross recalled an earlier sculpture from the 1930s, titled *Vanity*. He pierces her with multiple blades, transforming her from the smooth wooden object she once was into an African power object whose purpose was to drive away evil forces: the purging of the old to begin anew.



Fig. 8 Chaim Gross, *Untitled*, February 1950. Ink on paper, 12 × 9¼ in.

Horizon Lines: Chaim Gross and the Landscape of Provincetown

Sasha Davis



Fig. 1 Peter Busa, *Provincetown*, c. 1948. Oil on canvas, 45 × 31 in.

For five decades, Peter Busa's large painting *Provincetown* hung in the stairwell of Chaim Gross's New York home at 526 LaGuardia Place, apparently on its side (fig. 1). Despite the signature appearing to make the work vertical, Gross had installed the painting horizontally. When viewed vertically, the piece appears abstract. Viewed horizontally, it becomes a landscape of Provincetown, Massachusetts.

Gross's personalized installation of Busa's painting is paradigmatic of his decades-long relationship with the arts colony of Provincetown.¹ Rather than working in three dimensions, as he did primarily as a New York City sculptor, Gross mainly drew and painted landscapes and figurative scenes during his time in Provincetown. Gross's shift in orientation, from his vertically-oriented, rising figurative sculpture to the serene horizontality of the summer beaches of Provincetown, allowed for a continued rumination on the relationship of figuration and abstraction, even while on summer 'holiday.'

Gross began his migrations to Provincetown, Massachusetts in the summer of 1925, traveling with fellow artist and Educational Alliance student Moses Soyer. Gross and Soyer made their way to Provincetown by hitchhiking. It is not surprising that they carried only notebooks, pencils, and watercolors with them, avoiding heavy equipment. Gross drew and painted, making *Untitled (View of Provincetown)*, most likely produced during this trip (fig. 2). In 1925 Gross had not yet begun studying direct carving, which he started in 1927 under the tutelage of Robert Laurent at the Art Students League. And although Gross produced some sculpture while in Provincetown over the years, including a 1967 portrait of artist and long-time Provincetown resident, Karl Knaths, his primary method while there was to work on paper (fig. 3). The practicality of working in two dimensions while mobile is only one piece of Gross's process as he transitioned from three dimensions in New York to two in Provincetown (fig. 4).

Gross began his annual summer stays in Provincetown in 1943 and continued going there for the rest of his life. In 1950 he and his wife Renee purchased the studio of prominent Provincetown artist and teacher George Elmer Browne (1871-1946). Browne, a successful landscape

1. For an overview of the history of Provincetown as art colony, see the recent exhibition catalogue, Alexander Noelle, ed. *The Tides of Provincetown: Pivotal Years in America's Oldest Continuous Art Colony (1899-2011)*. New Britain Museum of American Art, July 15-October 16, 2011. University Press of New England, 2011.

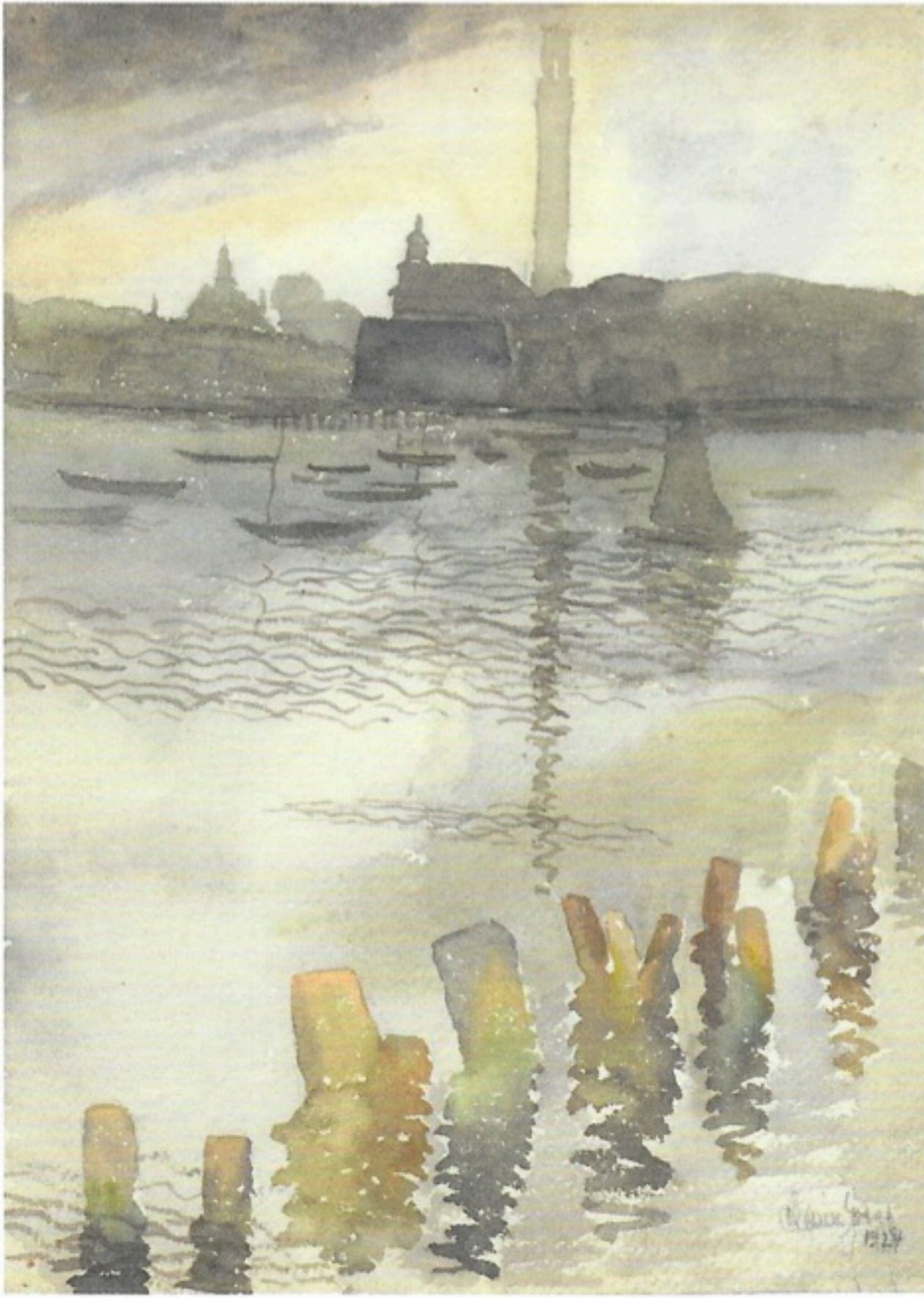


Fig. 2 Chaim Gross, *Untitled (View of Provincetown)*, c. 1925. Watercolor and pencil on paper, 15 × 11¹/₁₆ in.



Fig. 3 Karl Knaths sitting for Chaim Gross as he works on portrait of Knaths, 1965. Photograph by Bernard Gotfryd

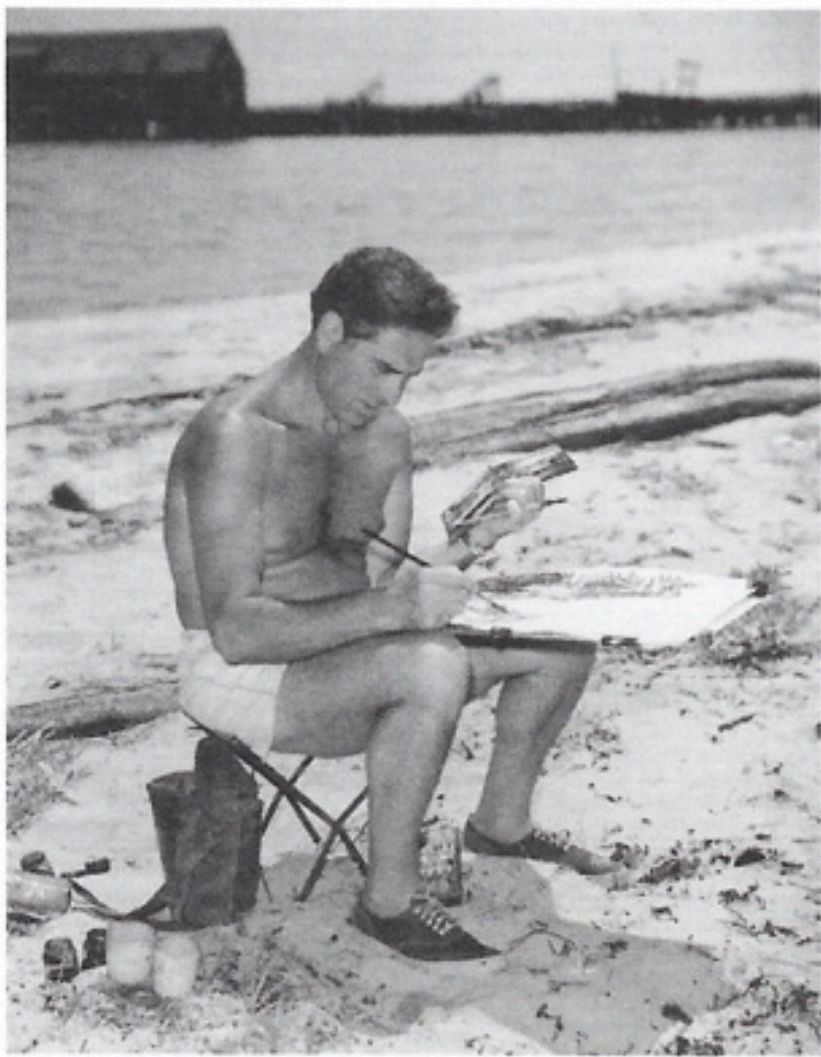


Fig. 4 Chaim Gross working in Provincetown, MA, c. 1948. Photograph by M.K. Arin

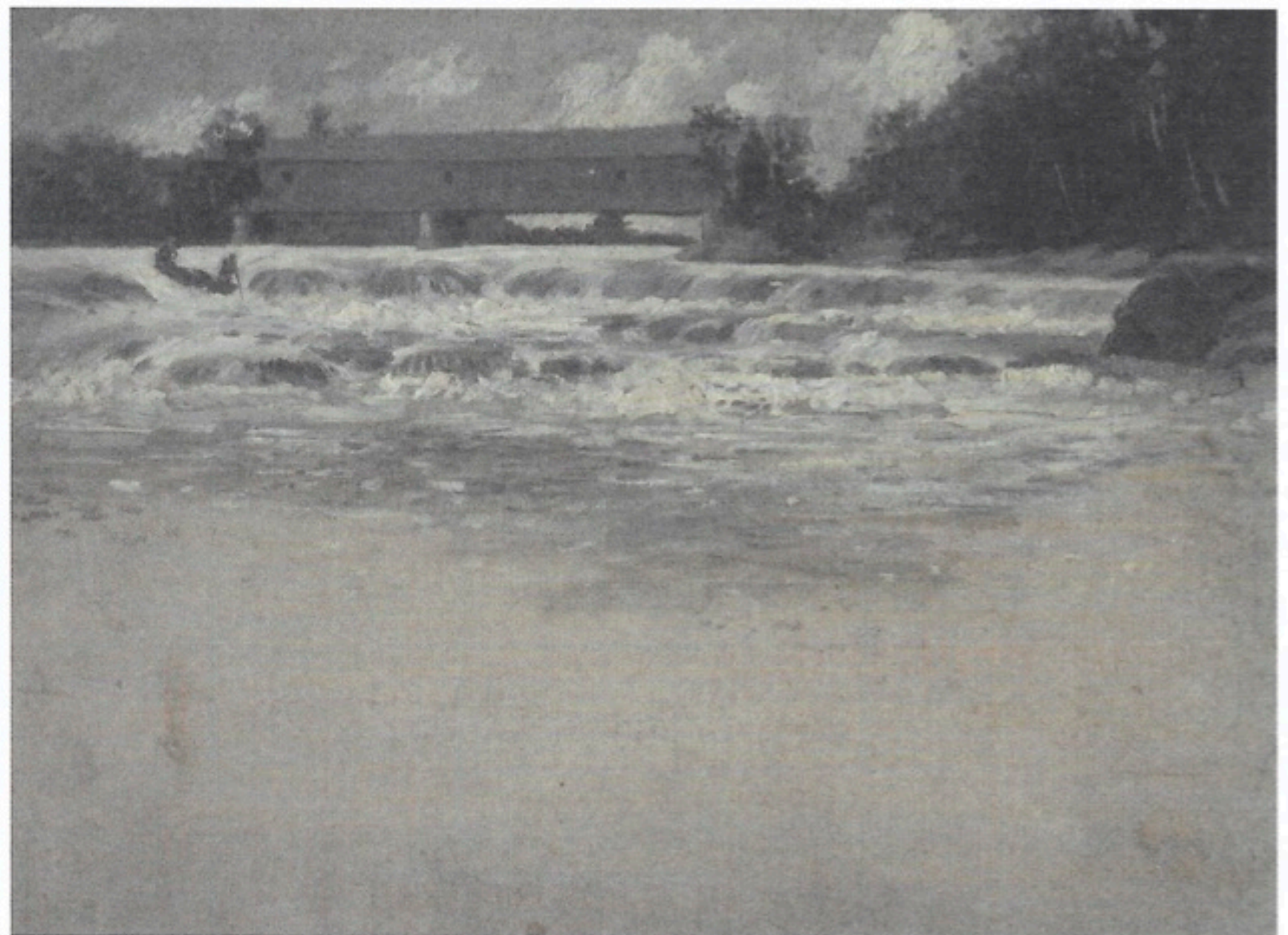


Fig. 5 George Elmer Browne, *Shooting Rapids at North Turner Bridge*, 1895. Oil on canvas board, 9 × 12 in.

painter, similarly split his time between Provincetown and New York, and was active in Provincetown from 1919 to 1946. He is best known for his works that capture the coast around Provincetown and Gross owned six works by Browne (fig. 5). The oil sketch *Shooting Rapids at North Turner Bridge* owned by Gross is mentioned by Browne in his tale “Canoeing Down the Androscoggin” in *Outing* magazine from July 1898.²

Gross also came to know many other artists in Provincetown. Close friends included Milton Avery and his wife Sally, and Adolph Gottlieb. Gross actively collected works by many artists working in Provincetown, installing and living with their paintings and drawings back in New York. Among the Provincetown artists, Gross came to own the most—at least 12 paintings and drawings—by Peter Busa, whose canvases explored both geometric and organic patterns paired with deep, saturated colors to create a unique world within each painting (fig. 6). Busa aimed to create his own visual language drawn from his subconscious while borrowing motifs from traditional Native American arts. Busa was active in Provincetown from 1936-70, overlapping with Gross’s years there. Busa studied with Hans Hofmann (1880-1966) at Hofmann’s school on 57th

2. George Elmer Browne, “Canoeing Down the Androscoggin,” *Outing*, Vol. 32, No. 4, July 1898, 364. Browne writes, “About noon we came to a long covered bridge which marked the village of North Turner, and it was here that we came to a fall of some six feet and a tangle of wild rapids. However, we managed to get through without incident, and, after making a sketch and a hasty lunch, we pushed on.”



Fig. 6 Peter Busa, *Untitled*, c. 1945. Oil on canvas, 40 × 50 in.

Street in New York City and at his new summer school in Provincetown from 1935-1938. Hofmann split his time between the two artistic hubs, spending five months in Provincetown each summer.

Busa first visited Provincetown with his parents when he was a young child, but, as he later wrote, “my interest in coming to stay later was kindled by Hofmann.”³ Beginning in Busa’s second year studying with Hofmann, he too was making the trip up to Provincetown to continue his work with the nomadic teacher. Busa bought a house in Provincetown in 1953. Like many artists drawn to the allure of the place, Busa explained:

In Provincetown, I ravenously ate up the atmosphere and light... In Provincetown the past was not dead, it was not even past. It was as though they were untouched by Picasso... Provincetown was an interesting place to work because it confounded the notion of progress in art. Like New York, it mixes all the directions apparent in art, all shades good and bummy, side by side. This is the ingredient that sustains its atmosphere.⁴

3. Sandra Kraskin in conversation with Peter Busa, *Life Colors Art: Fifty Years of Painting by Peter Busa*, Provincetown Art Association & Museum, Provincetown, Massachusetts, May 22-July 7, 1992, 56.

4. *ibid.* 59.

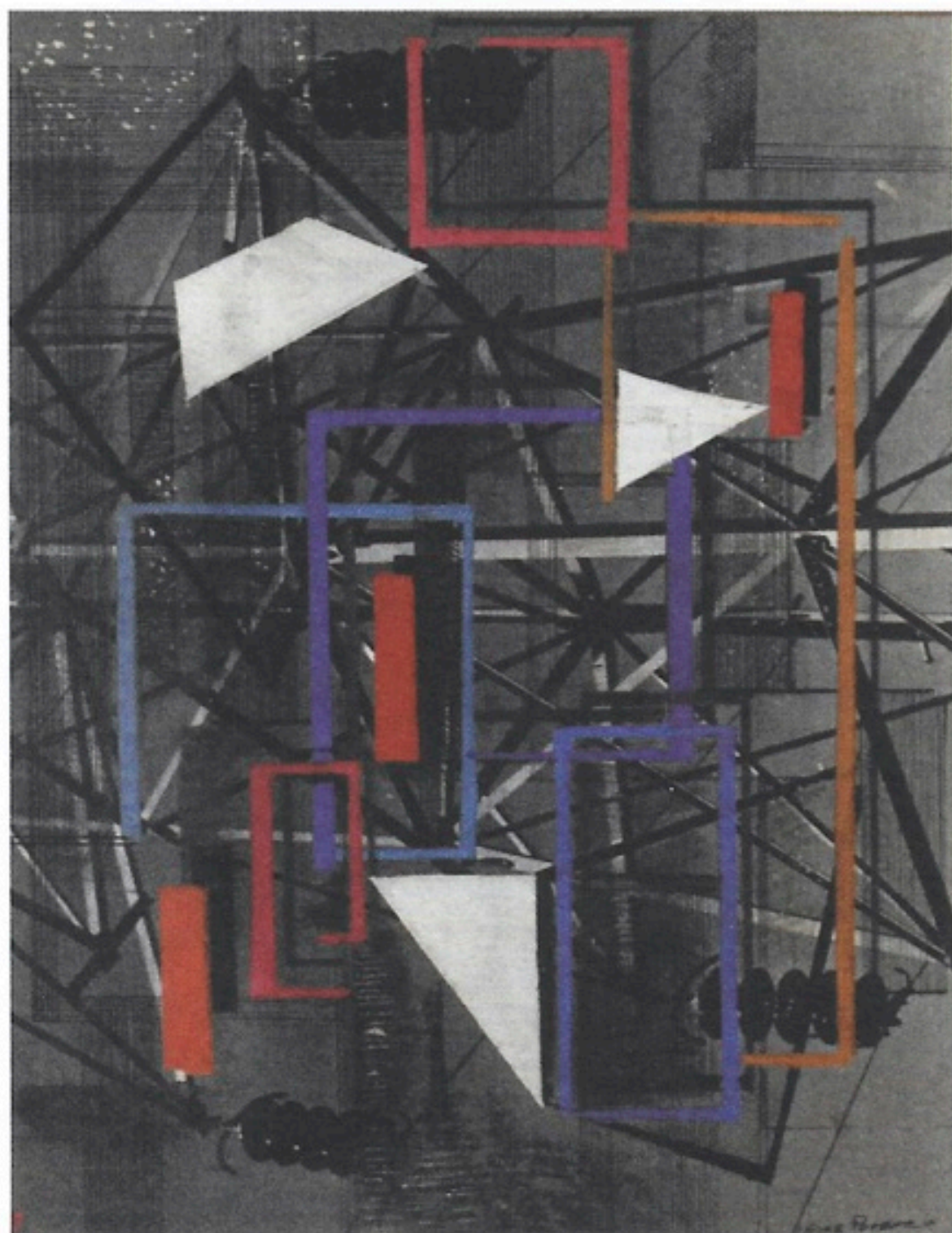


Fig. 7 Irene Rice Pereira, *Untitled*, 1941. Mixed media, 14 × 11 in.

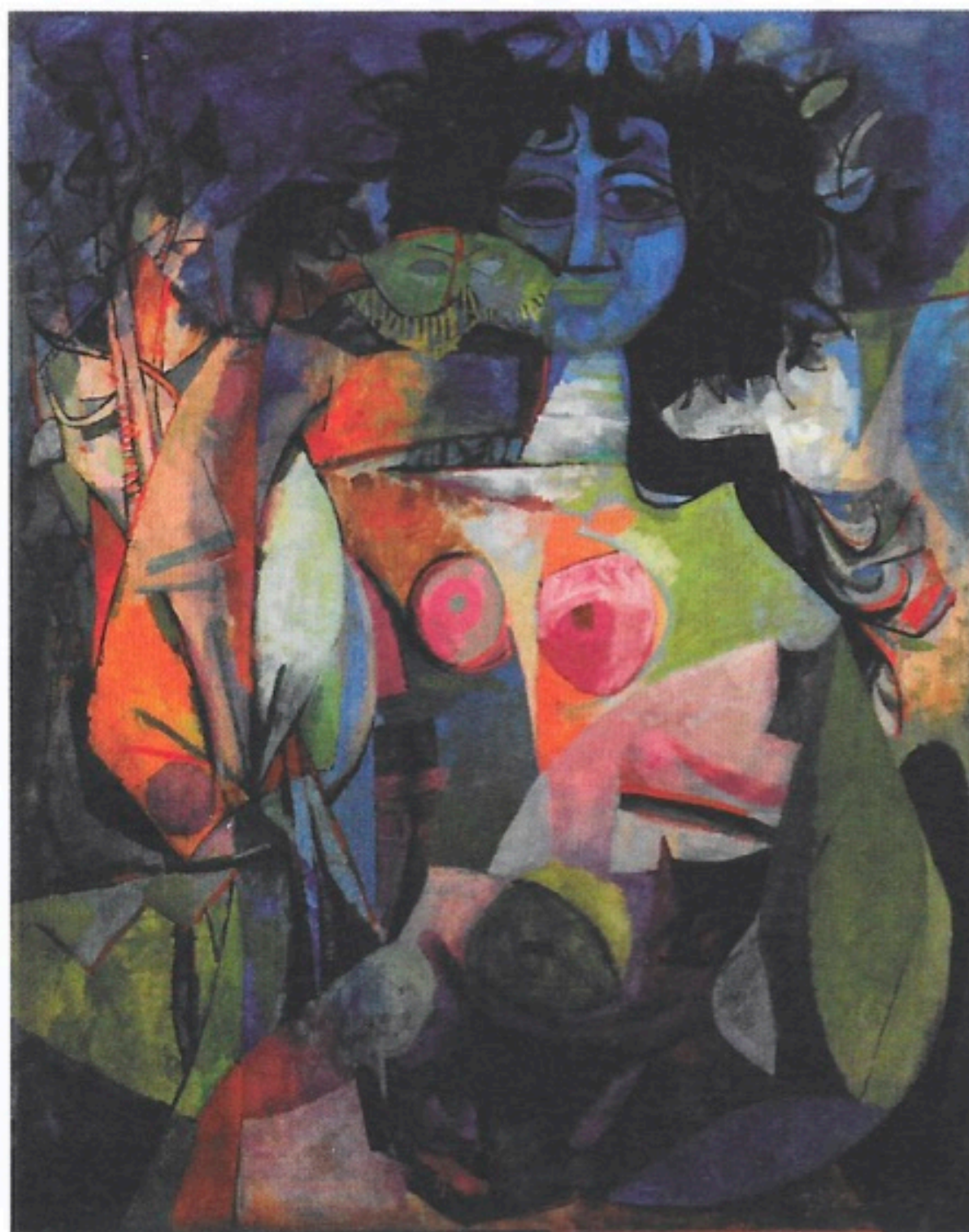


Fig. 8 Byron Browne, *Woman with a Mask*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 38 × 30 in.



Fig. 9 Byron Browne, *Head of a Woman*, 1938. Oil on canvas, 28 × 24 in.

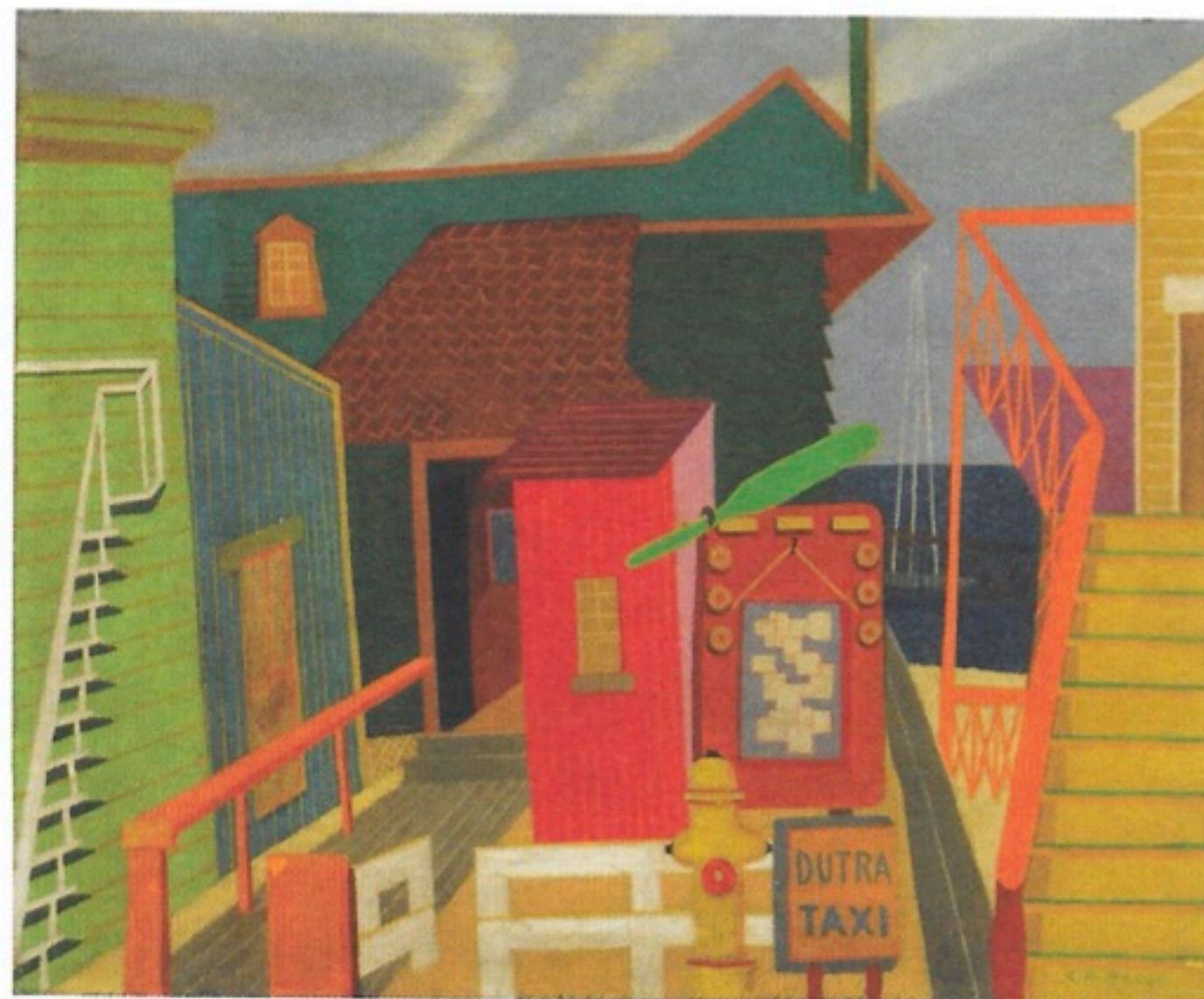


Fig. 10 Sylvia Carewe, *Untitled (Dutra Taxi)*, Provincetown, mid- to late 1940s. Oil on canvas, 20 × 24 in.

The imaginary worlds within Busa's paintings defied trends in contemporary art, like Picasso's Cubism, or Abstract Expressionism. Busa first owned I. Rice Pereira's mixed media college, later sold to Chaim Gross, which likewise escapes trends and builds a network of interrelated lines, shapes, and connectors (fig. 7).

Busa's friend and neighbor Byron Browne, in contrast, embraced Picasso's powerful influence on American painting, albeit in his own, idiosyncratic way, in a body of work that was mostly figurative (fig. 8). Browne was active in Provincetown for just under a decade, from 1952 to 1961, moving there shortly after having a heart attack in 1952, into a house next to Busa on Commercial Street. His abstract style is exemplified by a striking 1938 painting of a woman's face that Gross owned (fig. 9). The abstraction and distortion of her face reflects the continuing impact of Picasso on American artists, twenty years after the invention of Cubism in Paris. Her monumentality, proximity to the picture plane, and classical form are indebted to Picasso. Browne, like Busa, infuses his subject with an expressive approach to color, in her pale blue skin, orange cheeks, and the fleshy pink shadow along her neck.

The intensity of color and flattened forms in Busa's work finds an echo in another Provincetown landscape owned by Gross by painter Sylvia Carewe (fig. 10). Busa's *Provincetown* in particular evocatively shares Carewe's charged palette. Like Busa, Carewe studied with Hans Hofmann both in New York and in Provincetown. She also created designs for textiles and tapestries, in which graphic forms, not shading, are integral to the medium. Likewise in her painted work, the lines of the railings, stairs, and roofs all defy perspectival space, creating a chaotic and exhilarating two-dimensional image. Carewe knew Gross and other painters and collectors in their network, both in Provincetown and New York (fig. 11).

Provincetown enabled artists to shift their orientation, not only from their urban context of New York City, but also the critical language and terminologies and artistic trends being forged there in the postwar period. The melding of figure and landscape in a 1945 sketchbook drawing (fig. 12) begins to suggest how the innovative visual languages of his artist friends in Provincetown seeped into his own work. Turning back to sculpture, Gross's *Seven Mystic Birds* conjures the idea of a web or network of interrelated parts, and features delicate birds flying through a set of linked and parallel rings (fig. 13). The sculpture is surprisingly two-dimensional for Gross's oeuvre. Gross installed an edition of *Seven Mystic Birds* outside his home, amidst the landscape of Provincetown. It fits his experience of the place.



Fig. 11 Federico Castellon, Chaim Gross, Sylvia Carewe, and Hudson D. Walker in the home of Renee and Chaim Gross, c. 1940.



Fig. 12 Chaim Gross, Untitled, August 1, 4, 1945. Ink on paper, 12½ × 9½ in.

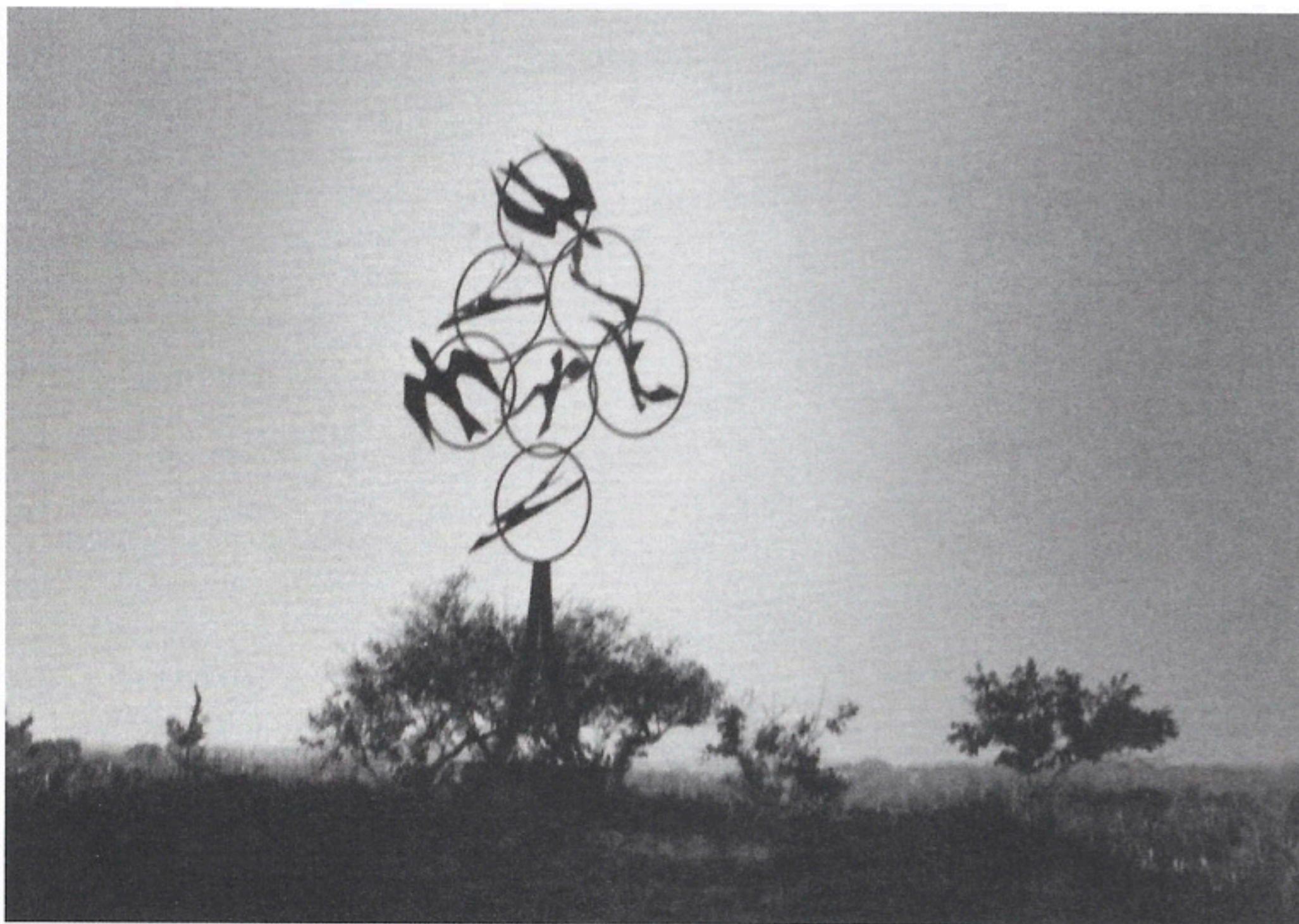


Fig. 13 Chaim Gross, *Seven Mystic Birds*, 1959. Bronze, 72 inches high

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Artist Biographies

SD/Sasha Davis
NF/Noalle Fellah
SF/Susan Fisher
ZV/Zak Vreeland



John D. Graham, *Sun Rider*, 1942. Oil on canvas, 24 × 16 in.

Byron Browne 1907–1961

Born in Yonkers, New York and attended the National Academy of Design in New York City. In 1928, after four years of study, Browne shifted to an abstract style of painting. Browne and his future wife Rosalind Bengelsdorf were founders of the American Abstract Artists group in 1936. In the 1930s both worked in the WPA mural program and in 1940 they married. Browne eventually came back to figurative painting, often in a style influenced by Pablo Picasso. In the 1940s he had frequent solo exhibitions at the Kootz Gallery and others, and taught at the Art Students League. At the end of his life he painted portraits, including one of Chaim Gross done in 1956, after knowing Gross for at least two decades. The Foundation now houses some 10 paintings and drawings by Browne. —zv

Peter Busa 1914–1985

Born in Pittsburgh, the son of an Italian artisan. While still studying art at the Carnegie Institute, Busa was taken to New York City by a teacher who introduced him to Arshile Gorky, who became a mentor and life-long friend. Busa moved to New York City and studied under Thomas Hart Benton and Hans Hofmann, and became close with Jackson Pollock, Stuart Davis and John D. Graham. Busa's work incorporated Jungian ideas about access to the collective unconscious, which came from Graham and the Surrealist artists who began arriving in New York at the beginning of World War II. In 1946 Busa had a solo show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery and also exhibited with artists who were influenced by Native American Art of the Pacific Northwest, sometimes called the Indian Space Painters. Busa explored purely abstract forms in the 1950s and later, both geometric and action painting. Like Gross, Busa was a part-time resident of Provincetown, Massachusetts, a town that had been an art colony since the late 1800s. —zv

Sylvia Carewe 1906–1981

Born Sylvia Karewsky to Russian immigrant parents in New York City (she changed her name in 1930). She attended Columbia University and then studied with Hans Hofmann and Yasuo Kuniyoshi, among others. Prior to her first one-woman show in 1947 in Poughkeepsie, she also worked as an advertising copywriter and artist and a tapestry designer for the Aubusson weavers in France. Her first solo show in New York City was at ACA galleries in 1948 and she went on to have some 20 solo shows in the U.S. Carewe was also a poet and writer. Her papers are now housed

at Syracuse University while the Renee & Chaim Gross Foundation holds numerous photographs of Carewe in its archives. —zv

Stuart Davis 1892–1964

Born in Philadelphia, the son of Edward Davis, the art editor of the Philadelphia Press. Most of the artists who would found the Ashcan school (including John Sloan, Robert Henri, George Luks) worked for Edward Davis at the paper as illustrators. Stuart studied with Henri and painted moody street scenes in the Ashcan style. He was only 21 when his work was included in the 1913 Armory show, which exposed Americans to modern art forms like Cubism. Davis soon developed an abstract style that had a powerful influence on younger American artists like Arshile Gorky, Peter Busa, and Willem de Kooning. Davis played an important role in being both a spokesman for abstract art, for the arts in general, and for social justice. In 1936 he founded the American Artists Congress, an exhibition and artists-rights group, whose members included Chaim Gross, Nahum Tschacbasov, Irene Rice Pereira, and Byron Browne, all featured in this exhibition. —zv

Willem de Kooning 1904–1997

Born in Rotterdam, the Netherlands and studied art at the Rotterdam Academy as a teenager. He came to the U.S. as a ship stowaway in 1926 and soon met Stuart Davis, Arshile Gorky and John D. Graham, a group he referred to as “the three musketeers,” all of whom would influence his style of art. Like Davis, Gorky and Byron Browne, de Kooning worked in the mural program of the WPA during the Great Depression. In 1936 de Kooning worked under Fernand Léger for one mural that was not completed, like many others, for political reasons. The same year de Kooning was taken off the WPA program because he was not a U.S. citizen. In the 1940s he began to develop his signature abstract style, and became, with Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock, one of the core members of the Abstract Expressionists. In 1959 he had a neighboring studio to Chaim Gross (whom he had known from the 1930s) for several months in Rome, during which time the two exchanged works and visited often. —zv

Max Ernst 1891–1976

Born in Brühl, near Cologne, Germany. He was a painter, sculptor, graphic artist, and poet, and was fundamental to the Dada and Surrealist movements between the wars. Ernst studied philosophy, art history, literature, psychology and psychiatry at the University of Bonn in

1909, at which point he began to paint. In 1912 he exhibited at the Galerie Feldman in Cologne with the Das Junge Rheinland group, after finding inspiration in the works of Pablo Picasso, Vincent van Gogh, and Paul Gauguin. During World War II, Ernst was interned in the Camp de Milles with fellow surrealist Hans Bellmer. He was released through the involvement of journalist Varian Fry and surrealist poet Paul Éluard, only to be arrested later by the Gestapo. The efforts of Fry and Peggy Guggenheim led to his release, and he escaped to the United States in 1941. Ernst moved to New York City with his new wife Guggenheim, inspiring the budding Abstract Expressionist movement. Gross purchased Ernst's *Flowers and Fish* in this exhibition from businessman George Paley, with whom he often exchanged African and Western art. —SD

John B. Flannagan 1895–1942

Born in Fargo, North Dakota and after the death of his father in 1900, raised in an orphanage. He studied at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design until the U.S. joined World War I, and then enlisted with the Merchant Marines. Some years after the war Flannagan returned to art, but now to sculpture, first woodcarving, and then to stone. As a proponent of direct carving, Flannagan approached his work with no pre-conceived notions, seeking to release the form from the rock, a notion that painters Peter Busa and Roberto Matta would explore in their experiments with automatic drawing and painting in the 1940s. In the 1930s Flannagan exhibited his sculptures with the Sculptor's Guild alongside Chaim Gross, William Zorach and David Smith and worked briefly in the government's WPA program. —ZV

Arshile Gorky 1904–1948

Born Vosdanig Adoian in the Armenian region of the Ottoman Empire. Following the Armenian Genocide and the death of his mother, he was sent to live with relatives in Boston, at which time he changed his name. Gorky studied at the New School of Design in Boston in the early 1920s and soon began teaching there. In 1925 he moved to New York City and became an instructor at the Grand Central School of Art. His work went through many styles, seeing the influence of John D. Graham, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque and Joan Miró. In the 1940s his paintings, like those of Roberto Matta, bridged Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism. Gross, though he may not have known Gorky, collected his work, partially through the friends they shared mutually, including Raphael Soyer and Peter Busa. —ZV

John D. Graham 1886–1961

Born Ivan Dombrowsky in Kiev, Ukraine, then part of Czarist Russia. After law school he joined the military, as a cavalryman. In the wake of World War I and the Russian Revolution he was considered counter-revolutionary and escaped first to Poland, then the United States in 1920. In New York in the early 1920s he studied at the Art Students League with John Sloan. He began dealing in antiquities and primitive art, making frequent trips to Europe. Through him many American artists and collectors were exposed to African art for the first time, including Chaim Gross. In the 1920s and 30s a group of younger artists formed around him, including Gross, Willem de Kooning, David Smith, Jackson Pollock and Adolph Gottlieb, to whom he expounded his ideas that would take form in his influential book *System and Dialectics of Art* (1937). His styles shifted from portraiture to spare abstractions, though in his later decades he painted in a surreal and figurative manner. —ZV

Chaim Gross 1904–1991

Born in the Carpathian Mountain region known as Galicia to an orthodox Jewish family. After being uprooted (and briefly conscripted) during World War I, Gross attended art school in Budapest and Vienna. In 1921 he and his brother emigrated to New York City to join other family members. Gross attended the Educational Alliance art school in the Lower East Side, which had classes in Yiddish. After a few years of working in watercolors, Gross discovered sculpture and subsequently studied with Elie Nadelman, Robert Laurent and others. Gross gravitated toward direct carving, first in wood and later in stone. He had his first solo show in 1932, which was followed by many more as Gross's commissions from the WPA gained him wide recognition. Following the war, Gross began working in bronze and frequently on a larger scale. He also became a major collector of African and contemporary western art and helped found the Museum of African Art (now part of the Smithsonian Institution). —ZV

Marsden Hartley 1877–1943

Born on January 4, 1877, in Lewiston, Maine and studied at the Cleveland Institute of Art. In 1898, at age 22, he moved to New York City to study painting under William Merritt Chase at the New York School of Art and later attended the National Academy of Design. Hartley had his first solo exhibition at photographer Alfred Stieglitz's 291 gallery in 1909. He moved between realism and abstraction throughout his career and focused his works largely on landscapes, portraits

and still lifes. Hartley is considered one of the earliest American abstract painters. Chaim Gross acquired the painting *Rest Period* in this exhibition from the photographer Alfredo Valente, who often shot Gross at work in his studio. —NF

Jacob Lawrence 1917-2000

Born in Atlantic City, New Jersey and at age 13 moved with his family to New York City. As a young teenager he studied the arts at a settlement house in Harlem and at the Harlem Arts Workshop. Like Theodoros Stamos, he continued study at the American Artists School, while securing a position with the WPA, and studied with Harlem Renaissance artists including Charles Alston and Henry Bannarn. Lawrence's painting focused on history, and particularly periods of African-American history, rendered in a style that he called "dynamic cubism" fueled by both French influences and also his immediate context of Harlem. Lawrence's first exhibition was a series about the Haitian general Toussaint L'Ouverture. The most famous of Lawrence's ambitious historical series is his *Migration of the Negro*, a 60-work set of narrative paintings charting the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to the North after World War I. Lawrence's *Valley Forge* in Gross's collection is from his 30-work series *Struggle: From the History of the American People* (1954-56). Chaim Gross and Lawrence were acquaintances through the Artist Equity Association, an artist rights group and Gross's daughter, artist Mimi Gross, studied with Lawrence at Skowhegan. —SF

Fernand Léger 1881-1955

Born in Lower Normandy, France and became a significant painter, sculptor, and filmmaker. Classically trained at the École des Beaux-Arts and the Académie Julian, Léger developed an interest in abstraction in 1907 after seeing the work of Paul Cézanne. At his first exhibition in 1910, Léger showed at the Salon d'Automne near to Jean Metzinger and Henri Le Fauconnier. Léger is known for his graphic, colorful take on Cubism, which frequently draws on the human form. Léger lived in the United States during World War II, teaching at Yale and continuing his work. One of his best-known pieces from this time period is *Three Musicians*, 1944 (Museum of Modern Art, New York). It was during this stay in the United States that Léger probably met Chaim Gross, as suggested by the inscription at the bottom of *Still Life* (1942) in this exhibition that reads "à Chaim Gross." —SD

André Masson 1896-1987

Born in the Picardy region of Northern France, and raised in Belgium. He studied from age 11 at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels and then in Paris, and fought for France in World War I. Masson is associated with French Surrealism and practiced automatic drawing in pen and ink through which he strove to free his art of rational control. In light of these interests it is notable that Masson was the brother-in-law of the famed French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. His work was deemed degenerate by the Nazis during the German Occupation of Paris, and Masson fled to the US during World War II. He lived in Connecticut, and his work influenced that of the Abstract Expressionists, including Jackson Pollock. Masson returned to France after the end of the War. —SF

Roberto Matta 1911-2002

Born on November 11, 1911, in Santiago, Chile. He studied architecture and interior design in his native country at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. While living in Europe during the mid-1930s, Matta became increasingly interested in painting. He moved to New York City in 1940 and had his first solo exhibition that same year at the Julian Levy Gallery. Matta's works blended abstraction, figuration, and multi-dimensional spaces into complex landscapes. As a member of the Surrealist movement, Matta was widely influential on the development of Abstract Expressionism and artists such as Jackson Pollock, Arshile Gorky, and Robert Motherwell. Chaim Gross purchased the two Matta paintings in this exhibition in Rome in 1957. —NF

Irene Rice Pereira 1902-1971

Exhibited as the gender-neutral I. Rice Pereria, was born in Chelsea, Massachusetts, moving with her family to Brooklyn in 1918. After working in an accountant's office for many years, she began to study painting, at the Art Students League under Jan Matulka and at the Académie Moderne in Paris under Amédée Ozenfant. In the 1930s, she again studied at the League under Hans Hofmann. During the WPA program she was instrumental in the Design Laboratory, a multidisciplinary school in New York City based on the Bauhaus. Her paintings, which from 1937 onward were geometric and pure abstractions, often contained textured layers and alternative materials like sand and glass. In 1953, the Whitney Museum of American Art held a retrospective of her work. —ZV

Pablo Picasso 1881–1973

Born in Málaga in the Andalusian region of Spain. Picasso's father, painter Don José Ruiz y Blasco, taught him drawing and painting from age 7, and after the family moved to Barcelona in 1895, Picasso gained admittance to the city's School of Fine Arts. At age 16 Picasso attended the Royal Academy in Madrid. In 1900 Picasso first visited Paris; he settled there in spring of 1904 and quickly became part of a group of artists and writers, particularly Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob, and Gertrude Stein. In 1908–09, Picasso worked closely with Georges Braque to formulate Cubism, which radically rethought pictorial space, mass and volume. Throughout his long and prolific career Picasso continued to redefine other media as well, including sculpture, printmaking and ceramics. Though he did not visit the United States Picasso was the key influence on American artists during the first half of the 20th century, through publications and the exhibition of his work, notably at Alfred Stieglitz's 291 gallery (who introduced Picasso's work to the U.S. in 1911), the 1913 Armory show, and the Museum of Modern Art, which held the first American retrospective of Picasso's work in 1939–40, curated by Alfred H. Barr, Jr. —SF

Theodoros Stamos 1922–1997

Born on Lower East Side in New York City to Greek immigrant parents. He studied sculpture at the American Artists School as a teenager and came under the tutelage of American painter Joseph Solman, a founding member of The Ten, a group of New York City Expressionist painters in the 1930s. In the later 1930s, while working in a frame shop, Stamos met Arshile Gorky and Fernand Léger. He had his first solo show in 1943 at the progressive Betty Parsons Gallery in New York City, an early promoter of Abstract Expressionism; Stamos would exhibit there until 1957. He taught at Black Mountain College from 1950–54 and at the Art Students League from 1955–75. Stamos was one of the youngest painters of the first-generation of Abstract Expressionists, which included Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Ad Reinhardt, Richard Pousette-Dart, and Mark Rothko. —SF

Nahum Tschacbasov 1899–1984

Born in Baku, Azerbaijan (then part of Russia) and immigrated to Chicago with his family in 1907. He enlisted in the Navy during World War I, returned to Chicago, earned a business degree and became an accountant. In the early 1930s, despite having started a family, his interest in art led him to go to New York

City, and then Paris. In Paris he changed his last name from Lichterman to Tschacbasov (an invented name reverting back to his Russian heritage after his father most likely changed their name upon arrival to the U.S.) and studied with Leopold Gottlieb, Fernand Léger and others. His first exhibitions were in Paris, and in 1934 he returned to New York and worked in the WPA program where he encountered other American avant-garde artists. He became a member of The Ten, a group of artists that included many other friends of Chaim Gross such as John D. Graham, David Burliuk, and Adolph Gottlieb. It was during this time that he painted *The Two Generals* (1938) in this exhibition. In the early 1940s his work, often socio-political, became more surrealist and, like Busa and Matta, adopted automatism, which he described as “abstract surrealism.” —ZV

Ruth Vodicka 1921–1999

Born in New York City and attended City College and classes at the Sculpture Center. She was best known for her welded steel sculpture, which was figurative, but at times nearly abstract. Her art studio doubled as a shop where she did welding repairs as a business. She had her first one-woman show in 1956 at the Associated American Artists, where Chaim Gross also frequently exhibited in the 1950s. —ZV

Exhibition Checklist

All works Collection of the
Renee & Chaim Gross Foundation
unless otherwise noted

Painting

Byron Browne
Woman with Mask, 1951
Oil on canvas, 38 × 30 in.
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Byron Browne
Head of a Woman, 1938
Oil on canvas, 28 × 24 in.
p. 17

Peter Busa
Provincetown, c. 1948
Oil on canvas, 45 × 31 in.
p. 12

Peter Busa
Turkish Moonbeam, c. 1945
Oil on canvas, 21 × 36 in.
Cover

Peter Busa
Untitled, c. 1945
Oil on canvas, 40 × 50 in.
p. 15

Peter Busa
Untitled, c. 1946
Oil on wood board, 5½ × 27⅝ in.

Sylvia Carewe
Untitled (*Dutra Taxi*),
Provincetown, mid- to late 1940s
Oil on canvas, 20 × 24 in.
p. 17

Stuart Davis
Still Life, 1921
Oil on canvas, 34 × 22 in.

Max Ernst
Flowers and Fish, 1916
Oil on canvas, 24 × 21 in.

Arshile Gorky
Fragment, c. 1930
Oil on canvas laid down on board,
7⅜ × 12⅜ in.

Arshile Gorky
Still Life, 1928
Oil on board, 16 × 30 in.

Arshile Gorky
Still Life, c. 1935
Oil on canvas, 16½ × 21½ in.
p. 2

John D. Graham
Red Square, 1934
Oil on canvas, 16 × 20 in.

John D. Graham
El Picador, 1941
Oil on canvas, 24 × 19½ in.
p. 10

John D. Graham
Sun Rider, 1942
Oil on canvas, 24 × 16 in.
p. 20

Marsden Hartley
Rest Period, 1942-43
Oil on board, 30 × 9 in.
p. 9

Jacob Lawrence
Valley Forge (from the series
*Struggle: From the History of the
American People*), 1954
Tempera on board, 12 × 16 in.
p. 10

Roberto Matta
*The Invincible Star Lands Like Blue
Bees*, c. 1953
Oil with pencil etching on board,
16 × 23 in.

Roberto Matta
Untitled, c. 1953
Oil with pencil etching on board,
16 × 23 in.

Theodoros Stamos
In the Cascades, 1949
Oil on canvas, 24 × 20 in.

Nahum Tschacbasov
The Two Generals, 1938
Oil on canvas, 43 × 27 in.

Works on paper

Byron Browne
Untitled, 1945
Gouache on paper laid on board,
13 × 9¼ in.

Peter Busa
Untitled, 1943
Watercolor, ink, and graphite on
paper, 5⅝ × 7 in.

Peter Busa
Venus, c. 1950
Pen and ink on paper, 21 × 14¾ in.
p. 6

Peter Busa
Untitled, c. 1940
Gouache on paper, 5⅝ × 6½ in.

Willem de Kooning
 Untitled, Rome, 1959
 Ink on paper, 40 × 30 in.
 p. 4

Arshile Gorky
 Untitled (*Ecorché*), ca. 1932
 Graphite on paper menu, 6 × 4 in.

Arshile Gorky
 Untitled, c. 1937-38
 Silkscreen, 11½ × 15 in.

Arshile Gorky
Still Life, late 1930s
 Pen and ink on paper, 10 × 12 in.
 Collection of Mimi Gross

Chaim Gross
 Untitled (with Oceanic mask), 1950
 Pen and ink on paper, 12¼ × 9¾ in.

Chaim Gross
 Untitled, 1950
 Pen and ink on paper, 12 × 9¼ in.
 p. 11

Fernand Léger
Music, c. 1942
 Gouache on paper, 20 × 26 in.

Fernand Léger
Still Life, 1942
 Gouache on paper, 11½ × 16 in.

Irene Rice Pereira
 Untitled, 1941
 Mixed media on paper, 14 × 11 in.
 p. 16

Pablo Picasso
Françoise Gilot, 1946
 Lithograph, 25¾ × 20 in.
 Ed. 32/50

Sculpture

Bwa mask, Burkina Faso
 Polychrome wood, 43 × 10 × 8 in.

Possibly Burkina Faso
 Polychrome wood, 35 × 9 × 4½ in.

Mask
 Papua New Guinea
 Polychrome wood, feathers, raffia,
 26 × 18 × 4 in.

John Flannagan
Cat, 1939
 Granite, 6 × 9 × 4 in.

Chaim Gross
Aerialist, 1936
 Sabicu wood, 20 × 55 × 7 in.
 p. 7

Chaim Gross
Balancing Acrobats, 1940
 Bronze, 6 × 2 × 2 in.

Chaim Gross
Acrobat and Offspring, 1953
 Ebony, 27¾ × 9 × 6 in.

Chaim Gross
Young Tumbler, 1958
 Ebony, 47 × 8½ × 4 in.

Fernand Léger
Plate with Figures, c. 1950
 Ceramic, diameter: 7 in.

André Masson
Brother and Sister, 1941
 Bronze, 6 × 5 × 3½ in.

Pablo Picasso
Bird with Worm, 1952
 Ceramic, diameter: 5 in.

Ruth Vodicka
 Untitled, 1955
 Bronze, 4½ × 3 × 3 in.

Photographs

Arnold Newman, Photograph of
 Max Ernst, 1941

Marion Palfi, Photograph of Renee
 Gross, Yehudah Gross, Chaim
 Gross, and Mimi Gross, 1944
 p. 8

Photographer unknown.
 Federico Castellon, Chaim Gross,
 Sylvia Carewe, and Hudson D.
 Walker at the home of Renee &
 Chaim Gross, c. 1940
 p. 18

Ephemera

Letter from Byron Browne to
 Chaim Gross. January 6, 1961

Alfred H. Barr, Jr, ed. *Picasso: Forty
 Years of His Art*. Museum of Modern
 Art, 1939.

Chaim Gross's notebook with in-
 ventory of his art collection, listing
 drawing by Arshile Gorky and
 Irene Rice Pereira acquired from
 Peter Busa, 1963

Letter from John D. Graham to
 Renee Gross, March 6 [no year]

Letter from Peter Busa to Chaim
 Gross, September 11, 1983

The Renee & Chaim Gross Foundation © 2014

Circa 1945:

*Abstract Art in the Renee and Chaim Gross
Foundation Collection*

June 5–September 30, 2014

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Figure 7, p. 10 © 2014 The Jacob and Gwendolyn
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Society (ARS), New York

Front Cover:

Peter Busa, *Turkish Moonbeam*, c. 1945.
Oil on canvas, 21 × 36 in.

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Dr. Susan Greenberg Fisher
Executive Director
The Renee & Chaim Gross Foundation

About the Foundation

The Renee & Chaim Gross Foundation is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization incorporated in New York State in 1988. Founded by American sculptor Chaim Gross (1904-91) and his wife Renee, the Foundation exhibits Gross's sculpture and drawings in the couples' Greenwich Village townhouse at 526 LaGuardia Place. The Foundation also organizes cultural activities and encourages visitors to actively engage with the Studio space and extensive art collections. The Foundation's initiatives include interdisciplinary programs, special events and exhibitions, and are organized around topics related to Gross and his contemporaries.



The Renee & Chaim Gross Foundation
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