

AUTO-AMERICA: THE AUTOMOBILE AND AMERICAN ART, CIRCA 1900-1950

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the theme of the automobile in American visual art in the first half of the twentieth century, specifically as it appears in painting and printmaking. During the period under consideration, the automobile evolved from a technological novelty owned and operated by wealthy individuals to become a ubiquitous part of American society that stretched across the nation and touched all economic classes. When present in art, the automobile serves as a pregnant image of modernity. The freedom of motion and the velocity provided by the motorcar suggests a horizontal and accelerated perception of modern life.

The influence of the automobile on society is found not only in images with motorcars, but also in compositions depicting the many support systems that developed to keep the nation mobile. The greater sense of automobility includes the newly built roadways and bridges, automotive factories, garages, gasoline pumps, auto-camps and eventual motels, roadside restaurants that aimed to serve and accommodate a populace on the move. Artists working in the United States responded to the expanding presence of motor vehicles in multiple and varied ways that reflect not only individual artistic tastes and styles, but also the artists' personal experiences and associations as automobile drivers and passengers. Several artists utilized the motor vehicle as a mobile studio, with works being created on location, within the confines of the vehicle itself.

My analysis explores various ways in which artists responded to the automobile and developed auto-related iconography. Depictions of the automobile's use in urban areas demonstrate its gradual acceptance and eventual dominance of city streets, while in rural areas the automobile offered opportunities for social engagement, shopping and entertainment. During the Great Depression, the motorcar served artists as a modern-day metaphor regarding the ship of state, with broken down and discarded vehicles used to address the nation's economic troubles. The study includes consideration of several artists' use of automobiles as well as depictions made of and from the road. This dissertation concludes with a brief look at artistic responses to the automotive theme that followed the period under this study.

Acknowledgments

The metaphor of the long automotive journey has often come to mind while I have worked on this dissertation. Like an extensive road trip that relies on the help of others along the way, this project has only been possible thanks to the support and encouragement by many kind individuals. Although this road has finally come to a conclusion, those who have made it possible for me to make the trip will always be remembered for their kindness, motivation and backing.

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encouraging, if from afar. My parents, Mildred and Gordon Smith, were always supportive of my endeavor and simply assumed I would finish. To them, it was a foregone conclusion. Sadly, they did not live to see me reach the goal, but their faith in my abilities continues to be great inspiration. They are so greatly missed, as is my eldest sister, Melva Keysaw.

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Similar to the patience displayed by my advisor, I also must acknowledge Jim Ballinger, director of the Phoenix Art Museum. A graduate of the University of Kansas, Jim is also my boss. He hired me as a green curator fresh out of finishing my university coursework. He has continually been supportive of my desire to finish this project and has prompted me toward completion as I struggled to balance work and school. His belief in my topic and desire to turn it into an exhibition has been tremendously encouraging. Many people at the Phoenix Art Museum have earned my gratitude, including David Restad and Kathryn Blake. I would also like to acknowledge the training I received during my bachelor's and master's studies at Arizona State University. In particular, professors Betsy Fahlman and Julie Codell were wonderful mentors

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Introduction

The automobile's profound influence on society is recognized in virtually every aspect of American life. A form of personal transportation, the motorcar ushered in a host of related systems necessary to support a mechanically mobilized nation. Since its introduction, artists—as drivers, passengers, and observers—have responded to the automobile's growing use and popularity around the nation. Their many images tell the story of the effects of the automobile on society. This dissertation examines the large theme of the automobile and its role in American culture and its frequent use as a subject in art, from the time of its introduction through the first half of the twentieth century. The focus is on the visual art of painting (including watercolors and other water soluble pigments) and printmaking, rather than commercial illustration, which routinely emphasized automotive design. This study considers automobiles in a larger, social context as found in works of two-dimensional art. The images examined here have been selected for their abilities to express a variety of meanings associated with American automobility. At times, a discussed work may be unique for representing a specific idea, while at others an image may be representative of several capable of conveying a similar concept. In a few instances, works made for commercial use have been identified to demonstrate specific themes. These designs thematically or in aesthetic quality exceed the work of typical automotive-related illustrations, which were primarily designed to market products. Photography as well as cinema as artistic media and their relationship to the automobile in America are enormous fields worthy of their own research. As such, they fall outside the scope of this dissertation, as do sculpture and automotive design.

This study is on only a small part relating to the story of the automobile in American art, which if told in full detail would also include literature, music, poetry and much more.

From the moment the first American-made automobile appeared in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1893 and the subsequent birth of the American auto industry in 1896, to the first decades of the new century, the motor vehicle rapidly evolved from being a technological novelty owned and operated as fun and sport by the wealthy into a ubiquitous part of everyday American life.¹ By the beginning of the 1920s, the motor vehicle was a common feature of the American landscape, urban and rural. Automobile registration multiplied a thousand-fold in a twenty year span, with eight thousand registered vehicles in 1900 ballooning to eight million in 1920.² President Warren G. Harding in 1921 recognized the growing importance of the automobile in American society, stating “the motorcar is an indispensable instrument in our political, social, and industrial life.”³ It was also an undeniable part of the nation’s artistic life.

The automobile was part of daily life in American cities in the 1920s, and its acceptance by those in rural communities exceeded that of their urban counterparts, with a vast majority of farming families owning a motorcar by the end of the decade.⁴ During the economically troubled 1930s, new automobile purchases and manufacturing declined, but enthusiasm for cars never waned and the auto industry regained its momentum following the Second World War. Throughout this period, the impact of automobiles brought about the construction of roadways, gas stations, municipal auto-camps and eventually motels, roadside stands, cafes, and drive-up restaurants. The need to control the flow of traffic and fight congestion in metropolitan areas prompted the establishment of directional lights and standardized road signs. Advertisers, responding to consumers

on the move, installed billboards to draw motorists' attention. Coined by John Chynoweth Burnham, the term "automobility" describes the combined cultural, emotional, and industrial impact of the automobile on society.⁵

America's artists were naturally among those who took part in the transformations wrought by the motor vehicle. Through observation and participation, artists experienced automobiles in the cities and traveled the countryside in cars in search of subject matter. Their compositions picture the dramatic shift from earlier patterns of transportation. On the issue of modern travel, former federal highway administrator Lowell K. Bridwell observed, "Before the beginnings of the modern era, the vast majority of mankind never went beyond a handful of miles from their home communities. Travel was mainly confined to lords and ladies and their retinue, armies on the move and adventurers and pilgrims."⁶ In the nineteenth century, artists and others became accustomed to railways, and in the latter part of the century many enjoyed riding on a bicycle. The motor vehicle, however, opened up new levels of mobility and personal freedom.

Despite its influence on American society, the automobile has rarely been recognized for its effect on the nation's fine arts. Art historians have routinely dismissed the motor vehicle's influence on the arts, arguing that it is rarely found outside of commercial illustration before 1950. Art historian Paul Karlstrom, in his research on the car in American art, observes that "cars were not given the prominence one might expect considering their novelty. They were simply accepted as the modern replacement of the horse and buggy, a new form of transportation that was one part of general street activity. ...Focus on the car as main subject came much later."⁷ Artists interested in contemporary, urban life were considered uninterested in the automotive theme. Gerald

Douglas Silk's doctoral dissertation, "The Image of the Automobile in Modern Art," reaches a similar conclusion to Karlstrom:

The artists of the ash-can school, the movement which chronologically coincided with the first flowering of the auto age in America, were avidly interested in urban life. However, to these artists, the fascination of the city lay in the purely human interactions it produced; and because machines were viewed as not enhancing and perhaps even obstructing human intercourse, technological subject matter played a minor role in ash-can art.⁸

These views have been reinforced through several exhibitions and publications in which motoring in art is examined, but rarely in depth with regard to America before 1950.

This dissertation counters the accepted opinion that automobiles play a minor note in the history of American art.

One aspect not often considered is the influence the automobile had on the arts in depictions of the nation's built environment. In a recent study on art of the 1920s, curator Teresa A. Carbone writes, "While the automobile is virtually absent from American art of the decade, it is nevertheless implied."⁹ Where indications of automobility are seen in several images of roadways, gasoline pumps, billboards, etc., this study demonstrates that the motorcar's presence was not only implied in American art, it was also pictured. Several artists who responded to European modernism and explored the soaring heights of skyscrapers as an expression of the modern age, for example, also turned to the horizontality of automobiles to energize their images. Regionalists further emphasized the widespread use of and reliance on the automobile in their depictions of the rural South, Midwest, and Southwest, as had the American scene painters in other areas of the country. Artists responded to the growing auto-culture in ways that reflect not only

individual artistic tastes and styles, but also the artist's personal experiences and associations with automobiles.

A Brief Overview

As the automobile came to define American life, artists naturally responded, exploring the burgeoning use and proliferation of the motor vehicle in their paintings and prints. Chapters examine various aspects of artistic production as it relates to American automobility. Chapter One considers the creation of auto-related iconography in the first decades of the century. The automobile was associated with a range of concepts, including progress, affluence, freedom, modernity, speed and danger, and artists expressed these ideas in their work. Beyond the means of most people, the automobile was initially considered a plaything for the wealthy and an example of conspicuous consumption. After little more than a decade, however, it was an unavoidable element of daily life and was featured as part of the American landscape. Among artists working in styles informed by European modernism, the motorcar and its component parts were expressed as a dynamic aspect of contemporary life. The freedom of motion and the velocity provided by the automobile suggested a horizontal and accelerated perception of modernism, a sharp contrast to the soaring verticality of the skyscraper imagery popular with many early modernists. The automotive industry became a topic in American art, in which artists both praised and criticized modern manufacturing. The automobile was also utilized as an instantly recognizable symbol of the modern era, a loaded image of modernity. The motorcar further lent itself to artistic expressions that confront racial

stereotypes and race relations in America. Progress and personal destination were wed in auto imagery.

Chapter Two explores the use of the automobile in America's urban environment, where cars were part of the often chaotic traffic that energized cities and cityscapes. Glimmering headlights lent themselves to romanticized depictions of urban nightlife. Images made over the course of the first half of the twentieth century demonstrate the progression of auto usage on city streets. When introduced, it was shown at the dawn of the automobile age as the lone motor vehicle on a busy roadway, where it was one of several means of urban transportation. Later compositions picture the motorcar's gradual acceptance and its eventual dominance of city streets. During this period, pedestrians were edged off roadways and onto sidewalks as a result of new traffic laws and urban engineering. The inevitable dangers of automobiles in congested areas were expressed in depictions of motor crashes.

The focus of Chapter Three is the important role the automobile played in the lives of rural Americans, a rich aspect of American art history. After an initial rejection of the automobile as impractical for daily needs, its acceptance helped put an end to isolation among those living in rural communities. People were able to strengthen bonds within a community by attending religious and social gatherings. Conversely, the automobile also provided an escape from such activities, opening up opportunities for entertainment. Artistic depictions of rural areas often highlight routine automobile trips into town and the dependency families had on their vehicles.

Chapter Four explores works of art that examine people's dependence on the automobile during the economic hardship of the Great Depression. During the 1930s,

many people were forced from their homes and their car became a lifeline as they searched for work. The family car became one of the last items people retained, giving up other belongs before letting go of their cars. In 1931, humorist Will Rogers keenly observed, “We are the first nation in the history of the world to go to the poorhouse in an automobile.”¹⁰ Broken down and discarded vehicles symbolize the difficulties of the times, which were also emphasized through the automobile’s absence. Hitchhikers on the sides of the road looking for a ride served as a potent metaphor for those lacking opportunities during the Depression.

Chapter Five considers images of and from the road and artists’ use of the automobile as mobile studios. With art supplies on board, they motored throughout the nation. Using their cars as mobile studios artists adapted to the rather cramped confines of their vehicles. Some customized their cars to suit their working needs, such as removing seats or installing shelves and holding racks to support paintings. In the process, artists became mobile tourists, visualizing the country through their car windshields. This is emphasized in this study particularly in the work of artists who traveled to the American Southwest, where a lack of other forms of transportation often necessitated the use of the automobile. On rare occasions, artists pictured the interior of their vehicles, stressing the sources of their inspiration. In most instances, however, the vehicle is implied in imagery by mobile artists as they visualized the country’s roads and roadside businesses. Gas stations and gas pumps were frequently included in paintings and prints of roadsides further marked by billboard advertisements—all symbols of the automotive experience. The Conclusion provides a brief review of what came after 1950 for artists confronting the subject of the automobile and automobility in their work.

Resources and Influences

The theme of the automobile in art has certainly received attention from art historians, especially in the last thirty-five years. At times, these exhibitions, catalogues, and related articles include aspects of American auto-related images from circa 1900 to 1950, but it has never been the primary focus of research. Possibly the first exhibition to consider the automobile in art was *Around the Automobile*, presented in 1965 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Installed by Dorothy C. Miller, curator of collections, the exhibition included twenty one works of art—twelve by Americans, but only two made before 1950.¹¹ Gerald Silk's 1976 dissertation for the University of Virginia, and D.B. Tubb's *Art and the Automobile* (1978) focus predominantly on European art, with American images produced after 1950 given far greater attention than earlier works. *Automobile Art: The James Barron Collection* (1974, Bethnal Green Museum), edited by Roy Strong, and John Zolomij's *The Motor Car in Art* (1990) are entirely centered on European art. *Art and the Automobile* (1978, Flint Institute of Arts), *Autoscape: The Automobile in the American Landscape* (1984, Whitney Museum of American Art), and the contemporary art exhibition *Motion As Metaphor: The Automobile in Art* (1991, Virginia Beach Center for the Arts) all relate predominantly to art made in the second half of the twentieth century. Silk expanded on his dissertation with contributions to texts for the exhibitions *Automobile and Culture* (1984, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles), and *Carsinart: The Automobile Icon* (1990, Pensacola Museum of Art), both of which continue his earlier focus on European and post-1950 American art. In these exhibitions and catalogues, scholars have made valuable

contributions to the understanding of the automobile's role in art. However, most fall outside of the scope of this current study. Focused research in 1978 by Mary Jane Jacob and Linda Downs on Charles Sheeler's and Diego Rivera's art inspired by the River Rouge automotive Ford plant outside of Detroit, as well as Downs's expanded research in 1999 on Rivera's *Detroit Industry* murals, have been invaluable.

Supplementing art historical research on the topic of automobiles and their impact on American society is a large body of work from the fields of literary and film studies, and the broadly-defined field of American studies. In the literary arena are Cynthia Golomb Dettelbach's *In the Driver's Seat: The Automobile in American Literature and Popular Culture* (1976), Ronald Primeau's *Romance of the Road: The Literature of the American Highway* (1996), and Roger N. Casey's *Textual Vehicles: The Automobile in American Literature* (1997). Relating to the topic of art, in a manner, is the research on the "road movie," a topic of particular interest in film studies in recent years. Analyses of various related themes comprise *The Road Movie Book* (1997), edited by Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark. David Laderman further explores road movies in *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie* (2002).

In a larger, cultural context, the impact of the automobile on society is explored in several texts, including James J. Flink's *The Car Culture* (1975), which he updated with *The Automobile Age* (1990), Warren James Belasco's *Americans on the Road* (1979), Julian Pettifer's and Nigel Turner's *Automania: Man and the Motor Car* (1984), the collection of articles edited by Peter Wollen and Joe Kerr, *Autopia: Cars and Culture* (2002), Cotten Seiler's *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America* (2008), and Peter D. Norton's *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in*

the American City (2008). Specific elements of American automobile culture have spurred research as well. The history of gas stations is featured in Michael Karl Witzel's *The American Gas Station* (1992) and John A. Jakle's and Keith A. Sculle's *The Gas Station in America* (1994); billboard history is the focus of Catherine Gudis's *Buyways* (2004). Further, aspects of tourism and visual culture are examined, since artists became tourists while traveling and inevitably responded, consciously or not, to the growing tourism industry. Important research in this area includes John Urry's *The Tourist Gaze* (1990), Hal K. Rothman's *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (1998), and Lucy Lippard's *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place* (1999).

The subject of the automobile in American art is an enormous topic that exceeds mere images of motorcars and its frequency in the fine arts has been underestimated. The automobile influenced society like no other invention and it brought about wholesale changes to the country's infrastructure, with roadways built connecting the country in profoundly new ways. As a result, distances between places meant something different to those who experienced them in automobiles. Author Aldous Huxley recognized the importance of the adaptation to the automobile with an updated calendar for his 1932 anti-utopian, futurist novel *Brave New World*, replacing the religious BC and AD with the technological BF and AF: "Before Ford" and "After Ford."¹² This study explores the influence of the automobile on American society and its importance to the nation's art through the examination of paintings and prints.

¹ Scholars differ on exactly when the automobile industry began in earnest. James J. Flink argues that the Duryea company's thirteen vehicles made and sold in 1896 is the beginning. John B. Rae, however, sees the greater push by the Pope Manufacturing Company, which in 1897 began producing both electric and gasoline-powered vehicles, as marking the beginning of the American auto industry. See James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1988, 1990), 23; John B. Rae, *The American Automobile Industry* (Boston: Twayne Publishers 1985; paperback 1985), 15.

² Mark Foster, "The Automobile and The City," *The Automobile and American Culture*, eds. David L. Lewis and Laurence Goldstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), 29.

³ Quoted by James J. Flink, *The Car Culture* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1975, 1982), 140.

⁴ Records show that in Iowa by 1926, for example, ninety-three percent of farmers owned an automobile, as did eighty-six percent of tenant farmers. Flink, *The Automobile Age*, 132.

⁵ John Chynoweth Burnham, "The Gasoline Tax and the Automobile Revolution," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 48, no. 3 (December 1961), 435.

⁶ Lowell K. Bridwell, "Artists and the Traveler," *Leonardo* 1, no. 2 (April 1968), 151.

⁷ Paul J. Karlstrom, "Reflections on the Automobile in American Art," *Archives of American Art Journal* 20, no. 2 (1980), 19.

⁸ Gerald Douglas Silk, "The Image of the Automobile in Modern Art," (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1976), 73.

⁹ Teresa A. Carbone, *Youth and Beauty: Art of the American Twenties* (New York: Skira Rizzoli Publications and Brooklyn Museum, 2011), 115.

¹⁰ Quoted by Lois Gordon and Alan Gordon, *American Chronicle: Year by Year Through the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 298.

¹¹ "Around the Automobile," The Museum of Modern Art, New York, press release (11 December 1965), www.moma.org/docs/press_archives/3561/releases/MOMA_1965_0137_133.pdf, (retrieved 2 February 2010).

¹² Aldous Huxley satirized Henry Ford throughout *Brave New World*, with continuous references to Ford as the supreme being, "Our Ford." While the futuristic tale is set in London, the importance of Ford and the Model T gives the text an "Americanized" subtext. Jerome Meckier, "Aldous Huxley's Americanization of the 'Brave New World' Typescript," *Twentieth Century Literature* 48, no. 4 (Winter 2002) 427-460.

Chapter One

Auto-Start: Establishing an Iconography

No innovation altered American life during the first half of the twentieth century as dramatically as the automobile. Initially an expensive curiosity, the automobile's widespread use came after the introduction of the Ford Model T in 1908. By 1927, more than half of all American families owned an automobile and auto manufacturing was the nation's leading industry, reaching a peak of more than five million vehicles produced in 1929.¹ Artists responded to the expanding presence of motor vehicles in multiple and varied ways that reflected not only individual artistic tastes and styles, but also the artists' personal experiences and associations as motorcar drivers and passengers. The auto, both in reality and art, became a permanent fixture of the American landscape, "as much a landscape element as are trees and mountains," observes art historian Paul Karlstrom.² Artists pictured the ubiquity of the automobile and demonstrated through their designs how it touched virtually every aspect of American life, altering the way people traveled, conducted business and socialized. They show how motorcars filled city streets and alleviated the isolation of those living in rural areas. Tourism boomed with the widespread use of automobiles; many artists became tourists themselves, and they pictured ways in which the nation's infrastructure was altered to accommodate the demands of motorists. Production slowed dramatically during the economically stressed 1930s, but motoring remained popular and the family car was routinely favored over virtually all other possessions. In the 1940s, manufacturing plants shifted much of their attention from automobiles to military equipment production, but once the Second World War ended the demand for new vehicles quickly outpaced availability.

The artists who responded to the automobile in their work faced several challenges, starting with the appearance of the motorcar as a machine in the landscape. “Technical subjects require technical knowledge,” observes art historian D.B. Tubbs, which makes the accurate rendering of motorcars a different and more difficult task than picturing a horse and buggy.³ Artists also had to contend with the many conceptual associations closely tied to the automobile: personal freedom, class and status, national identity, industrialism, individualism, modernity, sexuality, space and time, speed, and its counterpart, danger. These associations were introduced and reinforced through a proliferation of illustrated advertisements, literature, music, motion pictures and the fine arts. Gender roles were both challenged and reinforced through auto-related imagery, and societal constructions of race were made apparent. In short, the painters and printmakers who included the motor vehicle in their work confronted the societal and industrial impact of the motorcar, the elements that make up America’s automobility. Introduced in this chapter are some of the many ways in which American artists visualized the initial reception and eventual acceptance of the automobile, recognizing the complexity of associations linked to the iconography of the motorcar.

Conspicuous Consumption

Our automobile age began in earnest in 1893 when brothers Charles and J. Frank Duryea became the first Americans to build successfully a combustion-engine vehicle, which they drove on the streets of Springfield, Massachusetts. Three years later, they made and sold thirteen vehicles, becoming the initial American automobile manufacturer.⁴ The Duryeas quickly had numerous competitors in the steady progression of America becoming the world’s predominant auto-nation. The automobile’s origins, however, are European and the original cars sold in

America were imports. France is the first country where motorcars were driven in significant number; even the term *automobile*, widely used in the States by 1899, is French in origin.⁵ “European by birth, American by adoption,” observes automotive historian John B. Rae.⁶ Not surprisingly then, the earliest significant painting of a modern, self-propelled vehicle by an American artist is that of Julius Leblanc Stewart, an expatriate living in Paris. Stewart painted *Promenade (En Promenade, or Les Dames Goldsmith au bois de Boulogne)*, 1897 (fig.1.1), for a predominantly European audience.

In France since the age of ten, Stewart was a well-regarded and successful academician trained under Jean-Léon Gérôme. Stewart’s meticulously finished, flattering depictions of Parisian high society and French aristocracy were regularly exhibited in the American section at the Paris Salon, where his paintings won official recognition.⁷ A sportsman who enjoyed hunting, fencing and bicycling, Stewart also was an avid automobile enthusiast. He owned an early-model Peugeot and was one of the first members of the Automobile Club de France, the world’s premier members-only motoring organization.⁸ Stewart likely pictured his own vehicle in *Promenade*, a large salon painting, measuring fifty nine by nearly sixty nine inches.

Promenade (En Promenade, or Les Dames Goldsmith au bois de Boulogne) portrays two fashionably dressed young women traveling in an open Peugeot, a small vehicle that included a single bench seat that would hold two adults. The emphasis is on the pair’s enjoyment of the vehicle’s accelerated forward motion. The duo speeds along a smooth dirt road and stirs up a trail of dust in their wake. The rush of oncoming air rustles the scarf held in the passenger’s right-hand as she steadies the brim of her hat with her left. A bull terrier stands at the fore, bracing itself against the wind. The forward momentum of the vehicle is further emphasized by the blur of spokes of the spinning rear wheel in the picture’s lower left, an artistic convention to

convey motion long used in images of horse-drawn wagons. The passenger, with a light smile and look of rapt attention, is clearly enjoying the exhilaration of the ride, while the driver intently concentrates on her driving, working the steering column with her left hand and accelerator and breaking mechanism with her right. Far from depicting a leisurely walk, the title *Promenade* appears deliberately ironic.

The active image of women motoring varies from Stewart's more typical depictions of society women at leisure, who rarely are shown doing anything more strenuous than arranging a bouquet of flowers, attending a luncheon or perhaps dancing with gentlemen at a formal affair. In *Promenade*, by contrast, the attractive women are shown as agents of their own destination, the motorized sisters of Charles Dana Gibson's contemporaneous, bicycle-riding "Gibson Girls" then popular in magazine illustrations (fig.1.2). The bicycle and automobile, both modern forms of transportation, allowed women to extend their social and geographic boundaries while simultaneously breaking stereotypes about inherent feminine mechanical limitations.⁹ The image of the "New Woman," as she would be called in America in the 1890s, was frequently featured in popular culture and literature of the era. These women pushed the envelope of socially acceptable behavior through their independence, interest in "masculine" pursuits, including bicycling and driving, and in their choice of clothing and personal style. They did all of this while maintaining their attractiveness and womanly manner, which was a large part of the appeal of Gibson's illustrations. As the women in *Promenade* demonstrate, the New Woman wore short-cropped or pulled-back hair and dressed in looser clothing than earlier generations fashioned after men's styles that allowed for greater physical movement.¹⁰

Although images of female drivers were frequently utilized in illustrations and manufacturer's advertisements to emphasize the ease with which a vehicle could be driven,

Promenade is a relatively rare depiction by an American artist of a female driver outside of commercial illustrations prior to the mid-twentieth century.¹¹ It is particularly noteworthy for its nineteenth-century origin, connecting women with the independence associated with automobility. Stewart's image recalls Winslow Homer's 1865 wood engraving of a female carriage driver, *Our Watering Places—The Empty Sleeve at Newport*, published in *Harper's Weekly* (fig.1.3).¹² Both share the thematic similarity of female drivers at the helm of a vehicle in motion focused on the task at hand, but Homer's portrayal of the aftermath of the Civil War is quite unlike Stewart's design of an enjoyable day of motoring. The passenger in each provides distinctly different narratives. The individual in Homer's *Empty Sleeve* is a disabled Union soldier who has lost his left arm in the war and is incapable of controlling the reins. The female driver is acting out of necessity rather than apparent desire and the accompanying text describes her actions as "unwomanly."¹³ In *Promenade*, the driver and passenger are agents of their own independence and a contemporary audience would have recognized, possibly even admired, these women as upstanding examples of the so-called New Woman of the age. Reflecting a change in attitude after three decades of asserting their public roles since Homer's engraving, the motorists are shown as respectable women of privilege and far from masculine or "unwomanly." Although women operated automobiles from the time of their introduction, driving was largely considered a masculine endeavor by society. Virginia Scharff, in her study on the history of women and the automobile, writes, "the auto was born in a masculine manger, and when women sought to claim its power, they invaded a male domain."¹⁴ While women would become frequent motorists, automobility has remained predominantly male-oriented. The Ladies Goldsmith, however, are afforded greater liberties as a result of their elevated social standing, and an appreciation of their status is important to the reading of the painting. Stewart was comfortably

part of the privileged class he painted and the composition lacks any note of criticism for the women's use of a motor vehicle. Without controversy, the painting was displayed at the Paris Salon of 1901.

For more than a decade after their introduction in America, automobiles remained expensive and beyond the means of most people. The majority of Americans in rural communities only read about automobiles in the newspaper or possibly encountered motorists taking weekend drives on country roads. Motorcars were considered novelties lacking practical merit and were largely thought of as little more than expensive toys owned and operated by wealthy hobbyists. Owners in New York City included notable society figures William Rockefeller and John Jacob Astor. These "millionaire automobilists," as they were called, were thought to be interested in driving as a thrill rather than any practical means of transportation.¹⁵ Not only were motorcars considered objects of conspicuous consumption, but motorists also often drove at speeds that needlessly put others in danger and frightened horses with the loud, backfiring machines. A writer in 1901 for the *New York Times*, for example, described the automobile as "the particular pet of select society ... the smart set," that was driven in "aggressive demonstrations of pride."¹⁶ Given such strongly worded opinions about motorists, it is not surprising that some early representations would be critical.

Unlike Stewart's flattering portrayal of high society motoring in *Promenade*, John Sloan's *Gray and Brass*, 1907 (fig.1.4), presents a motorcar in order to ridicule the wealthy motorists, expressing popular opinion. The canvas pictures the broadside of a chauffeur-driven vehicle, its convertible top pulled back, with two men and two women as passengers. The women in the rear seats are notable for their elaborate hats and scarves, while the presumed owner in front has the bloated air of self-importance. In his diary, Sloan wrote of being inspired

while walking in New York City and observing passing vehicles, with one making a particularly strong impression: “The leaves in Madison Square are commencing to show the touch of fall, very beautiful rich color and the brass trimmings of the automobiles dashing by on Fifth Avenue suggest a picture to me. The brass of the life of those riding.”¹⁷ Rather than making sketches on site, Sloan relied on memory of the scene for his composition when, the following day, he began work on the painting. He wrote, “... took a start on an idea which crossed me yesterday, a brass-trimmed, snob, cheap, ‘nouveau riche’ laden automobile passing the park.” The passengers appear to have made as great an impression on Sloan as the automobile itself. The design is an unusual instance of Sloan expressing social commentary in his painting, as he preferred to express such views in his illustration work.¹⁸ The majority of his images feature motorcars as part of the contemporary American landscape.

Sloan’s composition demonstrates similarities to a work of the previous century, Thomas Eakins’s *The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand (A May Morning in the Park)*, 1879-1880 (fig.1.5). It likewise pictures a group of wealthy individuals riding through a wooded park in an elegant, open-air carriage. The differences, however, are readily apparent. Gerald Silk, in his 1976 study of automobiles and modern art, writes of Sloan’s painting, “The passion of the moneyed classes for fashionableness and possession symbolized by the triumvirate of good food, fine clothing and fancy modes of conveyance, is transmogrified by excess; Sloan portrays an over-fed, gross, plumed, primped, dull-witted bunch chugging along in a car barely capable of supporting their ‘over’-weight.”¹⁹ While there are similarities between the two works by Eakins and Sloan, including the tree-lined settings, there are important differences as well. Where Eakins placed his carriage squarely in the center of the composition, Sloan expressed the fleeting quality of the scene by cutting the rear of the vehicle out of view on the right side of the canvas. This use of

cropping helps emphasize the spontaneity of the moment as the vehicle speeds past. Similar use of capturing only the front or back of a vehicle in a painting would later become a frequently used technique in artistic depictions of automobiles. Sloan's composition also consists of several aesthetic and thematic contrasts that help convey the intended message. The vehicle and its occupants are shown in sunlight, while people on benches in the background are darkened by shade. The wealthy automobilists wear much brighter clothing than the rather drab garments worn by those seated nearby. Further, the rich are in motion, while the poor remain in place.²⁰ The leisure class rides in their automobile in silence, with little interaction with one another, while the working-class figures on the benches lean toward one another, gesture and actively engage in communication. The machine appears to detract from social interaction.

The technical aspects of the vehicle proved challenging, and to ensure authenticity to the motorcar's design Sloan sought advice from a friend and auto-enthusiast, Sherman Potts. In his 1939 autobiography and treatise on painting, *Gist of Art*, Sloan wrote, "I well remember how earnest was my intention to bring out the pomp and circumstance that marked the wealthy group in the motor car. The car, gray trimmed with much brass gave me my title for the picture."²¹ The painting was rejected from the 1907 National Academy of Design's Winter Show. It remained in Sloan's possession for twenty-seven years, eventually selling in 1934 following an exhibition at New York's Montross Gallery.²² By this time, the full impact of the haughty display of the motorists would likely have softened with age due to the far greater number of cars on the roads. In the 1930s, the image could just as easily have been appreciated as not only a satire of the wealthy motorists, but as a nostalgic look back to the early years of automobiles.

Despite Sloan's expressed feelings against conveying his strong socialist politics through his paintings, he again included automobiles in a painting that harshly critiques conspicuous

consumption in *Fifth Avenue, New York, 1909-1911* (fig.1.6). Begun two years after completing *Gray and Brass*, the work pictures a crowded sidewalk filled with pedestrians and a row of cars parked along the curb. Unlike the adventurous Parisian women painted by Julius Stewart, here female passengers ride comfortably in the back seats as male chauffeurs do the driving. Along the sidewalk are several of these bourgeois passengers, women festooned with large, decorated hats, wearing expensive gowns that were at the height of fashion at the time. Just right of center is a stout woman who displays an air of self-importance, with her chin uplifted she expresses complete detachment from those nearby. The woman verges on caricature. Created during Sloan's active participation with the Socialist Party, it is a clear criticism of the women's displayed wealth. In their study of Sloan's city images, Heather Campbell Coyle and Joyce K. Schiller write, "If Sloan's sympathy for the poorer classes does not always emerge in his paintings, his antipathy for certain types of wealthy individuals is usually clear in his pictures of the privileged."²³ Sloan used modern and expensive automobiles to emphasize his point.

Ten years after painting *Gray and Brass*, Sloan returned to a similar theme of passengers riding in an open vehicle in *Passing Through Gloucester, 1917* (fig.1.7). Featuring an open car filled with occupants, *Passing Through Gloucester* recalls *Gray and Brass*, but is distinctly different in both composition and expressed sentiment. Where both show a passing vehicle filled with occupants, less emphasis is placed on the vehicle itself in the later painting, with only the interior and a small portion of the hood included. The vehicle is prominent in *Gray and Brass*, centrally placed and comprising approximately half of the painting. In the slightly elevated perspective of *Passing Through Gloucester*, the car occupies the bottom of the design, which is filled primarily with homes around Gloucester Bay, as well as a pair of pedestrians enjoying a walk on a sunny day. The criticism of the bourgeois motorists in *Gray and Brass* is obvious,

where in *Passing Through Gloucester* the narrative appears more humorous than critical, as the women in the rear of the automobile struggle to hold onto their elaborate hats to keep them from flying away. These two paintings demonstrate that in the course of a decade, Sloan, like the rest of America, had become accustomed to automobiles. Production of the Ford Model T in 1908 made the automobile affordable to most Americans. By 1917, automobiles were no longer strictly playthings for “snobs” and the “nouveau riche.” While in Gloucester, Sloan would ride in fellow artist Randall Davey’s vehicle, which Sloan described as “a blue Mercedes, a few years old but full of pep and power.”²⁴ Two years later, Sloan owned his first car, which he shared with Davey.²⁵

Modern Styles for a Modern Machine

Sloan was a member of the “Ashcan” school of art, led by Robert Henri, who emphasized the artistic exploration of the contemporary world among all walks of life. Attention to the subject matter of everyday life among working class urbanites, minorities and activities in ethnic ghettos, set members of Henri’s group apart from other artists of the day who continued to depict the idealized subjects of the Gilded Age. Recognized for their innovative subject matter, Henri and Sloan employed the loose-brush techniques that recall Édouard Manet’s designs and the slower pace of the nineteenth century. The automobile, with its accelerated horizontality and sleek designs, belongs to the modern age, the machine age, and the innovative painting styles associated with modern art developed at approximately the same time.²⁶ “Modernism is roughly coincident with the internal combustion engine,” observes art historian Lisa Tickner.²⁷ In Europe, the automobile was pictured by several artists working in a modern style, including Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Henri Matisse and Pierre Bonnard.²⁸ However, no movement or

group of artists responded to the motorcar as passionately or as frequently as the Italian futurists. The futurists selected the automobile as the ultimate expression of modern technology that incorporated the concepts of beauty, speed, dynamism and contemporary urban life and the car appears repeatedly in futurist images, poetry and literature. Giacomo Balla, for example, executed more than one hundred works dealing with the automobile.²⁹ Futurism was derived from the geometric and fractured designs of cubism. In America, by the early 'teens, the automobile, particularly the affordable Ford Model T, was already a common feature of any major city and it would not have carried the same cachet as it would in Europe, where cars were less abundant. Although the automobile never created a similar heightened level of excitement among modern artists working in America, the combined influences of cubism and, to a lesser degree its progeny futurism, are found in images of motorcars by a diverse group of American artists, including John Marin, Abraham Walkowitz, and Charles Demuth. A number of the images were created by artists who associated with the promoter of modern art, Alfred Stieglitz.

Marin demonstrated his adaptation of cubist forms and futurist ideals in his work, developed while in Europe from 1905 to 1910. After returning to the States, he used this new visual language to create a series of watercolors based on his experiences in New York City. The works feature towering buildings and city streets filled with activity, including the movement of automobiles, which, at that time, were still struggling for acceptance on the urban thoroughfares alongside pedestrians, trolley cars, and horse-drawn wagons. In paintings that include *Thirty-Fifth Street and Fifth Avenue at Noon*, 1911 (fig.1.8), and *Movement, Fifth Avenue*, 1912 (fig.1.9), skyscrapers are pictured as if built from so many faceted blocks that lean and appear to sway over the streets as if they may come crashing down at any moment. The roadways below are filled with kinetic energy, where stylized, barely identifiable motorcars realized through

watery touches help convey the impression of the city as a place of constant motion, of continuous comings and goings. In *From the Window of '291' Looking Down Fifth Avenue*, 1911 (fig.1.10), the perspective is elevated, looking down at the motorcars on the street, which are indicated through splashes of color. The view is from Stieglitz's The Little Galleries of the Photo Secession, better known for its Fifth Avenue address, "291," where Marin exhibited. In the catalog for his 1913 exhibition at the 291 gallery, Marin exclaimed how "the whole city is alive." He used terms that would have mirrored those of his Italian futurist contemporaries, describing the "pushing, pulling forces" found in the city and how "powers are at work pushing, pulling, sideways, downwards, upwards."³⁰ The written passages, matched in the modern style of his compositions, convey the city as a dynamic place of nonstop rhythms and the constant surge of people and machines.

In later paintings of New York, including Marin's watercolor *Street Crossing, New York*, 1928 (fig.1.11), and the oil on canvas *Pertaining to Fifth Avenue and Forty-Second Street*, 1933 (fig.1.12), the geometric shapes of his city portrayals are sharper, more rigid and pronounced. V-shapes indicate movement and may suggest the sounds of the city, including loud automobiles.³¹ Both picture the city from street level, its hectic pace and rhythm emphasized through distortion and rectangular shapes. Cars are blocked from full view by the pedestrian traffic, but in both works the circular shapes of tires stand out against the hard edges that make up the majority of the composition. The round tire in the lower left of *Pertaining to Fifth Avenue* is recalled in the green light of the traffic signal in the upper right. While the majority of motion on the road appears to be on foot, through the inclusion of the traffic light Marin demonstrates that by 1933, movement on the street was dictated by the automobile. Pedestrians crossed the streets at crosswalks, directed by the flow of motor traffic.

Another artist who emphasized the motion of automobiles within the city in a modern idiom was Abraham Walkowitz. He discovered modern painting while studying in Paris in 1906 and 1907. While there, he met fellow American, Max Weber, who encouraged Walkowitz's newfound interest in modernism.³² Returning to New York, Walkowitz was introduced to Stieglitz and exhibited at 291 for the first time in December, 1912.³³ With the exception of 1914, he showed there annually until the gallery closed in 1917. The city was of great interest to Walkowitz. He created a series of modern urban paintings between 1910 and 1917 that emphasized the role of the automobile. *Cityscape*, 1910 (fig1.13), pictures Manhattan from a pedestrian's perspective, with motorcars, delivery trucks and horse-drawn wagons lining the street. A conglomeration of buildings rises in the background, blending into one another in the abstract work. The clearest, discernible automobile in the lower right is identifiable by side windows that are set into an otherwise solid block of color atop circles to represent tires. It is the generalization of an automobile realized through simplified forms.

In later works, the city becomes more abstracted, with buildings and street traffic painted as design elements rather than representations of actual structures or specific automobiles. *New York*, 1917 (fig.1.14), is filled with an impossibly tight grouping of skyscrapers, their height emphasized by the vertical format of the composition.³⁴ Windows are realized in irregularly spaced dashes of color. From an elevated perspective, the street rises from the bottom of the design to meet and be enveloped by the soaring structures. It is filled with dashes and force lines of predominantly black paint to represent the rush of motoring traffic. The verticality of the skyscrapers, which appear bathed in light, is strongly contrasted by the accelerated horizontality of the motoring traffic, shown in shadow. No building is recognizable nor is any means of transportation detailed. Instead, it pictures Walkowitz's interpretation of the dynamic city, what

art historian Betsy Fahlman describes as “visual improvisation on the theme of the city.”³⁵

Structures dominate the composition, but the painting is made vibrant through the activity at street level. Realized in gouache on paper, *New York* resembles Marin’s watercolor cityscape of a few years earlier because of the water-based medium, the looseness of his brushwork, and the tension expressed in the cubist construction.

That the automobile was not given greater attention by Walkowitz, Marin and others can likely be attributed to their association with Alfred Stieglitz, who despised the look of most motorcars. Walkowitz spent considerable time at 291. Of the gallery and Stieglitz, Walkowitz claimed, “He was a live wire. Stieglitz was Stieglitz. And I stayed with him. I used to come into the gallery at ten o’clock and stay until ten at night. ... He was a good fighter, but he didn’t know too much about inner things. But he was like a good lawyer, he could fight. And that’s where he put it all.”³⁶ Stieglitz was an influential photographer and gallery owner who not only promoted modern art and the artists whose works he exhibited, but also supervised the direction taken by his artists. Stieglitz considered the automobile a hideous machine, particularly after the introduction of the Model T, which Ford designed for mass consumption. Art, on the other hand, was intended as a form of spiritual retreat away from commercialism and the crudity of everyday life.³⁷ The two things, art and automobiles, were simply at the opposite ends of the spectrum by Stieglitz’s account, with lofty concepts and individuality on the one side and base consumerism and mass production on the other. He questioned the general appearance of automobile design and he questioned its “so called usefulness,” opinions he certainly extolled to the artists under his personal guidance.³⁸ Artists in the Stieglitz circle, including Marin and Marsden Hartley, described automobiles in derogatory fashion in published accounts and personal letters to Stieglitz, although it is unclear whether this was from heart-felt conviction or examples of telling

the influential promoter what he wanted to hear. The automobile is included in works by artists of the Stieglitz circle, although its appearance is infrequent. When Stieglitz included automobiles in his photography, which was rare, it was often to question the changes that technology has caused in human interaction and land use.³⁹

Despite Stieglitz's personal views about the crudeness of the mass-produced automobile, Marin and Walkowitz explored automobility as a subject matter in their work, as did Arthur Dove, another artist in Stieglitz's inner circle. Dove was deeply interested in the observed world, conveying his interpretations and moods derived from nature in an abstract and rhythmic manner. "I no longer observed in the old way," Dove exclaimed, "and, not only began to think subjectively, but also to remember certain sensations purely through their form and color, that is, by certain shapes, planes of light, or character lines determined by the meeting of such planes."⁴⁰ His experimentations with materials and tactile surfaces led to the creation of roughly thirty collages, or "assemblages" as he called them, between 1924 and 1930 using found objects and appropriated imagery. *Long Island*, 1925 (fig.1.15), introduces a photograph of an automobile cut from a magazine and glued into place. The car rides over a hill in a landscape made of twigs, pebbles, leaves, grasses and shells, set beneath a painted sky. Living on a houseboat at the time, Dove was keenly aware of the separation of land and water. The shells lining the bottom of the image suggest a view of a passing vehicle along the shore in a creation of surreal image that stresses a dada sensibility. The photographed automobile—its hard body and engineered form—strongly contrasts the gathered, natural objects in *Long Island*. In paintings, however, manmade objects and organic nature are more likely to meld visually rather than clash. In *Phelps, New York*, 1937 (fig.1.16), Dove transformed motorcars into soft, biomorphic forms where metal surfaces seem to blend with the natural world.⁴¹ Realized in flowing, gestural lines, a vehicle in

the left middle-ground is recognizable by the placement of side windows and circular shapes representing tires, recalling the shorthand method of depicting a motorcar found in works by Marin and Walkowitz as well. In the foreground, a vehicle—likely a company’s delivery van recognized by letters on its side panel—is more fully realized, although it too is shown in soft, flowing lines and watercolor washes that blend with its surroundings.

The automobile appearing to blur with nature is emphasized again in Dove’s *Cars in a Sleet Storm*, 1937-38 (fig.1.17). The abstract, radiating forms suggest the frequent use of organic shapes in the artist’s oeuvre, expressing the artist’s stated desire “to give in form and color the reaction that plastic objects and sensations of light from within and without have reflected from my inner conscious.”⁴² The painting is Dove’s response to observation of automobiles in motion through sleet on a road near his home in Geneva, New York. Like much of his use of abstraction based on observed nature, the forms are unrecognizable on their own rather than something clearly inspired by automobiles. Three, roughly oval shapes fill the bottom portion of the painting, with the suggestions of rolling hills of a landscape behind. The title provides the inspirational source and helps clarify the otherwise obscure theme, as does a small watercolor study that features more recognizable detail (fig.1.18). It makes evident that the vehicle suggested at the left is shown from above and slightly behind, as it moves into the picture plane. The study makes clear the rectangular shape of the car’s roof and the position of the rear window. In the oil, the roof is outlined in white, with a further splash of white used for the window. The two shapes at center and to the right in *Cars in a Sleet Storm* face forward. The two, smaller oval shapes with each of the larger shapes might suggest oncoming headlights, although the study shows that the punctuations of color in the oval forms are to suggest the vehicles’ windshields. The front bumpers and headlights are just out of view at the bottom of the

composition. Formally abstract, both the oil and similarly titled study highlight the personal transformations Dove created from observing the natural world. The colors of the automobiles appear manmade in comparison to the muted earth tones of the distant landscape, particularly the reflective black to the left and variations of blues at center. Dove's abstract visual vocabulary served his emotive response to the inorganic machines seen in nature. "What Dove saw along the highway in Geneva is part poetry, part mechanomorphic fantasy," observes art historian Elizabeth Hutton Turner.⁴³

Auto Parts

Dove, Marin and Walkowitz all explored the automobile in the landscape or cityscape, at times abstracting forms to the edge of readability, offering few clues to discern the vehicles' presence. Marin and Walkowitz emphasized the roundness of tires and the void of windows in autos' chassis. In *Cars in a Sleet Storm*, Dove stressed the eye-like qualities of windshields and a rear window. The parts help explain the whole. Automotive parts were used in a different fashion by the French artist Francis Picabia. In his initial visit to the States in 1913, working in a cubist-derived manner, he explored the dynamics of the skyscrapers, bridges and general energy of Manhattan. His second visit from 1915 to 1917 saw his turning away from the built environment and toward a machine aesthetic and "mechanomorphic style," in which he drew from magazine and newspaper advertisements of automotive parts.⁴⁴ Speaking to American sculptor Frederick Macmonnies, who had recently returned from France and was reporting for the *New York Tribune*, Picabia stated, "Almost immediately upon coming to America it flashed on me that the genius of the modern world is machinery, and that through machinery art ought to find a most vivid expression."⁴⁵ The works indicate the hard, exacting style associated with architectural and

engineering schematics, and each is named after individuals or people he admired. They are arcane “object portraits,” as Picabia called them. They provide clues to indicate the envisioned relationship between the automotive parts in the designs and specific people. Inspiration for this new style can be found in the nonfigurative portraits by Marius de Zayas, the Mexican artist in New York associated with the 291 gallery, and the machine aesthetic employed by fellow Frenchman, Marcel Duchamp.⁴⁶

Picabia was an unapologetic automobile enthusiast, owning more than one hundred cars in his lifetime and expressing his enjoyment of spending time doing mechanical repairs and upkeep on his vehicles.⁴⁷ His passion for motorcars countered Stieglitz’s feelings against automobiles, but Stieglitz still saw fit to promote Picabia’s avant-garde art and featured his work in exhibitions at 291. Picabia playfully jabbed at Stieglitz’s distaste for automobiles in *Ici, c’est ici Stieglitz*, 1915 (fig.1.19), an object portrait that combines a draughtsman’s-like drawing of a camera atop a schematic of an automobile brake and gear levers. It includes, in the word play of dada artists, collaged, individual gothic letters spelling out the word “ideal” at the top of the design, along with a printing of the title and “*foi et amour*” (faith and love) to the left side. The camera has a broken bellows, which lists to the side. Stieglitz, represented by the damaged camera, is incapable of achieving the heavenly “ideal,” which is further emphasized by the automobile’s brake and gear levers shown in the parked position.⁴⁸ Examined in depth by several scholars since its creation, the work has been read as either a depiction of Stieglitz’s endless yet ultimately unsuccessful desire to achieve the “ideal” in art and life, his tireless (or tired) drive to reach the impossible goal, and, in contradiction, the paladin’s continued “faith and love” to accomplish his “ideal” goal, a protagonist ready to change gears and push forward.⁴⁹ *Ici, c’est ici*

Stieglitz was published in the July-August, 1915 edition of *291*, a modern art journal named for Stieglitz's gallery.

The object portrait of Stieglitz was one of several works by Picabia that incorporated automotive parts, and four others were included in the same 1915 issue of *291*. Each features aspects of the automobile that can be attributed to the various people involved with the journal's publication. *De Zayas! De Zayas!*, 1915 (fig.1.20), pictures overlapping schematics for electric and lubricating systems, suggesting the artist's role as organizing the journal and acting as "editor in chief," connecting all the necessary parts for publication.⁵⁰ Picabia's depiction of a spark plug, *Jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité (Portrait of a Young American Girl in a State of Nudity)*, 1915 (fig.1.21), pictures a spark plug, with the word "For-ever" on its side. It serves as an abstract, conflated vision of American female sexuality in general, as well as a sign of admiration for the role in the publication of *291* played by Agnes Meyer, whose financial support was the spark needed to create the journal.⁵¹ In the object self-portrait, *Le Saints de Saints*, 1915 (fig.1.22), Picabia imagined himself as a car horn in front of a piston. "Borrowing the form of the automobile horn from a magazine advertisement, in all probability the one in the June 23, 1915 issue of *Horseless Age*," writes art historian William Innes Homer, "Picabia used it to signify his personal traits, referring doubly to his own noisy personality and his fondness for automobiles."⁵² Picabia's time in the United States during the First World War was a critical period for his artistic development, which he would continue to refine into the 1920s after returning to France.⁵³

In a related approach to Picabia's object portraits, Charles Demuth visualized the movement of a motor vehicle to suggest an individual, concentrating on specific parts of the vehicle in *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold*, 1929 (fig.1.23). One of the most celebrated images in the

history of American art, it is an example of Demuth's self-described "portrait posters" series, which are paintings based on a billboard aesthetic that suggest individuals through associations of the pictured objects and words. *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold* was intended to bring to mind the poet William Carlos Williams through the visual interpretation of Williams's 1921 poem, "The Great Figure." The poem describes the sensation of surprise brought on by the fleeting glimpse of a speeding vehicle, specifically a red fire engine, one of the many hybrid adaptations of the automobile age. Hurling down a New York street, "to gong clangs / siren howls" into the night, the engine bears a distinctive golden number five.⁵⁴ Instead of picturing a recognizable fire engine, Demuth's composition shows only parts of the vehicle, most noticeably its headlights and axle, and the fire truck's gold "5." The composition is not specifically based on the lived experience of witnessing a zooming truck; rather it is drawn from the sharp word play describing those sensations found in Williams's poem. The painting includes the words "Bill," a truncated "Carlo[s]" and the initials "W.C.W." in direct reference to the poet.

Art historian Bram Dijkstra accurately describes the composition that "strains and pulls, receding and projecting itself again onto the canvas, its original movement in time transformed into visual tensions, caught with the warring pressure lines of darkness and lamplight, a golden object held suspended on the red fires of sound."⁵⁵ The dynamic diagonals, the repeated number "5" of the fire truck, the sharp, broken changes of color values and the urban setting all demonstrate a cubist sensibility that recalls the angular forms of Marin's and Walkowitz's auto-related works as well as the machine aesthetic of the futurists from a decade earlier. Where they accentuated the mobility of the automobile through emphasis on round tires, Demuth places attention on the vehicle's rolling motion—"and wheels rumbling"—through bowed forms at the painting's edges. The force lines radiate off the ends of the spinning axle and the curvature

within the receding “5” itself. Like the number of tires on a vehicle, the numeral repeats four times, and these repeated numerals are shown in varying scale, the last barely visible at the outer edge of the composition. The numeral, realized in a style likened to contemporary commercial stencil design, is comprised of a double set of circular shapes: the open portion at the bottom of the number and the bulbous end of the serif typeface.⁵⁶ These curvilinear forms play off the engine’s round, bright lights. The painting suggests the dramatic and spliced-together movement to which Americans had become accustomed by watching moving pictures where locomotives, police cars, fire engines and runaway automobiles threatened to burst through the picture screen.⁵⁷ Although not a movie, *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold* is a *motion* picture.

Auto Manufacturing

The images of Picabia and Demuth concentrate on specific machine parts, separating their designs from those of Marin, Walkowitz and Dove. Especially in Picabia’s “object portraits,” the precision with which he creates his images speaks to the factory production of the items pictured. These are not hand-made items, but rather the types of things made in manufacturing plants. Henry Ford capitalized on the efficiency of automobile manufacturing, creating large plants filled with a wide variety of machines and conveyor belts to mass produce automobiles and automotive parts. Although there were many other auto makers, Ford more than any other individual is associated with auto-plant engineering. A photograph of the inner workings at a Ford plant can be read, in the abstract, as a type of “object portrait” of the man himself and would have been read that way by people throughout the country. Of his output, production, and success, biographer Steven Watts writes of Ford, “His fellow citizens responded with a kind of worship, and his assembly line, much like the Model T it produced, became a

symbol of modern America and its prosperity.”⁵⁸ The manufacturing of automobiles became a component in visualizing American automobility, similar to roads, bridges and gas stations. Among those artists who created images of automobile plants are Charles Sheeler and Diego Rivera, both commissioned by Ford Motor Company to picture the River Rouge manufacturing facility in Dearborn, Michigan.

Splitting his work between painting and photography, Sheeler was hired in 1927 to photograph the newly-completed River Rouge plant. It was then the largest industrial complex in the world, covering more than 2,000 acres and employing 75,000 workers.⁵⁹ It was built to produce Ford’s new line of automobile, the Model A, the replacement for the once enormously popular Model T. Without a specific purpose in mind other than using the images for general promotional material, Sheeler was commissioned to document the plant. Sheeler spent six weeks at the complex. Of the thirty-two photos produced for the company, ten were used for public relations on covers of the *Ford News* bimonthly newsletter from 1927 to 1931 and several appeared in various periodicals (fig.1.24).⁶⁰ The photos are reverential to technology, idealizing the River Rouge plant as a cathedral of modern innovation and the power of industry.⁶¹ They recall President Calvin Coolidge’s proclamation: “The man who builds a factory builds a temple. The man who works there worships there.”⁶²

In addition to the official photographs Sheeler gave to Ford Motors, he took reference photographs to be used as studies for works in other media. “When I got out there, I took a chance on opening the other eye, and so I thought maybe some pictures could be pulled out.”⁶³ From his photographic studies, between 1928 and 1936, Sheeler created one lithographic print, three drawings, three water soluble and four oil paintings based on his photos, with a fifth tempera painting produced in 1947.⁶⁴ All are designs realized in Sheeler’s precisionist style and

closely relate to their photographic sources. He created his oil paintings by projecting the images onto the canvas and tracing the compositions.⁶⁵ As a result, the images possess an unsettling quietness, as if the industrial complex exists somehow in a vacuum.

The photographs and subsequent paintings focus on the plant's buildings and industrial machines, but given the purpose of the plant conspicuously absent are automobiles. Not a single automobile or automotive part is included in any of Sheeler's River Rouge images. Instead, the grandeur of the complex is meant to convey the awe-inspiring strength and power of Ford Motors and American industrialism. The series of photographs and paintings are a glorification of not just Ford—Motors and Henry—but of national ingenuity. Nationalism is apparent in the title of *American Landscape*, 1930 (fig.1.25). In the related *Classic Landscape*, 1931 (fig.1.26), the title indicates it is more than a contemporary factory, but a monument for the ages and a lasting shrine to the automobile and machine age. "It may be true that our factories are our substitute for religious expression," claimed Sheeler.⁶⁶

As a temple to withstand the tests of time, however, it is apparently not a place for mere mortals. No people are included in *Classic Landscape*, nor is there even the suggestion of organic life. It is a built environment without workers. A solitary figure is pictured in *American Landscape*, but his presence is minimized, shown at a distance in the middle-ground from across the river. He is dwarfed by the surrounding cranes, silos, railcars, and a towering smokestack. The photographs focus on the mechanisms of industry rather than on the factory's employees, but when translated in painting they suggest a different meaning altogether. Painted in the most severe years of the Great Depression, the composition's absence of workers is reflective of the times, since industry was failing to provide steady employment. The seemingly deserted *Classic* and *American* industrial-scapes read as ironic titles under the economic circumstances. Karen

Lucic, in her study of Sheeler and his industrial imagery, suggests that the artist's compositions no longer praise the mighty factory, but rather they "conveyed a haunting sense of absence, much more pointedly than in the River Rouge photographs."⁶⁷ Sheeler's paintings are dramatically different from the mural cycle by Mexican artist Diego Rivera painted for the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1932 (fig.1.27-1.28), a gift from Edsel B. Ford, president of both Ford Motor Company and the Detroit Arts Commission.⁶⁸

Based on tours Rivera took of River Rouge, his North and South wall frescoes for the Institute's Garden Court focus on the manufacturing that happened inside the plant and the processes of automobile production itself. Where Sheeler's images are quiet, Rivera's appear to scream with the activity of machines and people. The North wall pictures the creation of engines and transmissions for the Ford V-8, from the initial stages of blast furnace smelting to the final line of production.⁶⁹ Men lean left and right, pulling heavy engine blocks on wheeled carts or working various tools and heavy equipment. On the South wall is shown the final production of the vehicles, with men pressing the chassis into shape, lowering engines into place and welding and buffing the metal. A completed vehicle is located at the end of the production line, in the center of the composition, a tiny car driving into the distance (fig.1.29). Rivera, a devout Marxist, depicts the workforce as multiracial, although the production is almost exclusively a masculine enterprise. Among workers, women are separated from the men, shown in the upper right, sewing seat upholstery (fig.1.30).⁷⁰ In the lower right are portraits of Edsel Ford and William Valentiner, who holds paperwork dedicating the mural project, recalling the patrons of Renaissance paintings, a fitting attribute given the artist's use of the Italian Renaissance fresco technique.⁷¹ Rivera also painted Ford's portrait on canvas, where he stands before a table holding the tools of an engineer in front of a blackboard with a line drawing of the Ford V-8 (fig.1.31).

Sheeler ignored the worker in his compositions of River Rouge, while Rivera exaggerated the number of laborers used in automobile manufacturing. Photographs from the same period show that there were far fewer workers along the assembly line than the shoulder-to-shoulder placement of figures in the murals. Although he pictured several identifiable figures, many of the workers appear almost machine-like as they fulfill their duties—automatons numbed to the claustrophobic conditions of their labor. On numerous grounds, the works were criticized in the press, where they were called “a slander to Detroit workingmen.”⁷² In response, in *Art Digest* Rivera claimed, “I paint what I see. Some society ladies have told me they found the murals cold and hard. I answer that their subject is steel, and steel is both cold and hard.”⁷³ Even workers after their shift appear stiff, slightly hunched and walking in tight formation as if still aligned along the plant floor. In a predella panel on the south wall, workers on a walkway cross a road, away from the factory and toward a parking lot (fig.1.32). The lot is filled with vehicles parked in unrealistically tight rows that continue into infinity, exceeding even the possibilities of the River Rouge plant. It is dramatically different from the depiction of auto workers in John Falter’s painting *Changing Shifts*, c.1950 (fig.1.33). Where Rivera depicts hunched workers, Falter shows individuals at the end of a day’s work. Across a parking lot filled with newer model vehicles, workers are shown headed to work while others end their shift, some being greeted at the gate by loved ones. “The bonds of family and fellowship in a prospering post-war community are emphasized,” writes art historian Charles C. Eldredge, “not the shackles imposed by capitalist management.”⁷⁴ Unlike Sheeler’s and Rivera’s designs, this focus is on the workers as individual employees, neither ignored nor engaged in labor. Rather, it is a depiction of prosperous times and satisfied workers, a post-war utopian work place.

Visualizing Speed and Danger

What is not found in any of the factory paintings are signs of the danger people faced working at an industrial site. Yet, automobility, from manufacturing to the risks that come with driving, is associated with danger. Part of the enjoyment of looking at a picture like Demuth's *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold*, for instance, is the vicarious thrill it suggests by making visual the sensation of a speeding motor vehicle. Where Julius Stewart pictures the exhilaration motorists can feel while driving briskly in *Promenade*, Demuth expresses the startling adrenaline rush from a sudden and close encounter with a hurtling vehicle. The quickness of the fire engine described in William's poem is vibrantly conveyed through Demuth's use of geometric angles and repeated receding forms in his cubist design. Walkowitz accomplished a similar effect with his use of dashed, receding lines in *New York*. Excitement from observing automobiles in motion was part of the motorcar's appeal from the beginning.⁷⁵ With accelerated speed comes danger, hinted at in Dove's *Cars in a Sleet Storm* by the inherent threat of driving during inclement weather.

Traffic accidents and hazards motorcars caused to others were apparent practically from the beginning of the automobile age. The first recorded death of a pedestrian in the U.S. happened in New York City on September 13, 1899.⁷⁶ The fear and anger over unsafe and speeding motorists were most acutely felt in urban settings, where cars and pedestrians were brought together in higher numbers. Images of impending danger and auto accidents in urban settings are explored in detail in Chapter Two of this study. Rural communities, however, also were concerned about automobile safety and laws were passed in many areas to slow "speed demons" in their "devil wagons."⁷⁷ Regionalist painter Grant Wood—an artist whose idealized paintings of rural landscapes are dotted with nostalgic horse-drawn carriages more often than

modern motorcars—painted an iconic image of the perils of American automobility in *Death on Ridge Road*, 1935 (fig.1.34). It shows a small stretch of rural road a moment before an impending collision. A long, low-riding limousine moving upward on the embankment of a narrow, two lane road has passed a slower Ford Coupe. The limousine is drifting back in to the right lane just as a large truck, coming from the opposite direction, is cresting the hill. The truck fills most of the roadway, seconds before the inevitable “death” occurs. The red truck makes a visual contrast with the nearby green fields and virtually every aspect of the composition—the winding road, approaching storm, staccato-like rhythm of the leaning fence posts, the cruciform telephone poles—adds to the narrative’s heightened drama. The seemingly out-of-place urban limousine passing the slower Ford, the vehicle preferred by rural farmers, suggests a crash of not only machines, but one of urban and rural life. Art historian Wanda M. Corn writes, “The speeding car seems completely out of place in the country landscape, as does the truck, a sign of modern commerce, and the telephone lines, representing the intrusion of new technology.”⁷⁸ Corn reads *Death on Ridge Road* as a “the artist’s metaphor for the social upheaval of his own times.”

The unavoidable certainty of a collision is likewise featured in Benton Spruance’s *Road from the Shore*, 1936 (fig.1.35). From a birds-eye view looking at a filling station at night, elongated cars are shown with directional lines streaming off them to indicate high rates of speed. The automobiles are exaggeratedly crammed together on the roadway, with two appearing to race toward one another, a split second from an apparently unavoidable head-on collision. Hovering over the scene with its arms spread wide is the caped, skeletal figure of Death. The composition is a stark warning to motorists about the dangers associated with automobility. Spruance turned to the subject of auto danger again in two versions of *Highway Holiday*, 1934-

35 (fig.1.36-1.37). Speeding automobiles drive over fallen bodies in both designs. One print features a skeletal driver and passengers in one of the zooming vehicles, recalling *Calaveras* figures by nineteenth-century Mexican printmaker, José Posada. In Spruance's similarly designed variation, the windows of the vehicle are opaque, but the scene is activated by a hand reaching up from a pile of what appears to be corpses beneath the cars' wheels. In making automobile imagery, Spruance thought its use infrequent in art. In a letter to Philadelphia Museum of Art print curator Carl Zigrosser, he incorrectly claimed that automobiles were "not being done by anyone else."⁷⁹ Spruance regarded this as an opportunity, writing, "and while I am aware that their perpetuity as art forms depends on everything else but subject—still they sort of form a contribution, don't they?"

A Pregnant Image of Modernity

Regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton also pictured automobiles in his work and was keenly aware of how the introduction of contemporary items can dramatically alter a painting's narrative. He successfully updated age-old stories through his use of contemporary clothing and hairstyles, architecture, and, at times, automobiles. In *Susanna and the Elders*, 1938 (fig.1.38), for example, the Old Testament morality tale is unquestionably brought into the twentieth century by the inclusion of a Model T parked in the background. The composition of elderly men leering at Susanna's nude body, a popular subject with artists since the Italian Renaissance, is shown as contemporary through the clothing and high heel shoes set on the river's edge, her modern hairstyle, and red nail polish. While critics, like the male elders in the painting, focused on Susanna's nudity, they made little notice of the automobile. Benton also included an auto in his updated version of the Biblical parable in *The Prodigal Son*, c.1939-41 (fig.1.39). Instead of

returning to find comfort in his father's blessings, the modern-day son returns to a homestead in ruins and its livestock deceased, reduced to a single skeleton portrayed in the foreground. As it had done in *Susanna*, the automobile in *The Prodigal Son* serves to pull the story out of a historical past and ground it in the present, amid the devastating and lasting effects of the Great Depression.

A contribution of the automobile in American art is the subject matter that, like skyscrapers in New York or Chicago, provided artists with the opportunity to make a modern statement. Unlike the tall buildings of cityscapes, the automobile was seen in virtually all regions of the nation. In a landscape setting, it serves as a pregnant image of modernity that can prove a shock to the expected view. Anticipating a visual escape from the man-made environment, one is surprised to find what Leo Marx, in 1964, succinctly described as the "machine in the garden." Writing of the interruption of the railway in natural settings described in nineteenth-century literature, Marx states, "Most important is the sense of the machine as a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction. It invariably is associated with crude, masculine aggressiveness in contrast with the tender, feminine, and submissive attitudes traditionally attached to the landscape."⁸⁰ Numerous painters in the nineteenth century introduced the railway in landscape paintings to designate the contemporary world. The automobile likewise announced the machine age to a twentieth-century audience. These technological intrusions into the landscape indicate the visual break from the pastoral ideal.

Ernest Blumenschein, a founding member of the Taos Society of Artists, spent the majority of his career in New Mexico. He changes a pastoral setting with the introduction of a single automobile in *Eagle Nest Lake, No. 4*, 1933 (fig.1.40), a small detail that dramatically alters the reading of the work. The largely traditional Taos colony of artists was a group whose

paintings art historian Erika Doss recently described as “nostalgic and anti-modernist longings for a pre-industrial past.”⁸¹ Blumenschein, however, often introduced modern subjects and contemporary artistic ideas in his work. He wrote, “It is some solace to be an artist in the transitional stage – between movements” and to “naturally form the bridge between the conservatives and the moderns.”⁸² The inclusion of an automobile in *Eagle Nest Lake, No. 4*, is an example of Blumenschein’s acceptance of the modern world, setting him apart from the majority of his Taos Society associates. From a distance, the landscape pictures a row of fishermen along the shore of a mountain lake, their poles arcing in the air.⁸³ There are no indications that the lake is a modern, man-made reservoir, created in 1920. The scene appears timeless, in the tradition of the Taos Society, with the exception of the rear end of a motorcar in the lower left. The distinctive, round spare tire above the back bumper is a minor detail that instantly signifies the painting as neither nostalgic nor a longing for a pre-industrial past, but as a work belonging to the modern era. The vehicle was possibly Blumenschein’s own 1924 Ford.⁸⁴

The motorcar’s presence in Blumenschein’s painting demonstrates its ability to carry people great distances and to remote regions with relative ease. Automobiles helped redefine our understanding of space, which is best demonstrated in paintings of the vast, wide-open land of the American West. The machine’s presence in a painting indicates that the expanse shown or suggested is manageable and the distance has been mitigated. With an automobile, no longer were such grand vistas meant as forbidding and difficult terrain. Maynard Dixon’s *Home of the Desert Rat*, 1944-45 (fig.1.41), presents a mountainous region of Nevada far removed from urbanization. The only indications of human presence are a small house with an automobile parked in the front, in the lower left. The composition recalls nineteenth-century paintings, like Frederic Edwin Church’s *A Country Home*, 1854 (fig.1.42), of a simple dwelling surrounded by

nature. Prior to the invention of the automobile, many people lived their entire lives within a few miles of their places of birth. Church's painting gives a sense of timelessness; one can imagine a family living and working the nearby land for years on end. Were it not for the automobile in *Home of the Desert Rat*, the home could represent a lonely dwelling of a true desert hermit. The car, however, dramatically modifies this reading. The vehicle suggests the ability to scurry about the grand space, although it would eventually need fuel. The necessity for gas indicates interaction with others, softening the isolation of the home. Within reach of others, the cabin can be appreciated as a quiet and private retreat, a destination away from, but within reach of, a more populated area.

Introducing an automobile to a landscape image alters the way the land mass is read. Jerry Bywaters suggests this in a 1939 painting and 1940 lithograph, each titled *Mountains Meet the Plains* (fig.1.43-1.44). Both feature a great expanse of land beginning at a mountain range with a roadway bisecting the mountains. The difference is that a tiny automobile, moving toward the pass, has been added to the lithograph. The small vehicle speeds through the terrain and the grandeur of the region suddenly is presented not as a challenge, but as a place through which to drive. In this way, it alters our understanding of the region. As in Dixon's *Home of the Desert Rat*, the formidable terrain becomes an area easily traveled, nature having lost its grandeur at the hands of technology.

Inclusion of an automobile in a painting can also do the reverse. The remoteness of an area can be emphasized by indicating it is a place accessible only with a motor vehicle. Duane Bryers's *Manzanar Internment Camp, California*, 1944 (fig.1.45), pictures a quiet scene in a snow-covered landscape several miles from the base of mountains in the background. Just beyond an intersection along the paved stretch of road leading to the mountains is a pair of

structures, one in the middle of the roadway and the other to the right. They are guard stations with two figures standing sentry in front of the building to the right. In the center, a car leaving the mountain road is stopped, as a guard leans over to speak with the driver. Not shown is the titled Manzanar Internment Camp, where Japanese-American families were held during the Second World War. The so-called camp was located approximately 230 miles outside of Los Angeles, situated at the base of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. At the very edge of the roadway needed to reach the camp, the area's isolation is emphasized by the coldness of the snow-covered ground and distant mountains. As a place for holding detainees, it was ideal; it was far removed from populated areas and the surrounding terrain was inhospitable for would-be escapees. Weather ranged dramatically in the region from triple-digit days in the summer to below freezing in the winter. Without an automobile, the remoteness made escape unlikely. In this instance, the presence of the automobile mitigates the isolation of the region while simultaneously emphasizing it.

Automobility and Race

At the Manzanar Internment Camp, as suggested by Bryers's painting, imprisoned families were kept far away and out of sight, and their lack of freedom is accentuated by a lack of access to motor vehicles. It suggests a racial divide between those with and those without automobiles. Thomas Hart Benton routinely toured parts of the country in his car in the 1920s and 1930s, and he witnessed the changes that took place as people adapted to the use of the automobile. Benton's images at times indicate how many African-Americans were excluded from advancements in technology. *Lonesome Road*, 1927 (fig.1.46), features a horse-drawn cart driven by a black man across a set of railway tracks. In the background, facing in the opposite

direction, is a car parked outside a structure, with a telephone pole nearby. While the scene is of the contemporary world, the horse and buggy indicate a pre-industrial past and a contemporary reality for minorities, many of whom were kept apart from technological advancement. The buggy rider of *Lonesome Road* is literally on the opposite side of the tracks, unable to take advantage of modern technology. Cotten Seiler, in his study on the history of American automobility, writes, “Myriad representations of non-whites and immigrants as physically graceless, technologically inept, and deservedly indigent served as reminders of the incapacity of racial others to fulfill the obligations of citizenship in a modern and complex republic.”⁸⁵

The separation of non-whites from technological advancement has a long history in American art. Numerous images emphasize the “primitive” nature of American Indians, for example, who are shown as perpetually apart from industrialization. Asher B. Durand’s *Progress (The Advance of Civilization)*, 1853 (fig.1.47), or Henry Farny’s *Morning of a New Day*, 1907 (fig.1.48), each stress the divide that kept American Indians from taking part in “progress.” Prior to the automobile, the railway was commonly employed in such images. Trains were shown in the light of the future, while Indians heading in the opposite direction are cast in shadow, symbolizing their association with the past.⁸⁶ N.C. Wyeth adapted this convention in his untitled advertisement commissioned by Fisk Cord Tires in 1919 (fig.1.49). Similar to Farny’s *Morning of a New Day*, Indians are in shadow, heading in the opposite direction from technology, in this instance represented by the roaring convertible that passes them. The vehicle-stirred dust surrounds the Indians, recalling Frances Palmer’s 1868 print design for Currier and Ives, *Across the Continent / “Westward the course of empire takes its way”* (fig.1.50). In Palmer’s print, industrious settlers are shown chopping down trees, having built homes and a public school, and installed telegraph lines that run the length of the rails. To the right of the tracks, amid an area of

uncultivated land, sit two Indians on horseback who are about to be engulfed by a cloud of billowing smoke from the nearby train. Like Benton's buggy rider, they too are shown on the wrong side of the tracks when it comes to technological progress. However, Benton's focus is on the African-American, indicating the potential for empathy, while Palmer, like Durand before her, placed the Indians in the margins at the corner of the scene, visually pushing them to the far edges of society.

In 1937, Maynard Dixon encountered prejudice against minority ownership of automobiles when the Bureau of Indian Affairs commissioned him to create a two-panel mural relating to activities of the bureau. Landing on the themes of *The Indian Yesterday* and *The Indian Today* (fig.1.51), Dixon evokes the past through struggles between soldiers and Indians, with present-day American Indians pictured as successful farmers. In their contemporary position, he shows Indians as a family unit who, like the majority of farmers at the time, own a truck. Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, however, rejected Dixon's early designs of a modern Indian farm and specifically objected to the inclusion of the motor vehicle.⁸⁷ In her essay examining the working relationship between Dixon and the bureau, art historian Erika Doss writes, "Apparently, agricultural prosperity was good for Native Americans, but too much economic success – as in Indians owning cars (a fact of life in the American West for whites and Indians alike since the 1910s) – was deemed suspicious."⁸⁸ It was not unusual for Dixon to include automobiles in his work. In his role as illustrator beginning in the late 1920s, Dixon made several magazine cover designs for *Standard Oil Bulletin*, *Land of Sunshine*, and *Sunset*, which included twelve covers for *Touring Topics* dealing with the history of transportation in the West.⁸⁹ His mural designs of past and present Indian life included progress in personal transportation he knew to be accurate. Despite the objections to Dixon's design by the Bureau of

Indian Affairs, Indians and other minorities in America did own automobiles, although not in the same percentage as Anglos. “Mobility served as a form of empowerment, and it made Indians, African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, workers, and all manner of women just a little more threatening,” observes historian Philip J. Deloria.⁹⁰ Only rarely are non-whites shown as automobile owners in American art.

Economics and lack of opportunities often kept minorities from owning automobiles in great numbers, and when ownership was possible, the roads could prove to be an inhospitable and dangerous environment for people of color. As a result, African-Americans often drove predominantly within the neighborhoods where other blacks lived. One of those regions was New York’s Harlem district, pictured in Palmer Hayden’s painting *Midsummer Night in Harlem*, 1938 (fig.1.52). It shows a lively neighborhood filled with people of all ages celebrating the midsummer night, June 24, in recognition of the nativity of St. John the Baptist. At the end of the street is a church, suggestive of the strong religious following in the neighborhood. On the street, partially cropped on the left of the image, sits an automobile and its occupants. Criticized by some of his contemporaries for his use of minstrel stereotypes, Hayden claimed his work was reminiscent of the difficulties and pleasures known in black communities.⁹¹ Hayden’s *Midsummer Night in Harlem* demonstrates the importance of community to African-Americans in the 1930s; similarly, Archibald Motley’s images of black motorists were primarily from the Bronzeville neighborhood in Chicago’s South Side.

Whether from Harlem or Bronzeville, African-American motorists traveling outside of established and known areas encountered dangerous situations brought on by those who wanted to suppress minority upward mobility and who saw automobile ownership as a sign of such progress. “Nothing infuriated whites concerned with limiting status symbols more than black

drivers,” writes automotive historian Clay McShane.⁹² Guidebooks for minority travelers, like *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, and *Travelguide (Vacation and Recreation Without Humiliation)* provided information to safely guide black drivers toward hospitable places to eat, rest and find mechanical aid. In his study of the cultural history of automobile culture in America, Cotten Seiler observes a history of segregation, laws, regulations and social and commercial practices that prevented black drivers from fully enjoying the freedoms of automotive travel.⁹³ Segregation influenced everything from mechanical aid to food and shelter. In a series of paintings by William Henry Johnson, the artist stresses the necessity of self-sufficiency for minority drivers. In his *Breakdown* and *Honeymooners* series of 1940 to 1941 (figs.1.53-1.54), young families are shown working together and depending on each other for personal support. When the car breaks down, they make their own mechanical repairs, emblematic of the fact that minorities could not rely on others’ hospitality while motoring. The self-reliance expressed in the images extended as well to Johnson’s modern, pseudo-naïve style of flattened forms and strips of brilliant, contrasting color. The designs echo African heritage found in the quilt and dress textile patterns used by African-Americans in the rural South.⁹⁴ The automobiles in Johnson’s *Breakdown* and *Honeymoon* series are realized as boxy, awkward machines that sharply contrast the expensive, streamlined vehicles then popular with enthusiasts. The cars may provide transportation, but the desire for upward mobility was a steep climb.

The automobile was a dramatic subject for artists to consider, offering a host of possible aesthetic possibilities. From a curiosity to a significant aspect of American society, the motorcar provided artists with the means to express views on a myriad of issues, ranging from criticism of the wealthy to addressing the problems minorities faced on the road. The growth in automobility was roughly concurrent with the rise of modern art and several artists influenced by the quickly

evolving trends in European modernism explored the auto's visual possibilities. Others working in more traditional styles demonstrated how an automobile in a landscape altered the understanding of the space shown, as great distances were conceptually shortened when driving. Similarly, the inclusion of a motorcar in a composition announced its modernity. Use of the automobile was so widespread that its factories became symbols of America's greatness, although, during the Great Depression, that reading could be perceived in a negative light. The lack of opportunities afforded minorities to drive expressed another side of automobility often ignored in more conventional depictions. Artists working with automobile imagery in the early twentieth century developed the iconography of status, speed, modernity, danger and nationalism that would aid in defining America as the world's auto-nation.

¹ Automobile manufacturing was the leading industry in the country, "whether one measured it in terms of product value, number of employees, or amount of materials (raw and semi-finished) consumed." Michael L. Berger, *The Automobile in American History and Culture: A Reference Guide* (Westport, Connecticut, and London: Greenwood Press, 2001), xx; and John B. Rae, *The American Automobile Industry* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984; paperback 1985), 61.

² Paul J. Karlstrom, "Reflections on the Automobile in American Art," *Archives of American Art Journal* 20, no. 2 (1980), 18-19.

³ D.B. Tubbs, *Art and the Automobile* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), 34.

⁴ James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1988, 1990), 23.

⁵ Other French words that were also popularized by early motorists included *garage* and *chassis*. Patricia W. Lipski, "The Introduction of 'Automobile' into American English," *American Speech* 39, no. 3 (October 1964), 176.

⁶ John B. Rae, *The American Automobile: A Brief History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 1.

⁷ Ellwood C. Parry, "Julius Stewart, Spring Flowers (In the Conservatory)," *Phoenix Art Museum: Collection Highlights*, ed. Michael K. Komanecky (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 31.

⁸ Ulrich W. Hiesinger, *Julius LeBlanc Stewart: American Painter of the Belle Époque* (New York: Vance Jordan Fine Art, 1998), 62.

⁹ Julie Wosk, *Women and the Machine: Representations from the Spinning Wheel to the Electronic Age* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 115.

¹⁰ "Perhaps the most representative piece of clothing worn by the New Woman of the 1890s was the shirtwaist," writes Holly Pyne Connor, which is worn by the passenger in Stewart's painting. Holly Pyne Connor, *Off the Pedestal: New Women in the Art of Homer, Chase, and Sargent* (Newark: The Newark Museum, 2006), 4.

¹¹ The most recognizable or popular image of a female motorist from the early twentieth century outside of America is Tamara de Lempicka's *Autoportrait*, 1925. The Polish artist pictured herself seated in a green Bugatti for the cover of a German fashion magazine.

¹² Winslow Homer, "Our Watering Places—The Empty Sleeve at Newport," *Harper's Weekly* 9 (26 August 1865), 532.

¹³ Quoted in Connor, “Not at Home,” 8

¹⁴ Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 13.

¹⁵ Laws regulating speeds were passed in municipalities around the country in attempts to slow the “millionaire automobilists.” In New York, legislation was considered to imprison speeding motorists for up to one year. “What does the millionaire automobilist care about a fine of \$25?,” questioned the unidentified writer. “Long Island Man on Automobiles’ Dangers,” *New York Times*, 23 January 1902, 1.

¹⁶ “Topics of the Times,” *New York Times*, 19 July 1901, 6.

¹⁷ Quoted in Bruce St. John, ed., *John Sloan’s New York Scene from the Diaries, Notes and Correspondence, 1906-1913* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 154-155.

¹⁸ Sloan wrote, “There is also much talk today about socially-conscious painting. My old work was unconsciously very much so, especially before I became a Socialist [officially joining the Socialist Party in 1909]. After that I felt that such a thing should not be put into painting and I reserved it for my etching. They may say that I am now fiddling while Rome burns, but I question whether social propaganda is necessary to the life of a work of art.” John Sloan, *Gist of Art* (New York: American Artists Group, 1939), 3.

¹⁹ Gerald Douglas Silk, “The Image of the Automobile in Modern Art” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1976), 76.

²⁰ Heather Campbell Coyle and Joyce K. Schiller, *John Sloan’s New York* (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 2007), 47.

²¹ Sloan, *Gist of Art*, 215.

²² Sloan realized \$1,250 for the sale of *Gray and Brass* in 1934. John Loughery, *John Sloan: Painter and Rebel* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 110, 323.

²³ Coyle and Schiller, *Sloan’s New York*, 51.

²⁴ Sloan, *Gist of Art*, 249.

²⁵ Sloan purchased a chain-driven Simplex with Randall Davey, and the two, with their wives, attempted to drive to New Mexico together in 1919.

²⁶ Modern art is here recognized as Post Impressionism and the styles stemming from Fauvism and Cubism.

²⁷ Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects: British Art in the Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 77.

²⁸ Outlined in the Introduction to this study, the depiction of the automobile in European art has been the topic of several studies and exhibitions.

²⁹ Gerald Douglas Silk writes, “Because both the inherent characteristics of the automobile – speed, dynamism, and forward motion – and the emotional and perceptual sensations associated with auto travel – freedom, intoxication and simultaneity – were the embodiments of the major principles of Futurism, the car became symbolic of the Futurist movement itself.” Silk, “Image of the Automobile,” 7, 15.

³⁰ Quoted in Sheldon Reich, *John Marin: A Stylistic Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1970), 54-57.

³¹ Celeste Connor, *Democratic Visions: Art and Theory of the Stieglitz Circle, 1924-1934* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001), 152.

³² Max Weber was an early champion of Paul Cézanne among American artists and he attended the memorial retrospective for Cézanne in the 1907 Salon d’Automne at the Grand Palais, Paris. He was also the first to introduce Cézanne’s images to the States, bringing eighteen photographic reproductions from France, which he displayed in his studio. Weber would develop his own cubist language that displayed, for a time, the influence of Italian futurism. His thematic interests were primarily in landscapes, still-life and portraits, although on at least one occasion he created a pastel, *Automobile Ride on the Avenue*, c. 1915, which is now lost. In city images from 1912 to 1915 that express the influence of futurism, accelerated motion is expressed through interpretations of the subways and city trains as experienced by commuters. Because of their availability in the city, automobiles likely influenced his interpretation of the city, but there is no clear indication of their presence in his images. See Dominic Ricciotti, “The Revolution in Urban Transport: Max Weber and Italian Futurism,” *American Art Journal* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1984), 46-64; and Percy North, “Max Weber (1881-1961),” *Cézanne and American Modernism*, eds. Gail Stavitsky and Katherine Rothkopf (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 322-325.

³³ In an interview, Walkowitz claimed to have met Stieglitz in 1911. Others state he was introduced to Stieglitz by Marsden Hartley in 1912. See Abraham Lerner, Bartlett Cowdrey and Abraham Walkowitz, “A Tape Recorded

Interview with Abraham Walkowitz,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 9, no.1 (January 1969), 14; Sheldon Reich, “Abraham Walkowitz: Pioneer of American Modernism,” *American Art Journal* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1971), 79-80.

³⁴ Walkowitz painted *New York* the same year Italian futurist Gino Severini and synchromist Stanton MacDonald-Wright exhibited at 291, which likely reinforced Walkowitz’s own interests in pursuing his own cubist interests. Reich, “Abraham Walkowitz,” 81.

³⁵ Betsy Fahlman, “Abraham Walkowitz,” *Phoenix Art Museum*, 281.

³⁶ Abraham Walkowitz, quoted in conversation by Lerner and Cowdrey, “Recorded Interview with Abraham Walkowitz,” 14.

³⁷ Wanda M. Corn, “Toward a Native Art,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1981), 167.

³⁸ Of motorcars, Stieglitz claimed, “I hate the sight of one because of its absolute lack of any kind of quality feeling. . . . They are just *ugly* things in line and texture – in every sense of sensibility in spite of the virtue of so called usefulness.” Alfred Stieglitz to Sherwood Anderson, July 5, 1924, quoted by Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999), 23-24.

³⁹ Stieglitz’s photograph *Barn and Car, Lake George*, 1934, for example, features a close look at the side of a barn, its doors open wide to reveal an automobile parked inside. The vehicle has replaced the traditional horse and the barn now acts as a garage. The barn originally kept the horses from breaking free and running off, while now it protects the automobile from the elements.

⁴⁰ Arthur Dove to Arthur Jerome Eddy, *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co., 1914), quoted in Elizabeth Hutton Turner, *In the American Grain: Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Alfred Stieglitz – The Stieglitz Circle at the Phillips Collection* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995), 25.

⁴¹ A year after painting *Phelps, New York*, Dove moved to Centerport, New York. While there, he made works inspired by Route 25A, which ran past his home. Ann Lee Morgan, *Arthur Dove: Life and Work with a Catalogue Raisonné* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1984), 280, 289.

⁴² Arthur Dove, *Foreword to Forum Catalogue*, 1916, quoted in Carl Zigrosser, “The American Collection,” *The Philadelphia Museum Bulletin* 40, no. 206 (May 1945), 77.

⁴³ Elizabeth Hutton Turner, “Arthur G. Dove *Cars in a Sleet Storm* (1938),” *Seeing America: Painting and Sculpture from the Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester*, ed. John W. Blanpied (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 235.

⁴⁴ Francis Picabia was in New York from 1915 to 1917, with brief visits to Cuba, Panama and Barcelona. Mariea Caudill Dennison, “Automobile parts and accessories in Picabia’s machinist works of 1915-1917*,” *The Burlington Magazine* 143, no.1178 (May 2001), 276; Corn, *Great American Thing*, 66.

⁴⁵ Frederick Macmonnies, “French Artists Spur on an American Art,” *New York Tribune*, 24 October 1915, D2.

⁴⁶ Silk, *Image of the Automobile*, 80-83.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 95; J.H. Martin, “Ses tableaux sont peints pour raconteur non pour prouver,” *Francis Picabia* (Paris: Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1976), 42, quoted by Dennison, “Automobile parts,” 276-277.

⁴⁸ William Innes Homer, “Picabia’s *Jeune fille américaine dans l’état de nudité* and Her Friends,” *Art Bulletin* 57, no. 1 (March 1975), 111.

⁴⁹ In addition to those sources already listed in footnotes 43 through 47, study of Picabia’s object portrait of Stieglitz useful to the author includes William A. Camfield, “The Machinist Style of Francis Picabia,” *Art Bulletin* 48, nos.3/4 (September – December 1966); Willard Bohn, “Picabia’s ‘Mechanical Expression’ and the Demise of the Object,” *Art Bulletin* 67, no.4 (December 1985), 673-677; and Francis Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994).

⁵⁰ Dennison, “Automobile Parts,” 276-283.

⁵¹ Homer, “Picabia’s *Jeune fille*,” 110-115.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 111.

⁵³ Stuart Davis also suggested the spark plug in his work. Major paintings toward the end of his career feature the word “Champion,” the brand name of a major manufacturer of spark plugs. The designs indicate a billboard-like emphasis on presenting words and images with a brevity of information that can be quickly read and understood. It is an advertisement style for people moving quickly. “Champion” is included in *Little Giant Still Life*, 1950, *Visa*, 1951, and *Switchski’s Syntax*, 1961.

⁵⁴ William Carlos Williams’s “The Great Figure” is a short poem that reads: Among the rain / and lights / I saw the figure 5 / in gold / on a red / firetruck / moving / tense / unheeded / to gong clangs / siren howls / and wheels

rumbling / through the dark city. Reprinted in Edward A. Aiken, "I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold": Charles Demuth's Emblematic Portrait of William Carlos Williams," *Art Journal* 46, no. 3 (Autumn 1987), 178.

⁵⁵ Bram Dijkstra, *Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams: The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 78.

⁵⁶ Corn, *Great American Thing*, 206-207.

⁵⁷ Aiken, "Charles Demuth's Emblematic Portrait," 180.

⁵⁸ Steven Watts, *The People's Tycoon: Henry Ford and the American Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 135.

⁵⁹ Sheeler turned to photography as a means to supplement his income, but quickly excelled in the medium. He returned to painting in the 1930s. Mary Jane Jacob and Linda Downs, "Foreword," *The Rouge: The Image of Industry in the Art of Charles Sheeler and Diego Rivera* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1978), 7.

⁶⁰ Mary Jane Jacob, "The Rouge in 1927: Photographs and Paintings by Charles Sheeler," in *The Rouge*, 12-13.

⁶¹ The reverence to industry recalls the idealization of man's built environment expressed in Sheeler's short film *Manhatta*, 1920, made with photographer Paul Strand.

⁶² Karen Lucic, *Charles Sheeler and the Cult of the Machine* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 16; quoted in William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 188.

⁶³ Charles Sheeler, quoted in Jacob, "Rouge in 1927," 15.

⁶⁴ Charles Sheeler's works inspired by his River Rouge photographs are: *Industrial Series # 1*, 1928 lithograph; *Smokestacks*; *Ballet Mechanique*; and *Industrial Architecture*, 1931, conté crayon on paper; *River Rouge Industrial Plant*; *Classic Landscape*, 1928, watercolor; *City Interior, No. 2*, 1935 gouache; and *American Landscape*, 1930; *Classic Landscape*, 1931; *River Rouge Plant*, 1932, oil on canvas; *City Interior*, 1936, aqueous adhesive and oil on composition board; and *Industrial Forms*, 1947, tempera on illustration board.

⁶⁵ Barbara Haskell, *The American Century: Art & Culture, 1900-1950* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999), 154.

⁶⁶ Kennedy Fraser, "Charles Sheeler, 'River Rouge Plant,' 1932," Beth Venn and Adam D. Weinberg, eds., *Frames of Reference: Looking at American Art, 1900-1950: Works from the Whitney Museum of American Art*, eds. Beth Venn and Adam D. Weinberg (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999), 84.

⁶⁷ Lucic, *Charles Sheeler*, 102.

⁶⁸ Linda Downs, "The Rouge in 1932: The 'Detroit Industry' Frescoes by Diego Rivera," in *The Rouge*, 47-48.

⁶⁹ Linda Bank Downs thoroughly identifies the specific areas of production pictured in the *Detroit Industry* murals. Linda Bank Downs, *Diego Rivera: The Detroit Industry Murals* (Detroit: The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1999), 123-163.

⁷⁰ Women are also shown among spectators watching the final assembly process.

⁷¹ Downs, "The Rouge in 1932," 51.

⁷² Downs, *Diego Rivera*, 173-179.

⁷³ "Will Detroit, Like Mohammed II, Whitewash Its Rivera Murals?" *Art Digest* 7 (1 April 1933); quoted in *ibid.*, 177.

⁷⁴ Charles C. Eldredge, "Small Towns in Paint and Prose: John Falter, Edgar Howe, and Atchison, Kansas," *Spencer Museum of Art Register* 7, no.9 (1 July 2006 – 30 June 2007), 24.

⁷⁵ The first road race presented as a spectator sport was held in Chicago in 1895. Track racing soon developed, with the most famous event being The Indianapolis 500, which was originated in 1911 and continues today. Berger, *Automobile in American History*, xxii, 275.

⁷⁶ Clyde Haberman, "Marking Birth of Death on the Road," *New York Times*, 14 September 1999, B1.

⁷⁷ Laws included requiring drivers to light a Roman candle if they saw a nearby horse-drawn wagon. Another stated that someone of mature age needed walk one-eighth of mile ahead of the vehicle carrying a red flag, while another passed a law that stated "The traveling motorist is ordered to telephone ahead to the next town of his coming, so that owners of nervous horses may be warned in advance." Quoted in Michael L. Berger, *The Devil Wagon in God's Country: The Automobile and Social Change in Rural America, 1893 – 1929* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1979), 25.

⁷⁸ Wanda M. Corn, *Grant Wood: The Regionalist Vision* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 82.

⁷⁹ Spruance to Zigrosser, 17 April, 1937, quoted in Lloyd M. Abernethy, *Benton Spruance: The Artist and the Man* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1988), 41.

⁸⁰ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964, 2000), 29.

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- ⁸¹ The Taos Society of Artists, 1915 to 1927, was formed to create traveling exhibitions. Erika Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 89.
- ⁸² "Modern Art and the Art Academy," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, February 1926, page unknown.
- ⁸³ Eagle Nest Lake is located approximately thirty miles east of Taos.
- ⁸⁴ Elizabeth J. Cunningham, "Blumenschein, Modernism, and National Art in the 1930s," *In Contemporary Rhythm: The Art of Ernest L. Blumenschein* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 228.
- ⁸⁵ Cotten Seiler, *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 109.
- ⁸⁶ Ian Kennedy, "Crossing Continents: America and Beyond," *The Railway: Art in the Age of Steam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 131.
- ⁸⁷ Erika Doss, "Between Modernity and 'the Real Thing': Maynard Dixon's Mural for the Bureau of Indian Affairs," *American Art* 18, no. 3 (Fall 2004), 15.
- ⁸⁸ Doss, "Maynard Dixon's Mural," 15.
- ⁸⁹ John Ott, "Landscapes of Consumption: Auto Tourism and Visual Culture in California, 1920 – 1940," *Reading California: Art, Image and Identity, 1900 – 2000* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2000), 55 – 56.
- ⁹⁰ Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 146.
- ⁹¹ Sharon F. Patton, *African-American Art* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 137-138.
- ⁹² Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 134.
- ⁹³ Cotten Seiler recognizes the widespread influence of racism on virtually all aspects of automobility. He states, "From the earliest days of automobility, overlapping and mutually sustaining racist laws, social codes, governmental regulation, and commercial practices have attenuated the mobility of the black driver: segregated roadside mechanical and medical aid, food, and shelter; the discriminatory membership policies of motoring organizations such as the American Automobile Association (AAA); profiling of minority drivers by law enforcement and regulatory agencies; the racial-spatial politics of highway planning and placement, especially in urban areas; the racebound economics of auto financing and insurance underwriting; and the venerable practice of general police harassment for 'driving while black.'" Seiler, *Republic of Drivers*, 106, 108-109.
- ⁹⁴ Leslie King-Hammond, "Creating Church: William H. Johnson Revisions the Narratives of the Bible," *William Henry Johnson: An American Modern*, ed. Teresa G. Gionis (Washington D.C. and Baltimore: Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition and Morgan State University, 2011), 65-68.

Chapter Two

The Automobile in Urban Imagery

Automobiles have been part of the urban experience since their introduction in the last decade of the nineteenth century and artists living in major American cities would have encountered them as part of their daily lives. Individual artists decided whether to include automobiles in their art, but even if they did not, like other urbanites, they would have been acutely aware of the rapidly growing acceptance of motor vehicle use. Introduced in the 1890s, the peculiar object was dismissed by critics as a fad and plaything for the wealthy, yet within fifteen years the automobile became a common part of the American urban environment. Artists Colin Campbell Cooper, John Sloan, and George Bellows were among the first to incorporate the automobile in their painted cityscapes, reflective of their shared interest in picturing contemporary city life. Their works demonstrate the evolution of urban automobility, beginning with the unique machine that stood apart from other means of moving through a city. Depictions of crowded streets illustrate how motorists originally shared the roads with pedestrian traffic, horse and bicycle riders, horse-drawn wagons and carriages, as well as the popular electric trolleys, which predate the automobile by a decade.¹ Paintings and prints accentuate the chaotic nature of urban travel as various methods of transportation jockey for space on busy roadways. Over time, images show that the primary change automobiles brought to city movement was the displacement of people on foot who, prior to the motorcar, freely used the roadways as their own personal right of way. Recording the progression over roughly four decades, works of art highlight how automobiles, combined with auto-friendly legislation, eventually forced pedestrians to sidewalks as

motor vehicles claimed the streets. Artists recorded the evolution of the automobile's urban use tracing its development as an intruder that interrupted established means of mobility to that of the dominant character defining urban traffic to this day.

Where some artists featured the growth of automobiles in the urban landscape, others de-emphasized their impact by concentrating instead on human interactions. This required marginalizing automobiles so they appear only on the edges of compositions, if not omitting them altogether. Artists making such designs acknowledge the presence of the motorcar while simultaneously turning away from its full impact. Cityscapes of the 1930s and 1940s reflect dramatic changes that took place in urban transportation as compared to images from a few decades earlier. Having replaced horse-driven carts and moved pedestrians to sidewalks, motor traffic became the designated purpose of city streets. This chapter examines the art of American cities as it relates to the introduction and adoption of automobiles and the resulting changes in urban movement.

The development of the automobile occurred along with that of modern advertising. In 1910, one in eight of all mass-market print ads was for motorcars, doubling to one in four by 1917.² Americans in the early twentieth century would have been accustomed to seeing artistic renderings of automobiles in advertisements featured in major periodicals and daily newspapers around the country. Edward Penfield is noted for his artistic approach to illustrations in 1907 advertisements picturing well-dressed men and women in an urban setting climbing into a Pierce-Arrow (fig.2.1).³ The ad is an early example of the shift from text-heavy announcements to image-based designs. In comparison to the large number of commercial illustrations that often show motorcars in luxuriant detail, automobiles are rarely the primary focus in the so-called "fine arts" of

the same period. When cars are featured in paintings and prints, they are often a minor detail in a larger composition. The initial use of automobiles occurred in cities and the majority of auto-related artworks before the late 1920s is urban based. Rarely was the focus centered on the vehicles themselves, with one notable exception being John Sloan's, *Gray and Brass*, 1907 (fig.1.4). It prominently features the profile of an automobile passing along New York's Fifth Avenue. However, as discussed in Chapter One, the primary subject of the satirical painting is the wealthy occupants inside the vehicle. By lampooning the pompous motorists, Sloan's canvas is a send-up of the concept of sophistication and status being associated with automobile ownership as presented in Pierce-Arrow advertisements.⁴

Spirit of Urbanity: Skyscrapers, Traffic and Dynamism

Picturing the automobile's expanding role in the cityscape was a common method of capturing the spirit of urban life. Recalling the bird's-eye views of Paris by French impressionists of the nineteenth century, artists such as Colin Campbell Cooper, Julian Alden Weir and Sloan applied similar techniques and compositions in their twentieth-century depictions of American cities. Their works demonstrate the emergence of automobiles in two ways—as small components and as machines injecting vitality into urban scenes. By pulling back from the exacting details of the vehicles, attention shifts away from the automobile drivers. The motion of motor vehicles alongside other forms of city transportation offer aesthetic potential through the rhythm of traffic patterns. The verticality of the skyscrapers contrasts the horizontal motion on the streets below.

One of the earliest paintings made in America to include an automobile is Colin Campbell Cooper's *Flatiron Building*, 1904 (fig.2.2). As discussed in Chapter One, the solitary motorcar emphasizes the contemporary nature of the scene and complements the modernity of the newly constructed building of the painting's title. Despite its motorized propulsion, the automobile does not give the painting energy. Instead, the dynamic quality of the work is owed to the sum of all forms of travel and the irregular motion created on the angled streets. Despite the modern era represented by the skyscraper, the largely unregulated movement on city streets continues the haphazard traffic in urban centers that existed in previous centuries. The random traffic contrasts with the clean, vertical geometry of the contemporary Flatiron Building. As Cooper's painting demonstrates, the introduction of the automobile did not immediately alter the disorder of city traffic. The kinetic energy of New York streets becomes an inherent part of Cooper's picturesque images of modern monumental architecture. Cooper was particularly successful in his own time with frequent paintings of looking down on New York City. He was part of a generation of American artists working in cities who showed the influence of French impressionism in their work. Others included Childe Hassam, Guy Wiggins, and Julian Alden Weir.

Glimmering lights of automobiles are capable of adding to the romantic potential in depictions of the city at night, as in Weir's canvas, *The Bridge: Nocturne (Nocturne: Queensboro Bridge)*, 1910 (fig.2.3). Picturing the elevated view from his studio, Weir's impressionistic nocturne of New York City illustrates a metropolis filled with spots of light that stream from windows and street lamps. Light shimmers along the support cables of the distant Queensboro Bridge. Tiny automobiles below are identifiable by dual

headlights that appear as glowing yellow orbs. With interest in the modern city, Weir's design recalls earlier paintings of Paris by Claude Monet and Edouard Manet, particularly those of Gare Saint-Lazare. In these images, the Frenchmen depict the contemporary structures, softened through loose brushwork and the effects of light in the moist atmosphere. Weir adopted the French painting techniques to emphasize the distinctly American scene marked by automobiles and skyscrapers. In *The Bridge: Nocturne*, Weir muted details of the cityscape but emphasized the bold architecture of the urban skyline. The light from windows, lamps, bridge and automobiles depicts a ripe, new city with artificial, man-made luminescence generated by electricity.

The Bridge: Nocturne closely resembles the night scenes of James Abbott McNeill Whistler, in particular the urban painting *Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Old Battersea Bridge*, 1872-75, and *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, 1875. Weir's indebtedness to nineteenth-century modern painting is clear, with the city lights refracting through the hazy air and off the street and building below. The lights from automobiles, however, make it a distinctively twentieth-century creation. Weir's painting further recalls contemporaneous nocturnes by several New York photographers, including Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, and Alvin Langdon Coburn.

John Sloan also created a nocturne of New York City and, like Weir, uses the motorcar headlights for aesthetic potential in *The City from Greenwich Village*, 1922 (fig.2.4). Sloan's composition looks down along Sixth Avenue, with a view visible from the roof of his Washington Place studio. The city at night glows from artificial lights in buildings, the streets, and the passing train. Two cars are clearly shown on the street immediately below, one driving toward the picture plane and the other facing left, driving

beneath the elevated train, with the lights in the city suggesting others. The city was changing and Sloan did not like it. In an undated note, he wrote, “Automobiles fill the streets and Prohibition turned the night life of the city into a nightmare of clubs and commercial entertainment. The city was spoiled for me.”⁵ Interest in urban imagery was waning for Sloan, and for the rest of his career his attention turned away from the city and towards more portraiture and the American Southwest, where he spent his summers. Sloan’s preference was for New York before automobiles filled the streets. Others shared this opinion, since motorcars introduced a new form of danger.

Forcing A Right of Way, or Who Owns the Roads?

Many urbanites initially considered automobiles a misuse of public roadways. The machines were noisy, frightened horses and were capable of reaching relatively high speeds that needlessly endangered others. Automobilists were originally expected to give heed to other means of transportation and speeding motorists were a particular point of contention. Around the time Cooper painted his sole motorcar within a crowded urban setting, people were expressing negative opinions about automobiles and their drivers in countless letters to newspaper editors and in magazine articles. Historian Peter D. Norton writes, “By obstructing and endangering other street users of unquestioned legitimacy, cars violated prevailing notions of what a street is for.”⁶ Prior to the twentieth century, everyone used streets and a walking pace was considered the appropriate measure of city movement.⁷ Pedestrians were prominent on urban thoroughfares, but the smooth pavements found in some cities around 1900—including New York, Cleveland, Buffalo, Detroit, and Washington—proved to be ideal for motoring.⁸ Conflicts arose between

auto-enthusiasts and others on the roads, and the machines added to the crowded conditions already considered a problem for urban travel.

Automobiles are heavy, metal objects that move faster than horse-drawn carriages and are able to alter direction quickly, unlike rail-bound electric streetcars. The danger they posed for non-motorists has remained a primary concern for urbanites since motor vehicles began to appear in large numbers on city roadways. Many of the initial laws regulating motorcars were intended to limit the possibilities of accidents. For example, in 1900, New York's Parks Commissioner attempted to confine the use of automobiles to side streets because of the potential harm to others, leaving main thoroughfares for horse traffic.⁹ In a 1902 cartoon titled *Our Leisure Class Must be Amused*, by Frederick T. Richards (fig.2.5), a battle takes place between motorists and non-motorists. A solid line of vehicles faces a disorganized mass of horses, carts, and people of all ages. The automobilists carry flags that read "Death to the Horse," "The Public be D____," and "Who Owns the Roads?" In the space between the two groups, a lone, kneeling woman pleads for mercy from the motorists. The graphic image expresses the general feeling among urbanites, one held into the 1920s, that motorists were primarily responsible for all automobile-pedestrian accidents. "Yet it will be hard to make anybody but the reckless drivers of motorcars believe that the slaughter of pedestrians in the streets is ever purely accidental," proclaimed a *New York Times* editorialist in 1909.¹⁰ Similar observations were frequent in newspaper editorials and letters written by concerned urbanites across the country. Innocent pedestrians, particularly children, being run down by uncaring motorists were routinely featured in editorial cartoons, where the personification of Death driving a motorcar was a familiar image.¹¹ Parades were held and monuments built to

honor those killed by automobiles. The issue of safety appears in automobile-related imagery throughout the period of this study.

John Sloan was possibly the first artist outside of editorial cartoonists to address the subject of the clashing winds that occurred at the end of the triangular-shaped Flatiron Building, in *Dust Storm, Fifth Avenue*, 1906 (fig.2.6). A natural phenomenon Sloan witnessed on a Sunday afternoon, the swirling cloud of dirt and debris rises from the base of the building, sending people dashing to avoid the storm. The white, Sunday's finest clothing provides a stark contrast to the murky clouds of dust and the darker storm clouds above. As with Cooper's depiction of the Flatiron Building two years earlier, Sloan emphasized the modernity of the scene through the inclusion of a single automobile, which "chugs up the avenue."¹² In the foreground, children scatter, with one small girl having fallen on the street. She is being helped up and dragged to safety by a young boy. In this detail of the storm-caused commotion, Sloan captured one of the greatest concerns urbanites held regarding automobiles—the real danger to pedestrian's life and limb posed by the new machines. Two children are close to the front end of the oncoming car, which appears set to pass within a short distance of the pair. People flee from the blowing debris, but it is clear that the automobile is capable of causing far more harm than the swirling dust. Living in New York City since 1904, Sloan would have been familiar with the popular views about the dangers associated with the automobile.

In the following decade, Sloan's etching, *Sidewalk*, 1917 (fig.2.7), is more explicit in its warning of possible harm to pedestrians, especially children, posed by motor traffic. On a crowded sidewalk on the left side of the composition a mother bends forward, holding tightly to a child who stands between her legs. She looks cautiously to

her right, in the opposite direction of the oncoming traffic, in apparent preparation to cross the street. Too far from the curb to suggest it is parked, a vehicle approaches. Cropped at the right side of the composition, only the right front wheel and fender are visible. The image expresses the precautions people had to take of looking both left and right before walking across a city street. Sloan wrote of pedestrians being endangered by automobiles as an “everyday incident on New York’s East Side.”¹³ The introduction of the automobile brought a new form of multiple deaths, most of which occurred in cities and largely involved young pedestrians as victims.¹⁴ He again approaches the topic of safety concerns while crossing streets in one of his most celebrated paintings, *Sixth Avenue Elevated and Third Street*, 1928 (fig.2.8). A group of four women busy in conversation and looking up at the approaching train flee in the roadway in front of an oncoming car. A motorist steers the vehicle dangerously close to the women.

As Sloan’s etching and painting indicate, it took vigilance by those on foot to avoid becoming a victim of motorists. Newspapers reported hostile city crowds confronting automobile drivers and innocent passengers at accident sites. One news story observed, “In several cases recently, the prompt arrival of assistance saved the occupants of vehicles from indignities or injury from the hands of an angry crowd, even where these occupants were women, who presumably had no responsibility in the management of the machine.”¹⁵ By twice showing children, the most vulnerable of citizens, in potential peril from approaching motorcars, Sloan visually expressed the frustration many urbanites felt when it came to the dangers automobiles presented in crowded cities.

Automobile Growth and Claustrophobic Cities

Like Sloan, George Bellows was one of the urban realists who gathered around the instructor Robert Henri to paint scenes of contemporary life in and around New York City. In a major painting of 1911, simply titled *New York* (fig.2.9), Bellows depicts the transition from horse-powered urban movement to motorized transportation, with both methods sharing the roads alongside electric trolleys, bicycles, and pedestrians. *New York* emphasizes through exaggeration the confusion and restriction Bellows saw in the city. Showing the business district of central Manhattan, the painting describes a disorderly massing of people, horses, carriages and automobiles on an impossibly crowded street, with traffic crossing horizontally in the foreground and approaching the picture plane in the distance. Tall buildings adorned with billboards in the middle and background visually enclose the scene, adding to the claustrophobic appearance of city life. On the road, the motorcar is part of the overall mix of vehicles and one of many means of transportation.

In this studio work, presumably based on architectural elements of Madison Square at Broadway and Twenty-third Street, Bellows intentionally magnified the congestion of buildings, vehicles, and people.¹⁶ The loose, painterly brushwork adds to the dynamism of the painting. People and inanimate objects are handled in an abbreviated manner, at times appearing unfinished as items blend with surrounding objects. Figures realized in just a few strokes of paint come and go in all directions, giving the composition a haphazard vitality. A single police officer in the lower center-right of the picture raises a hand in an apparently futile attempt to direct the confusion on the streets, a hopeless gesture that accentuates the painting's chaotic nature.

Through a kaleidoscope of colors and shapes, *New York* is a scene of energetic and disorganized city life. Remarking on the overwhelming urban masses pictured at street level, a contemporary art critic exclaimed, “you feel the rush, you hear the noise, and you wish you were safely home.”¹⁷ However, despite the vibrancy of the painting, the actual movement portrayed is uncomfortably slow and deliberate. By 1911, the motorcar was already associated with concepts of exhilarating speed and personal freedom. But in Bellows’s *New York* the automobiles, along with all other forms of vehicular traffic, are at a near standstill. Clashing color combinations and bravura brushwork provide the painting’s energy, but otherwise there is little “rush” to be found. Horse-drawn and motorized vehicles inch along the road at a slow, stop-and-go pace, allowing pedestrians to cross easily the street between them.

In the left foreground of *New York*, a sanitation worker dressed in the recognizable white uniform is busy sweeping animal waste from the street to provide a clear path for pedestrians. This seemingly minor detail addresses one of the major differences between engines and animal power. Car emissions were considered preferable to horse dung, which helped turn the tide in favoring motorcars over horses in urban settings. A horse would release between fifteen and thirty-five pounds of waste each day on streets, with urination adding to the animal deposits.¹⁸ In New York City, this accounted for more than one million pounds of manure a day that needed to be hauled away.¹⁹ In addition, overworked draught animals that sometimes died in the streets were left there to decompose, contributing to the problems of urban sanitation and raising serious health concerns.²⁰ Further, the rattle and clacking from the thousands of wood and metal wagons and their contents combined with horses’ metal-shod hooves made for

extremely noisy streets. In comparison, the emissions from automobiles were thought to be no worse than burning coal, and rubber tires were far quieter than horse-drawn wagons. The growth in urban automobile popularity also stemmed from beliefs that people were safer in an auto than on a horse. Ultimately, a machine was determined to be more dependable and manageable than the volatile horse. By the 1910s, an automobile was faster and more manageable than a draught horse, and mechanical difficulties were largely thought to be easier to repair than curing a sick, aging or overwhelmed horse.²¹

Bellows emphasized the congested roadway through the use of a slightly elevated vantage point. By picturing the scene from just above street level—with the immediate crush of people in the foreground and a mass of vehicles just beyond—both immediacy and depth are added to the congestion. Placing the viewer in such a position removes the comfort of distance provided by aerial views of overcrowded cityscapes, as in Colin Campbell Cooper's *Flatiron Building* or Alfred Juergens's *LaSalle Street at Close of Day*, 1915 (fig.2.10). The aerial perspective provides remoteness from the hectic roadway and the distance softens the feeling of the frenetic pace and crowding below. The paintings were created from within high-rise buildings, with Juergens showing the thriving midwestern city of Chicago. As with Cooper's and Bellows's images of Manhattan, Juergens emphasized the heavy traffic of Chicago, teeming with movement of all kinds including at least one rider on horseback in the lower right, possibly a mounted police officer. Despite being paintings of different cities, the significant distinction among the three is the time that separates their creation. In just a few years, there is a marked increase in the number of cars on the street in Juergen's *LaSalle Street at Close of Day* when compared to both Cooper's painting of 1904 and Bellows' work of

1911. By 1915, the automobiles take up an entire lane of the roadway and are sandwiched between trolleys on one side and horse and pedestrians on the other. Those on foot continue to cross the boulevard at random points along their journeys.

Similar to Cooper and Juergens, Leon Kroll's painting, *Broadway and Forty-Second Street, New York*, 1916 (fig.2.11), presents a vantage point from high above city thoroughfares. Created one year after Juergens's view of Chicago and five years after Bellows's *New York*, Kroll's depiction of the famous New York crossroads demonstrates the continuing increase in the number of automobiles found in American cities. Not only are there more cars, it suggests the first indication of regulations being enforced on city streets that favor automobiles over other forms of transportation. Few people on foot can be discerned on the roads, with most shown walking on the sidewalks and out of harm's way from motor traffic. Unlike earlier images, the relative speed in cities had since accelerated well above the gait of pedestrians. Kroll's painting affirms that by the late 1910s, the automobile was no longer considered a new form of transportation and within urban centers it had begun to dominate the roadways. Motorcars had gained prominence and acceptance over the years and by the end of the decade were being given the legal right of way through favorable legislation and allowed to dictate traffic patterns on American city streets.

Just as paintings of different locations, artists and periods of time show an increase in automobile usage, such changes also are easily discernable when comparing images of the same place made in different years by the same artist. Colin Campbell Cooper made at least two paintings of New York's Columbus Circle, once in 1909 and again approximately fourteen years later. When considered together, the paintings

illustrate the significant transformations that took place on urban roadways, and what this meant to pedestrians, in little more than a decade. For the initial canvas, *Columbus Circle* (fig.2.12), Cooper adopted a bird's-eye view, looking down on the public space located at the southwest corner of Central Park from the rooftop of the Gainsborough Studio Building. The use of an aerial perspective recalls his similar technique in other paintings from this period, including *Flatiron Building*, 1904. Where a single motorcar can be detected in front of the Flatiron, several are on the road five years later in *Columbus Circle*, although horse-drawn carts still outnumber autos. Traffic appears to move easily on the streets, with pedestrians prominent in the roadway.

Columbus Circle, c. 1923 (fig.2.13), differs remarkably from its similarly titled predecessor. Rather than the view from above, the artist lays out the scene from the street level giving viewers a pedestrian's perspective. Motorcars are the predominant means of travel, with a single horse-drawn carriage located at the far left of the composition. Most pedestrians are situated at the edges of the image as well. The exceptions are a traffic officer in the roadway directing motor vehicles entering the intersection and a single male who looks over his shoulder and pauses awkwardly in mid-step. He contemplates his next move as he crosses traffic to the island at the circle's center where rests Gaetano Russo's statue of Columbus.

This later *Columbus Circle* lacks the congestion of Bellows's *New York*, and the implied motion is one of people and vehicles dashing quickly in and out of view. With the exception of the lone pedestrian, virtually all vehicles and figures on foot within the composition move with purpose. The man's hesitancy in crossing suggests that he may be a visitor to New York or at the least someone who is less comfortable moving through the

city, as compared to the casual pair walking along the lower right. The pedestrian's perspective used in *Columbus Circle*, c. 1923, lends to this reading, as does the knowledge that an early innovator of traffic control and road safety, William Phelps Eno, designed the Circle.²² It is unknown if Cooper was aware of the connection between Eno, Columbus Circle and traffic control, although the circle was completed in 1905, shortly after Cooper first moved into the building overlooking the space.

Cooper's personal change in living conditions since his earlier painting of Columbus Circle is one explanation for the modification in perspective. After residing in New York for twenty years and building a reputation based on his depictions of the vertical growth of the modern city, Cooper moved to Santa Barbara, California in 1921, two years before creating his later image of Columbus Circle. Although he maintained his apartment in the Gainsborough Studio Building, in personal notes he nevertheless expressed feelings of being "isolated from the artistic universe of America," and missing "the many friends with whom I was associated there."²³ The comments of isolation and separation may have been an exaggeration by the artist, who continued to visit and exhibit in Manhattan. But by picturing Columbus Circle at street level the immediacy of the space is more vibrant and transient than his earlier use of an aerial perspective.

Horse-powered traffic and trolley cars convey people along city streets, but Cooper's painting hints at the main battle over the right of way being between motorists and pedestrians. Auto-enthusiasts fought the accusation that motorists drive at excessive and dangerous speeds by redirecting the blame for accidents at careless pedestrians, utilizing the term of "jaywalkers" for those who crossed streets unsafely and at undesignated areas. In his study of the introduction of the automobile in American cities,

Peter D. Norton writes, “A ‘jay’ was a hayseed, out of place in the city; a jaywalker was someone who did not know how to walk in a city.”²⁴ No longer a permanent resident of New York, Cooper may have felt a connection to the “jay” he pictured crossing the street in *Columbus Circle*, c. 1923. In New York and other American cities, police enforced new laws introduced by those interested in promoting automobility and making sure automobiles gained dominance by being given the right of way on city streets. Focusing primarily on the modern aspects of New York in his art, Cooper regularly included automobiles in his paintings and would have known about the new laws aimed at controlling pedestrians in favor of motorcars. In the time between his 1909 and 1923 paintings of Columbus Circle, traffic control engineering had leaned toward recognizing the technological advancements of the automobile over pedestrian and horse-powered mobility.

Laws and Traffic Engineering: Automobiles Awarded the Right of Way

Over the concerns and objections of pedestrians, the automobile was given preferential legislative treatment in the 1910s and 1920s, leading to a social reconstruction of urban thoroughfares that favored the automobile.²⁵ Not only were pedestrians beginning to be discouraged from walking across streets except at corners, but city planners were also widening streets to give motor vehicles more space. For example, to accommodate a greater flow of auto-traffic in New York City, in 1908 sidewalks on Fifth Avenue were cut back seven and one half feet on each side.²⁶ Walkways on Madison Avenue were narrowed in 1921 from nineteen feet to thirteen, and there were numerous other changes to the city’s infrastructure. In the boom years of the

1920s, automobile production expanded almost five fold, with more than five million cars manufactured in 1929.²⁷ The greater use of automobiles is apparent in urban imagery and cars became a common cityscape element.

“In a culture that has invariably preferred technological to political solutions to its problems, automobility appeared to be a panacea for many of the social ills of the day,” writes auto-historian James J. Flink in regard to the rapid growth of the American automobile industry.²⁸ City officials introduced numerous regulations favoring automobiles over other forms of travel, limiting pedestrian’s unfettered access on roadways. Yet many of the laws were ineffective as people continued to cross streets when and where they could, as recognized by Cooper’s later *Columbus Circle*. In 1922, manned traffic control towers were installed in the middle of New York’s Fifth Avenue at its most active intersections to ease motor congestion.²⁹ Emily Noyes Vanderpoel’s *Fifth Avenue, 1927* (fig.2.14), pictured the towers on their stilted supports with directional lights ringing the lintels of the glassed enclosures rising above a heavy stream of motorcars below. This feature to city streets was short lived. Timed lights were introduced in Chicago in 1926 and soon adopted by other cities, including New York, which replaced the towers in 1930. Hanging lights fed by underground wires succeeded towers, a momentous step in providing auto-traffic efficiency on city streets. The lights hindered pedestrian travel, but made street crossing safer.³⁰

Automobile production and ownership set a new record for the number of vehicles on the roadways in 1929. The combination of traffic lights and designated street crossings, along with laws relegating pedestrians to the sidewalks, marked the automobile’s domination of city streets by the end of the decade. The effects of these new

rules of the road are found in several images from the era. Printmaker Louis Lozowick made lithographs of streets crowded with motorcars, most notably in *Traffic*, 1930 (fig.2.15). Bringing his machine aesthetic to subjects of urban mobility, Lozowick visualized New York as a city overcome with mechanical activity. Large cars, driven beneath even larger elevated trains, create a mass of hard metal surfaces on the streets. In the 1920s, Lozowick optimistically used details based on machine parts in abstract compositions that convey technological advancements as liberating. By the end of the decade, however, he wondered if people had become too reliant on machines, including automobiles. With the onset of the Great Depression, Lozowick questioned if technology was a destructive rather than positive force and the relationship of workers and technology became his primary subject, although the shift is a matter of degrees rather than a complete departure.³¹ The pedestrian in the foreground of *Traffic* crosses the roadway surrounded by an oppressive accumulation of motorcars, trains, metal and concrete, appearing out of place and lacking control of his own destiny. A dark sky adds visual weight and forcefulness to the vehicles, demonstrating how city streets were no longer comfortable places for those on foot.

J. Jeffrey Grant's aerial view of *Michigan Avenue*, c.1934 (fig.2.16), pictures the main thoroughfare of central Chicago. Like Lozowick's depiction of New York, Grant's painting is packed with automobiles, which create a heavy flow of vehicles moving in opposite directions along six lanes. The avenues display what architect Lawrence Halprin called "the choreography of motion" that grew from the implementation of legislation intended to govern motor vehicles.³² Now absent from the central city are the slower horse-drawn carts. When compared to earlier, aerial views by Cooper, Juergens, and

Kroll, the differences in roadways and movement are dramatic. Pedestrians were now found exclusively on sidewalks, restricted not only by laws and traffic control mechanisms, but for self-preservation.³³

Despite the establishment of automobiles on city streets, several artists continued to express urban life through the context of human activity, marginalizing the vehicles to the edges of compositions. The movement of people is emphasized over motoring traffic and automobiles. Whether parked or in motion, cars play a minor, yet unmistakable role of consigning those on foot to sidewalks. Texas-born, New York-based artist Howard Thain made several paintings dealing with Manhattan streets, including the bustling nightlife portrayed in *The Great White Way, Times Square, New York City, 1925* (fig.2.17). Facing the brilliantly lit billboards, flashing neon signs, and sparkling theater marquees of New York's famed Theater District, the winter scene is filled with pedestrians crossing and walking along the sidewalk of Forty-third Street. At the far left, the front of a motorcar is visible on the roadway, with portions of two others located at the far right on Broadway. The hustle of those on foot animates the city scene beneath the glowing lights, billboards, and lighted windows of tall buildings of the Theater District. Automobiles are cropped at the edges and barely part of the composition, a shorthand method of introducing the motorcar while simultaneously ignoring it.

Others utilized a similar manner of capturing American automobility in their work. Sloan employed a truncated vehicle in *Sidewalk*, and in depictions of the Plaza area of Santa Fe, New Mexico. In the 1920s, Sloan took photographs on the streets near his Washington Square apartment, selecting shots that show only the back ends of cars, the rest extending beyond view. He used these photos to inform later paintings.³⁴ Picturing

only a small portion of a vehicle along the margins allows an artist to address the modernity of the scene while concentrating on the narrative possibilities of human behavior. Additionally, as Sloan learned when working on *Gray and Brass* in 1907, there are a number of exacting details and technical knowledge required to convincingly portray an automobile.³⁵ Add to this consideration the variations of makes and models on the roads, and it is easier for an artist to picture part of a car rather than the entire vehicle, which may encourage greater scrutiny by automotive purists.

Paul Cadmus shared Sloan's primary interest in the narrative qualities offered by the human figure and also included truncated autos in his urban imagery. In his painting for an unrealized public mural sponsored by the government's Treasury Relief Art Project, *Aspects of Suburban Life: Main Street*, 1937 (fig.2.18), Cadmus places the composition's attention on the people along the sidewalks.³⁶ Filled with characters of all sorts, the work is an American scene painting that recalls the storytelling quality of Sloan and other Ashcan School artists. The image is of a lively city street, yet no vehicles are shown in motion, despite a patrol officer directing unseen traffic. The only automobiles in the painting are a parked car and a vehicle under repair on the right. Without showing automobiles driving through town, the image nevertheless addresses the importance of motor vehicles to those living on the outskirts of larger cities. In Cadmus's related *Aspects of Suburban Life: Commuter Rush* (fig.2.19), cars line a crowded street as businessmen and women hustle to catch a train heading into the city. While the importance of motor vehicles is stressed for commuters living in the suburbs, no automobiles appear fully in view. The cars are blocked by the individuals rushing toward the train, making the design about the people living just outside of the city rather than the

machines they used to get to the train stop and elsewhere. In Cadmus's city and suburban imagery, life is lived by expressive characters that are shown primarily on foot rather than behind the wheels of cars.

The automobiles in Cadmus's paintings can be easily considered as secondary because of the wildly gesturing and exaggerated behaviors of his cast of characters. The point of view is most often that of someone on the street. The compositions address how residents continued to traverse the city on foot, even though walking no longer took place on roads. Fairfield Porter explored this theme of the walking city in a series of quiet cityscapes from the early-to mid-1940s, presenting the everyday experience of what it meant to be a pedestrian living in a society where the roads were now ruled by automobiles. In *Cityscape*, c. 1942, *Parked Cars* and *Untitled (First Avenue)*, both c. 1945 (figs.2.20-2.22), there is a distinct division between the sidewalks and the roads that reads as psychological as well as physical. From a pedestrian's view, the walkways take up approximately two-thirds of the lower portion within all three compositions. Buildings on one side and automobiles on the other frame the path. The streets are devoid of motion, although they are lined by rows of parked vehicles. The paintings are unremarkable slices of ordinary, daily life that stress Porter's artistic theories that state, "the profoundest order is revealed in what is most casual."³⁷ This series of works, like the bulk of Porter's paintings, are calm, quiet images that are casual in every sense other than the complex construction of the artist's compositions. There is little, if any narrative offered, as one might find in the work of Sloan, for example. Porter simply pictured people on the sidewalk and cars lining the streets nearby. Yet the images speak to the domination of automobiles on city streets by the 1940s. In *Untitled (First Avenue)*, and

the similar *Street Scene*, c. 1943, people either remain on the sidewalks or enter the streets to cross, and then only at corners, traversing the street at the safest points.

Edmund Lewandowski likewise captures a pedestrian's point of view in *Third Avenue, New York City*, 1941 (fig.2.23). On the small space provided for the sidewalks, when compared to the wide and largely empty street nearby, people crowd one another. As with Porter's images, the point of observation is from the vantage of those walking toward the viewer, far removed from the motor traffic. Prior to the now familiar signs telling pedestrians when to "Walk" and "Don't Walk," the traffic light is green in Porter's *Untitled (First Avenue)*, allowing the pedestrian shown entering the street to walk without crossing in front of oncoming traffic. Although the images by Lewandowski and Porter lack the story-telling qualities found in Sloan's paintings of New York, the three artists shared an interest in portraying the relationship pedestrians have with their motorized city.

Although pedestrians yielded the right of way to automobiles on roadways, an attitude of indignation remained with many who walked the city. Printmaker Peggy Bacon expresses the resentment some felt for motor congestion in the drypoint *Heavy Traffic*, 1941 (fig.2.24). A student of Sloan's while at the Art Students League from 1915 to 1920, Bacon routinely examined New York and its inhabitants in her art, often using caricatures and satire to convey her message. "The thing that keeps any artist's work alive and healthy is the constant observation and recording that should be part of his daily life like breathing," the artist recalled late in life.³⁸ In *Heavy Traffic*, Bacon pictures an overly crowded road filled with people who spill beyond the sidewalks on both sides of

the street, with a few figures crossing defiantly in front of the oncoming traffic, including a mother who drags a small child at her side.

Heavy Traffic Leads to Automobile Fatalities

While several artists examined the continued uneasy relationship of pedestrians and motorists, others looked specifically at automobiles, which they pictured as dangerous, speeding machines. Philadelphia printmaker Benton Spruance considered the increasing motor speed of the contemporary city in his 1936 lithograph, *Traffic Control* (fig.2.25). Beneath a pair of directional lights, a massing of speeding vehicles in profile fill the composition, the lines of simplified vehicular forms overlapping and blending one into the other with no space between. The impossible stacking of cars and trucks is an extremely claustrophobic vision of motor traffic. Bellows's *New York*, from only a quarter century earlier, appears calm and controlled by comparison. *Traffic Control* is a nightmarish image of technological advancement run amok. There are no pedestrians, nor room for anything other than the motor traffic. The horizon line, found high on the picture plane, offers little visual escape. Spruance's title is satirical, as there is limited ability to control the rush of the moving vehicles. Intended as a condemnation of the accelerated speeds of motorists, *Traffic Control* can also be read as a warning to pedestrians. It relates to Spruance's more dramatic automobile image, *Highway Holiday*, 1935 (fig.1.37), in which similarly stylized, abstracted cars bolt through an electronic traffic light, driving over fallen bodies on the roadway. One hand reaches up in a futile attempt to stop the racing vehicles.³⁹

Fatalities from automobiles had become a constant in urban life. In the 1920s, more than 200,000 people were killed in auto-related accidents, with pedestrians accounting for more than two-thirds of all deaths.⁴⁰ Images of traffic accidents, however, are relatively uncommon. Howard Taft Lorenz, while working for the Federal Works Progress Administration, painted *Automobile Accident*, c. 1936 (fig.2.26), an explicit depiction of the mayhem caused by a collision on the streets of New York. Working in an abstract manner that exaggerates human proportions, Lorenz shows a car as it crashes into a fire hydrant after apparently failing to negotiate a turn. The driver of the vehicle is pinned in the wreckage, but his torso is hurtled forward and his hat flies off his head. A passenger sails through the air in the direction of a brick building, and by the crunched metal of the automobile, a single figure lies, corpse-like, a pedestrian casualty of the accident. A diapered baby stands crying by the front of the vehicle. The reaction from those on the streets and nearby buildings ranges from bewilderment to nonchalance with several “rubber-necking” to see the crash as they continue to go about their business. Making himself part of the scene, the artist uses street signs for his signature: “Howard,” “Taft” and “Lorenz.”

Across the nation in Los Angeles, California, Howard Warshaw expressed fascination for the city’s automobile culture, including its abundance of car crashes, after moving from Manhattan in 1946. Warshaw witnessed the aftermath of an accident one evening, inspiring the painting *Wrecked Automobiles*, 1949 (fig.2.27), which he described as “the culmination of everything ... the time when everything interlocks.”⁴¹ A subsequent exhibition of thirty-five works, held that same year, dealt with the carnage of traffic accidents and motor deaths, with the works carrying titles such as *Broken Figure*,

Traffic Signal, Head of a Traffic Victim and *Bones on the Street*. Warshaw found influences in daily newspapers. “Every day,” he stated, “I saw a good accident picture on the front page of the newspaper.” However, to avoid any moralizing to be associated with his images, he intentionally shied away from including any traces of gore. By concentrating on only the vehicles themselves, it appears to have been Warshaw’s personal method of coping with the sometimes horrific reality of living in an automobile driven society.

Artistic images of the automobile in urban America demonstrate the steady increase in motor vehicle use over time, from their initial introduction in which motorcars were the minority on the roadways to their control of street traffic a few decades later. Aerial views of cities through the years show how quickly motorcars replaced horse-drawn vehicles and forced pedestrians to sidewalks, redefining what was considered the proper use of city streets in the process. In images from street level, the potentially dangerous machines explain why those on foot kept to the sides of roads for protection. The horizontality offered by the vehicles contrasts with the verticality of the modern skyscrapers, and the shining lights of cars at night allowed for picturesque nocturnes. Based on fine-art imagery, the acceptance of the motorcar in urban settings is undeniable, although human exchange remained important for artists who regularly chose to marginalize the automobiles in order to concentrate on people and other aspects of the city. Motorists themselves remain largely absent in cityscapes, with drivers being hidden within and represented by their machines. While autos gained the admiration and desire of urbanites, the question of why vehicles were so popular is rarely answered by the artists or demonstrated in their cityscapes. Although there are exceptions, in general,

automobiles in urban imagery are there as part of the scenery rather than the primary focus.

¹ Created by Frank Julian Sprague in 1888, the electric “trolley” quickly became popular in urban centers around the country. Initially used for railcars drawn by horses, electronic railways were widely used by the turn of the century. Stephen B. Goddard states, “few inventions have ever been embraced more quickly and widely than the electric streetcar.” Stephen B. Goddard, *Getting There: The Epic Struggle Between Road and Rail in the American Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 67.

² John Ott, “Landscapes of Consumption: Auto Tourism and Visual Culture in California, 1920-1940,” *Reading California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900-2000* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2000), 51.

³ Newspapers with automobile advertisements were commonly read in cities, while ads in popular magazines brought images of automobiles into virtually every home in America. See Rob Schorman, “‘This Astounding Car for \$1,500’: The Year Automobile Advertising Came of Age,” *Enterprise & Society* 11, No. 3 (September 2010), 469. See also Jim Heimann and Phil Patton, *Classic Cars: 100 Years of Automotive Ads* (Cologne: Taschen, 2009), 9.

⁴ *Gray and Brass* could not have been a satire of Edward Penfield’s Pierce-Arrow advertisement directly, since Sloan began his painting two months before the ad was published. Sloan began work on *Gray and Brass* in September, 1907, and the Pierce-Arrow advertisement with Penfield’s illustration was published in *House Beautiful* in November. Bruce St. John, ed. *John Sloan’s New York Scene From the Diaries, Notes and Correspondence, 1906-1913* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 155.

⁵ In the undated, unpublished note, Sloan expressed his unhappiness with the changing city. The reference to Prohibition and the spread of speakeasys is indicated by the “Moonshine” sign on the left. John Sloan quoted by Elzea, *John Sloan’s Oil Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonné*, v. 2 (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1991), 257-258.

⁶ Peter D. Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2008), 7.

⁷ Joseph A. Amato, *On Foot, A History of Walking* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2004), 235.

⁸ The cities with smooth roadways and an industrial base to support automobile manufacturing, which excluded Washington and New York, became the major auto producers. “Other large cities with automotive pioneers and appropriate industrial base, notably Springfield (Massachusetts), Hartford, Indianapolis, and Allentown, contained poor pavements and did not last long as car-making centers.” Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 112.

⁹ “Horsemen for Good Roads,” *New York Times*, 10 May 1900, 8.

¹⁰ “The Danger of the Streets,” *New York Times*, 14 February 1909, 10.

¹¹ Peter D. Norton writes, “A motoring Grim Reaper rivaled Uncle Sam for dominance of cartooning’s iconography.” Norton, *Fighting Traffic*, 27.

¹² Sloan, *Gist of Art*, 208.

¹³ John Sloan quoted in Peter Morse, *John Sloan Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Etchings, Lithographs, and Posters* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 256.

¹⁴ Norton, *Fighting Traffic*, 11, 30.

¹⁵ “Automobile Topics of Interest,” *New York Times*, 6 July 1902, 12.

¹⁶ Sarah Newman places the site of Bellows’s painting in Madison Square based on historical photography and the placement of billboards. Her argument contradicts Marianne Doezema, who believes that the painting features architectural elements located in both Union Square and an area of Sixth Avenue two blocks south. Sarah Newman, “George Bellows’s *New York* and the Spectacular Reality of the City,” *American Art*, 18 no. 3 (Fall 2004), 93-94; Marianne Doezema, “The ‘Real’ New York,” *The Paintings of George Bellows* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 111-114.

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- ¹⁷ “An Impression of the Spring Academy of Nineteen Hundred and Eleven: Some Young Men Prize-Winners,” *Craftsman* 20 (May 1911): 146-51; quoted by Newman, “George Bellows’s *New York*,” 92.
- ¹⁸ Donald Albrecht and Phil Patton, *Cars, Culture, and The City* (New York: Museum of the City New York, 2010), 33.
- ¹⁹ McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path*, 51.
- ²⁰ Germ-laden dried dung, known as “street dust,” was rightly considered unhealthy for humans. At the end of the nineteenth century and just prior to the widespread use of automobiles, upwards of fifteen thousand horse carcasses were removed each year from New York City streets. See James J. Flink, “Three Stages of American Automobile Consciousness,” *American Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (October 1972), 456; and Julian Pettifer and Nigel Turner, *Automania: Man and the Motor Car* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1984), 50-51.
- ²¹ Gerald Douglas Silk, “The Automobile in Art,” *Automobile and Culture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984), 42.
- ²² William Phelps Eno created many of the original rules of the road, which encouraged traffic flow and the use of rotaries or roundabouts to control traffic. Michael L. Berger, *The Automobile in American History and Culture: A Reference Guide* (Westport, Connecticut, and London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 359.
- ²³ Quoted by William H. Gerdtz and Deborah Epstein Solon, *East Coast / West Coast and Beyond: Colin Campbell Cooper, American Impressionist* (New York and Manchester: Laguna Art Museum and The Irvine Museum in association with Hudson Hills Press, 2006), 103.
- ²⁴ Norton, *Fighting Traffic*, 72.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 259.
- ²⁶ “News of the Municipalities: Roads and Pavements,” *Municipal Journal and Engineering* 27, no. 6 (11 April 1909), 224; and Donald Albrecht and Phil Patton, *Cars, Culture, and The City* (New York: The Museum of the City of New York, 2010), 33-34.
- ²⁷ There were 1,116,119 cars manufactured in 1921, with 5,337,087 made in 1929. Rae, *American Automobile Industry*, 61.
- ²⁸ Flink, “Three Stages,” 455.
- ²⁹ Michele H. Bogart, “Art Scenes and the Urban Scene in New York City,” *Painting the Town: Cityscapes of New York*, ed. Jan Seidler Ramirez (New Haven and London: Museum of the City of New York in association with Yale University Press, 2000), 53-55.
- ³⁰ Kent A. Robertson, “Pedestrians and the American Downtown,” *The Town Planning Review* 64, no. 3 (July 1993), 274.
- ³¹ Barbara Zabel writes, “The metamorphosis in attitude which occurs between Lozowick’s art of the 1920s and that of the 1930s reflects his acute perception of the changing relationships between art, society, and technology.” Barbara Zabel, “Louis Lozowick and Urban Optimism of the 1920s,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 14, no. 2 (1974), 21; see also Janet A. Flint, *The Prints of Louis Lozowick: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1982), 25-26.
- ³² Quoted by Vivien Arnold, “The Image of the Freeway,” *JAE* 30, no. 1 (September 1976), 28.
- ³³ Norton, *Fighting Traffic*, 223.
- ³⁴ Heather Campbell Coyle and Joyce K. Schiller, *John Sloan’s New York* (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 2007), 72-73.
- ³⁵ Sloan learned about the difficulty of painting an automobile when working on *Gray and Brass* in 1907, about which he received “some practical criticism on the construction of my auto” from fellow artist and auto-enthusiast, Sherman Potts. Having apparently learned a lesson about the technical complexities of painting images of motorcars, it proved to be the first and last time Sloan made a design that focused so closely on an automobile. John Sloan, quoted in St. John, ed. *John Sloan’s New York Scene*, 155.
- ³⁶ The Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) was a precursor for the longer-lasting Works Progress Administration (WPA). Although Cadmus’s four studies, *Aspects of Suburban Life*, were rejected for use in a Long Island post office by TRAP officials as “unsuitable for a federal building,” the artist completed a larger version of his *Main Street* design. It was purchased for a private collection. Lincoln Kirstein, *Paul Cadmus* (New York: Imago Imprint, 1984), 33-33.
- ³⁷ Fairfield Porter quoted by Glen MacLeod, “Fairfield Porter and Wallace Stevens: Kindred Spirits of American Art,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 24, no. 1 (1984), 2.

³⁸ Quoted by Sara F. Meng, "Peggy Bacon and John Sloan: Their Urban Scenes, 1910 – 1928," *Woman's Art Journal* 25, no. 1 (Spring – Summer, 2004), 19.

³⁹ Benton Spruance created two versions of *Highway Holiday*, both lithographs created in 1935. In one, the background suggests a rural setting, although few rural roads had traffic lights in the 1930s. In the second version, the background is devoid of detail, by which the traffic light indicates an urban space, where such electronic directional signage was common. Ruth E. Fine and Robert F. Looney, *The Prints of Benton Murdoch Spruance: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 93.

⁴⁰ Norton, *Fighting Traffic*, 21.

⁴¹ Quoted in "Art: Abstract Traffic," *Time* 56, no. 6 (7 August 1950), 59.

Chapter Three

The Automobile and Rural Imagery

The importance of the automobile to Americans living in rural areas in the first half of the twentieth century cannot be overstated. The motorcar became a lifeline to the outside world and the reliance on the auto among rural residents is well illustrated in the nation's art, particularly that produced in the late 1920s and through the 1930s. This period corresponds with the rise in popularity of the regionalist art movement, in which artists from across the country portrayed scenes of homegrown America, with many hailing from the rural Midwest and lightly populated areas in Southern and Southwestern states. Defined primarily by a realistic style and recognizable narrative subject matter that emphasized contemporary life outside of American cities throughout the country, regionalist art captures the wide acceptance of automobiles in rural areas.

Examination of art from this period helps explain why automobiles were prevalent and significant to rural residents—a distinct contrast to images of motorcars in urban centers. As detailed in the previous chapter, cityscapes highlight the growing use of automobiles in the nation in the early twentieth century. However, since other means of transportation were readily available to urbanites, the images rarely help viewers understand or appreciate exactly why autos became popular in the first place. Cityscapes chiefly show that vehicles were present, a part of the scenery. Imagery of a motorized rural America routinely goes beyond the recognition and presence of automobiles, using narrative pictorial qualities to explain why the vehicles were popular.

The art of rural America demonstrates how automobiles ended the virtual isolation of far-flung rural residents. Cars strengthened rural social networks, making it

possible to travel relatively long distances to attend community functions, like baptisms and funerals. Motor vehicles also allowed greater opportunities for commerce, as individuals or entire families drove to towns and cities to shop, bank, conduct business and participate in social events. Equally important, the motorcar opened avenues for entertainment and other welcome distractions from the potentially monotonous work associated with an agrarian lifestyle. Regionalists Thomas Hart Benton and John Steuart Curry and American scene painter John Sloan, who painted automobiles in Manhattan as well as the rural Southwest of New Mexico, were paramount among the many artists who depicted the role of the automobile in rural areas. In brief, this chapter details artistic treatments of rural America and the importance of motorized vehicles in rural society.

Rejection Before Acceptance

The initial artistic reaction to automobiles took place where autos were first used the most, in American urban centers where hard-surfaced roads provided the best available driving conditions. Wealthy individuals gathered in cities and were able to afford the expensive vehicles for personal transportation and pleasure, despite the availability of alternative means of travel. Although automobiles originally amassed in cities, in time their greatest impact was on the nation's rural areas. While autos helped move urbanites more freely and perhaps quickly than previous transportation, the motor vehicle forever changed people's lives in rural communities. Automobile historian Reynold M. Wik states, "Not only did it substantially alter modes of travel, it affected the economy, changed the structure of social life, and became part of the cultural fabric of rural civilization."¹

During the first decades of the twentieth century, as automobiles were introduced in rural America, depictions of the motorcar were rare. The majority of auto-related rural imagery comes after 1928, the year of Benton's *Boomtown* and Curry's *Baptism in Kansas*, two significant, early examples of regionalist art that address the automobile's acceptance in lightly populated areas of the country. However, the paintings were produced almost two decades after motorcars had become a common part of mobility in many rural areas.² They demonstrate that starting in the late 1920s, a relative explosion of art addressing automobility in rural settings was produced, in large part due to the rise in regionalist art. A brief history of automobile ownership helps place the subsequent discussion of images in context.

For almost the entire twentieth century a greater percentage of rural families owned automobiles than did their urban contemporaries. In 1909, for example, farming households in Iowa were five times more likely to own a motorcar than their New York City contemporaries.³ By 1930, the federal census shows 58 percent of all farms had at least one automobile.⁴ The popularity of the automobile in rural America can be traced to the affordability of the construction-line produced Ford Motor Company's Model T. Introduced in 1908, it was designed to drive on rough roads and appealed to rural residents initially skeptical about the automobile's necessity. The Model T proved to be what author Philip Van Doren Stern famously called "the right car at the right time at the right place."⁵ Low prices, the introduction of installment-plan financing and a secondary market put ownership within the budgets of all but the poorest of migrant farmers.⁶ Henry Ford became a hero to rural Americans and they sent the manufacturer thousands of thankful letters. In one, a woman expressed her gratitude, stating, "You know, Henry,

your car lifted us out of the mud. It brought joy into our lives.”⁷ Ford biographer Steven Watts explains, “Unlike robber barons such as John D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan, and Cornelius Vanderbilt, Ford emerged as a folk hero in the eyes of ordinary citizens. He became a symbol not only of responsible business, but of the most cherished American values.”⁸ The popularity of Ford’s Model T is evident in numerous compositions of American countrysides, most of which were created well after the end of production of the Model T in 1927.

The use of the automobile in rural communities by the mid-to-late 1910s was a dramatic turnaround from the initial response in the same regions. Originally looked upon disparagingly as a “devil wagon,” motorcars were considered unnecessary machines that were far more expensive and less valuable than a horse. The first encounters many farmers had with automobiles were often unpleasant. Urbanites on pastoral drives regularly suffered mechanical malfunctions on the rough roadways or became stuck in muddied roads requiring the assistance of a team of horses for a tow. People enjoying day trips were known to ignore private property rights, using farmlands to have picnics leaving behind trash and helping themselves to farmers’ crops. Even more alarming, automobilists were considered a danger to rural residents and animals alike. Noisy engines startled farm animals and too often livestock were injured or killed when motorcars collided with them. Depictions of motorists encountering animals, horseback riders, or farmers on wagons are primarily the material for magazine illustrations or cartoons and are rare in the category of “fine arts.” Excepted are two works by Charles Marion Russell. The watercolors *An Old Story* and *Life Saver*, both of 1910 (figs.3.1-3.2), picture the hazards caused when horses and automobiles meet. Horses bolting in fear

from passing motorcars imperil the lives of those riding in wagons, in each instance a young family with infant child. These paintings not only show the dichotomy between mechanized motion and a living horse, but they capture one of the primary fears many rural residents expressed about automobiles, that they were dangerous machines driven recklessly by careless, wealthy urbanites.⁹ Farm journals at the turn of the century featured commentaries with the titles, “The Deadly Auto,” “The Auto Menace,” and “The Murderous Automobile.”¹⁰ By 1910, such threats to those living in rural communities already were an old story.

The strongly negative opinion of automobiles shared by rural Americans, however, was relatively short lived, lasting little more than a decade in much of the country.¹¹ People were accustomed to train travel, but autos overcame the obvious limitations and time restrictions of riding the rails. Paintings and prints from the 1920s and 1930s picture lone vehicles driving along otherwise deserted stretches of road. Examples include Stuart Davis’s *Pajarito*, 1923, Erle Loran’s *Minnesota Highway*, 1933-34, Gustave Baumann’s *Bound for Taos*, 1936, and Thomas Hart Benton’s *Oklahoma*, 1938. Each of these images expresses the personal freedom of independent travel afforded by automobiles, while offering separate, but related, depictions of American automobility in art.

In a painting of mechanical progress in the lightly populated Southwest, Davis contrasts a passing automobile with a horse and rider in *Pajarito*, 1923 (fig.3.3). The work is one of eighteen known oil paintings Davis made during his only trip to New Mexico in the summer of 1923. Recognized as a state only eleven years earlier, New Mexico was a popular destination in the late 1910s and 1920s for several New York

modernists.¹² Davis, with his brother Wyatt, accepted the invitation of John and Dolly Sloan to join them on a trip to New Mexico, riding together from New York in the Sloans' Model T. The narrative image of *Pajarito*, created in Davis's recognizable style that incorporates heavy outlines and flat areas of color, recalls his earlier illustration work rather than the collage-like, cubist-inspired modern compositions he had made over the prior two years. The light tan colors of the landscape emphasize the high desert setting of New Mexico, as do the cowboy hats and scarves worn by both horseman and chauffeur. It is unclear if the passenger in the back of the vehicle, wearing black clothing in contrast with the light-colored, Western styles worn by the cowboy, is intended as a self-portrait.

The prominent water bag on the side of the motorcar is a detail that stood out to Davis, who routinely referenced automobiles and auto-culture in his paintings. It is a feature intended to emphasize the Western setting as much as the cowboy hat worn by locals. In the dry, desert region, Davis noted, "The sun boils down sumpin [sic] fierce," adding, "You have to drink a lot of water or you will dry up like a leaf and carbonize. Every automobile here has a water bag that they always carry with them."¹³ In a letter to his mother, Davis commented on the importance of having a motorcar to get around in the Southwest. "The most marvelous landscape you can imagine. We look across country into the cañons of the *Pajarito* [approximately fifty miles north of Santa Fe]. Saw 3 thunderstorms going in at once above them. Must be seen to be appreciated but you have to have a car to see it."¹⁴ Davis related his experience to the land from the seat of an automobile.¹⁵

The solitary vehicle passing through the landscape in Davis's *Pajarito* is autobiographical in nature, visually describing his experience of traveling through the

countryside. The same is true of Erle Loran's *Minnesota Highway*, 1933-34 (fig.3.4), and printmaker Gustave Baumann's *Bound for Taos*, 1936 (fig.3.5), except they depict areas near their own homes rather than those of a tourist exploring a new region. In doing so, they present contrasting aspects of the automobile in rural settings. Baumann's work is set in the unpaved roads of the high desert of New Mexico, and Loran's painting features a newly completed roadway in the rural North. As hard-surfaced roads became more abundant in rural areas in the 1920s and 1930s, the image of the road became more frequent in paintings by several artists, such as Loran's *Minnesota Highway*. This composition features a wide, paved road that bisects a barren, winter landscape. In the lower right corner is a sign designating the highway as Route 5, a recently paved stretch of road. The mailbox just beyond the highway sign is marked with the artist's name. Not only a clever method of signing the painting, it indicates that Loran, who was born in Minnesota and lived in the Twin Cities not far from the location pictured, felt at home.¹⁶ A single vehicle of unspecified make or model is visible in the distance, driving away toward a bend in the road that leads out of the viewer's sight.

Although the composition of a roadway leading into the distance and suggesting an extension beyond the scene is reminiscent of formulas associated with nineteenth-century landscapes, Loran's painting is a slice of modern life. Created at the height of the Great Depression, *Minnesota Highway* should be read as an optimistic image for the economically troubling times. The winter landscape of lifeless fields and leafless trees speaks to the hardships facing the nation, but the road leads to blue skies further ahead. The vehicle has passed the low point in the road and a cattle guard, a temporary rough

portion of the ride, and is now on the upward climb. The landscape is bleak, yet the outlook is positive, with technology leading the way into the future.

Despite the optimism of Loran's portrayal, motoring in rural America remained quite unlike the smooth trip offered by newly paved highways. Most of the nation's roadways remained rough, dirt paths. The passenger of a vehicle on dry dirt roads in the country was often depicted in a trail of rising dust that marked an automobile's passage, such as featured in Baumann's *Bound for Taos*. Baumann lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and was familiar with the two-hour drive to the artists' colony in Taos. In his print, the motorcar is the only indication of man's presence in the landscape. As discussed in Chapter One, the appearance of an automobile in an otherwise isolated landscape significantly changes our perception of that landscape. With the ability to cover great distances in a relatively short period of time, the vehicle in Baumann's woodcut suggests ideas about space later found in Maynard Dixon's *Home of the Desert Rat*, 1944-45 (fig.1.41). Although markedly different images, in both works the automobiles appear as minor details within larger compositions. The similarity is in the psychological reading of the vastness of the Southwest territory, which, like Loran's Minnesota, becomes accessible due to the automobile. The ability to pass easily through space changes the way a large expanse is perceived, not only in how a work is read, but also in reality.

Few American artists recognized the transformations automobiles had on rural regions as fully as Thomas Hart Benton and John Steuart Curry. Both were leading members of the regionalist movement that most often concentrated on life in rural America, most famously from the Midwestern and Southern states. In his autobiography,

An Artist in America, Benton explained individual artistic expression using an automotive analogy. “In our descriptions of the world of our experience,” Benton wrote, “we are very much like two witnesses of a motor collision whose respective brothers were the drivers of the opposing cars. They see according to their conditioned attitudes and describe under the pressure of their interests.”¹⁷ Both Benton and Curry included motor vehicles in their paintings, prints and drawings with regularity, emphasizing the importance of the automobile to people’s everyday lives.

In his mobile expeditions across the nation, Benton made drawings and paintings based on quotidian aspects of life in the country, and he personally witnessed the ways in which rural life had become intricately attached to the motorcar. Benton’s painting *Oklahoma*, 1938 (fig.3.6), features an open and battered Model T, speeding along a rough road, kicking up dirt and dust as it passes through the flat, Midwestern landscape marked by tall sunflowers along the roadside. The work could be imagined as a close-up of the driver in Baumann’s *Bound for Taos*. The solitary rider has both hands firmly gripping the steering wheel to maintain control over the vehicle as it speeds along the uneven road. He is a wiry, elderly character typical of the farmer types Benton frequently painted, characterized by his slumped posture, worn hat and work clothes. Benton had used driving as a way to show another American type, the self-assured Northern gentleman in vest and white shirt who sits upright in his car seat, in *The Yankee Driver*, 1923 (fig.3.7).¹⁸ The automobile becomes a foil by which Benton classifies people based on their geographic location. In both instances, the drivers’s immediate destinations are unclear—the farmer is possibly on a routine trip into town for supplies suggested by the vehicle’s empty bed—but the sense of determined motion is apparent. The message is not

the narrative of where the drivers are headed, but that they can travel as they choose and will get to their destinations in automobiles.

Commerce and the Saturday Trip

Living in isolation, rural residents came to rely on the motor vehicle as their personal connection to the communities around them. The patterns of daily life were not altered initially by the introduction of the automobile, but it certainly changed weekend practices. Outings into the nearest town became commonplace. “The isolation of farm life ended with institutionalization of the Saturday trip to town to market products, shop, and visit with friends,” observes automobile historian James J. Flink.¹⁹ “Automobility ended the reliance of farmers on shopping from mail order catalogs, opened up much larger trading areas that killed off the crossroads general store, and brought city amenities, such as better medical care and education opportunities, to the farm.”²⁰ Regionalist artist Dale Nichols, having been raised on a Nebraska farm, recognized the importance of the weekly trips into the nearest town. Nichols’s *City National Bank*, 1937 (fig.3.8), pictures a moment at a corner of a small Nebraska town. Cars are parked along the side of a road, a woman walks briskly along the sidewalk, another with child in hand is walking toward a store, and other townspeople relax on benches nearby. At the street corner a woman bends over, grasping the coats of two small children who are attempting to dash out into the road in front of an approaching car, a hazard of visiting the city.

Nichols wrote of his desire to convey a sense of life on the farm in his art for a brochure to accompany his 1938 exhibition at New York’s William Macbeth Gallery. “These paintings are not just pictures of farms,” Nichols stated. “All are re-creations of

farm life. In painting these canvases I felt again the vastness of endless skies; experienced again the penetrating cold of Nebraskan winters; lived again as farmers live.”²¹ *City National Bank* demonstrates the contemporary farm life and was included in his Macbeth Gallery exhibition. Although it does not picture a farm, it addresses the experience of farm life, including the important role automobiles had in the patterns of life for those in rural areas. Joseph Interrante, in his study on how the motorcar altered American’s perceptions of distance, states, “Automobile use encouraged not longer trips, but more frequent ones. Families that traveled to a nearby village only one or two times per year before the car, traveled every three or four weeks with one. They traveled during the week and in the evening as well as on Saturday.”²² With the growth in automobile ownership in lightly populated regions, many rural businesses closed or became centrally located within towns. People came from all directions for goods and services, and Nichols recognized how driving into town had become part of the farming family’s weekly routine.

Like Nichols, several artists had pictured the influx into towns of automobiles driven by those from nearby rural farms. In print making, Howard Cook’s etching *Country Store*, 1929 (fig.3.9), describes a scene outside a small general store, with two cars, a truck, and a single horse-drawn wagon outside the business. Cook made the print when he was living in Granville, Massachusetts, and he described the image as “farmers gathered on the wide front porch waiting for the daily arrival of the mail.”²³ Andrew Butler’s etching *Going to Market*, 1932 (fig.3.10), is remarkably similar in sentiment, and features an unidentified township in the Southwest. As in Cook’s image, three cars are parked outside the main shop, as the gentlemen gather and talk outside the storefront.

Jackson Pollock, a student of Thomas Hart Benton, also looked at the infiltration of motorcars in small rural towns in *Cody, Wyoming*, c. 1934-38 (fig.3.11), which includes both autos and horses together. The composition, with its undulating forms, shows the direct influence of Benton, as does the rural American subject matter. Farmer types, wearing utilitarian, workman's overalls, stand near the vehicles. Pollock's image, as well as those examined above, speaks to the general acceptance of automobiles in rural districts, illustrating how the modern means of transportation had quickly become incorporated as a recognized part of life. Within a couple of decades, automobiles had become a necessity for rural residents, catching the attention of those artists looking at the rural American scene in the late 1920s through the 1930s.

Automobiles played a prominent role in regionalism. Benton highlights the popularity of automobiles and the type of activity one might find in a Saturday trip into town in *Boomtown*, 1928 (fig.3.12). Once oil was discovered, Borger, Texas, rapidly developed into a bustling municipality, surrounded by distant oil wells and the rising plume of smoke from the gas burned at the carbon mill on the outskirts of town.²⁴ Parked along the street are several black Model Ts, the "universal car" that carried such nicknames as "tin Lizzies," "flivvers," "rattlers," "Little Henrys," and "mechanical cockroaches."²⁵ The lack of variation in the color recalls the line attributed to the auto's manufacturer, Henry Ford: "The customer can have it any color he wants – as long as he wants it black."²⁶ Benton visited Borger while traveling the Texas Panhandle in his own Model T. Described by Benton biographer Henry Adams as "Benton's first regionalist masterpiece," *Boomtown* places automobiles, and automobility through the production of

gasoline and the construction of oil wells, at the very forefront of the regionalist movement.²⁷

Bringing Communities Together

As Benton's *Boomtown* demonstrates, regionalism became a major artistic movement in the United States after rural isolation had, in many respects, come to a close due to the automobile. Automobility is at the heart of the regionalist movement and can be found in several paintings by Benton, as well as another of the leading artists associated with the movement, John Steuart Curry.²⁸ Typical of Curry's rural imagery is *Kansas Wheat Ranch*, 1930 (fig.3.13), which shows a modest rural home set within a flat landscape, broken only by two slight hills on the horizon. Clothing hangs to dry on a line in the back of the home near a shed and an outhouse. The necessities for farming are to the right and farther from the house, including two silos, a barn and a tractor-truck, with a few head of cattle in the background. The painting is virtually identical to a design Curry created the year earlier in a similarly titled lithograph. The canvas updates the lithograph by replacing a horse-powered manure spreader with a motorized truck.²⁹ This alteration emphasizes the value of gasoline powered vehicles in rural areas as well as addressing the modernity of the scene. A car is parked in the fenced-in area surrounding the home. It is not a component of the working farm, unlike the motorized truck, which is parked in the field like a mechanized beast of burden. The car, rather, is more closely tied to the family and its social life. It is kept near the home, like an extension of the family, and is protected by the shade of the house.

Curry's painting visualizes how a large majority of farming families owned an automobile by the 1930s, as confirmed by sales and registration records across the country.³⁰ The affordable Model T was particularly appealing to those in the outskirts. "Farmers, plugged into the world now by telegraph, telephone, and rural free mail delivery, were no longer content to stay down on the farm and sought the attractions beckoning from the scores of new cities that the steam railroads had created," states Stephen B. Goddard in his study of the changes brought by the preference for motor vehicles as the favored means of personal transportation.³¹ Goddard adds, "In short, the country was an overflowing cornucopia of people on the move." Similarly, in his autobiography, Benton described Americans as a "restless" people, noting that those with cars were taking control of their own fate: "The automobilist may stay or go, tomorrow or the next day makes no difference. He is, consequently, freer of a sense of fate than was his earlier foot-itching brother for whom the train whistle not only suggested journey but, after the ticket was bought, commanded it." Benton added, "Except among very poor and unfortunate people, ignorant and backward and left to drift on the edges of the machine age, the fatefulness of travel is past."³²

Automobiles helped build communities, as shown in Benton's *Boomtown*, and they enabled travel to bring people together. The auto's ability to strengthen social interactions for rural residents is frequently the subject of regionalist paintings. The distance between rural homes became manageable, recognized in works by Curry and Benton. In Curry's *Baptism in Kansas*, 1928 (fig.3.14), one of the most celebrated regionalist paintings, a group gathers to witness and take part in baptisms by full immersion into a wooden cattle trough. A young woman in a white robe is about to be

lowered backwards into the water by the minister, as a handful of similarly dressed individuals stand near the tank waiting their turn. Surrounding the trough are families from the community. Encircling the gathering is a row of automobiles, which brought all the people to the location. Curry's design places the viewer among the audience for the baptism. "With considerable skill," notes art historian Henry Adams, "Curry pulls us gradually into the composition, as if we ourselves had just driven up in our Model T Ford and were about to join the congregation."³³ At the far left, an elderly woman remains seated in the back of a car, allowing her to watch the proceedings. The roadway leading to the farmhouse connects the far-flung rural residents together and stretches to the horizon and the rest of the nation. Unlike their urban counterparts, those in rural areas were not quite as concerned with the ownership of an automobile as a status symbol. There is nothing particularly glamorous or elegant about these cars. Rather, these vehicles enable people to take part in religious and other group functions. The automobile helps form a community of dispersed people.

Christian religion plays an important part in most traditional Midwestern regions and was a frequent subject in works by Curry and Benton. In 1928 and 1929, religion was particularly important in Curry's art, prompting his initial biographer, Laurence E. Schmeckebier, to write that, based on the paintings made during this period, "it would appear that religion was more important to him than anything else."³⁴ *Baptism in Kansas* demonstrates not only the artist's interest in the topic of religious practices, but also the automobile's effect on denominational habits in rural parts of the country. A rise in church attendance was contributed to motor vehicle ownership, as autos made it easier for the community to make it to church on Sunday mornings, particularly the elderly.³⁵

Nevertheless, as noted in Robert and Helen Lynd's *Middletown*, the often-cited study of the habits of Muncie, Indiana, this did not stop preachers from denouncing what they called "automobilitis – the thing those people have who go off motoring on Sunday instead of going to church."³⁶

The vantage point in *Baptism in Kansas* places the viewer in the position of participant and likely contributed to the generally positive response the painting received. However, to Easterners unfamiliar with the Midwestern landscape or the religious practices of Kansas, this places the viewer in the uncomfortable position as both a latecomer and an outsider.³⁷ This sense of being an outsider was reinforced early on by critic Edward Alden Jewell, who, writing for the *New York Times* in 1928, described the painting incorrectly as "a gorgeous piece of satire."³⁸ Jewell concludes a brief formal analysis of the painting, "Finally on all sides spread the flat Kansas prairies stretching to a horizon that fences from the outer world this shut-in frenzy of the human soul." To reach his conclusion of people suffering from "shut-in frenzy," Jewell ignored in his description the obvious presence of the automobiles that brought people together from the local region and beyond the visible horizon.

Curry continued his exploration of the importance of the automobile to rural residents in the 1920s in *The Return of Private Davis from Argonne*, 1928-40 (fig.3.15), a painting of a military funeral. In the open plains of Kansas, a group has gathered to pay final respects to a soldier killed in war. The coffin in the foreground is draped in an American flag, the crowd stand with heads bowed. In the middle ground is a line of cars, which is cropped at the edge of the canvas, with the roadway and more parked cars pictured turning back into view in the upper right, leading off in the distance. *The Return*

of *Private Davis from Argonne* was started the same year as *Baptism in Kansas* and the two paintings were intended as a companion pair meant to examine life and death in a small farming community in contemporary America.³⁹ Changes made years later greatly altered the finished canvas.

The subject was inspired by the death and burial of the artist's friend, Private William Davis, a casualty of the First World War.⁴⁰ Sketches made after the funeral indicate a much smaller gathering than in the finished work, with a circular formation of individuals reminiscent of the congregation in *Baptism in Kansas*. No automobiles are apparent in the initial sketches. In the finished painting, the event is attended by a much larger group, as if the entire community has come together in shared grief, recalling the graveside service in Gustave Courbet's monumental *Burial at Ornans*, 1849-50, in which an ordinary burial becomes significant.⁴¹ According to contemporaneous sketches, Curry's friend had a humble burial, but the painting pictures a much larger event. Additionally, the scene is updated from 1918 to the contemporary era, recognizable in the clothing of attendees and the modernity of the automobiles in the middle ground. The lead vehicle, an elongated, motorized hearse, further speaks to the current setting, as the actual burial on which the image is inspired would have included a horse-drawn carriage for transporting the body of the deceased. Before the 1930s, it was widely considered improper for remains to be transported in a motorized hearse.⁴²

Where Curry features an entire community showing respect to a deceased soldier, the funeral in James Stovall Morris's *Velorio*, c. 1930s (fig.3.16), is a smaller event in comparison. It is a simple, evening wake in rural New Mexico, likely attended by only family and close friends. Inside a large adobe structure lit brightly by candles is an open

casket holding a female corpse. Several women in white sit in attendance, facing the departed, joined by a solitary male figure, imaginably the husband of the deceased. Outside in the dark of night beneath a sliver of a moon, men casually gather in small groups, talking and drinking, one figure holding a bottle high in front of him as if giving a toast. As in Curry's *The Return of Private Davis from Argonne*, automobiles are prominent. In *Velorio*, the vehicles are in the foreground, indicating ownership by the men nearby, and cropped at the bottom of the canvas, leaving the possibility of more vehicles parked further on.

The cars provided the transportation that brought family members together at this time of personal tragedy, and the different types of automobiles suggest economic and geographic differences among those gathered. The three dissimilar vehicles in *Velorio* are a large touring car, a streamlined sports car, and a boxy, open vehicle, most likely a Model T. The larger touring vehicle is the type that might be driven by a family and is capable of holding several passengers. These were used in both rural and urban settings. In contrast, the sports car seems out of place in this rustic scene featuring uneven dirt roads and undulating hills. It is a car more suitable for driving in an urban location, suggesting the owner came from a populated municipality. The Model T, with its basic engineering and rudimentary motor on which most owners could make basic repairs themselves, remained popular in rural communities, indicating that someone living in the general vicinity drove it to the wake.

Another funeral composition in the rural Southwest, Victor Higgins's *Winter Funeral*, 1931 (fig.3.17), offers a much different viewpoint from that of Curry and Morris. Instead of showing the social interactions relating to death rituals, or the

trappings of a group in solemn prayer for a fallen soldier, Higgins presents a bird's-eye view of a burial site at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in northern New Mexico. The huddled mass surrounds what can only be presumed, based on the title, to be a graveside service. The land is covered in snow with automobiles parked on the right. To the left of approximately fifteen motorcars are six horse drawn wagons, one of which would have been used to carry the deceased. The painting recognizes the continued use of horsepower in the Southwest that lasted longer than in Midwestern states. Where the burial of Private Davis is a spectacle and presented as a grand moment of patriotism, in *Winter Funeral* the mourners are dwarfed by the grandeur of nature. Given the context of the burial, the automobiles in the Southwestern territory do not suggest the ability to easily traverse the region as shown in other paintings. Instead, nature proves to win in the end, as it always will, even in the context of modern life. The symbolic possibilities offered by motorcars as a modern-day form of transportation during one's life journey suggest why artists included automobiles in paintings of rural funerals.⁴³

Entertainment On The Horizon

Religious gatherings and funerals are serious affairs that strengthen communities through shared reverence or contemplation, and greater attendance became possible as a result of the automobile. The motorcar also provided opportunities for rural families to escape the routine of an agrarian lifestyle and travel to enjoy a variety of social outings. This trend began early in the century, and has continued since. "Learning to handle the car has wrought my emancipation, my freedom, I am no longer a country-bound farmer's wife," wrote Christie McGaffey Frederick in a 1912 article for *Suburban Life*.⁴⁴ "I am no

longer dependent on tiresome trains, slow-buggies, the ‘old mare,’ or the almanac. The auto is the link which binds the metropolis to my pastoral existence; which brings me into frequent touch with the entertainment and life of my neighboring small towns – with the joys of bargains, library and soda-water.”

John Sloan examined the entertainment possibilities afforded rural residents through automobile ownership in his paintings of contemporary life. This became a prominent subtext to many of the images he created during his annual visits to the small town of Santa Fe, New Mexico. After accepting Robert Henri’s invitation in 1919, Sloan traveled to the Southwest almost every summer thereafter. Continuing his observational style practiced in New York, he painted the everyday activities found in his new setting. In the historical Plaza of Santa Fe, Sloan enjoyed the town band, which played in the center of the square bringing people into town from neighboring communities to take part in the summer evening’s festivities. *The Plaza, Evening, Santa Fe (Music in the Plaza)*, 1920 (fig.3.18), pictures a mix of citizens, nearby country residents and tourists. Many of the New Mexicans wear Southwestern styles of clothing and hats, while visitors from out of state, like the seated woman with perfect posture on the right, are dressed in more traditional fashions of the era. The front of an automobile directly behind the seated tourist demonstrates the manner in which people arrived for the event. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, band concerts became popular around the nation as ways to attract people to town centers for entertainment. In other states, where cities may be closer together, promotions often overlapped one another, seeking traffic from as far as twenty-five miles away for an evening out on the town.⁴⁵ It was not until the onset of the Great Depression that the trend for town-sponsored band concerts was slowed.

Another example of rural residents having access to popular amusements via the automobile is seen in Sloan's painting of the action and lights in *Traveling Carnival*, 1924 (fig.3.19). Under a dark sky, a diverse crowd of Anglos, elderly Hispanic women draped in black shawls, young women in fashionable short skirts and an assortment of cowboys and ranch hands enjoy the evening. Rides include a colorful and bright merry-go-round, a Ferris wheel, and tents feature games of chance. Sloan observed: "These collapsible and portable entertainments, when permitted by the city authorities to flaunt their charms are a tremendous success with the people. Indians, Spanish, and Anglos—as we are called – enjoy the agreeable change from the flickering films."⁴⁶ The predominantly Southwestern clothing indicates the revelers are locals and fellow New Mexicans. Tourists may have been hesitant to take part in such a raucous form of entertainment as a carnival. The cropped front end of a car in the lower right recalls the similar placement of a vehicle in *The Plaza, Evening, Santa Fe*, while other cars parked nearby demonstrate the automobile's importance to the carnival's attendance.

Sloan infrequently included social criticism in his art, but made exception in several depictions of inappropriate behavior by tourists observing religious ceremonies of Pueblo Indians. He visited several of the Indian rituals himself and paid close attention to the participants and the actions of others in attendance. Such observations would lead to satirical depictions of tourists appearing in his first Southwestern print, *Hopi Snake Dance*, 1921 (fig.3.20). In similar fashion, Anglos line the bottom of *Grotesques at Santo Domingo*, 1923 (fig.3.21), watching nearby dancers. In his 1939 treatise on painting, *Gist of Art*, Sloan wrote, "I think I am in a position to inform the reader that the grotesques in the picture are in the immediate foreground. The word could not be well applied to the

Koshare [dancers]...”⁴⁷ In *Traveling Carnival*, the situation has been flipped. A group of Indians now stand in observance on the edge of the composition, near the parked automobiles, watching the animated actions of the fair’s attendees. The Indians, including an elder who stands with his arms crossed tightly at his chest, appear marginalized and separated from the mechanical entertainment.

Portrayals of the automobile in rural America, particularly in works from the 1920s and 1930s, demonstrate how motorcars opened up social and entertainment opportunities for people living in geographic isolation. Beginning in the late 1920s, regionalism became a prominent art movement that expressed homegrown images of the life and values of the American heartland and territories across the country. Rejecting European modernism, the regionalists made narrative compositions that address everyday life in rural parts of the United States. Because of the rise in car ownership, these pictures of the American countryside needed to include automobiles to be true accounts of what was occurring in the nation. Works by Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, John Sloan, Dale Nichols and others express the ways in which people came to rely on their automobiles. Providing an escape from the routines and isolation of an agrarian lifestyle, the motorcars became part of that lifestyle by providing the regular Saturday drive into town. From an undesirable “devil wagon” to the beloved family car, the automobile’s evolution is visualized in regionalist art.

¹ Reynold M. Wik, “The Early Automobile and the American Farmer,” *The Automobile and American Culture*, eds. David L. Lewis and Laurence Goldstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980, 1983), 37.

² Following the introduction of the Ford Model T in 1908, automobile historian Reynold Wik writes, “the American farmer went on an auto-buying spree, spurred by an improved agricultural economy, the improved dependability of motor cars, and a growing knowledge of their practicality in a rural environment.” Wik, “Early Automobile,” 40.

³ In 1909, the percentage of automobile owners was still small. Just 2.8 percent of farming families in Iowa owned a motorcar, but that still accounted for a greater percentage than the .05 percent ownership in New York City. Outside of the wheat-growing states like Iowa, however, the automobile would take several more years to gain popularity. Reynold M. Wik, *Henry Ford and Grass-Roots America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973), 21.

⁴ Michael L. Berger, *The Devil Wagon in God’s Country: The Automobile and Social Change in Rural America, 1893-1929* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1979), 52.

⁵ Philip Van Doren Stern, *Tin Lizzie: The Story of the Fabulous Model T Ford* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), 13.

⁶ The price of a Model T was \$950 in 1909. By 1916, the price was \$360. Automobiles on the secondary market were even more affordable.

⁷ Wik, *Henry Ford*, 1.

⁸ Steven Watts, *The People’s Tycoon: Henry Ford and the American Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 160.

⁹ In several areas around the country, laws were created to limit when, where, and how quickly automobilists could drive. In Illinois in 1903, a law passed stating that whenever an automobile encountered a horse that “is about to become frightened by the approach of any such automobile or vehicle, it shall be the duty of the person driving or conducting such automobile or vehicle to cause the same to come to a full stop, until such horse or horses have passed.” Quoted by Norman T. Moline, *Mobility and the Small Town, 1900-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971), 62.

¹⁰ Wik, *Henry Ford*, 15.

¹¹ The ill feelings rural people had for automobiles was short lived because, in part, the use of motorized machines by farmers was nothing new. Reynold M. Wik, in his study on the relationship between Henry Ford and rural America, writes, “Not only had many farmers in the United States been using steam engines for almost a century before the automobile appeared in 1892, but they had also been exposed to the stationary gasoline engine.” Wik notes that from 1860 to 1895, tens of thousands German-manufactured Otto company combustion engines were sold in America and used on farms. “Significantly enough,” he adds, “these stationary gasoline engines reached American farms before the advent of the automobile, hence the notion that cars took rural people completely by surprise is fallacious. Why would farmers be awed by gasoline buggies if they were already operating internal combustion engines for farm work?” *Ibid.*, 20.

¹² Artists who traveled from New York to New Mexico in the 1910s and 1920s included, Paul Burlin, Robert Henri, Andrew Dasburg, Marsden Hartley, John Sloan, Will Shuster, John Marin, and most famously, Georgia O’Keeffe. Jerry N. Smith, “Cézanne and the American West,” *Cézanne and American Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 119-122.

¹³ Stuart Davis to Hazel Foulke, July 3, 1923, quoted in Ani Boyajian and Mark Rutkoski, ed., *Stuart Davis: A Catalogue Raisonné* vol. III (New Haven and London: Yale University Art Gallery in association with Yale University Press, 2007), 134.

¹⁴ Stuart Davis to his mother, July 10, 1923, quoted in Boyajian and Rutkoski, ed., *Stuart Davis*, 134.

¹⁵ Stuart Davis’s experience of New Mexico from the seat of a motorcar is further explored in chapter four of this study, which deals with artists and their mobile studios.

¹⁶ Ann Prentice Wagner, *1934: A New Deal for Artists* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2009) 130.

¹⁷ Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 3d ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1968), 78-79; all subsequent citations are to this edition.

¹⁸ Suzanne Muchnic, “Who’s that guy behind the wheel at the Huntington?” *Los Angeles Times* (10 May 2009); <http://latimesblog.latimes.com/culture-monster/2009/05/whos-that-guy-behind-the-wheel-at-the-huntington.html>, accessed 3 April, 2011.

¹⁹ James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1988, 1990) 104.

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- ²⁰ Automobiles ended the reliance on mail order catalogs among those in rural communities, yet the catalogs remained highly popular among consumers. The growth of automobile use for shopping did not mark the end of mail order catalogs, which remained popular well beyond the 1950s cutoff of this study.
- ²¹ Dale Nichols, "William Macbeth Gallery Announces the Paintings of Dale Nichols for Two Weeks Opening January 18," exhibition catalog, Macbeth Gallery, New York, 1938.
- ²² While some people in rural areas may have traveled to local towns only once or twice a year, certainly others would have made more frequent trips. Joseph Interrante, "The Road to Autopia: the Automobile and the Spatial Transformation of American Culture," *Automobile and American Culture*, 97.
- ²³ Stephen Goldfarb, "Howard Cook," *The American Scene on Paper, Prints and Drawings from the Schoen Collection* (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, 2008), 69.
- ²⁴ Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton, An American Original* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989) 152.
- ²⁵ Model Ts ran on simple combustion engines that could be easily repaired with a minimum of mechanical skills and they proved highly reliable. The ride, however, was rough. The name "flivver" was based on its rough vibrations when driving, which were said to be "good for the liver." Watts, *The People's Tycoon*, 111.
- ²⁶ Rae, *American Automobile Industry*, 37.
- ²⁷ Henry Adams, "Thomas Hart Benton, *Boomtown* (1928)," *Seeing America: Painting and Sculpture from the Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester*, ed. John W. Blanpied (Rochester: Memorial Art Gallery, 2006), 211.
- ²⁸ Grant Wood, the other of the famous trio of artists most closely associated with regionalism also included motorcars in his work, but only on rare occasions, preferring instead to depict a pre-industrial and idealized heartland.
- ²⁹ Stephen H. Goddard, ed., *Remembering the Family Farm: 150 Years of American Prints* (Lawrence: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 2001), 42.
- ³⁰ James J. Flink, *The Car Culture* (Cambridge and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1975, 1982), 142
- ³¹ Stephen B. Goddard, *Getting There: The Epic Struggle Between Road and Rail in the American Century* (New York: Basic Books), 75.
- ³² Benton, *Artist in America*, 73.
- ³³ Henry Adams, "Space, Weather, Myth, and Abstraction in the Art of John Steuart Curry," *John Steuart Curry: Inventing the Middle West* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1998), 119.
- ³⁴ Laurence E. Schmeckebier, *John Steuart Curry's Pageant of America* (New York: American Artists Group, 1943), 91.
- ³⁵ Wik, "The Early Automobile," 47.
- ³⁶ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), 259.
- ³⁷ Adams, "Space, Weather, Myth," 119.
- ³⁸ Edward Alden Jewell, "Eleventh Corcoran Exhibit and German Primitives," *New York Times* (4 November 1928) 128.
- ³⁹ Adams, "Space, Weather, Myth," 120.
- ⁴⁰ Robert L. Gambone, "The Use of Religious Motifs in Curry's Art," *John Steuart Curry*, 145.
- ⁴¹ Curry likely saw the Frenchman's large depiction of a country funeral while visiting museums during his stay in Paris in 1926 to 1927. Schmeckebier, *Curry's Pageant*, 37.
- ⁴² Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 891, quoted by Berger, *The Devil Wagon*, 183.
- ⁴³ While automobiles could bring rural communities together, it is worth noting that they also had the converse ability to separate people. Automobiles offered both travel to as well as an escape from communal gatherings. Motorcars brought far-flung residents together for religious ceremonies, but they also gave transportation to criminals, like the Ku Klux Klan, who spread terror in rural areas in their night rides. Numerous motion pictures of the 1920s and 1930s glamorized prohibition-era gangsters who used automobiles to transport whiskey or as getaway vehicles after robberies, although these themes largely did not appear in paintings from the period.
- ⁴⁴ Quoted by Deborah Clarke, *Driving Women: Fiction and Automobile Culture in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 11.

⁴⁵ While focusing on trends in Oregon and Illinois specifically, Norman Moline's study on the effects of mobility on small towns reflects trends recognized across the country. Norman T. Moline, *Mobility and the Small Town, 1900 – 1930: Transportation Change in Oregon, Illinois* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1972), 112.

⁴⁶ John Sloan, *Gist of Art* (New York: American Artists Group, 1939), 275.

⁴⁷ Sloan would return to the theme of tourists and non-Indians watching Pueblo Indian ceremonies, perhaps most notably in the 1927 etchings *Knees and Aborigines*, and *Indian Detour*. Sloan, *Gist of Art*, 270.

Chapter Four

The Automobile in Art During the Great Depression

Automobility grew exponentially across America during the 1920s, giving rise to a boom in infrastructure development, suburban real estate and a wide range of businesses to support a motoring nation. Petroleum, steel, glass and rubber industries flourished and road building was the government's second largest expenditure in the decade, trailing only military spending.¹ Eight million motor vehicles were produced in 1920, with the number rising to more than twenty-three million automobiles manufactured in 1929. By the end of the decade, there was one registered vehicle for every 4.5 individuals in the country. The collapse of the stock market in October 1929 and subsequent Great Depression dramatically hampered automotive production for more than a decade, but interest in motoring and automobile ownership remained strong due to a glut of vehicles available on the second-hand market. During the 1930s and into the early 1940s, artists frequently stressed the importance placed on automobiles among owners, particularly the dispossessed who lived out of their vehicles. Compositions express how many destitute Americans came to rely on their vehicles to provide shelter and mobility in the desperate search for employment. Old, battered, stalled, junked and abandoned vehicles were frequently used in imagery to symbolize the unfavorable economic conditions in a country that had transformed its economy to rely heavily on the automobile. Painter Walter Ufer's composition of his own motorcar is given thorough attention in this chapter, and his automobile was featured as a personal statement about difficult times that can be read as a displaced self-portrait. Several artists emphasized the continued importance of the motorcar as one of the last consumer items people retained. For those without a home, the automobile served as a lifeboat on wheels. While the automobile could represent hard times, its absence stressed even greater

destitution as artists showed the despair of those without a vehicle. This chapter examines works of art that picture automobility and its relationship primarily to those who struggled during the Great Depression.

Dust Bowl Days and Displacement

Where paintings of the 1920s demonstrate social opportunities for automobile owners, including attending religious services or an evening of entertainment, images from the 1930s are more likely to indicate a different type of reliance on the motor vehicle. For those who lost their livelihoods in the droughts and land erosion of the Dust Bowl, the automobile became one of their most valuable possessions as families in search of work left their homes through force of foreclosure or abandonment of failed farms. During the Depression, automobile sales slowed considerably, but people kept their cars over other possessions. When *Middletown* authors Helen and Robert Lynd returned to Muncie in 1935 to observe the changes that had taken place since they visited in the late 1920s, they witnessed the growth in dependence on automobiles. “While some workers lost their cars in the depression,” wrote the Lynds, “the local sentiment, as heard over and over again, is that ‘People give up everything in the world but their car.’”² A banker told the authors, “The depression hasn’t changed materially the value Middletown people set on home ownership, but *that’s* not their primary desire, as the automobile always comes first.” Although discussing the specifics of Muncie, the sentiment was applicable to the nation, particularly its rural regions. The practice of holding onto the automobile when all else was lost is apparent in numerous images.

Otis Dozier, a Texas artist and part of the “Dallas Nine” group of regionalists, created a memorable image of a dispossessed farming family in *The Annual Move*, 1936 (fig.4.1).³ The

title suggests the seasonal routine of migrant farmers, although the picture may represent tenant farmers being evicted, a frequent practice of banks during the Depression. Preparing to leave a farm house in Garland, Texas, a mother of two cares for the young while the father loads the family's few possessions in their Model T.⁴ For accuracy of detail, Dozier borrowed from fellow artist Perry Nichols a 1918 Ford that featured a recognizable, two-part windshield and hand-cranking starter.⁵ The road in front of the tiny house leads off in the distance, similar to the stretch of road in John Steuart Curry's *Baptism in Kansas* (fig.3.14). A rolled-up mattress and duffle bag fill most of the back seat, while a clock, ancestral portrait, and three chickens near the front wheel wait to be loaded into the car. A three-drawer chest with mirror sits near the vehicle, although it seems impossibly large to make the impending trip; it is equally unclear what will happen to the small cow standing directly behind the woman. The brown fields in the background, however, make it clear that staying is not an option for her. Although the image is one of desperation, the strength of the family and the importance of familial history indicated by the old portrait, inspire hope for the future. *The Annual Move* received favorable reviews when exhibited as part of the Texas Centennial Exhibition of 1936 and reached a national audience through its reproduction in *Art Digest*.⁶

George Schreiber's *From Arkansas*, 1939 (fig.4.2) captures the sense of desperation of those left with little more than their automobile.⁷ Schreiber's social realist composition pictures a thin and haggard woman in tattered clothes looking over her shoulder at a battered farmhouse and solitary auto. Leafless branches enter the composition on the right and the dry, flat fields in the background emphasize the harsh conditions. There appears little hope for the woman and her barren farm, recalling the graphic, documentary photographs by those working for the Works Progress Administration of the struggles experienced by farmers of the South and Midwest. In

literature, *From Arkansas* finds its equivalent in the portrayal of destitute families in John Steinbeck's 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, the story of the trials and tribulations faced by the Joad family of Oklahoma, for which Thomas Hart Benton created illustrations, a subsequent set of lithographs and related paintings. The print and painting of *Departure of the Joads* (fig.4.3) shows the family loading their car with all they could carry before departing for California in search for employment. In a stand against modern technology, the grandfather sits on a chair outside the small farmhouse refusing to join the group, rejecting the hope for a new life offered by the automobile.⁸

The hope for many of the unemployed travelers in America was to experience what Charles Frederick Surendorf expressed in his print *Calif.*, 1938 (fig.4.4). The image shows a couple and their infant having reached the western state, their promised land. The man attaches a new, golden California license plate, which is the only hand-colored aspect of the otherwise black-and-white wood engraving. Although the man, woman and child reside in a tent nearby, their situation appears temporary and their outlook seems promising. A goat and palm tree speak to their good fortune—the palm being a conventional symbol of paradise.⁹ Surendorf had moved to California in 1929, in his own words, "...rolling into Los Angeles seated on an orange crate strapped to a Model T Ford chassis."¹⁰ The artist found his earliest success in the state and had reason to be optimistic in his outlook on the region.

Many of the farmers who traveled to California from other states were not as fortunate. Once on the road, destitute families made do by living out of their cars, setting up makeshift tents and sleeping along the roadside. Long gone was the romantic perception of the early 1900s of adventurous explorers taking an auto camping vacation, then popularly known as "gypsying." By the 1930s, the earlier practice of sleeping in or to the side of one's auto—often on property

owned by others—had been replaced by the convenience of auto-camps, which provided a variety of amenities for travelers who could afford them. During the Depression in particular, those who could not afford even the least expensive auto camp became known by the unflattering term “flivver bums,” identifying the migratory unemployed in search of work by their old style Ford Model Ts.¹¹ Depictions of people living out of their vehicles were routine among the New Deal photographers, and in art similar work was produced, including Maynard Dixon’s *Okie Camp*, 1935, Millard Sheets’s *Miggs Ready for the Road*, 1938, and Mervin Jules’s *Bare Statement*, 1941 (figs.4.5-4.7). Dixon, Sheets and Jules picture people living next to their vehicles in small, improvised tents. These are the poor, unemployed travelers living on the edges of society, who were known to go without purchasing food for themselves in order to pay for the gasoline needed to feed their vehicles. The many camps in California in the 1930s were filled with the resident unemployed population along with travelers from across the country chasing what turned out for many to be a false hope for job opportunities.

Mary Blair’s watercolor *Okie Camp*, 1932 (fig.4.8), pictures a squatters’ camp occupied by people who have parked their vehicles and stopped traveling for a time. The image depicts one of the many “Hooverville” shanty towns built around the country that were occupied by the unemployed and under-employed homeless. The California artist demonstrates that many Dust Bowl migrants and fired factory workers alike failed to find the land of opportunity they sought. Blair’s watercolor documents how the homeless built provisional shelters from salvaged materials, such as old wood, shipping crates, cardboard and scraps of corrugated metal, and often installed a small, wood-burning stove. In *Okie Camp*, children play in a red wagon while adults share domestic responsibilities. Their car is parked to the right edge of the composition, while multiple tents and shacks cropped at the left suggest additional families at the site. Like Dixon’s

and Jules's images of campers just off the roadway, Blair's *Okie Camp* shows figures and their camp at a distance and excludes identifying details about the people depicted. The work appears to report general information about life in a shanty town without giving social commentary.

On the other hand, Paul Weller's lithograph *Home*, c.1938 (fig.4.9), focuses on a single woman's plight. She sits holding an infant at the opening of her makeshift dwelling. The closer look at a single individual suggests a greater need for empathy for the woman and her specific circumstance. Single unemployed and homeless mothers faced extraordinary difficulties, as they needed to work in order to feed themselves and their children while simultaneously needing to care for those too young to care for themselves. In America, poor women were stigmatized in a society that enshrined the position of the male bread winner within the family unit.¹² The home, in turn, was the woman's traditional place in American society, thus the title of Weller's work is particularly poignant. Discarded billboards are used to make walls for the shelter, making an ironic statement about advertisements directed at a consumer culture of motorists, as the woman's car sits nearby. The prominent sign reading "Cremo 5¢" refers to a specific brand of cigar, an item associated with masculinity that hints at the absence of the child's father.¹³ The design recalls Dorothea Lange's famous photograph, *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California*, 1936 (fig.4.10), which pictures a thirty-two-year-old woman in need of work with three of her seven children.

In John Langley Howard's *The Unemployed*, 1937 (fig.4.11), men are the subjects, with two figures slumped over inside a parked, or possibly stalled car. The passenger-side doors are absent, which allows a view inside the vehicle's cramped quarters, with its torn and tattered seats. The hulking male figures have thick hands and hardened features indicating years of hard labor, their clothing is soiled and worn, and a hole appears in the red sock and shoe of the man in

the back seat. It is an image of absolute dejection that does not appear to be improving, because outside the driver's window is a California patrol officer with a large, rounded, pink face.

Migrants from other states were frequently treated poorly by California authorities. In 1931, state legislators passed a three-year waiting period before those from out of state could receive government assistance of any kind.¹⁴

Howard brought a strong social consciousness to his Depression images. A member of the Monterey chapter of the John Reed Club, he involved himself with assorted communist causes.¹⁵ His paintings frequently address the conflict between those with and those without financial means. *Hooverville*, 1933 (fig.4.12), is a bird's-eye view of a gathering of people from multiple ethnicities who listen to a man who holds a defiant fist in the air as he addresses them. Howard stated, "The people are being proselytized to organize and struggle against their intolerable conditions."¹⁶ Behind them are the lean-to shacks of their Hooverville and in the background is an abandoned and neglected factory. In the foreground a derelict car is tipped on its side, a symbol of the lack of opportunities for the nation's unemployed.

Howard contributed to the 1933-1934 mural cycle at San Francisco's Coit Tower (fig.4.13), a project commissioned to highlight California industry and paid for with New Deal funds. He and the others involved in the project instead painted scenes that questioned business practices and celebrated radical political views. For the cylindrical tower at the top of Telegraph Hill, Howard pictured a new hydroelectric plant, with a large mass of striking workers beneath it. One of the strikers holds a copy of the *Western Worker*, California-based newspaper for the Communist party.¹⁷ In the stream that runs from the dam, an unemployed family washes clothing and pans for gold, while in the background, chauffeured individuals stand alongside a limousine

and observe the conditions of a tent city (fig.4.14). Their yellow, streamlined vehicle is dramatically different than the blocky and battered black Ford owned by the squatters.

Howard further expresses the contrast between the rich and the poor in his canvas *Embarcadero and Clay Streets*, c.1936 (fig.4.15). The image conveys the unease of wealthy, white-collar workers when they are forced to co-exist with the unemployed and the working class on a city street. A man in a light-tan suit glances nervously over his shoulder as he crosses the street, looking at a group of approaching workers to the left and walking toward apparently unemployed men on the sidewalk to the right. Another man in a dark suit holds his arms closely to his body as if protecting himself, despite the fact that the laborers do not appear to take much notice of their managerial counterparts. The unease of the businessmen contradicts the prominent billboard on the corner, which reads “Confidence.” The fancy automobiles parked at the curb address the extraordinary wealth some had during the Depression, while many more suffered from the general lack of employment opportunities.¹⁸

An Auto-Self Portrait

Howard demonstrated that automobiles in art of the 1930s were utilized as objects to indicate everything from great wealth to extreme poverty and were featured to express a political opinion. Walter Ufer’s *Bob Abbott and His Assistant*, 1935 (fig.4.16), a painting of a stalled vehicle, can similarly be read as a metaphor of the economy, success and failure—both society’s and the artist’s own—and Ufer’s attempt to rebuild his life and reputation. It is a major painting within the artist’s career that should be appreciated for being both a statement about the Depression as well as the artist’s personal history, through which the automobile reads as Ufer’s

displaced self-portrait. This requires a consideration of the artist's biography and the circumstances of his working in Taos, New Mexico.

Arriving in Taos from Chicago in 1914, the academically trained Ufer joined the Taos Society of Artists.¹⁹ While many in the group made images of historicized Indians, Ufer pictured the contemporary life of what he called the "Americanized" Indian, a people forced to adapt to the modern American lifestyle.²⁰ In the late 1910s and into the 1920s, he was one of America's most successful artists, described by John Singer Sargent as one of the nation's finest painters.²¹ Ufer's paintings of Taos won major national and international exhibition prizes and his works sold for thousands of dollars. However, success was relatively short lived. Sales slowed considerably with the 1926 death of Ufer's New York art dealer, John E. D. Trask.²² As with most artists, his situation only worsened following the stock market crash of 1929. In the best of times, Ufer was irresponsible with money, frequently borrowing from clients to pay off debts. *Bob Abbott and His Assistant* was made as Ufer attempted to regain his former prominence on the American art scene. Due to its maker's untimely death a year later, it proved to be Ufer's last significant work, serving as a summation of his unique approach to Southwestern imagery.

Bob Abbott and His Assistant is a large painting that combines splashes of loose brushwork with measured instances of exacting detail in a believably realistic scene showing two middle-aged men working on a stalled automobile. The men, Bob Abbott and Jim Mirabal, were Ufer's close friends.²³ Abbott owned a mechanic's garage on the Taos Plaza and Mirabal, who lived at the Taos Pueblo, was one of Ufer's most frequent Indian models. The setting is the expansive Taos landscape before the Sangre de Cristo mountain range beneath a light blue sky dotted with unthreatening clouds. The painting's dominant feature is the black, two-door convertible touring car in the foreground that diagonally bisects the canvas. The auto is presented

closely enough that all of it does not show on the canvas. Minute details add to the painting's descriptive realism, including the corrugated design of the radiator grill, the cut glass pattern of the headlight, the touches of rust at the tip of the right front fender, and the delineation of individual grooves on the running board, each imbedded with dirt. These exactly detailed sections are combined with the loosely handled refraction of light off the vehicle's metallic surfaces. The automobile was Ufer's own, a deluxe Buick touring car, model number H-Six-45 with Goodyear cord tires, purchased during the prime of his career for \$1700 through the Davis Auto Company, Taos, in May 1919.²⁴ It was a luxury vehicle bought at a time when a new Model T could be purchased for less than \$400.²⁵

The only way into the composition's distant terrain is either over or through the vehicle. For the time being, however, traveling there by means of the motorcar is apparently not an option. The raised hood, which echoes the contours of the rising mountain peaks, indicates that the area's rough roads and worn desert pathways had taken their toll and the car has stopped running. In the soil at the front of the car is a tire bolt, which resembles in color, shape and size the gray rock behind Abbott's heels on the opposite side of the canvas. Near the bolt is an S-shaped metal lug wrench, which mimics a desert snake in motion. Despite the seemingly remote location, the scene does not seem desperate, nor do the men appear overly concerned. Apparently, it will only be a matter of time before the vehicle is again operable. An indication that this car has witnessed frequent repairs is the three visible tires. Varying thread designs clearly mark each tire as different from the others. Ufer stressed his inclusion of unmatched tires in a letter to a potential patron and to a newspaper reporter to demonstrate his careful attention to details.²⁶

Abbott is shown making the repairs, as he leans on the car facing the exposed engine. Tools protrude from his back pants pocket and he holds pliers in his right hand, and possibly a second tool in his left. The back of his right hand is spotted with grease and motor oil, especially on the knuckles of his middle fingers. Abbott wears durable, heavily-soiled and comfortable work clothes. The fronts of his leather shoes are worn smooth, and his dungarees, indicated by the brass rivets at his pockets, reveal many hours of wear and layers of dirt and grime. His leather jacket is torn at the right elbow and again near the cuff. A dusty blue shirt peeks out from beneath the coat's collar. In its present state, the clothing blends with the colors of the natural setting. Abbott's driving cap, with its black-leather brim, shades his eyes from the midday sun, allowing him to look out toward the viewer. The assistant, Mirabal, sits on the front bumper, wearing brightly-colored clothing that stands in stark contrast to Abbott's earth-toned attire. Not only is his shirt a vivid red, it is also clean, as is the white sash or apron wrapped around his waist. Though he holds a screwdriver in his left hand, his skin remains free of grease. Despite the painting's title, Mirabal appears to provide Abbott little assistance in the present endeavor, emphasized by his back being turned to the vehicle.

One possible reading of *Bob Abbott and His Assistant* is that Ufer was responding to the popular use of Indians in American art as people who remained separate from modern machines; Mirabal has his back turned not only to the car, but to technology itself. Examples of this iconography are found in nineteenth-century images by artists who include Asher B. Durand and Henry Farny (figs.1.47-1.48). The theme continued in the twentieth century in the works of many members of the Taos Society of Artists, as well as the advertisement by N.C. Wyeth for Fisk Cord Tires (fig.1.49). Two years after Ufer completed *Bob Abbott and His Assistant*, Maynard Dixon's mural design, *The Indian Today* (fig.1.51), was rejected by the Bureau of Indian Affairs

for showing a motor vehicle as part of everyday farming by contemporary Indians. The widely held stereotype supported the notion that Indians, the cultural Other, were incapable of fully utilizing modern technology. In hindsight, this notion is noticeably ironic given the many manufacturers that chose Indian names to market automobiles. Given the origin of an automotive name like Pontiac, historian Philip J. Deloria, in his study of the reception of Indian imagery, writes, “Things get weird, however, when the symbolic systems built on cars and Indians intersect.”²⁷ He adds:

On the one hand, there is a palpable disconnection between the high-tech automotive world and the primitivism that so often clings to the figure of the Indian. At the same time, however, those very distinctions are constantly being squashed back together. ... How might one think about the uncertainties conjured up, for instance, when the non-Indian world turns to imagine a Cherokee in a Cherokee...?

Deloria’s study explores the reception of images of Indians using modern technology. He notes that Indians have been linked to the past, and in the past transportation was equestrian. *Bob Abbott and His Assistant* is a rare painting from the first half of the twentieth century that portrays an American Indian alongside an automobile that does not also include a horse.

The automobile used as a signifier to indicate Indians as non-technological people aligns with many gendered stereotypes as well. Ernest Martin Hennings’s *Taos Plaza, Winter, 1921*, c.1935 (fig.4.17), for example, visually separates by means of a low wall Anglos from Indians, but also Anglo men from Indian women and children. Technology thus becomes tied to race and gender, with automobiles shown predominantly as masculine. Clarence Arthur Ellsworth’s *A Badlands Episode*, 1926 (fig.4.18), likewise blends widely held racial and gender stereotypes for the era. Pictured are three Indian men on horseback watching a Caucasian woman struggling with a broken down vehicle out in an open expanse of desert. The woman bends, reaches out and

strains to remove what appears to be a flat tire. The men remain on their horses and, like Mirabal in Ufer's painting, do not offer assistance. They sit, watch and wait. They have a fourth horse with them, which is saddled to provide the woman a lift should she be unable to fix her car. The message is layered, offering a narrative that addresses and supports stereotypes about masculinity and of Indians and women naturally being anti-technological. Apparently unable to help with the repair, the men, nevertheless, offer a solution to the problem. It suggests that men, even those deemed the non-technological Other, are capable of handling situations, one way or another, where a woman might fail. However, the narrative remains incomplete, and it is unclear whether the woman will repair the vehicle or will ride away on horseback. Certainly, she works at bettering her situation while the men idly sit and only observe the labor of others.

Rather than playing to stereotypes frequently found in American art in which minorities are shown separate from modern machinery, however, Ufer confronted them. He was a card-carrying member of the International Workers of the World union and a follower of Leon Trotsky. Ufer brought a strong social consciousness to the Taos artists' colony and expressed political opinions that match John Langley Howard's activism in San Francisco. The initial title for *Bob Abbot and His Assistant* was the more strident *Two Workers*.²⁸ The concept of depicting workers as they performed their tasks, as he often did, fit with Ufer's sympathetic, personal feelings with regard to laborers, including those who were American Indians. However, after being warned that "no capitalist will buy it," he may have changed the title to soften the socialist point of view in the hopes of making a much needed sale.²⁹ On one level, Ufer would have considered the tribulations of the working class as an equivalent to the struggles artists routinely endured at the hands of an unsympathetic public. For the socialist Ufer, *Bob Abbott and His*

Assistant suggested the important role Ufer envisioned for the working class in repairing the economically troubled nation.

Ufer experienced few sales in the 1930s, drank to excess, habitually gambled and fell from favor with established patrons because of his gruff and frequently argumentative manner. For a time, Ufer's alcoholism made him incapable of painting with regularity and, as recently as 1991, art historians described him as having "died an indigent alcoholic."³⁰ However, *Bob Abbott and His Assistant*, made the year before Ufer died, points to the fact that he actually recovered from his debilitating addiction. The bold image of two men and a car set within a New Mexico landscape is a testament of the artist's renewed painting skills. The canvas is one of the largest he ever painted and is a grand statement that he had conquered his demons. While working on it, he wrote:

You may believe me I have not slumped any this season. The one I am finishing now a 50 x 50 canvas will be the best one I ever did. My only worry is that my money runs out before I finish. It costs to paint. ... If my money holds out I will show it either at the Corcoran Gallery or the National Academy – then later in Chicago and elsewhere. I am happy though I am terribly broke. I love this painting.³¹

In *Bob Abbott and His Assistant*, the vehicle appears to be on a beaten dirt pathway, which, outside of a few maintained and promoted highways, was true of most roadways in and around Taos in the 1930s. Motorcars appear with some regularity in art of New Mexico, although seldom in works by Taos Society artists. When they do, they are often shown as a small part of a larger setting, as in Victor Higgins's *Winter Funeral*, 1931 (fig.3.17), where human activity is dwarfed by the grandeur of nature and man's modern achievements are insignificant in the larger scheme of life and inevitable death. At times, other artists pictured the motor vehicle driving through open spaces, as in Stuart Davis's *Pajarito*, 1923 (fig.3.3), or in several works of

New Mexico by John Sloan. Others used the automobile as part of a binary visual play contrasting old and new, as in Hennings's *Taos Plaza, Winter, 1921*, and Barbara Latham's *Tourist Town, Taos, c.1940* (fig.4.19).

On a national level, a broken down automobile could be understood as a metaphor for the economic hardships then facing the nation. During the Depression, several artists turned to picturing cars in need of repair as well as abandoned motor vehicles, which symbolically addressed the nation's economy and the lack of opportunities for workers. Otis Dozier's *Abandoned House, 1935* (fig.4.20), features the exterior of a weather-beaten home with a dilapidated, inoperable vehicle in the yard. People held on to their cars as a last resort, so an automobile that has been left behind suggests utter despair. Once considered a symbol of economic success and personal mobility it is now shown as signifying the collapse of the nation. In Aaron Bohrod's *Stokie Park Auto, 1935*; E Boyd's *Auto Salvage Yard, Tucson, Arizona, c. 1935*; and William Fisher's *Junkyard in Wells, Maine, c. 1940* (figs.4.21-4.23), junked vehicles are surrounded by piles of scrap metal, old tires and broken windows.³² The immobility of the automobiles serves as a powerful metaphor for the ship of state, wooden rudders replaced by the rubber tires of a modern era. However, all hope is not lost. Both Boyd and Fisher included individuals in the scrap yard, apparently looking for that needed part for their own vehicles. On a national level, this suggests that if people try and use what is around them, they can make the best of a bad situation to get themselves back on the road, both automotively and metaphorically.

To artists in Taos, a broken down vehicle had significant meaning apart from a national, economic one, and a stalled journey could symbolize optimism for a new beginning. In 1898, Bert Geer Phillips and Ernest Blumenschein halted their intended trip to Mexico after their wagon broke a wheel. Phillips stayed with the wagon while Blumenschein took the wheel to the

nearest town, Taos, for repair. Over the course of a few days, the two artists were so impressed by the location that they chose to go no further. From this fateful event grew the Taos artists' colony. Subsequent artists promoting their work back East retold the story frequently. Over the years, it evolved into a type of creation myth in which Phillips and Blumenschein "discovered" the region.³³

Ufer undoubtedly knew the tale well and likely helped in its dissemination. He was the first artist from the colony to win a major exhibition award—the 1918 Thomas P. Clarke Prize at the National Academy of Design—and a member of the Taos Society of Artists from 1917 until it disbanded in 1927, having served as its president in 1922 and 1923. For a time, he was one of the town's most successful artists, comparable in popularity to Eanger Irving Couse. Among artists in Taos, Ufer was a force to be reckoned with. Ufer would have considered himself as important to the Taos artists' colony as the original members in bringing attention to their community, their art, and their quest to find an original American style. It is in this light that Ufer's automobile can be read as a displaced self-portrait.³⁴ The vehicle in *Bob Abbott and His Assistant* is the painting's dominant feature, just as Ufer had been prominent among Taos artists. While Ufer was academically trained, he considered himself a modern artist, capable of showing new ideas in a realist manner. However, while other Taos artists routinely painted historicized scenes relating to imagined ancient Indian practices and pre-industrial ways of life, in 1935 Ufer was the only artist in Taos to express nostalgia about a sixteen-year-old car.

The automobile in *Bob Abbott and His Assistant* recalls a happier and more prosperous time, when Ufer was successfully selling paintings, winning awards and not worrying about the cost of painting. He took pleasure in his automobile and shortly after its purchase he made a painting of the vehicle driving through a desert wash in *My Buick: Taos Canyon*, 1919 (fig.4.24).

The painting visually connects Ufer to the desert landscape through the designation of ownership. To the artist, he was not picturing a generic vehicle, but rather his vehicle—“my” Buick. He exhibited the work at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts exhibition in 1920.³⁵ The car was clearly a matter of pride, a symbol of Ufer’s success and in the early 1920s others claimed to see him driving around Taos almost daily.³⁶ People in Taos associated Ufer with that car.

In earlier times, Mirabal had been financially supported by Ufer, but that had ended with the onset of Ufer’s alcoholism and the loss of his patrons. Mirabal sits at the front of the vehicle, thus, if the painting is read as a displaced self-portrait, the artist continues to support Mirabal, only physically rather than financially. The motorcar, like Ufer, had seen better days. The artist, like the car itself, relied on a little help from his friends to see him through his troubled times. He had succumbed to his addictions and was virtually incapable of painting due to alcoholism.³⁷ Complicating matters, Ufer was also pitifully poor due to an addiction to gambling. He took on students to make money and traded his wife’s paintings for goods and services, claiming them to be his own. After joining the Public Works of Art Program for the New Mexico/Arizona region, something Ufer earlier swore he would never do, coordinator and fellow New Mexico Painters artist Gustave Baumann wrote: “After his entry into the project we found Ufer’s ability as a painter had been completely effaced by drink.”³⁸

With Baumann’s help and encouragement, in 1934 Ufer made two trips to a sanitarium in Pueblo, Colorado. On the second attempt, an extremely ill Ufer actually quit drinking for good, a success story of the controversial Keeley Cure, a “cure” that included drinking gold dust.³⁹ Ufer saw *Bob Abbott and His Assistant* as his comeback work—“the best one I ever did”—as he hoped to regain the fame and modest fortune known earlier. In an attempt to create interest and

potentially find a buyer, he wrote numerous letters including to his former patron, Carter Harrison.⁴⁰ He showed the painting in 1935 at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., the Art Institute of Chicago, the National Academy of Design and the Grand Central Gallery, New York, and, in 1936, at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts Centennial Exhibition, but it failed to sell and Ufer's career never recovered.⁴¹

Further Repairs and People Left Without a Vehicle

Similar to Ufer's use of the automobile to express his own biography, William Henry Johnson also pictured broken down vehicles as a symbol of America's troubled economy in his *Breakdown* series of 1940-1941. In the paintings and related serigraphs, Johnson pictures vehicles rendered inoperable, a motif used to express his personal experiences as an African-American artist living in the United States. He had returned to America a little more than a year earlier, following twelve years living in France, Denmark and Norway, as well as the North African country of Tunisia. During this time, he experimented with various styles of European modernism. At his late 1938 return, he was working in an intentionally naïve or "primitive" style, as Johnson sometimes described his work, of flattened forms and solid colors.⁴² In *The Breakdown* (fig.1.53) a man's legs stick out from beneath a vehicle, while a woman tends to a fire over which a pot of food is being prepared. The car appears to have furniture stacked atop the roof, perhaps as the couple travels to find work, or as part of the northern and westward migration of African Americans from southern states early in the twentieth century. Johnson himself moved from his home state of South Carolina to New York at the age of seventeen. As travelers apparently living alongside the road, wherever the couple stopped became their home, indicated by an abbreviated depiction of a picket fence near their automobile. *Breakdown with*

Flat Tire (fig.4.25) pictures a family with children, and there is no indication they are on an extended journey. The man works to repair the rear passenger tire while a woman with two kids stands close by. The couples in the *Breakdown* series cope with their situation, with broken down vehicles and hard times.

The *Breakdown* series suggests the lack of opportunities for African Americans during the Depression, even as the economy was slowly improving by 1940 as the country prepared for inevitable war. Johnson's cars are old, boxy vehicles and far removed from the long, low streamlined automobiles then driven by those of means, as pictured in John Langley Howard's *Embarcadero and Clay Streets* and Coit Tower mural. A hand crank protrudes from the front of the car in *Breakdown with Flat Tire*, dating the automobile to before the 1920s when electric starters had become standard on motor vehicles. The man and woman have exaggerated hands and feet, indicating their status as manual laborers defined by their large, rough and likely calloused appendages.⁴³ "In all my years of painting," Johnson said, "I have had one absorbing and inspiring idea, and have worked towards it with unyielding zeal: to give—in simple and stark form—the story of the Negro as he existed."⁴⁴ For the families represented in the *Breakdown* images, the automobiles offered at least a semblance of hope and opportunity. Johnson's own spirituality is indicated by the kneeling postures of figures and the cruciform shape of the hood ornament, which, once the vehicles get moving again, will lead the way for the travelers.

Making repairs to a motorcar, however, was not always possible. Families stranded without an automobile during the Depression faced great difficulties, which included acquiring basic goods. Many rural businesses and services of the pre-auto era had relocated to centralized towns and cities, while others, like liverys, had become gas stations or garages. This meant that those in rural areas without a vehicle did not have access to needed goods. The depiction of a

broken down car could be associated with economic hardship, while a discarded vehicle suggests abandonment, or lost hope for recovery. John Langley Howard's, *Hooverville*, Otis Dozier's *Abandoned House*, 1935, and Arnold Blanch's lithograph, *Arizona*, c.1935 (fig.4.26) are three examples. In a work intended to relate to *The Annual Move*, Dozier shows a vehicle outside of a home.⁴⁵ However, the home is now deserted and in tatters and the car is inoperable, with parts missing and the front left wheel on its side, removed from the axle. Unlike *The Annual Move*, there is no family present and the house and land are in decay. Likewise, Blanch pictures an abandoned jalopy in a desolate location. The vehicle is missing its rear wheel, the frame to the windshield is broken, and it appears to have been driven until it could simply go no farther. *Arizona* demonstrates the harsh reality discovered by many of the unfortunate travelers from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas and other states to the East who attempted unsuccessfully to traverse the harsh deserts of the Southwest. In Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, Tom Joad responds to a New Mexico border guard's question: "How long you plan to be in Arizona?" with "No longer'n we can get acrost her."⁴⁶ While the Joads traveled across the state to reach California in short order, in reality many real-life travelers never reached their intended destination, their car breaking down from the extreme weather conditions encountered in the desert along the way. Still others made it to California, but lost their transportation after their arrival.⁴⁷

Once people lose their vehicles, they are left to the devices of others to get them where they want to go. Benton Spruance, a printmaker who made several auto-related images, shows a couple with small child in *Repose in Egypt*, 1940 (fig.4.27), with a modern American metropolis standing in for Egypt in Spruance's updated adaptation of the Biblical tale. As the family awaits the next bus, their worldly belongings appear to be no more than what will fit in their luggage.

The vantage point is low, on the level of the seated woman, with cars passing on the street directly behind. The perspective places the viewer on the family's level. Without a vehicle of their own, the couple rely on the bus and its schedule, a return to the restrictive travel known earlier by those who traveled by train.

Hitchhiking was another travel option for those without a motorcar. In a painting and related print, John O'Neil shows a single figure waiting for or hoping to catch a ride. In both the painting *The Hitchhiker*, 1940, and the similar linoleum cut print *Highway West*, 1941 (figs.4.28-4.29), a lone figure stands on the side of a roadway, a suitcase at his feet. Off the road by the hitchhiker are a large, dead tree, a billboard and, apparently, the farm house the man is leaving behind. The distant landscape is desolate. In both compositions, a structure is on the right side, but in the painting the visible window is broken, which adds to the area's bleakness. The major difference between the painting and print is that the roadway is clear in the painting, while in the graphic work a vehicle approaches and the hitchhiker holds his thumb in the air, displaying the universally accepted hand signal of asking for a ride. Despite the stark conditions of the area, the possibility for an exciting journey adds a touch of romanticism to the images, which O'Neil suggested in an interview a half century later. "In 1940, the attraction of the road was a call to adventure," said O'Neil, "whether one drove a car or hitch-hiked a ride in one: the world of scenery yet unseen, of stop-overs in tourist courts and tourist cabins before they became anonymous motels, impelled many of us toward the excitement of a cross-country journey."⁴⁸

Bordman Robinson presented a starkly different image of hitchhikers in his lithograph *The Hitchhikers*, c.1933 (fig.4.30). A man and woman walk along the side of a road, the man holding his thumb up to seek a ride. In O'Neil's images of the lone man on the road, the perspective is slightly elevated, above the scene. Robinson uses a lower point of view, looking

slightly up at the couple. They are monumental figures, filling the central portion of the composition. Through dark, hollow eyes, the man looks out toward the picture plane. Where O’Neil’s *Highway West* suggests a narrative that questions if the hitchhiker will receive a ride or remain on the side of the road, Robinson represents the scene from a motorist’s or roadway point of view. The perspective places the burden on the viewer to decide whether to offer a ride to the destitute couple.

With the onset of the Great Depression and drought conditions of the Dust Bowl, the automobile became a lifeline for destitute families. During the 1930s, the automobile proved a potent symbol for artists making political statements in support of workers and the unemployed. An old vehicle weighted down with personal belongings traveling America’s roadways served as a potent symbol for those expressing the nation’s difficulties. Walter Ufer visualized his own Buick in need of repair as a displaced self-portrait. Similarly, William Henry Johnson used broken down automobiles as a way to highlight the hardships faced by African-Americans. The automobile was used in numerous ways to express the difficulties endured by Americans during the Depression, but ultimately, those who suffered the most were those without a vehicle at all.

¹ James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1988, 1990), 188-189.

² Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1937), 265.

³ The members of the Dallas Nine included Jerry Bywaters, Harry Carnohan, John Douglass, Dozier, Alexandre Hogue, William Lester, Perry Nichols, Everett Spruce and Thomas Stell.

⁴ Rick Stewart identifies the area as Garland, Texas. Rick Stewart, *Lone Star Regionalism: The Dallas Nine and Their Circle, 1928-1945* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1985), 63.

⁵ Art historian Sam Ratcliffe described Otis Dozier’s borrowing of Perry Nichols vehicle in a 2003 panel discussion relating to artist Jerry Bywaters. Sam Ratcliffe, Jerry Bywaters Cochran, John Lunsford and Joseph B. Rucker, *The Lone-Star Regionalist: The Legacy of Jerry Bywaters*, panel discussion, Dallas Museum of Art, 3 April, 2003. Transcript available, www.dallasmuseumofart.tv/program_recordings/transcripts/BywatersLegacy_01.pdf, accessed 3 October 2011.

⁶ Stewart, *Lone Star Regionalism*, 63.

⁷ In 1941, George Schreiber created a similar lithograph, also titled *From Arkansas*, which was sold through the Associated American Artists.

⁸ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Viking Press, 1939; 1967), 113-117.

⁹ Cynthia Payne, "Charles Frederick Surendorf," *The American Scene on Paper: Prints and Drawings From the Schoen Collection* (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, 2008), 301.

¹⁰ Krista Kestly, "Charles Surendorf," Vault Gallery of Fine Art, Sonora, California, www.vaultart.com/surendorf, accessed 2 February 2012.

¹¹ The roadside "flivver bums" were often unable to afford the most economical auto camp prices. Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1979), 143.

¹² Elaine S. Abelson, "'Women Who Have No Men to Work for Them': Gender and Homelessness in the Great Depression, 1930-1934," *Feminist Studies* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 104-127.

¹³ Ironically, Cremo became the best-selling brand of cigar in 1931 with an ad campaign promoting that their cigars were machine made, rather than rolled by hand, a process that put laborers out of work. That same year, Cremo ran a successful campaign in which they gave away "a-car-a-day" to lucky winners. Patricia A. Cooper, "What This Country Needs Is a Good Five-Cent Cigar," *Technology and Culture* 29, no. 4 (Oct. 1988), 799; Tony Hyman, "Cigar History 1910-1960," National Cigar Museum (15 February 2008), www.nationalcigarmuseum.com/Cigar_History/History_1910-1960.html, accessed 28 December 2011.

¹⁴ Federal aid helped relieve some of California's migrant population, but that assistance was available only from 1933 to 1935. See Katherine D. Lovell, "Migrant Aid in California, 1849: 1939: A Comparison of the Social Services for Transients during the Gold Rush and the Great Depression," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 3, no. 1 (October 1943), 83-84.

¹⁵ Paul Manoguerra, "John Langley Howard," *Coming Home: American Paintings 1930-1950, From the Schoen Collection* (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, 2003), 181.

¹⁶ Quoted by Manoguerra, "John Langley Howard," 181.

¹⁷ Other sections of the Coit Tower murals were painted by Victor Arnautoff, Bernard Zakheim and Clifford Wright, other artists who drew inspiration from Mexican muralist Diego Rivera and shared the political views of John Langley Howard. In a section painted by Arnautoff, a newsstand sells copies of *The Masses* and *The Daily Worker*, while in Zakheim's library imagery, a man pulls a copy of Karl Marx's *Capital* from the shelves. Only the sickle and hammer painted by Clifford Wright proved to be too politically offensive and were cut from the wall. See Steven M. Gelber, "Working to Prosperity: California's New Deal Murals," *California History* 58, no. 2 (Summer 1979), 104-106.

¹⁸ By the 1940s, Howard lost interest in making art with social commentary and renounced communism. See Linda Aldrich, "John Langley Howard," *American Scene Painting: California, 1930s and 1940s* (Irvine: Westphal Publishing, 1991), 183-184.

¹⁹ Walter Ufer trained at the Dresden Academy and joined the Taos Society of Artists in 1917.

²⁰ Patricia Janis Broder, *Taos: a Painter's Dream* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1980), 215.

²¹ Mary Carroll Nelson, *The Legendary Artists of Taos* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1980), 76.

²² Dean A. Porter, "Walter Ufer: 1876-1936," Unpublished manuscript for Gerald Peters Gallery (May 2000), 9.

²³ After Ufer died in 1936, Bob Abbott and Jim Mirabal scattered the artist's ashes. "Ufer, Painter of Southwest, Dies at Taos," *Art Digest* 10, no.20 (1 September 1936), 13.

²⁴ J. Oscar Davis, manager of Davis Auto Company, Taos, New Mexico, to Walter Ufer, 3 May 1919. Dean Porter files.

²⁵ James J. Flink, *The Car Culture* (Cambridge and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1975, 1982), 53.

²⁶ Ufer described "the old car with no tires of the same manufacture," in a newspaper clipping, possibly published in Albuquerque, and in a letter to Carter H. Harrison. Clipping and letter context courtesy of Dean Porter. "Taos Painter Entertained on His 60th Birthday," unidentified newspaper clipping, July 1936, Dorothea Fricke Collection, University of Notre Dame; Walter Ufer to Carter H. Harrison, 2 January 1935, Newberry Library Archives, Chicago.

²⁷ Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 138.

²⁸ Walter Ufer to Dorothea Fricke, Taos, 14 January, and 31 January 1935. Walter Ufer Archives: Dorothea Fricke Collection, University of Notre Dame.

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- ²⁹ Ufer's wife and fellow artist, Mary Frederiksen Ufer, praised the painting, but was apprehensive of it finding a buyer. She wrote, "I saw your painting [*Bob Abbott and His Assistant*] at the Grand Central Gallery – it is splendid. But Walter, no capitalist will buy it of that I am sure." Mary Ufer, Auditorium Hotel Chicago, to Walter Ufer, 10 June 1935. Dean Porter files.
- ³⁰ J. Gray Sweeney, *Masterpieces of Western American Art* (New York: Crescent Books, 1991), 218.
- ³¹ Ufer to Harrison.
- ³² Elizabeth Boyd White used the letter "E" as a first name, without a period, and kept the last name Boyd even after several marriages. Stacia Lewandowski, *Light, Landscape and the Creative Quest: Early Artists of Santa Fe* (Santa Fe: Salska Arts, 2011), 243.
- ³³ Phillips and Blumenschein were not the first people to arrive in Taos. The Taos Pueblo is thought to be the oldest inhabited location in America, dating back more than one thousand years.
- ³⁴ Walter Ufer's displaced self-portrait recalls Francis Picabia's "object portraits" of Alfred Stieglitz, Marius de Zayas and others. Picabia used automotive parts as metaphors for individuals rather than picturing their physical features (figs.1.19-1.21).
- ³⁵ *Catalogue of the One Hundred and Fifteenth Annual Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Feb. 8th, 1920 – March 28th, 1920*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1920), 58.
- ³⁶ Lula Merrick, "Walter Ufer: Painter of Indians," *International Studio* 77, no.4 (July 1923), 299.
- ³⁷ Ufer previously painted thirty to forty paintings a year. In the 1930s, it became difficult to make even three or four a year, and the results were pale comparisons to his finest work. Porter, "Walter Ufer," 25-27.
- ³⁸ Gustave Baumann quoted in Registrar files, Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky.
- ³⁹ Broder, *Taos: A Painter's Dream*, 229.
- ⁴⁰ Ufer to Harrison.
- ⁴¹ Ufer died in 1936 following an attack of appendicitis. Ufer's widow, Mary, gifted the painting to the J.B. Speed Museum, Louisville, Kentucky in 1946. It was the town in which Ufer was raised. Suzan Campbell, ed., *Taos Artists and Their Patrons, 1898-1950* (Notre Dame: The Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame, 1999), 105.
- ⁴² William Henry Johnson described himself as a "modern primitive" and used similar terms in a contemporary art context to express trends in modern art that emphasized a simplification of forms and colors. His use of words like "primitive" or "naïve" relate to art practices and training, not to people. See Teresa G. Gionis, ed. *William H. Johnson: An American Modern* (Washington, D.C. and Baltimore: Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service and Morgan State University, 2001).
- ⁴³ Richard J. Powell, "'In My Family of Primitiveness and Tradition': William H. Johnson's 'Jesus and the Three Marys,'" *American Art* 5, no. 4 (Autumn 1991), 29.
- ⁴⁴ Nora Holt, "Primitives on Exhibit," *New York Amsterdam News*, 9 March 1946, 16; quoted in Richard J. Powell, *Homecoming: The Art and Life of William H. Johnson* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 213.
- ⁴⁵ A note in the Schoen collection files indicate that this painting was related to Dozier's *The Annual Move*, also of 1935. William Underwood Eiland, "Otis Dozier," *Coming Home*, 129.
- ⁴⁶ Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath*, 208; also quoted by Betsy Fahlman, *New Deal Art in Arizona* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 94.
- ⁴⁷ The text accompanying the publication of Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother* photograph gave details to the woman's situation and explained that the sitter had sold the tires to her car for food money, thus leaving her stuck without operable transportation. David Acton, *Keeping Shadows: Photography at the Worcester Art Museum* (Worcester: Worcester Art Museum, 2004), 182-183.
- ⁴⁸ Quoted by Paul Manoguerra, "John O'Neil," *Coming Home*, 251.

Chapter Five Artists on the Road

Automobiles allowed artists to explore and experience more of the nation with greater ease than ever before, especially after a dependable system of roads was established with passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1921.¹ In search of subject matter, they carried the essentials of their trade, some as little as a sketchpad and pencil, while others packed folding easels, brushes, paints, stretched canvases and containers to store wet paintings safely. While on the road, artists worked *en plein air* or utilized their cars' interiors for shelter, creating drawings, watercolors or modestly sized oils from inside their automobiles. Some went so far as to retrofit their vehicles, creating traveling studios that accommodated their working needs while maximizing limited interior space. Artists contributed to the growth in American automobile tourism and, like others, camped alongside or slept in their vehicles. Photographic records place artists such as John Sloan, Georgia O'Keeffe, Andrew Dasburg, and Victor Higgins painting and drawing while inside their vehicles, or working outdoors with their cars close at hand.

While artists traveled the United States in their vehicles, reference to the automobile is not always found through its representation. The motorcar is frequently suggested through the depictions of the nation's infrastructure; the series of roads and highways, and the proliferation of roadside businesses that developed to sustain a mobile nation. The automobile's presence is routinely implied through the depictions of roadways, a popular theme found in works by many artists, including Ralston Crawford, O. Louis Guglielmi, and Edward Hopper. Automobility and roadside activity is further represented in works by Hopper, Stuart Davis, Wanda Gág, and others, in which traffic and directional signs, advertisement billboards, gasoline pumps, garages, auto-camps, motels, roadside diners and hitchhikers are found. These images routinely suggest a

motorist's point of view, highlighting what one might see when looking through a windshield. In a few instances, artists even emphasized the specificity of the mobile perspective by including the automobile's interior and the framework of the windshield as part of overall designs. This chapter examines ways in which artists responded to automotive travel, utilized vehicles as mobile studios and how automobility pervades American art through depictions of the nation's expanding auto environment. Road imagery exists from all regions of the country, from Maine to California and Vermont to Florida, especially after the expansive road-building projects initiated in the 1920s. Particular attention is given to artists working in the picturesque American Southwest. New Mexico was a place of refuge for many artists, including John Sloan who, more than others, included the automobile in his work. New Mexico was also a tourist destination that lacked an expansive rail system so people there relied heavily on the automobile for transportation. Visiting in the summer of 1923, Stuart Davis expressed the sentiment of others who visited the state, writing, "you have to have a car to see it."²

The Auto-Studio

Artists have long incorporated travel into their work, whether by train, carriage, horse, boat or simply on foot. The hardships endured by the explorer-artists at the beginning of the nineteenth century were eased with the proliferation of railways by century's end. With a sufficient web of roadways crossing the continent by the late 1920s, automobiles made travel even more convenient, allowing a freedom unavailable through restricted rail travel to determine a destination. The automobile altered the way artists experienced the country, which they now viewed through a windshield. The ability to alter quickly one's geographic location created the possibility for an ever-changing kaleidoscope of scenes to influence compositions. Artists had a

new way to experience and visualize nature, which recalls earlier inventions like the *camera obscura* of the sixteenth century and the photographic camera of the nineteenth century. Just as earlier artists came to rely on these tools to inform their work, numerous artists in the twentieth century depended on the automobile to get them from one scenic place to the next.

The automobile aided what artists could see and experience, although they did not always indicate automotive travel in their images. Diary accounts, letters, and photographs relate artists' road adventures, but the auto itself is not often depicted in finished works. Paintings of the American West by Frank Tenney Johnson serve as one example. Based out of New York, Johnson and his wife visited California by train in 1912, touring the southern portion of the state by car.³ Their second westward sketching trip took place in 1918. They drove across the country in a recently purchased Dodge during a time when people still relied on train travel for long journeys, with extended auto-travel proving difficult due to unreliable roads. This was the first of many auto journeys the couple would take as part of their routine explorations of the western United States (fig.5.1). Despite their usefulness in crossing the country and finding inspiring locations, automobiles are rarely, if ever, included in Johnson's paintings. However, they do appear in his commercial illustrations as directed by his editors. Instead of painting the contemporary West as he experienced it, Johnson made landscapes populated by figures on horseback—cowboys, ranch hands and American Indians—with no indication of automobility whatsoever. His paintings of equestrian figures romanticize the American West of the past, a time before the automobile age. Johnson reached remote locations by automobile, yet his paintings give no indication that a motorcar assisted in getting him there. A lack of pictured evidence relating the use of an automobile is true of works by countless artists and was not limited to those painting a romanticized past.

Modernist Georgia O’Keeffe used her car with regularity not only to search for intriguing places, but also as a mobile studio to protect her as she worked. Her coupe provided shelter from the sun and the harsh Southwestern elements and powerful storms. One known painting made from the interior of her car is *Gerald’s Tree II*, 1937 (fig.5.2), which pictures an old and twisted cedar tree. It recalls the artist’s emphasis on isolated objects, such as flowers, leaves, plants, and bones. The automobile-related context of *Gerald’s Tree II* is known through a photograph by Ansel Adams, which documents O’Keeffe working on the painting while inside her vehicle (fig.5.3).⁴ In the photograph, O’Keeffe holds a brush to the canvas, looking over her right shoulder towards the viewer, pausing from her work as the photograph is taken. Having purchased her first vehicle almost a decade earlier, O’Keeffe was well accustomed to painting in her car by the time of Adams’s photo.

O’Keeffe learned to drive during her first visit to Taos, New Mexico, in 1929. Using the Ford owned by her hostess, Mabel Dodge Luhan, O’Keeffe was given lessons by Mabel’s husband, Tony Luhan, and by fellow artist, Rebecca Salsbury Strand. O’Keeffe’s letters expressed her immediate thrill with the experience. She wrote of “passing and turning and twisting – parking and chasing prairie dogs” and of extended driving trips “with tops of the cars down most of the time – greased faces and peeling noses and everybody loved it.”⁵ Stifled and out of place in the constructed, concrete environment of New York City, O’Keeffe responded enthusiastically to her new surroundings in the high desert. From her letters, it is clear the joy of motoring—the speed, the wind in the face and thrill of possible danger, the independence—added to the artist’s excited response to the New Mexican landscape. She embraced the most contemporary means of personal transportation in a land that has been accurately described as “that most ancient of American quarters.”⁶

When O’Keeffe arrived in Taos, she struggled initially to take in the vastness of the region and the crisp, dry air that adds to its beauty. She first painted objects close at hand, including a small, wooden *bulto* Virgin owned by Mabel Luhan and landscapes near the Luhan home. When she learned to drive, O’Keeffe ventured throughout the region and visited nearby towns. She painted the same sites frequented by other auto-tourists, including the Ranchos de Taos church and the multi-storied Taos Pueblo.⁷ O’Keeffe’s response to her time in New Mexico was profound, deeply personal and was enhanced, at the very least, by her driving experiences. She returned almost every summer before relocating permanently in 1949. During her first summer in Taos, she purchased a Model A Ford and had it delivered to the home she shared with her husband, Alfred Stieglitz, in Lake George, New York, where the upstate traffic challenged her.⁸

She was enamored of her car and the newfound freedom it provided. Stieglitz, on the other hand, despised automobiles, considering them crass, commercial products. “Every time I see a Ford car something in me revolts,” he wrote, adding, “they are just ugly things in line and texture – in every sense of sensibility in spite of the virtue of so called usefulness.”⁹ His feelings are rooted in his elitist sensibilities and the privileged class, of which he was part. Regardless of Stieglitz’s personal feelings, he created a series of fifteen photographs over several years that picture O’Keeffe in her vehicle. Images of her in the Model A Ford and later with a Ford V-8 she owned were part of his continued composite portrait of O’Keeffe, an extended photographic portrait begun in 1917.¹⁰ Photos capture her seated within the vehicle looking out the side window, and standing proudly next to her automobile, with her hand shown in elegant contrast to the molded shape of the fender. The vehicle’s black exterior and O’Keeffe’s black clothing suggests her affinity with her car and the newfound independence it provided.¹¹ When pictured

inside her Ford, O’Keeffe is behind the solid and dark barrier of the car door that can be read within the context of the psychological distance then separating the couple.

O’Keeffe, like other artists, customized her vehicle to accommodate her painting needs, removing the back seat to provide enough room to paint.¹² Some liked to sleep in their vehicles or set up a small camp nearby. Auto-camping, which became popular after the turn of the century, gained the romanticized name of “gypsying” by the 1910s.¹³ This was an activity practiced by California-based painter Mary Agnes Yerkes, and her husband, retired Navy Commander Archibald Nester Offley. They traveled extensively through the western United States, during which Yerkes painted while Offley kept a detailed travelogue, written as if a published weekly newsletter. In one entry, titled “How to Make a Pullman Out of a Parlor Car Buick,” he included a sketch of the vehicle and described the manner in which their 1920 Buick was outfitted (fig.5.4). It had a mattress for sleeping that could be stored easily, leaving “no visible sign that it ever was a bed room, except the neatly rolled mattress which then fits easily in the rear seat.”¹⁴ The major differences between the popular Pullman railroad sleeping car and a motorcar are that the driver was on his schedule and the destination was self-determined.¹⁵ In their numerous travel photographs, the automobile is frequently present, some picturing Yerkes painting from an easel with the vehicle close at hand. However, no known paintings by Yerkes show a car. Instead, her work is largely of pristine landscapes with rarely a hint of man’s presence. Like Johnson and O’Keeffe, Yerkes’s images are symptomatic of countless artists who spent considerable time in their vehicles, driving to distant locations only to ignore in their art any relationship to the modern machine that took them to their destinations.

Some artists who drove included the automobile in their works, including Ernest Blumenschein and particularly John Sloan. A founder of the Taos arts colony, Blumenschein

retrofitted his 1919 Ford, which he named “Michelangelo,” to accommodate his camping and painting needs and, on occasion, included it in his work. Blumenschein made major adjustments, adding a large, hinged box to the back of the vehicle to carry supplies, and installing collapsible seats and a shelf on the interior to hold paintings, increasing the purchase price by half.¹⁶ An automobile, possibly his own, appears in *Eagle Nest Lake, No. 4*, 1933 (fig.1.40), made in the same year the artist spent considerable time in his vehicle touring Arizona and southern California.¹⁷

In 1919, John Sloan purchased a chain-driven 1912 Simplex, splitting the cost with fellow artist, Randall Davey, with the intention of driving together with him from New York to Santa Fe, New Mexico. The artists equipped their vehicle with camping gear, including tents, a portable stove, rainwear and a small bathtub.¹⁸ The Sloans and Daveys were on the leading edge of the growing trend for auto-camping in America in the 1920s, when the camping equipment industry boomed.¹⁹ With their wives, Dolly and Florence, the artists were determined not only to reach Santa Fe, but “to see America” along the way. The ride proved far more difficult than envisioned and “Miss Simplex,” as Dolly named the auto, was unreliable and needed frequent repairs. It broke down completely before they reached their destination.²⁰

Upon arriving in Santa Fe, Sloan wrote to Robert Henri, describing their trip as “a record breaker for expense.”²¹ He explained, “it cost Davey and me each about \$750! We did not quite get here [and] had to come by train the last 90 miles.” Sloan made sketches along the way, including illustrated letters picturing their vehicle tooling along the road. Of Iowa’s grain fields, he wrote, “I think it would be fine to paint as seen from the automobile, but once the roads get wet, good night, it is impossible to take your eyes off of the ruts in the mud!”²² However, he never made such paintings. Sloan’s trek across the country was a long and difficult one, and it

was the group's intention to camp along the way, a form of revolt against the strictures of Victorian conventions that would have appealed to Sloan. As romantic as the idea of sleeping in tents might have seemed at the outset, he and his traveling companions soon realized that sleeping in hotels included creature comforts to which they had grown accustomed. All but two nights during the six-week trip were spent indoors.²³

The problems faced by those who sought the outdoor life of gypsying were two-fold. Some who drove into the country did not hesitate to stop where they wished, helping themselves to the bounty of the land. These campers too often demonstrated little regard for the farmers who owned the property. Secondly, many would-be campers, like the Sloans and Daveys, were urbanites accustomed to the comforts of indoor life and not prepared for rugged, outdoor camping. To assist motorists, municipalities beginning in 1920 opened specified campgrounds, providing showers and basic facilities free of charge in the hopes of luring leisurely travelers into town where they would spend money.²⁴ Walter C. Yeomans's *The New Outfit*, an undated drypoint engraving (fig.5.5), pictures the type of campground available to those driving through the country. Depicting a family's arrival to the camp, the work shows a man carrying a large bundle from his car, presumably the tent he will erect to match those already set up. A child struggles with a bedroll, while his mother gestures and appears to communicate to those already there. The two families in place, with their tents set up next to their vehicles, go about their activities while observing the newcomers. The three families form a triangle within the composition. The shared, open space within the camp, with tents close to one another and meals taken outdoors at picnic tables, suggests a communal gathering among the travelers who come and go. Despite urban centers' hopes of realizing boosts in tax revenues from visiting campers, many motorists never bothered to venture into populated centers to shop. Outside of gasoline,

travelers regularly carried canned goods and other daily rations from home and simply wanted to continue motoring.²⁵ By 1930 and the onset of the Depression, free auto-camps were largely replaced by fee-based operations, as cities discouraged visits from “tin-can tourists” and the “undesirables” or “flivver-bums,” the large numbers of unemployed people driving the country in search of work.

In the late 1920s and into the 1930s, private entrepreneurs opened motorlodges, consisting primarily of small cabins with adjacent parking spaces, providing rustic comfort for those able to spend one to three dollars per day for the convenience. It was still a form of roughing it, with cruder accommodations than those found at home or hotels, but far more comfortable than pitching tents and sleeping on the ground. John Steuart Curry's *Tourist Cabins*, c.1934 (fig.5.6), pictures the atmosphere of the ideal motorlodge, in which the usual domestic gender roles are reinforced. The men gather outside around the fire. In such situations, without revealing too much about themselves, strangers likely shared their experiences of life on the road. Conditions found on roadways and other camps were regular topics of discussion.²⁶ The women sit indoors by radios, crocheting or mending clothing, and care for small children as larger children run and play together. Curry portrays a fellowship of strangers from various parts of the country. A writer in 1924 for *Motor Camper and Tourist* magazine recognized the solidarity found in the auto-camp, which was “transforming the provincial-minded man into a national-minded one.”²⁷ Despite the potentially diverse backgrounds of those staying at Curry's *Tourist Cabins*, the flags on the top of each cabin identify all as Americans.

Staying Close to the Car and the Tourist's Perspective

Artists driving long distances may have frequented motor camps; however, most artists took trips consisting of short drives to locations relatively close at hand.²⁸ With the automobile came the practice of driving to the countryside to spend the day. The motor vehicle allowed for an escape, even if brief, from populated areas and industrialized city life, much as a walk into Central Park could provide a New Yorker respite from the hustle of the surrounding city. An outing into the countryside for a picnic became a popular form of motorcar recreation. This pastime activity presented a modern take on the eighteenth-century's *fête galante* tradition, as found in a pair of paintings by John Sloan and Marguerite Zorach. In both Sloan's *On the Ridge*, 1920 (fig.5.7), and Zorach's *The Picnic*, 1928 (fig.5.8), the artists convey the experience of a brief trip to delight in the country. Each pictures people enjoying an outdoor gathering, along with the front of a car entering the composition at one side. *On the Ridge* includes John and Dolly Sloan among a group of thirteen people at an early evening outing, sitting on blankets and appreciating one another's company around a roaring fire. Helen Shuster, wife of artist Will Shuster, throws her arms in the air in apparent jubilation. The site at which the company relished their "many hot dogs," was only "a couple miles out on the North Road," outside of Santa Fe.²⁹ Sloan returned to the theme in *Picnic, Arroyo Hondo*, 1938—"a happy party taking a holiday lunch to a spot five miles out of town"—where several people carry goods and baskets from the open doors of a car to a spot not far away.³⁰ Similarly, the modernist Zorach painted an outdoor gathering in *The Picnic*, 1928. The stylized composition is informed by the angular forms of cubism combined with the coloration suggestive of fauvism. Blankets are spread on the ground as two couples set up for a picnic, while children play in a tree nearby. In the distance are a few homes, likely depicting the farmhouses of Robinhood, Maine, where Marguerite and William

Zorach moved in 1923. Paintings and photographs demonstrate that Americans commonly enjoyed nature while keeping the automobile that made the trip possible close at hand. Images show people setting up camp next to their vehicles and picnicking alongside their cars. These depictions suggest a general reluctance among motorists to stray too far from their automobiles and this included artists.

Will Shuster's *Hyde Park Picnic*, 1938 (fig.5.9), and Sloan's *Gateway to Cerrillos*, 1946 (fig.5.10), picture artists' use of automobiles to find destinations to paint. Ironically, by including their vehicles in their compositions, Shuster and Sloan demonstrate the common practice of artists working near their vehicles while ignoring them in their imagery. Evidence of this is most frequently found in photographs. *Hyde Park Picnic* pictures a family visiting an established park setting within a wooded area in New Mexico. Children play and explore the boundaries of the park, while two women sit and converse at a picnic table. The foreground is framed on the left by the front of an automobile and on the right by an artist painting at an easel. It is unclear if the painting is intended as a self-portrait, or an image of another artist. He faces to the right, away from the car. The painter is shown making a landscape from a tourist-ready point of view. Similarly, Sloan's *Gateway to Cerrillos* shows three artists, Sloan, Joe Reed, and Helen Farr Sloan, sketching and painting just yards away from their large, blue sedan, which is parked off the side of the paved road.³¹ The road itself continues on, winding through the New Mexican landscape toward distant mountains. Of the trio, only Sloan faces in the direction of the automobile, but he does not include it within the composition he is creating.

By including the automobile, *Hyde Park Picnic* and *Gateway to Cerrillos* serve as examples of how few artists pictured their own vehicles during their travels. The paintings also demonstrate that artists were content to paint at easily reached destinations. These include parks

and scenic outlooks, which provide a tourist-based visual sensibility. This is reinforced through a pair of 1926 photographs by T. Harmon Parkhurst that shows Sloan outdoors, painting at his easel (figs.5.11-5.12). In each, Sloan stands with his arm outstretched toward the canvas in a manner seen in Shuster's later *Hyde Park Picnic*. Next to Sloan is his recently purchased Studebaker, with Dolly in the front seat looking toward the photographer.³² Sloan's placement is the only variation between the two photos, taken during the same session. In one, the canvas on which Sloan supposedly paints is visible, while in the other the canvas has been turned in the opposite direction, requiring Sloan to look back over his shoulder at the landscape. He turns away from the automobile in both.

The multiple photographic and painted images of artists working in or quite near their automobiles demonstrate that artists were frequently content to drive to a location without venturing further. As a result, their paintings do not depict hard-won vistas from remote locations. Instead, the images convey the easily obtained view from what art historian Lucy Lippard refers to as "the beaten track."³³ *Gateway to Cerrillos*, painted in the studio, shows Sloan seated in a folding chair at his easel along the side of the road painting the landscape before him. It suggests that a destination worthy of painting is easily accessible and can be found just to the side of the road. Conclusively, the greater access the automobile allowed did not equal a greater exploration of the land. Rather, it meant covering more of the known landscape.

Sloan's and Shuster's paintings indicate the influence and explosive growth of tourism brought on by the automobile. Landscape paintings of the nineteenth century were celebrations of the promise offered by the newly appreciated continent, featuring grand compositions of sublime and picturesque wonders of nature. The tourists' landscapes of the twentieth century, on the other hand, are of vistas that anyone with an automobile could reach. To the tourist, the land

becomes something to experience by seeing, before quickly moving on to the next scenic view. Art historian John Ott writes: “‘Scenic’ implies seriality and movement from one visual setting to another, unlike the static connotations of the picturesque (‘like a picture’). Within the regime of consumerism, the scenic view was often mobilized to suggest boundless consumer choice.”³⁴ Ott adds, “The steering wheel becomes the handle of a shopping cart, the natural world a showroom with infinite consumer possibility.”

A number of artists traveled to the Southwest seeking its innate beauty and seemingly readymade scenes to paint. In 1917, Evelyn Marie Stuart wrote of the artistic qualities to be found in New Mexico: “The whole Southwest is indeed a land of romance, the Indian, the Spanish Cavalier, the devout Mission Father, all alike, are striking and pronounced types each with a story full of thrills.”³⁵ Writing of the wonders New Mexico offered to scientists, ethnologists and archeologists, Stuart added, “the artist finds equal opportunity for landscape or figure painting wherein the most careful realism would still seem fanciful, so vivid is the color of the country and its life.” In Oscar Berninghaus’s undated painting *Taos Tapestry* (fig.5.13) he demonstrated the seemingly endless possibility of experiences available in New Mexico, noting that an automobile makes them possible. Hailing from St. Louis, Berninghaus visited New Mexico in 1899, returning to paint every summer until relocating permanently in 1925. He was one of the founding members of the influential Taos Society of Artists, which helped promote the region through its traveling exhibitions and images used in advertisements for the Santa Fe Railway.

Despite his many years in New Mexico, in the collage-like design of *Taos Tapestry*, Berninghaus visualized the Southwest as if experienced by a tourist. The composition is a dizzying kaleidoscope of activity, picturing at varying scales the people and places of New

Mexico, including architectural elements, ceremonial events, and flora and fauna. From missionaries to gamblers and Pueblo Indians, the juxtaposition of seemingly exotic and familiar details reads like a travel poster that combines in a single format many of the sights and pursuits available throughout the state. A motorcar near the center of the composition psychologically connects the varying scenes, indicating that each experience is a short car ride away. The automobile is the conveyance capable of taking tourists to the various sights and tying all the people and places together. Immediately above the vehicle are domed, red gas pumps, Berninghaus's acknowledgment of one of the most important support systems needed for a mobile populace. Directly in front of and larger than the automobile is a well-dressed tourist couple. The male holds a camera at the ready, his anticipation of the awaiting experiences palpable. Berninghaus not only reveals the importance of the automobile to tourists, but confirms that artists who travel are also tourists.

Sloan likewise made several paintings dealing with the experiences made possible for tourists by driving in New Mexico. Two paintings from 1930 of the same event emphasize the role the auto played in his artistic production. In *Christian Soldiers* (fig.5.14), five devout Catholic women dressed in black are "proudly escorting the gold fringed banner of Our Lady."³⁶ Behind is the Saint Francis Cathedral Basilica, Santa Fe. The emphasis is on the humble women, their slumped postures of deference emphasizing their deep devotion. The same procession is included in *Corpus Christi Procession on the Alameda* (fig.5.15), and this time the point of view is from farther away and includes more of the procession and surrounding area. The church is in the back, with the procession in the middle ground, and the women carrying the banner are now shown as part of the greater pageant. Between the line of worshippers and the foreground a couple is seated with the back end of their car nearby. Despite the deep devotion of those in the

procession, the presence of the automobile and onlookers reduces the religious ceremony to an event for spectators, expressing the sentiment found in Berninghaus's *Taos Tapestry* of the Southwest being a place for tourist experiences. The implication is that the presence of tourists markedly changes the areas and events they attend. We find the activity of tourists again in *Old Jemez Mission, 1922* (fig.5.16), featuring a parked vehicle and several of its occupants walking about outside a mission church. "Note the proud Ford owner snapshooting his family on this old prehistoric spot," wrote Sloan in his autobiography.³⁷ Sloan is referencing the picture-worthy quality of a tourist destination, hinting at the shallowness of the experience. Visiting the ancient location is something worthy of a snapshot. Lucy Lippard, in her examination of tourism, writes, "The underlying contradiction of tourism is the need to see beneath the surface when only a surface is available."³⁸

As found in *Corpus Christi Procession on the Alameda*, Sloan's art frequently shows viewers as party to a series of observations—watching people who in turn watch others. For example, in one of his most celebrated works, *Hairdresser's Window, 1907*, a crowd gathers beneath the window of a hairdresser enjoying the view of a client's long red hair being bleached. The focus is on the hairdresser's work as well as those watching the process. Sloan's paintings of audiences in observation often involve American Indian religious ceremonies, as mostly Anglo-Americans look on. He described the audiences as "grotesques" in *Grotesques at Santo Domingo, 1923* (fig.3.21), and his 1927 etching, *Knees and Aborigines* (fig.5.17), shows immodestly dressed "flappers" outnumbering the more subtly dressed dancers. His most striking criticism comes in *Indian Detour, 1927* (fig.5.18), a companion to *Knees and Aborigines*, for its harsh look at the effect of the influx of the automobile on sacred events. The performers in the Indian dance are circled by the cars and touring buses of the Fred Harvey company. Not only do

the motor vehicles block out the view for the Indian observers on nearby rooftops, but few visitors are actually watching the dance.

Sheldon Parsons apparently shared Sloan's opinion that tourists altered the areas they visited; this view is highlighted in his painting *The Santa Fe Has Brought Invaders (Ever So Sharp)*, after 1924 (fig.5.19). The image is an appropriation of Joseph Henry Sharp's *Sunset Dance—Ceremony to the Evening Sun*, 1924 (fig.5.20). Sharp's design pictures the Indians of Taos gathering for an event, presumably the titled Sunset Dance, rather than the ceremony itself. It shows the undulating, adobe gate and low wall of the Christian church at Taos, with the stacked structure of the Pueblo and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in the distance. The Indians' clothing is colorful and some are wrapped in bright blankets. They gather in small and large groups. In the foreground, three back-turned figures look onto the courtyard of the church, and in the lower left, a woman in a dark wrap approaches to join.

Sharp was one of the first Anglo artists to visit Taos, making his initial trip in 1893, returning again in 1897 and 1898. He spent summers there regularly thereafter and would have experienced Taos before the growth of tourism. Parsons, on the other hand, arrived in 1913, just as Santa Fe and Taos were beginning to become popular as artist colonies. Unlike Sharp, Parsons likely would not have experienced a Taos ceremony without the presence of a large number of tourists. *The Santa Fe Has Brought Invaders (Ever So Sharp)* copies the location, time of day, and even the cloud formations found in Sharp's *Sunset Dance*. However, where Sharp shows Indians, Parsons inserts summer tourists wearing light colored clothing and sporting straw hats. The title, with *Ever So Sharp*, is painted on the front of the canvas, making a pun of the pictorial source and the sharply dressed travelers. In the foreground, one of the tourists looks outward, a visual means of inviting the viewer into the composition. The implication is that the viewer also

is a tourist. In Sharp's original design, a woman in a black shawl at the left edge contrasts with the more colorfully dressed participants. Parsons, however, uses this space to feature the rear end of a black motorcar, with another in front of it indicating a possible line of vehicles that are cropped from view at the left side. While stating that the "invaders" had arrived via the Santa Fe Railroad, Parsons visually acknowledges that motor vehicles were also responsible for bringing people further north to Taos.

Tourism was prominent in New Mexico in the early automobile age because of the state's emphasis on road building, meant to capitalize on the growing number of auto-tourists. In 1917, the first film produced by the New Mexico Tourist Promotion Bureau was *Adventures in Kit Carson Land*. It features a "thrilly ride," often from the point of view of a moving vehicle, along the apparently smooth dirt roads—at least those sections filmed—in the northern portions of the state to various tourist destinations, including Taos.³⁹ The film is a map-led journey into northern New Mexico that emphasizes the area's roads, although they generally were not as well maintained as indicated in the film.⁴⁰ Sloan recognized that roads not only afforded opportunities for experiences among tourists, but that economic possibilities awaited locals as well. In the past, trains would stop at depots, where any assortment of goods was offered to travelers. As motorists became more common, some people selling goods moved away from populated areas and set up stands on rural roadsides. *Indian Art by the Highway (Better Mouse Traps)*, a tempera and oil of 1936 (fig.5.21), pictures a group of Indians attempting to entice passing motorists.⁴¹ "Small groups of Indians from Santo Domingo erect these shelters along the Albuquerque highway in hopes that some passing traveler may be tempted to buy their pottery," observed Sloan.⁴² The perspective is near the stand, where the artisans have their pots for sale lined up in rows. A road

leads from the foreground and disappears in the distance, with a car approaching in the middle ground, leaving the viewer to complete the narrative and decide if the driver stopped to shop.

Roads Across America

Roads themselves across the nation became a significant part of twentieth-century visual culture, with images of and from roadways regularly the focus of paintings. Acting not only as the literal ground on which people travel, roads are the arteries of the nation that allow for the free-flow of motor vehicles. The road is a subject rich in meaning and routinely explored in poetry, literature and film. A road, by offering opportunities for travel, can symbolize connections and separation, as well as the beginnings of new adventures or the end of a journey. The open road hints at the future and can be read as an indication of freedom, escape, possibilities, longings and personal growth; or of never-ending monotony, a course that simply continues onward without change. In essence, a depiction of a road hints at large issues relating to the human journey, of life and death and what lies beyond. Roads also carry personal and private meanings for artists, relating to places known and visited. Further, roads provide interesting compositional elements and are capable of bisecting a design into distinct parts.

The road's eye view is utilized in a several works created by artists in various parts of the country. For example, Morris Kantor's *Leaving Town*, c. 1930 (fig.5.22), O. Louis Guglielmi's *Vermont*, c. 1931 (fig.5.23), and Helen Spang Pearce's *New Mexico Ribbon*, 1946 (fig.5.24), represent a trio of works that place the viewer slightly above the road's surface, suggesting a motorist's perspective. The proliferation of paved streets and highways address the growth in automobility, and in the paintings by Kantor and Guglielmi, gasoline pumps to fuel the autos are present. Guglielmi's *Vermont* delves into the specificity of place, a view of a town's interior. The

roadway, which is crossed horizontally in the foreground by railway tracks, leads into the middle ground before veering to the right and out of sight. The road is surrounded on both sides by homes and businesses and there is little implication of escape or a long excursion, except perhaps by the possibility of railway travel. Guglielmi's quiet scene suggests simply a motorist's view of an uneventful drive through a community. Kantor and Pearce indicate longer journeys. As the title states, *Leaving Town* implies forward movement, as the roadway heads into the distance before disappearing over a hill. Pearce's *New Mexico Ribbon* features a colorful and abstracted highway and is the view of an expedition already in progress. Neither indicates the narrative beyond the traveling motif itself. Each visualizes the observation of American author E.B. White: "Everything in life is somewhere else, and you get there in a car."⁴³

The roads in the paintings by Kantor and Pearce are hilly, winding passages through the countryside. However, in the Florida Keys, Ralston Crawford's 1939 *Overseas Highway* (fig.5.25) and its related 1940 lithograph, differ dramatically, picturing an ideal motoring condition of a pristine roadway without end. Crawford was living as the artist-in-residence at the Research Studios (now Maitland Arts Center) in Maitland, Florida in 1938, and was inspired by driving on the newly completed above-water highway that connects the Florida Keys with the mainland. "I remember at this particular point on the causeway I felt I was quite literally going to sea in my car," recalled Crawford.⁴⁴ Unlike the curves and twists of town or country roads, Crawford's roadscape is a smooth, small modern stretch of highway, lined with immaculate guardrails that appear to float above a body of calm blue water before disappearing without interruption in the distance. *Overseas Highway* is part of a series of industrial constructions by Crawford that embraced modern industry. He described his precisionist images of the built environment as "symbols of the emancipation of the times."⁴⁵ It is a painting of a future

apparently made better by industry. The pristine highway, however, offers a reading of the road being too perfect, indicating unease rather than the utopian motoring experience.

The road as a metaphor for life's journey has a long tradition in fine arts, and it grew in popular use during the automobile age. Due to the many associations of the road in American culture, depictions of roadways often suggest more questions than provide answers. An open road offers opportunities, escape, a path into the future and the great beyond. It begs the universal question: "What lies ahead?" As motorcars and paved roads proliferated, painters and printmakers, along with filmmakers, writers, and musicians, frequently utilized the road as a theme to express a wealth of associations. More than a fixture within the landscape, the road becomes the conveyance for modern life. The paintings by Kantor, Guglielmi, Pearce, and Crawford, with their depictions of paved roadways intended to show that automobiles are indicative of a particularly American voyage. "We Americans are restless," wrote Thomas Hart Benton, not the first to recognize something apparently inherent within the national psyche.⁴⁶ He added: "We cannot stay put. Our history is mainly one of migrations." In the nineteenth century, paintings of Conestoga wagons heading west addressed the wanderlust of the American people, and depictions of a roadway as seen from an automobile would have been received in the early twentieth century in a similar, although altered manner. A wagon's passing was slow when compared to an automobile and the motorist is capable of quickly navigating the twists and turns of the roadway and life.

Edward Hopper's paintings in particular personified the feelings of American restlessness and frequently included aspects of automobility. He demonstrated that roads have the potential of conveying emotion, as found in the long, lonely stretch in *Solitude #56*, 1944 (fig.5.26). A man of few words who largely preferred his own company to that of others, for Hopper the isolation

of the road was a potent metaphor for what art historian Linda Nochlin calls the “condition of alienation” found in much of Hopper’s art.⁴⁷ John Sloan is arguably the artist most associated with depictions of the automobile in a literal sense; Hopper was more inclined to convey a greater psychological appreciation of the automobile and what it meant in contemporary society. For Hopper, the roadway traveled by car was a place of emptiness, isolation and, more importantly, contemplation. He explained, “I am not painting fact ... but thought.”⁴⁸ Yet his designs were routinely inspired by his travels, and ideas occurred to him while driving.⁴⁹ Hopper used various locations to explore his personal feelings. In 1933, he wrote, “My aim in painting has always been the most exact transcription possible of my most intimate impressions of nature.”⁵⁰ Through his automobile trips he found settings that visually supported his inner emotions. As a result, his paintings often deal with the surfaces of a given place as something seen rather than an exploration of its inner workings. He handled the built environment in a manner similar to his depictions of people, with narratives purposefully left unresolved. Within Hopper’s paintings, nature almost always includes man’s presence through roads and architecture. “A road cuts across the foreground of most of Hopper’s paintings,” observed an anonymous reporter for *Time* magazine in 1948. “Sometimes it becomes a city street, or a railroad embankment, or a porch step, but it is there – a constant reminder of transience.”⁵¹ These thoroughfares convey a sense of motion, indicating travel and a greater searching for something further down the road.

One aspect of road travel suggested in *Solitude #56* is the perception of movement as experienced by someone behind the wheel of an automobile. It is a rare example of the depiction of the visual sensation of motion from within a moving motorcar. The majority of paintings that provide a driver’s perspective from atop a roadway, like Morris Kantor’s *Leaving Town* or

Ralston Crawford's *Overseas Highway*, give little indication of forward momentum. Placement on the road suggests the driving experience, but the stillness of the roadscapes and the attention to details indicate a view that could just as easily be offered from a parked, or at least temporarily stopped, vehicle. The slight blur of the dry grass of Cape Cod and soft focus of pines hint at things observed with peripheral vision, with attention being on the sand-swept road ahead. Adding to the sense of a kinetic landscape is the flattened representation of the white house to the right. The nearest corner is shown slightly shorter than the back edge of the structure and the front of the building is pushed forward, indicating a view of the house while moving past it, seeing it from the side and front end simultaneously.⁵² Hopper imagined the composition from the confines of his home studio, but he based the painting on his driving experience and presents the landscape as one seen while passing through it quickly.⁵³

Gasoline Stations and Gas Pumps

Regardless of the destination, motorists needed fuel to keep their automobiles moving. Fuel and the need for other necessities resulted in a proliferation of roadside services. Beyond the roadways and the automobile itself, the presence of gasoline pumps and filling stations were perhaps the most prominent signifiers of the development of automobility in America. By 1920, there were more than fifteen thousand gas stations in the country.⁵⁴ Within ten years, gas consumption went from four million gallons per day to more than fifteen million.⁵⁵ Fortunately for motorists, gasoline, once a waste product in the production of kerosene, was readily available and inexpensive. The earliest refueling outposts tended to be on the outskirts of towns. There are no known paintings of these "bulk depots," as they were called. The first hand-pumped, glass-domed dispensers, which delivered measured amounts of fuel from underground storage tanks,

were invented in 1906.⁵⁶ Mechanical pumps soon replaced the need for the hand pumps, but the domes at the top remained a popular, decorative item for many years. Taxes were applied to gasoline sales, first in Oregon in 1919 and expanded nationwide within ten years, helping to finance roads and highways. More roads led to a greater number of automobiles and increased gasoline consumption.

One of the artists to feature gasoline pumps with regularity in his work was Stuart Davis, and he incorporated items relating to automobility in his modernist designs with regularity throughout his career. As a student of Robert Henri, he learned a lesson that would stay with him—drawing his inspiration from everyday experiences and contemporary life. He appreciated the uniqueness of the twentieth century, its inventions, machines and modes of transportation. “I paint what I see in America,” explained Davis, “I paint the American scene.”⁵⁷ Automobiles first appear in Davis’s work in 1913, and gas pumps and stations soon followed in the paintings *Mobil Oil*, and *Garage No. 1*, 1917 (figs.5.27-5.28). Cars and gas pumps appear regularly in his images of the outdoors as do traffic signs, roadways, garages and automotive product names. In a 1943 article, Davis made a list of things that inspired him, which included “brilliant colors on gasoline stations, chain-store fronts, and taxi cabs ... fast travel by train, auto and aeroplane which brought multiple perspectives, electric signs”⁵⁸ The gas pump, one of his favorite motifs, appears in no fewer than twenty paintings.

As an instantly recognizable motif, the pump fit his general interests in the modern world. Davis addressed the importance to artists of technology and scientific advancements during a 1940 radio broadcast, claiming, “An artist who has traveled on a steam train, driven an automobile, or flown in an airplane doesn’t feel the same way about form and space as one who has not.”⁵⁹ His representation of automobility appeared before his departure for France in 1928,

and he returned to New York with a renewed interest in the subject at the end of the summer of 1929. He admired the French artists and the European lifestyle, but he came to recognize what he called, “the enormous vitality of the American atmosphere as compared to Europe.”⁶⁰ In France, his interests involved the exploration and enjoyment of the city, its cafés and nightlife. During this time, items in his work begin to appear flattened, like cut out forms of recognizable objects created in solid colors, showing the influence of synthetic cubism on his art. Although Paris was the first city to experience automobile traffic, Davis’s paintings are based on a pedestrian’s point of view. He knew Paris as a walking city. By the late 1920s, America had far exceeded its European counterparts in the expansion of automobility. Almost immediately after his return, Davis once again includes gasoline pumps and automobiles in his compositions, beginning with *Early American Landscape, No. 2*, c. 1929 (fig.5.29).

Throughout the 1930s, the gasoline pump and automobiles continue as motifs in Davis’s compositions, a regular part of his visual language of easily identifiable objects and brand name products. *New York – Paris No. 3*, 1931 (fig.5.30), juxtaposes aspects of the two cities, with automobility shown as a major component of New York life. Two pumps are prominently visible in the center foreground, shown larger than the Woolworth Building in the upper right corner, as are the tail end of an automobile, street and directional signs, and the name of an automotive garage. America is shown as a place where one travels by car, compared to the buildings representational of Paris, marked with signs that read “Hotel” and “Café.” In a letter to his mother, Davis explained that Paris was a place for leisurely pursuits, where “one could [sit] all afternoon with a six cent glass of coffee without anything being thought of it. At the next table people may be drinking champagne cocktails in dress suits. That is how it is different than N.Y.”⁶¹ Paris is old hotels and cafés, while America is modern skyscrapers and automobiles.

As a visual reference, the red gasoline pumps with their distinctive glass domes are strong vertical objects in the landscape. On a trip to Rockport, Massachusetts, Davis painted *Landscape with Garage Lights*, 1931-32 (fig.5.31). Among multiple factories and a view of a waterway and passing ship are three gasoline pumps, one in the distance appearing as a line drawing while the two prominent pumps are painted a patriotic red, white, and blue. The pumps range in size, from largest on the right to smallest on the left, creating a diagonal within the picture. The composition's geometry was based on Davis's intuitive response to several modern design principles.⁶² He explained his process for a 1945 exhibition catalogue, describing how in creating his paintings, "there was no intention to make a replica of the optical appearance of the place. Instead, its elements of form, color and space are changed to meet the requirements of a sense of dimensional unity, which develops and becomes complete as I study them."⁶³ *Gasoline Pump* (fig.5.32) is the subject for the left panel of his triptych mural *Abstract Vision of New York*, 1932, a highly visible commission for the Museum of Modern Art's 1932 exhibition *Murals by American Painters and Photographers*.⁶⁴ The geometric design is presented as monumental in the landscape, acting as a surrogate for the skyscrapers of the city.

Gasoline stations, pumps and automobiles in Davis's work should be read as predominantly masculine. Davis used such a common feature of the landscape as the ubiquitous gasoline pump in major compositions, indicating its importance to his visual language. He included one in the prominent mural commission for the men's lounge at New York City's Radio City Music Hall. Filling almost the entirety of the more than ten-and-one-half-foot-tall canvas, *Men Without Women*, 1932 (fig.5.33), features a larger-than-life pump with an automobile at the near left. A barber's pole on the right helps frame the composition. Between the vertical pump and pole is painted an assortment of arbitrarily scaled objects that include a pipe, cigar,

cigarettes, matches, a playing card and sailboat. These are objects one could associate with the male experience: smoking, driving, gambling, sailing and visiting with other men at the local barbershop. Davis's selection of objects thus places the gasoline pump among recognizably masculine things, in an arena intended for men.

Leo Marx likened machine culture to masculinity in his 1964 examination of technology and culture, *The Machine in the Garden*: "Most important is the sense of the machine as a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction. It invariably is associated with crude, masculine aggressiveness in contrast with the tender, feminine, and submissive attitudes traditionally attached to the landscape."⁶⁵ Sociologists and automotive historians John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle declare that the "gasoline station has emerged as a cultural icon central to the American psyche," and they too identify masculine associations with the mechanical and social aspects of garages and gas stations.⁶⁶ Since the introduction of the automobile, gas powered engines have been associated with masculinity, while electric cars, with their slower speeds and limited range, were built and advertised with female consumers in mind.⁶⁷

Other American artists introduced gas stations and pumps in their work, including John Steuart Curry, O. Louis Guglielmi, Victor Higgins, Konrad Cramer, Howard Cook, Morris Kantor, Santos Zingale, and Clinton Adams. Styles vary from naturalistic depictions of a specific place to abstract and modern designs. Of all images of gas stations, however, the best known are those by Hopper, although he made only three oils on the theme: *Gas*, 1940; *Portrait of Orleans*, 1950; and *Four Lane Road*, 1956 (figs.5.34-5.36). Each is distinctly different from the others, suggesting alternative points of view on the gasoline station. *Gas* depicts a lone attendant working at a desolate Mobil Oil station, while *Portrait of Orleans* captures a station and likely a garage at a glance, only recognizable by the Esso sign extending into the scene in the upper right

corner above a stack of new tires for sale. *Four Lane Road* is a narrative set at a gas station, but the theme is not necessarily automobility as much as it is communication, or its lack, between an aging man and woman.

Gas, the earliest of Hopper's paintings picturing a gasoline station, suggests the viewpoint of a motorist pulling into a station and the commonly shared experience of motoring and stopping for fuel, briefly, before quickly traveling on. It represents what would be a forgettable moment for most travelers. For motorists, the isolated gas station is not so much a place worth remembering as it is a place between places. Major themes found in Hopper's oeuvre are represented here: the lone figure, often performing menial or ambiguous tasks at work; the desolate country road; and the melancholy of dusk. Similar ideas are found in other Hopper paintings from this period, including *New York Movie*, 1939, featuring a solitary theater usher, *House at Dusk*, 1935, with a single figure seated in an apartment building, and *Nighthawks*, 1942, Hopper's most famous view of a late-night diner as seen from a city street. In all of these paintings, artificial light plays a significant role in conveying the general themes. In *Gas*, the sharp yellow light coming from inside the station casts long shafts of light. The red of the pumps, painted in the recognizable color used at Mobil Gas stations around the country, plays off the dark green of the pines in the distance. The diagonal road separates the artificial, man-made environment of geometric shapes and bright colors from the earth tones and deep greens of the natural environment in the distance. According to his wife, Josephine Hopper, the painting was based on at least eleven preparatory drawings of a station in Truro, Massachusetts, and it was a subject he had "wanted to do for years."⁶⁸

Where Hopper's *Gas* suggests a sense of loneliness and isolation through the moody lighting and solitary attendant, *Four Lane Road* is a painting of a relationship, although set at a

similarly isolated gasoline station. It was not uncommon for small stations to have a home behind them where the owners lived, as the painting suggests. An aging gentleman sits in a chair just outside the station, facing into the sun. His wife, defined as such in Josephine's diary, leans out a window directly behind him.⁶⁹ She is speaking, yet he appears oblivious to her words. Occupying the entire left side of the composition, opposite the station and the protagonists, are horizontal lanes of the road that lead to the station, with a dark landscape behind. The bank of trees in the distance is reminiscent of those in *Gas*, but is set farther back from the road. Also like the setting in *Gas*, the emphasis is placed on the isolated location. The psychological play, however, is dramatically different. If read in the context of the Hoppers' own marriage, the isolation mirrors the troubles of Edward's personal relationship with Josephine. The separation or distance suggested by the remote location is intensified by the couple's lack of communication. The woman is inside, while the man sits outdoors looking off into the distance. Considering the often difficult relationship between Edward and Josephine, it is not difficult to read the painting accordingly. Vivien Green Fryd, in her study of Hopper's marriage, observes, "[Hopper] wanted to maintain control within his own family, while his wife often resisted it. Within this context, Hopper's representations of the road could signify his desire for flight from the home that was a discordant space."⁷⁰

Where Hopper utilized the gas station to represent a quiet, isolated and possibly lonely place, others imagined it as an active location where interesting people came together from many different directions, even if for brief periods of time. Paul Cadmus, whose images of motorcars in an urban setting demonstrate the communal qualities of automobility, created the stage and costume designs for Lew Christensen's 1938 comic ballet *Filling Station*, 1937 (fig.5.37). The original sketches were displayed in advance of the production at the Julien Levy Gallery, New

York.⁷¹ The ballet was staged as if in a garage and gas station to designate it as a distinctly American setting and the dancers were accompanied by a jazzy, American musical score by Virgil Thomson and a comic libretto by Lincoln Kirstein.⁷² In Cadmus's set design, a large, red neon sign that reads "Gas" lights the scene through the station's front window. The original dancers of the Caravan Ballet Company in New York performed in his costumes made of transparent plastic, accented with red piping.⁷³ Created at a time when ballet was still considered a European art form, *Filling Station* was an attempt to Americanize ballet. As such, it has been called the first truly American ballet, utilizing an American choreographer, performed by an American dance company, with designs and music by American artists.⁷⁴ Cadmus's set designs were created within a few years of other works by the artist that prominently featured aspects of automobility, including *Commuter Rush*, 1935 (fig.2.19), *Aspects of Suburban Life: Main Street*, 1936 (fig.2.18), and *Aspects of Suburban Life: Polo Spill*, 1936.

Billboards and Businesses

With the use of automobiles came consumerism along roadways. Filling stations, like the many other businesses along American roads, used colorful signs and large billboards to attract motorists.⁷⁵ Wanda Gág examined life on the road in the satiric lithograph, *Progress!*, 1936 (fig.5.38). Filled with contradictions and visual puns, it features an ornate filling station in a rural setting of rolling hills and a rustic, covered wooden bridge. A dated Model T, with its boxy design, contrasts with a modern, streamlined automobile, which in turn, is compared to the weathered bridge that seems more suited for a horse-drawn carriage than a sleek motorcar. The old bridge is something from an earlier time, emphasized by the garish and new castle-like design of the station with its many lights, American flag, and assorted signs intended to attract

motorists' attention. On the sides of the roadway are billboards, one picturing a masked gangster in promotion of the movie "G-Men," while opposite is a billboard for a nail varnish featuring a fashion model. Hitchhikers stand next to a sign advertising cigarettes, sarcastically claiming, "They give you a lift." Apparently, the driver of the Model T does not. Describing *Progress!*, art historian Dennis Harper writes, "In a deceptively comic manner, Gág addresses the desecration of America's Garden of Eden, suggesting that its ruin is wrought by the very push to experience and commemorate its glory."⁷⁶ Turned off by the proliferation of American consumerism, Gág once wrote, "There is no term vile enough in my estimation that applies to business."⁷⁷ Exhibited at the anti-Fascist American Artists' Congress in 1936, *Progress!* expresses Gág's personal feelings that human values and life in general were deteriorating in modern America.⁷⁸

Gág emphasizes the growth of billboard advertisements along roadways that coincided with the rise of automobility in the 1920s. The advertising signs lined roads on the fringes of cities and towns, highlighting goods and services available just ahead. Unlike the posted bills of earlier generations that were text heavy and intended to be read at length by pedestrians, billboards were designed to be understood by motorists passing at higher speeds. In her examination of the history of billboards, Catherine Gudis writes, "As outdoor advertisers came to see drivers and passengers as mobile markets, they worked to make the automobile trip itself a commercial experience aimed to help motorists consume more."⁷⁹ Intended for a captive audience of auto travelers, billboards became an integral part of what geographer Karl Raitz calls a "linear retail corridor," which lacked aesthetic appeal.⁸⁰ Despite criticism of the unattractive signage, by the mid-1930s the placement of roadside advertisements was supported by the Outdoor Advertising Association, a strong billboard lobby.

As Gág demonstrates in *Progress!*, billboards and roadside advertisements in American art are predominantly shown as obnoxious intrusions on the landscape. Although criticism of billboards appears infrequently in the fine arts, numerous cartoons in the 1920s ridiculed the signs that blocked the view of the landscape from the roadway, describing such areas not as highways, but “buyways.”⁸¹ Maynard Dixon, commissioned to create paintings for several covers of the journal *Standard Oil Bulletin*, addressed the problems drivers faced in the May 1929 edition (fig.5.39). The cover features a scenic landscape painting of a smooth, curving roadway near the base of a mountain vista, marked by trees and a farmhouse in the distance. Within the closely cropped image, a long vehicle has just passed the bend in the road, traveling toward the viewer. It is a bold, modernist composition of strong diagonals and deep shadows. Inside the magazine, the frontispiece presents an altered rendition of the same landscape, this time filled with various billboards lining the road (fig.5.40). Even more closely cropped, the image takes on a claustrophobic feel, with the advertisements blotting out much of the beauty of the scene. The harsh colors of the billboards sharply contrast the natural colors of the landscape, where historian John Ott observes, “the scenery has become signery.”⁸² The signs are an intrusion on the imagined right to a clear view of the passing landscape. Rather than a natural landscape, the view becomes an artificial one aimed at gaining the attention of motorists. The experience of window-shopping is given a mobile context, as the windshield stands in for the storefront window.⁸³

As early as the 1920s, the billboards and business signs for roadside proprietors, like those shown in *Progress!*, were considered a blight on the natural scenery. Reformers sought to end the use of the nation’s roadways for advertisements, which many felt had become “linear slums” filled with a myriad of commercial signs that marred the escape offered by driving in the

countryside.⁸⁴ Advertisers fought for the right to conduct business in areas others felt were public spaces. “The soldiers of the ‘billboard wars’ pitted the beauty of nature against the beast of commerce,” writes Catherine Gudis.⁸⁵ An example of what raised people’s ire can be found in the signs lining the road in Jerry Bywaters’s *Oil Field Girls*, 1940 (fig.5.41), where statuesque women in the foreground mirror the tall oil rigs in the distance. Apparently waiting for a bus to take them to the next town, the women are likely prostitutes. They appear as another commodity advertised along the road, with one woman’s red-and-white boots mimicking the colors of the Coca-Cola sign nearby.

A motorist’s perspective brings immediacy to roadway imagery, allowing a viewer to feel a connection to the journey and the driving experience. Fred Shane offers the tourist’s perspective in *Entrance to Pike’s Peak Region*, 1940 (fig.5.42), which features a sculptural advertisement of an American Indian looking in the direction of the “Stonewall Auto Camp.” A ticket booth for Greyhound Bus Lines peddles sightseeing tours to Colorado’s Pikes Peak. Will Shuster’s *Curb Service*, 1941 (fig.5.43), pictures a drive-in diner, with waitresses serving food on trays brought to parked vehicles. As early as 1910, soda-fountain owners began selling food to customers who honked their horns from the curb.⁸⁶ The practice of eating in the car became a conspicuously American dining habit, which led to restaurants in the 1930s employing “carhops” who took orders from and delivered food directly to customers’ vehicles. Most roadside diners, however, remained a place where motorists parked and went inside, as found in James Peter Cost’s *Americana No. 2 (Manhattan Beach All Night Truck Stop and Diner)*, c. 1950 (fig.5.44). Cost emphasizes the roadside as a developed, commercial space with directional and highway signs competing with advertisements offering twenty-four hour service.

Inside Looking Out

Numerous images, including those by Bywaters, Shuster, and Cost, as well as Hopper's *Gas*, suggest the perspective from inside an automobile. Only on rare occasions have artists outlined a composition using the interior panels or the windshield frame. The space inside a car is small and offers limited possibilities for points of reference. The perspective can be that of the driver behind the steering wheel, or of a passenger in the front or rear seat, with the vehicle portrayed in motion or at rest. Having more than one person inside a vehicle emphasizes the close quarters, which forces intimacy between the protagonists and leads to potential narrative.⁸⁷ The view outside the windshield establishes the setting.

Victor Higgins created a watercolor of the Southwest as many artists would have experienced it, from the front seat of his automobile in *New Mexico Landscape Through Auto Window*, c. 1935-37 (fig.5.45). This unusual perspective uses the upper portion of the steering wheel to frame the bottom of the composition, with the curved surround of the roof and windshield support bar at the side. The landscape depicted beyond the windshield is similar to many others by Higgins at the time. It includes a winding river and a farm house in the distance, with mountains beyond. It is painted in a modernist style that indicates the influence of John Marin, who visited New Mexico in the summers of 1929 and 1930. Before Marin's visit, Higgins's primary medium was oil paints.⁸⁸ The portability of watercolors allowed greater freedom when traveling, and it was Higgins's routine to drive to a desirable location and then work while seated in the trunk of his car, as pictured in a 1947 photograph by Laura Gilpin.⁸⁹ His watercolor suggests that on at least one occasion, he remained inside his vehicle. Higgins places the viewer in the driver's seat looking out onto a Southwestern landscape. With the river shown directly outside the windshield the perspective indicates that the vehicle is at rest. New York

artist Theodore Torre-Bueno presents a similar point of view by positioning the viewer not only in the seat of the driver, but as the driver, with arms and gloved hands reaching out to grasp the steering wheel in the small etching, *Behind the Wheel*, c. 1940 (fig.5.46). The vehicle is in motion, navigating a left curve in the road. Outside the windshield is the paved road, a guard rail to the right, set within a hilly, rural landscape. The entire bottom portion of the image is comprised of the motorcar's dashboard and interior compartment, an unusual point of view among automotive imagery. Possibly an experimental design, only three impressions of a single state are likely to have been produced.⁹⁰

Where Torre-Bueno pictures the road from the driver's seat, Eugenie McEvoy's oil on canvas *Taxi! Taxi!*, 1933 (fig.5.47), suggests her personal experience of riding in a taxicab. She designed the composition from the position of the central character in a romantic encounter taking place in the back seat of a New York taxicab. Through the front and side windows appears the hustle and bustle of a busy city street at midday, which is filled with pedestrians cutting between the slow-moving traffic, other cars and double-decker buses filled to capacity. From the rear seat, the back of the male taxi driver, with dark hair and a workman's cap, is visible. The cabbie's license in a holder on the back of the front seat shows him wearing large, round glasses. To the right of the cab driver is a meter box, shown inching toward \$8.75, indicating that this is a lengthy ride. In the back seat is a couple in an intimate embrace, seen only in the reflection on the glass barrier between driver and customers. The man and woman's hats are set aside on the right and their feet stretch forward towards the left. The man's face is turned toward the woman, nuzzling her neck, as she looks in the direction the cab is traveling. It is not immediately apparent, but the narrative is directed through the woman's gaze, placing the viewer in the position of the woman in the embrace. The imagined noise and jostling on the street—the car

immediately ahead tilts left at a strong angle as if the right wheels had driven up on a curb adding to the motion happening outside—counters the intimate tryst of the couple in the semi-private confines of the cab. The convincing depiction of interior space, reflected surfaces and urban thoroughfare prompted *New York Times* critic Edward Alden Jewell to reproduce the image in the paper and write: “In the hurly-burly of Fifty-seventh Street you remember McEvoy’s ‘*Taxi! Taxi!*’ and applaud once more ... the amazing skill with which technical difficulties have been tossed off by this artist.”⁹¹ Jewell added, “Not often does one encounter such sang froid as *that*.”

Hopper, in the 1946 watercolor *Jo in Wyoming* (fig.5.48) paints the image of a motorcar from a similar position in the rear seat. Unlike the intimate embrace of the lovers in *Taxi! Taxi!*, Hopper pictures his car being used as a mobile studio, while simultaneously indicating the psychological space separating him and his wife.⁹² Josephine Hopper is seated in the front, passenger seat. With a pad on her lap, she looks out the open passenger door and paints a landscape of the distant mountains. Holding paintbrush to paper, her position recalls Ansel Adams’s photograph of Georgia O’Keeffe working inside her vehicle. The entire image is outlined by the interior of the car, with the road on which they were traveling seen heading into the distance through the side and front windows. It is one of only two images he ever made that shows Josephine as an artist. *Jo in Wyoming* not only captures a slice of life while on the road, it reveals part of the dynamic of the Hoppers as a couple. They quarreled over Josephine’s desire to drive, altercations at times becoming physical, with Edward forcefully pulling his wife out from behind the wheel of their car.⁹³ In this painting, while he sits in the backseat, his coat is draped over the back of the driver’s seat, thus marking his territory as the driver. The dark portion to the left of the rear view mirror suggests Hopper’s presence in the back seat. Through his placement,

Hopper demonstrates his role as the thinking artist, the one constructing a complex image from the vehicle's interior. Josephine, on the other hand, is apparently content to paint the landscape as she finds it. What appears on the surface as a tranquil image of a mobile studio in use becomes, within the context of the Hoppers' frequently difficult relationship, a dramatic picture dealing with gender roles, marital discord and artistic capabilities. The reading of *Jo in Wyoming* as one depicting the undercurrent of troubles within the Hoppers' marriage is possible only through knowledge of the couple's biography.

Hopper learned to drive in 1927 after purchasing a used, 1925 Dodge. It became a common habit for him to look for subjects while driving.⁹⁴ He made sketches in his car and, on occasion, painted inside the vehicle when it rained.⁹⁵ When the couple traveled together, Hopper often worked from the tight confines of the back seat. By 1946, when *Jo in Wyoming* was painted, the Hoppers owned their third car, a 1935 Buick.⁹⁶ Travel, whether over railroad tracks or roadways, and the manmade landscape, played a significant role in Hopper's oeuvre. Even in images devoid of architectural elements, man's presence is found in the tracks and roads that cut through the land, although Hopper seldom includes automobiles in his work. He liked to drive and search for subjects, stating, "To me the most important thing is the sense of going on. You know how beautiful things are when you're traveling."⁹⁷ Because of their easy transportability, Hopper routinely used watercolors to record his impressions and ideas while on the road.

One aspect of the mobile studio Hopper hints at in *Jo in Wyoming* is the pictorial potential of the rear view mirror, but his presence is unclear and it remains a minor note in the finished work. Stuart Davis and printmaker Benton Spruance are two artists who expressed a greater pictorial potential for the rear view mirror and, through its placement on the windshield, its ability to allow seeing both forward and backward simultaneously. Combining the speed of

the motorcar adds the dimension of time to the fractured perspective, of coming and going, of juxtaposing the present of the interior with the future through the windshield and the past in the rear view mirror. Such fissures in time and depictions of discontinuous space are part of the cubist language, which had a major influence on Davis's work.⁹⁸ Many of his images include aspects of automobility and the often hectic facets of urban streets, including the 1932 gouache *Windshield Mirror* (fig.5.49). Within the conglomeration of shapes, only a reversed letter "R" followed by an "O" and possibly a stylized "F"—perhaps meant to suggest the sign of a "FORD" dealership—indicate a reflective image. Other shapes, particularly the capitalized "U" above a standard "S," suggest a non-reflective perspective. The mirror ultimately appears to be immaterial to the finished composition, acting only as a conduit for Davis's interest in the rhythmic play of shapes and geometric designs. Davis biographer Karen Wilkin writes, "Davis was attracted less by the conceptual basis of an image seen in a car mirror than by the purely visual aspects of the reflection, with its squeezed distances and its jumpy layers of planes."⁹⁹ He returned to the theme again more than twenty years later, in *Untitled (Black and White Variation on "Windshield Mirror")*, 1955-56 (fig.5.50). Forms become even more simplified and flattened in their monochromatic representation, with more letters added to the design. It is a conceptual leap in which Davis looks back at his own creative history through depicting a reflective image. The mirror as source, however, is blurred and recognizable primarily because of the work's title.

Capitalizing on the importance of a rearview mirror allowing one to see what is behind while simultaneously seeing what lies ahead is exploited to its fullest in Spruance's expressive, anti-war image, *The 1930s – Windshield*, 1939 (fig.5.51). A surrealist image framed by the interior of an automobile that places the viewer in the driver's seat overlooking the steering wheel, it captures a horrific, war-torn landscape just outside the windshield. Bombs fall from the

sky in the distance, figures strain as they attempt to pull a wagon loaded with an unspecified cargo, while on the right soldiers march alongside what appear to be the guns of tanks just out of view. The soldier nearest the vehicle, wearing a helmet and carrying a gun, is a skeletal form that holds its thumb out seeking a ride. Directly behind the soldiers is a traffic light, indicating “Go.” At the top of the image, just to the right of center, however, is a dramatically opposite scene. The rear view mirror shows a rich farmland, a field being plowed by oxen, while a couple sit and relax, enjoying the day. The mirrored image depicts what lay behind, an idyllic past—while the view ahead is of ruinous future. *The 1930s – Windshield* was a prophetic image by Spruance, made in July 1939, two months before the Second World War began in Europe.¹⁰⁰ Spruance had previously pictured skeletal images of death in depictions of automobility, but this is his only composition explicitly emphasizing a point of view within an automobile.

The automobile ushered in a period of dramatic change in America. It provided artists the ability to travel and experience the country, visit new places and easily reach nearby destinations. Through their travels, artists became part of the growing auto-tourist industry, and their depictions often indicate the easily accessible scenic views known to fellow tourists. The fertile subject matter of automobility is expressed in the many depictions of roads and the proliferation of roadside businesses that developed to provide for the needs of motorists. Artists pictured the gasoline pumps, filling stations, roadside diners and auto-camps, along with the billboards that lined the roads, all highlighting the uniquely American qualities of auto-tourism. As a mobile studio, an automobile’s interior provided protection from the elements and inspiration for finished works. Most often implied, only rarely did artists make their point of view explicit by including elements of a car’s interior as part of a composition. Ultimately, the automobile proved

an important tool to artists that not only provided individual transportation, but allowed artists to visualize the country in a new way: through the windshield of a car.

¹ In 1921, the Federal Highway Act was passed, becoming the first successful provision to create and maintain a national system of highways. By 1927, it financed 96,000 miles of national highway. On the state level, taxes on gasoline also helped finance roads, becoming prominent in the 1920s. John B. Rae, *The American Automobile Industry* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984; paperback 1985), 59.

² Stuart Davis to his mother, July 10, 1923, quoted in Ani Boyajian and Mark Rutkoski, ed., *Stuart Davis: A Catalogue Raisonné* vol. III (New Haven and London: Yale University Art Gallery in association with Yale University Press, 2007), 134.

³ Melissa J. Webster, *Frank Tenney Johnson and The American West* (Santa Fe: Gerald Peters Gallery, 2000), 20.

⁴ The photograph was taken during a painting and photography trip in New Mexico, where Adams and O'Keeffe were joined by arts patron David McAlpin. Richard B. Woodward, "Northeast by Southwest: Alfred Stieglitz, Georgia O'Keeffe, Ansel Adams, and New Mexico," *Georgia O'Keeffe and Ansel Adams: Natural Affinities* (New York, Boston, London: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 17.

⁵ Georgia O'Keeffe to Paul Strand, Taos, May 1929; and Georgia O'Keeffe to Rebecca Strand, on train from New Mexico to New York, 24 August 1929. Quoted by Sarah Greenough, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Art and Letters* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1987), 190, 193.

⁶ Charles C. Eldredge, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 103.

⁷ Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley, London, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 260-262.

⁸ Benita Eisler, *O'Keeffe and Stieglitz: An American Romance* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 404.

⁹ Alfred Stieglitz quoted in Corn, *Great American Thing*, 23.

¹⁰ Stieglitz's composite portrait of O'Keeffe consists of 329 photographs. Vivien Green Fryd, "Georgia O'Keeffe's 'Radiator Building': Gender, Sexuality, Modernism, and Urban Imagery," *Winterthur Portfolio* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2000), 282.

¹¹ Vivien Green Fryd, *Art and the Crisis of Marriage: Edward Hopper and Georgia O'Keeffe* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 188.

¹² Eisler, *O'Keeffe and Stieglitz*, 464.

¹³ Gypsying became a popular form of recreation for automobile enthusiasts in the 1910s. Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 7-17.

¹⁴ Travelogues are the possession of Craig H. Yerkes, grand nephew of Mary Agnew Yerkes, and are a pending gift to the Crocker Art Museum. Archibald Nester Offley travelogue, "How to Make a Pullman Out of a Parlor Car Buick, Weekly News Letter 7, no. 14," 17 July 1922.

¹⁵ The Pullman Car Company introduced the sleeping car in 1867: it proved particularly popular with businessmen riding railways between cities.

¹⁶ The alterations to Blumenschein's vehicle added \$728 to the cost of his Ford. See Sherry Clayton Taggart and Ted Schwarz, *Paintbrushes and Pistols: How the Taos Artists Sold the West* (Santa Fe: John Muir Publications, 1990), 174.

¹⁷ Elizabeth J. Cunningham, "Blumenschein, Modernism, and National Art in the 1930s," *In Contemporary Rhythm: The Art of Ernest L. Blumenschein* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 210.

¹⁸ John Loughery, *John Sloan: Painter and Rebel* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 248-250.

¹⁹ James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1988, 1990), 183.

²⁰ The Simplex stopped running approximately one hundred miles outside of Santa Fe. The party finished their trip to Santa Fe by train, with the car shipped on a flat car. Loughery, *John Sloan*, 250.

²¹ John Sloan to Robert Henri, Santa Fe, August 26, 1919. Quoted by Bennard B. Perlman, ed. *Revolutionaries of Realism: The Letters of John Sloan and Robert Henri* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 246-247.

²² John Sloan to Robert Henri, Omaha, July 5, 1919. Quoted by Perlman, ed., *Revolutionaries of Realism*, 245-246.

²³ Loughery, *John Sloan*, 250.

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- ²⁴ By the early 1920s, there were between 3,000 and 6,000 auto camps in the country. Belasco, *Americans on the Road*, 71.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 116-120.
- ²⁶ Warren James Belasco writes of the mindset of camp life among groups of strangers, where “campers commonly took their names from their license plates: ‘Hello New York, you’re a long way from home.’” *Ibid.*, 98-99.
- ²⁷ Mrs. C.G. Elmore, “Omaha Tourist Camp,” *Motor Camper and Tourist* (August 1924), 183. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 93.
- ²⁸ Automobile use in general did not encourage longer trips, but more frequent ones. Where people who lived on a farm might travel to a nearby town once or twice a year, with a car, they drove into town multiple times a week. This idea of shorter travels was also true for artists. Joseph Interrante, “The Road to Autopia: The Automobile and the Spatial Transformation of American Culture,” *The Automobile and American Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), 97.
- ²⁹ Sloan wrote, *Picnic on the Ridge* features “Mahonri Young, the Biesels, the Shusters, Myra Thomas, Martha Simpson, Louis Wright, Mae Larson, O. Wells, two pups, many hot dogs, and an old gray Ford, a couple of miles out on the North Road.” John Sloan, *The Gist of Art* (New York: America Artists Group, 1939), 263.
- ³⁰ Sloan, *Gist of Art*, 333.
- ³¹ Rowland Elzea, *John Sloan’s Oil Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonné, Part Two* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1991), 416.
- ³² Apparently unhappy with John Sloan’s purchase of a new automobile, Dolly Sloan wrote: “Now I will confess the Sloans’ faults. Sloan has bought a Studebaker car for \$800.00 and some dollars. He has a year to pay it. We also increased the debt on the house for \$1000.00 which he borrowed from [Will] Shuster to let him build a studio and sleeping quarters.” Dolly Sloan to Marjorie and Robert Henri, 29 July 1926, quoted in Bennard B. Perlman, ed., *Revolutionaries of Realism: The Letters of John Sloan and Robert Henri* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 311.
- ³³ Lucy Lippard, *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 4.
- ³⁴ John Ott, “Landscapes of Consumption: Auto Tourism and Visual Culture in California, 1920-1940,” *Reading California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900-2000* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2000), 56.
- ³⁵ Evelyn Marie Stuart, “Taos and the Indian in Art,” *Fine Arts Journal* 35, no. 5 (May 1917), 341-342.
- ³⁶ Sloan, *Gist of Art*, 306.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 266.
- ³⁸ Lippard, *Beaten Track*, 8.
- ³⁹ *Adventures in Kit Carson Land* (Santa Fe: New Mexico Tourist Promotion Bureau, 1917).
- ⁴⁰ The road between Santa Fe and Taos was first paved in 1934.
- ⁴¹ The similarly designed etching, *Better Mouse Traps?*, 1937, features a lone seller along the roadside.
- ⁴² Sloan, *Gist of Art*, 332.
- ⁴³ E.B. White, *One Man’s Meat*, 1942; quoted by Roger N. Casey, *Textual Vehicles: The Automobile in American Literature* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1997), 171.
- ⁴⁴ Jack Cowart and Ralston Crawford, “*Coal Elevators* by Ralston Crawford,” *Bulletin (Saint Louis Art Museum)*, new series 14, no. 1 (January – March 1978), 14.
- ⁴⁵ Ralston Crawford quoted in an undated (late 1940s) unpublished essay by Malcolm Preston, quoted in Barbara Haskell, *Ralston Crawford* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1985), 51.
- ⁴⁶ In the nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville recognized the restlessness of Americans, which he determined was a manifestation of democracy and equality. Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 3rd ed., (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1968), 65.
- ⁴⁷ Linda Nochlin, “Edward Hopper and the Imagery of Alienation,” *Art Journal* 41, no. 2 (Summer 1981), 136.
- ⁴⁸ Quoted in Pamela N. Koob, “States of Being: Edward Hopper and Symbolist Aesthetics,” *American Art* 18, no. 3 (Autumn 2004), 54.
- ⁴⁹ Lloyd Goodrich, *Edward Hopper* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1976, 1993), 105.
- ⁵⁰ Edward Hopper, “Notes on Painting,” *Edward Hopper Retrospective Exhibition* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1933), 17; quoted by Goodrich, *Edward Hopper*, 161.
- ⁵¹ “Traveling Man,” *Time* 51, no. 3 (19 January 1948), 61.
- ⁵² Walter Wells, *Silent Theater: The Art of Edward Hopper* (New York and London: Phaidon Press, 2007), 180.

⁵³ Lloyd Goodrich, "Notes of Conversation with Hopper," typescript 20 April 1946, 4-5, Whitney Museum of American Art Archives, Edward and Josephine Hopper Research Collection; quoted by Elliot Bostwick Davis, "Hopper's Foundation," *Edward Hopper* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2007), 38.

⁵⁴ Michael Karl Witzel, *The American Gas Station: History and Folklore of the Gas Station in American Car Culture* (Osceola, Wisconsin: Motorbooks International, 1993), 39.

⁵⁵ John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *The Gas Station in America* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 49-52

⁵⁶ John J. Tokheim of Thor, Iowa, invented the first gasoline pump that delivered measured amounts of gas in a glass dome from underground storage tanks, using technology similar to a basic water well pump. Many small businesses installed underground tanks and installed curbside pumps in front of their stores. The potential for explosions, however, led to bans in most cities by 1923. Filling stations, often on the outskirts of town, were built. Witzel, *American Gas Station*, 11-21, 32.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Bucarelli, "Painting the American Road," 22.

⁵⁸ Stuart Davis, "The Cube Root," *Art News* 41 (1 February 1943), 33-34, quoted in Patricia Hills, *Stuart Davis* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 121.

⁵⁹ The complete quote reads, "An artist who has traveled on a steam train, driven an automobile, or flown in an airplane doesn't feel the same way about form and space as one who has not. An artist who has used telegraph, telephone, and radio doesn't feel the same way about time and space as one who has not. And an artist who lives in a world of the motion picture, electricity, and synthetic chemistry doesn't feel the same way about light and color as one who has not. An artist who has lived in a democratic society has a different view of what a human being really is than one who has not." Stuart Davis, "Is There a Revolution in the Arts?" (transcript of radio broadcast from Town Hall, New York City, in association with NBC, 15 February 1940); quoted in Mark Rutkoski and Earl Davis, "Chronology of the Life of Stuart Davis," *Stuart Davis: A Catalogue Raisonné* vol. 1 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 141.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Hills, *Davis*, 80.

⁶¹ Quoted in *ibid*, 84.

⁶² Davis had absorbed several color and design theories, including those of Hardesty G. Maratta, Denman W. Ross, and Jay Hambidge, which he incorporated into his work. Davis's art was informed by such theories, but he did not follow any single theory too closely. John R. Lane, *Stuart Davis: Art and Art Theory* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1978), 23.

⁶³ Ani Boyajian and Mark Rutkoski, eds., *Stuart Davis: A Catalogue Raisonné* vol. 1 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 255.

⁶⁴ Davis later separated the canvases, presenting each as an individual canvas. Boyajian and Rutkoski, *Stuart Davis*, 258.

⁶⁵ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964, 2000) 29.

⁶⁶ "Part of the mystique of automobility was the use and care of the motorcar as machine and central to car maintenance was the gasoline station. For males, especially, the neighborhood gasoline station – with its ringing bell announcing customers, its smell of gasoline and grease signifying technology, and its brisk socializing indicating community – constituted a very important social setting indeed. Here could be found the exhilarating tension of mechanical and other problems faced and solved. In gasoline stations, both close to or far from home, young boys eagerly entered the exhilarating adult world." Jakle and Sculle, *Gas Station*, 3-5.

⁶⁷ Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 35-37.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Gail Levin, *The Complete Oil Paintings of Edward Hopper* (New York: Whitney Museum of America Art, 2001), 278.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Levin, *Complete Oil Paintings*, 356.

⁷⁰ Vivien Green Fryd, *Art and the Crisis of Marriage: Edward Hopper and Georgia O'Keeffe* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 86.

⁷¹ The original sketches are now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. "Benefit Art Show at National Club," *New York Times*, 9 December 1937, 28.

⁷² *Filling Station* centers on a station attendant, Mac, who interacts with various motorists and truck drivers who stop at the station in the course of an evening.

⁷³ Lincoln Kirstein, *Paul Cadmus* (New York: Imago Imprint, 1984), 51.

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- ⁷⁴ Debra Hickenlooper Sowell, *The Christensen Brothers: An American Dance Epic* (Amsteldijk, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), 316-319.
- ⁷⁵ Beginning in the 1910s, oil companies marketed themselves through place-product-packaging and standardized stations. Shell Oil began marketing itself in 1914 in California, with stations opening up throughout the West and Midwest in the 1920s. They were recognized for their simple station designs, with a roof supported by columns over an island with pumps that projected from a glass-paneled office. The “A” style station was made from prefabricated parts, which could be delivered to stations as needed. Jakle and Sculle, *Gas Station*, 54-55.
- ⁷⁶ Dennis Harper, “Wanda Gág,” *The American Scene on Paper: Prints and Drawings from the Schoen Collection* (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art and University of Georgia, 2008), 105.
- ⁷⁷ Quoted in Richard Cox and Julie L’Enfant, “Old World Symphony: Thoughts of Minnesota in the Late Work of Wanda Gág,” *Minnesota History* 55, no. 1 (Spring 1996), 7.
- ⁷⁸ Richard C. Cox, “Wanda Gág: The Bite of the Picture Book,” *Minnesota History* 44, no. 7 (Fall 1975), 249.
- ⁷⁹ Catherine Gudis, *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004) 3-4.
- ⁸⁰ Karl Raitz, “American Roads, Roadside America,” *Geographical Review* 88, no. 3 (July 1998), 381-383.
- ⁸¹ Gudis, *Buyways*, 1.
- ⁸² “Scenic or Sign-ic,” *Standard Oil Bulletin* (May 1929), 2; quoted in John Ott, “Landscapes of Consumption: Auto Tourism and Visual Culture in California, 1920-1940,” *Reading California*, 58.
- ⁸³ Gudis, *Buyways*, 6.
- ⁸⁴ Daniel M. Bluestone, “Roadside Blight and the Reform of Commercial Architecture,” *Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 170.
- ⁸⁵ Gudis, *Buyways*, 163.
- ⁸⁶ John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *Fast Food: Roadside Restaurants in the Automobile Age* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 43, 65.
- ⁸⁷ Motion picture directors were quick to recognize the potential of intimate exchanges between people in the interior of automobiles. David Laderman, *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 17.
- ⁸⁸ Dean A. Porter, *Victor Higgins: An American Master* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1991), 152.
- ⁸⁹ Suzan Campbell, ed., *Taos Artists and Their Patrons, 1898-1950* (Notre Dame: Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame, 1999), 156.
- ⁹⁰ The only known version of Torre-Bueno’s *Behind the Wheel*, in the collection of the author, is numbered in pencil “1. 2/3,” which is believed to indicate the first state, and number two of three impressions. No second state is known. James Goodfriend to author, New York, 7 July 2006.
- ⁹¹ Edward Alden Jewell, “The Etchings of Georges Rouault – A Variegated and Numerous Hardy Perennial – The Prix de Rome and the Mooney Case,” *New York Times*, 7 May 1933, X8; quoted in Dennis Harper, “Eugenie McEvoy,” *Coming Home: American Paintings 1930-1950 From the Schoen Collection* (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, 2003), 239.
- ⁹² Hopper’s *Jo in Wyoming* is the only painting known to this author to represent an automobile interior as a mobile studio. All other known representations are photographic.
- ⁹³ Fryd, *Art and the Crisis of Marriage*, 75.
- ⁹⁴ Goodrich, *Edward Hopper*, 105.
- ⁹⁵ The watercolors *Custom House*, *Portland*, and *Libby House*, *Portland* were painted in 1927 from the inside of his car when it was raining outside. Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Rizzoli International, updated edition, 2007), 206-209, 392.
- ⁹⁶ The Hoppers’ vehicle had a car radio. Radios were still relatively new to automobiles. There were some homemade and attempts at car radios in the 1920s, but they moved beyond the experimental stage with the creation of Motorola in 1930. At the time, spoken accents from various regions would have been apparent to listeners as they traveled, which would have emphasized how far one was from home. In thinly populated Wyoming, however, they may not have been within radio range. Whether varying accents or distance from radio range, the radio could have added to the sense of isolation associated with Hopper’s work, as he distanced himself from any comforts of home and became a stranger in a strange land. John Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life* (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland and Company, 2009), 99; Lippard, *Beaten Track*, 9.

⁹⁷ Quoted in William C. Seitz, *Edward Hopper in Sao Paulo 9* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1969), 22; see Viviana Bucarelli, "Painting the American Road: Edward Hopper, Stuart Davis, Alfred Leslie, Edward Ruscha" (Master's thesis, City College of the City University of New York, 2001), 16.

⁹⁸ Davis explored these concepts of discordant themes as early as 1918's *Multiple Views*, a painting of multiple themes and points of time on one canvas.

⁹⁹ Karen Wilkin, "Multiple Views," *Stuart Davis: A Catalogue Raisonné* vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 2007), 110.

¹⁰⁰ Carl Zigrosser, *The Artist in America: Twenty-Four Close-Ups of Contemporary Printmakers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), 87.

Conclusion

Since making its initial appearance on American roadways in 1893, the automobile has been a consistently popular subject in American art. While the automobile provides motorists the freedom to determine their own destination, its depiction conveys a diverse and often contradictory range of meanings. It has been used to picture everything from great wealth to absolute poverty, speed to halted motion and communal bonding to racial segregation. As the symbolism of the road tells of the journey of life, images of the motorcar in the fine arts illuminate aspects of what it meant to live in America during the machine age. The growth in automobility paralleled the nation's prominence on the world stage in the twentieth century—from the period of progress through the 1920s, to the hardships of the 1930s and into the war years of the 1940s—during which time America became associated with the automobile more than any other country. Throughout this period, the automobile was featured in art, serving as a cipher for the times and individual artists' personal circumstances.

The automobile appears with such regularity that its importance in picturing the American condition has too often been overlooked by art historians. Art historian Paul Karlstrom considers the motorcar “as much a landscape element as are trees and mountains,” a point of view apparently shared by others.¹ Yet it is the automobile's ubiquity to the point of being considered an ordinary feature of the landscape that emphasizes how important and frequently it has been included in art. By looking at the vehicles, it can be determined that the automobile redefined how people use public space and that its use fundamentally changed the way people worked and socialized. These major changes in how Americans went about their daily lives are featured in the works of art examined in this study.

While the first automobiles were custom machines built by hand, the conveyer belt system employed by Henry Ford in the assembly of the Model T revolutionized the automotive industry. As objects of mass production, motor vehicles became affordable to most Americans. The automobile's assembly line manufacturing and popular use is what spurred the artists who looked to the motorcar as fitting subject matter in the years following the period covered in this dissertation. Pop artists repeatedly turned to the automobile in their work, as did several painters working in the precise style of photo realism. For the very reason Alfred Stieglitz considered automobiles crass and "ugly," pop artists found them appealing.² Whether a bottle of Coca-Cola or an automobile put together on a conveyer belt, the commercial product fulfilled the needs of mass culture. From his art production "factory," Andy Warhol claimed, "I want to be a machine, and I feel that whatever I do and do machine-like is what I want to do."³ During his career, Warhol made several works of art inspired by automobiles. An early example, *Twelve Cadillacs*, 1962 (fig.C1), features one of the most glamorous and recognizable vehicles then available to consumers. Like Walter Ufer's expression of himself as a 1919 Buick, a symbol of his success, it was not by coincidence that the status-conscious Warhol chose such an iconic American car as the Cadillac for his composition.⁴ Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series, 1963-64, with the related *Ambulance Disaster* and *Saturday Disaster*, 1964, find a precedence in Howard Warshaw's *Wrecked Automobiles*, 1949 (fig.2.27), and both artists found inspiration in photographic reproductions in local newspapers. Jim Dine also explored the artistic possibilities of automobile accidents in *Car Crash*, 1960, a live performance "happening" that drew from his personal experience of surviving an automobile accident. The happening further inspired paintings, lithographs and drawings. Dine stated that a crashed vehicle was "a potent metaphor for the

danger, tragedy, and omnipresent specter of death that [the artist] sensed in American life,” a sentiment apparently shared with Warshaw and Warhol.⁵

The softness of Claes Oldenburg’s canvas sculptures, including *Soft Airflow*, 1966 (fig.C2), and its related drawings, play against the reality of hard surfaces emphasized in most automotive art. Yet they recall the organic forms of Arthur Dove’s automobile paintings (figs.1.16-1.18). “Of the doubles man has made of himself, the car is the most ever-present, competitive and dangerous,” claimed Oldenburg.⁶ He felt that the motorcar was a violent part of the American street, and by rendering it in soft form, or in pliable cardboard in his *Autobodys* happening of 1963, that he could then control it and make it less threatening. Oldenburg’s works would in turn inform the hand-sewn leather Volkswagen, *Vocho (Yellow)*, 2004, by Margarita Cabrera (fig.C3). In printmaking, Oldenburg’s *The Profile Airflow*, 1969 (fig.C4), features a clear polyurethane relief over the lithograph design of a streamlined Chrysler, part of a series begun in 1965 based on the 1930s vehicle.⁷ Oldenburg’s rendering of the Chrysler Airflow in profile recalls the engineering schematic in the background of Diego Rivera’s 1932 portrait of Edsel Ford (fig.1.31).

Mel Ramos’s depiction of a spark plug in *Kar Kween*, 1964 (fig.C5), recalls Francis Picabia’s *Jeune fille américaine dans l’état de nudité (Portrait of a Young American Girl in a State of Nudity)*, 1915 (fig.1.21), in which Picabia used a spark plug to indicate feminine sexuality in a specifically American context. The “AC” brand spark plug in Ramos’s work is a substitute for a virile American male, marked “Made in U.S.A.” on its side. The standing plug is slightly taller than the pin-up nude caressing it. Like a centerfold model, she looks over her shoulder, exaggerating the habits of advertisers to use sexuality to sell products. The painting is one of at least three works by Ramos picturing an upright spark plug with a nude woman.

According to Ramos, the reference to Picabia is intended.⁸ Ramos returned to the motif in 1996, replicating the spark plug used by Picabia, also marked “Forever,” and repeating Picabia’s title of *Jeune fille américaine dans l’état de nudité*. Ramos made frequent reference to works from the canon of Western art history throughout his career.⁹

The automobile proved particularly important to the artists involved in the fine style of photo realism of the 1960s and 1970s. Instead of emphasizing speed or freedom to choose one’s destiny, the photo realists used photography to inform their compositions of automobiles in everyday situations: parked on city streets or in parking lots, driving along roads lined by strip malls, fast food restaurants and filling stations, or even crashed and abandoned. Among the notable artists were Robert Bechtle, Ralph Goings, Don Eddy and Richard Estes. They indicated a sameness and blandness among ordinary vehicles and demonstrated their shared interests with the pop artists in mass production. Bechtle claimed, “I try for a kind of neutrality or transparency of style that minimizes the artfulness that might prevent the viewer from responding directly to the subject matter,” adding, “I want him to relate much as he would to the real thing, perhaps to wonder why anyone should bother to paint it in the first place.”¹⁰ In the 1940s, Fairfield Porter expressed a similar idea in picturing the automobiles as unremarkable objects that lined city streets, although his painterly style is far different from the smooth approach of the photo realists. John Salt’s photo-realist paintings of abandoned and wrecked vehicles immediately recall previous junk yard paintings from the 1930s. Salt’s *Desert Wreck*, 1972 (fig.C6), was from a time when the British artist lived in America. Similar to images of automobiles created in response to the nation’s economic hardships in the Great Depression, Salt was working in the country at a time of great political and economic unrest.

The road and its relation to the automobile has been a frequent motif for American artists. In the work of Allan D'Arcangelo, long stretches of road suggest Ralston Crawford's *Overseas Highway* (fig.5.25) by continuing into apparent infinity. D'Arcangelo's *Hello and Good-Bye*, 1964 (fig.C7), depicts a highway marked by a center line that stretches uninterrupted toward the horizon. A painted rearview mirror on top of the canvas shows that the road ahead repeats exactly the road just traveled. In other compositions by D'Arcangelo, the highway is filled with signs and billboard advertisements, often cropped from full view as if seen at a speeding glance. The four panel serigraph *June Moon*, 1969 (fig.C8), shows what first appears to be the moon cresting on the horizon. On the final three panels, the "moon" is enlarged, revealing the round sign for a Gulf Oil company station instead. Man's presence replaces nature.

In similar fashion, Ed Ruscha's *Standard Station, Amarillo Texas*, 1963 (fig.C9), indicates an automobile perspective, a focal point often found in his work. *Standard Station* is realized in a style reminiscent of an architectural drawing, with the emphasis on the standardized construction of the Standard Oil gas station, with bays of rectangular pumps beneath an awning that connects to the building. The perspective line of the structure extends away at a sharp angle toward the far right corner of the composition. The design recalls hard-edged, geometric abstract imagery. Considered at the time as belonging to a new breed of universal stations that could be erected quickly, it is presented as something grand and monumental. The lack of people, however, expresses a disconnect from the human condition and brings to mind Charles Sheeler's seemingly abandoned Ford factory at River Rouge (figs.1.25-1.26). Robert Rauschenberg indicates the road experience of seeming to endlessly drive by ironically eliminating figures and the road altogether in his *Automobile Tire Print*, 1953 (fig.C10). A monoprint made on a twenty-

foot long piece of paper placed on a street in San Francisco, it features the mark left by an inked wheel of a car driven by the avant-garde composer John Cage.¹¹

In the first half of the twentieth century, motion of automobiles was predominantly found in art visualizing passing vehicles. Rarely was the motion of the driving experience itself expressed. Depicting movement from within a moving automobile is a subject more frequently explored by artists working after 1950. The abstract red and brown cliffs in Georgia O'Keeffe's *Canyon Country*, c. 1965 (fig.C11), were inspired by the artist's automotive travels through Arizona.¹² Wayne Thiebaud painted the geometric designs of modern roadways beginning in the 1970s, making imaginative designs of roads that combine aspects of the topography of Los Angeles and San Francisco; of steep hills, ribbons of crisscrossing highways and precarious, tilted turns, as in *24th Street Intersection (Twenty-Fourth St. Ridge)*, 1977, and *Urban Freeways*, 1979-1980 (figs.C12-C13). English artist David Hockney likewise made paintings that draw on his memories of driving during the time when he was living in California. *Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio*, 1980 (fig.C14), creatively pictures the winding roads that led to his Los Angeles studio. The automobile culture in which Hockney took part in America and views from the experience of driving continue to influence his recent work of Yorkshire, England.¹³ Since the 1980s, visualization of the kinetic movement from within an automobile has been a routine subject for artists, including Woody Gwyn, Gregory Thielker, Julie Bozzi and James Doolin.

Since the 1970s and into the present, the automobile has given rise to a new body of meanings, often dealing with environmental concerns raised by the continued use of combustion engines that run on a finite resource and that emit greenhouse gases, or the sociological ramifications of people living in suburbs and driving to and from work. Those were not the concerns of artists working at the dawn of the automobile age. Though new associations have

been applied to the automobile by artists through the years, it has always been looked upon as much more than a machine to transport people. From the onset, it has been proven a rich metaphor with seemingly endless potential for meaning. Americans embraced the motorcar and it is part of our national consciousness. The motor vehicle is central in the lives of a large majority of Americans and it continues to be a prominent part of our visual arts. Fertile in meaning and symbolic associations, to artists the automobile remains an important American icon.

¹ Paul J. Karlstrom, "Reflections on the Automobile in American Art," *Archives of American Art Journal* 20, no. 2 (1980), 18.

² Alfred Stieglitz, quoted by Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999), 26.

³ Quoted in G.R. Swenson, "What is Pop Art?" (Part I), *Art News* 62, no.7 (November 1963), 26.

⁴ Observations on Andy Warhol's *Twelve Cadillacs* have been discussed with Gail Stavitsky, curator at the Montclair Art Museum, which is planning the exhibition and catalogue *Warhol and Cars: American Icons*, set for opening and publication in 2012.

⁵ Quoted by Steven Jay Schneider, "Death as Art / The Car Crash as Statement," *Car Crash Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 279-280.

⁶ Claes Oldenburg quoted by Gerald Silk, "The Automobile and Art," *Automobile and Culture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984), 155.

⁷ Helen M. Franc, "Claes Oldenburg," *Members Newsletter (The Museum of Modern Art)* no. 6 (Autumn 1969), 1.

⁸ Mel Ramos, "RE: Quick question," e-mail to Jerry N. Smith (12 March 2012).

⁹ Francis Picabia's automobile-inspired work continues to be an influence for artists. The American installation artist Jason Rhoades also recalled Picabia, specifically the artist's fascination with automobiles, in the construction piece, *Fucking Picabia Cars / Picabia Car with Ejection Seat*, 1997/2000, shown at the 2001 exhibition *Ich bin mein Auto (I am my Car)* in Berlin. Hans-Dieter Fronz, "Ich bin mein Auto," *Kunstforum* no.157 (November – December, 2001), 358.

¹⁰ Quoted by Karlstrom, "Reflections," 20-21.

¹¹ Lynne Cooke, "Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s. San Francisco, MoMA," *Burlington Magazine* 134, no.1070 (May 1992), 336.

¹² Betsy Fahlman, "Georgia O'Keeffe," *Phoenix Art Museum: Collection Highlights* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 287.

¹³ Clare Griffiths, "Yorkshire's Prodigal Son: David Hockney's Awakening from the California Dream," *The Times Literary Supplement*, no. 5679 (3 February 2012), 17-18.

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Location unknown

Fig. 4.3

Thomas Hart Benton (1889-1975)

Departure of the Joads, from The Grapes of Wrath, 1939, lithograph, 13" x 18 1/2"

The Art Institute of Chicago

Fig. 4.4

Charles Frederick Surendorf (1906-1979)

Calif., 1938, wood engraving with hand coloring on paper, 6 1/4" x 8"

Collection of Jason Schoen

Fig. 4.5

Maynard Dixon (1875-1946)

Okie Camp, 1935, oil on board, 10" x 14"

The Delman Collection

Fig. 4.6
Millard Sheets (1907-1989)
Miggs Ready for the Road, 1938, watercolor, 15 ½" x 22 ¼"
Location unknown

Fig. 4.7
Mervin Jules (1912-1994)
Bare Statement, 1941, tempera on panel, 14 1/8" x 21 1/8"
Collection of Jason Schoen

Fig. 4.8
Mary Blair (1911-1978)
Okie Camp, 1932, watercolor, 18" x 22"
Collection of Eva and Terry Herndon

Fig. 4.9
Paul Weller (b.1912)
Home, c. 1938, lithograph, 9 7/8" x 14"
Collection of Jason Schoen

Fig. 4.10
Dorothea Lange (1895-1965)
Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California, 1936, gelatin silver print, 16" x 12"
Library of Congress, FSA/OWI Collection

Fig. 4.11
John Langley Howard (1902-1999)
The Unemployed, 1937, oil on cardboard, 24" x 30 ¼"
Oakland Museum of California

Fig. 4.12
John Langley Howard (1902-1999)
Hooverville, 1933, oil on canvas, 20" x 26 ¼"
Collection of Jason Schoen

Fig. 4.13
John Langley Howard (1902-1999)
Coit Tower mural, 1933-1934
Coit Tower, San Francisco

Fig 4.14
John Langley Howard (1902-1999)
Coit Tower mural (detail), 1933-1934
Coit Tower, San Francisco

Fig. 4.15

John Langley Howard (1902-1999)

Embarcadero and Clay Street, c.1936, oil on canvas, 36" x 43 ½"

Private collection

Fig. 4.16

Walter Ufer (1876-1936)

Bob Abbott and His Assistant, 1935, oil on canvas, 50 ¼" x 50 ¼"

The Speed Art Museum

Fig. 4.17

Ernest Martin Hennings (1886-1956)

Taos Plaza in Winter, 1921, c. 1935, oil on canvas, 34" x 40"

Collection of Philip Anschutz, Denver

Fig. 4.18

Clarence Arthur Ellsworth (1885-1961)

A Badlands Episode, 1926, oil on canvas, 19" x 29"

Private collection

Fig. 4.19

Barbara Latham (1896-1989)

Tourist Town, Taos, c. 1940, egg tempera on Masonite, 24" x 35 ¾"

Roswell Museum and Art Center

Fig. 4.20

Otis Dozier (1904-1987)

Abandoned House, 1935, oil on board, 25 ½" x 31 ½"

Collection of Jason Schoen

Fig. 4.21

Aaron Bohrod (1907-1992)

Stokie Park Auto, 1935, oil on board, 23 5/8" x 31 5/8"

Collection of Jason Schoen

Fig. 4.22

E Boyd (1903-1974)

Auto Salvage Yard, Tucson, Arizona, c. 1935-40, watercolor, 15 ¼" x 22 ¼"

Gerald Peters Gallery

Fig. 4.23

William Fisher (1891-1985)

Junkyard in Wells, Maine, c. 1940, oil on canvas

Terry and Eva Herndon Collection

Fig.4.24
Walter Ufer (1876-1936)
My Buick: Taos Canyon, 1919, oil on canvas, 25" x 25"
location unknown

Fig. 4.25
William H. Johnson (1901-1970)
Breakdown with Flat Tire, c. 1940-41, oil on wood, 34 1/8" x 37 1/2"
Smithsonian American Art Museum

Fig. 4.26
Arnold Blanch (1896-1968)
Arizona, c. 1940, lithograph, 12 1/8" x 16 3/4"
Steven's Fine Art, Phoenix

Fig. 4.27 Benton Spruance (1904-1967)
Repose in Egypt, 1940, lithograph, 15 1/4" x 10 1/8"
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Fig. 4.28
John O'Neil (1915-2004)
The Hitchhiker, 1940, oil on canvas, 24 1/2" x 32 1/4"
Collection of Jason Schoen

Fig. 4.29
John O'Neil (1915-2004)
Highway West, 1941, linoleum cut on paper, 7 3/8" x 9 3/8"
Collection of Jason Schoen

Fig. 4.30
Boardman Robinson (1876-1952)
The Hitchhikers, c. 1933, lithograph, 9 3/4" x 8 3/8"
M. Lee Stone Fine Prints, San Jose, California

Fig. 5.1
Frank Tenney Johnson (1874-1939)
Sketching Trip, 1918, photograph
Frank Tenney Johnson Collection, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical
Center, Cody, Wyoming

Fig. 5.2
Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986)
Gerald's Tree II, 1937, oil on canvas, 40" x 30"
Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas

Fig. 5.3

Ansel Adams (1902-1984)

Georgia O'Keeffe Painting in Her Car, New Mexico, 1937, gelatin silver print, 8 5/16" x 12 1/8", Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona

Fig. 5.4

Mary Agnes Yerkes (1886-1989) with Archibald Nester Offley

How to Make a Pullman Out of a Parlor Car Buick, 1922

Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California

Fig. 5.5

Walter C. Yeomans (1882-1972)

The New Outfit, not dated, drypoint on paper plate, 6" x 8"

Smithsonian American Art Museum

Fig. 5.6

John Steuart Curry (1897-1946)

Tourist Cabins, c. 1934, oil on canvas, 16 1/2" x 36 1/2"

Collection of Philip Anschutz, Denver

Fig. 5.7

John Sloan (1871-1951)

On the Ridge, 1920, oil on canvas, 26" x 35"

Collection of James Parks, Los Angeles, California

Fig. 5.8

Marguerite Zorach (1887-1968)

The Picnic, 1928, oil on canvas, 34" x 44"

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Barney A. Ebsworth

Fig. 5.9

Will Shuster (1893-1969)

Hyde Park Picnic, 1938, oil on board, 24" x 18"

Private collection

Fig. 5.10

John Sloan (1871-1951)

Gateway to Cerrillos, 1946, mixed media on panel, 18" x 25 3/8"

Denver Art Museum

Figs. 5.11 - 5.12

T. Harmon Parkhurst (1883-1952)

Artist John Sloan at Work, 1926, photographs

Palace of the Governors Photo Archives, Santa Fe

Fig. 5.13

Oscar Berninghaus (1874-1952)

Taos Tapestry, not dated, oil on canvas, 36" x 30"

Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas

Fig. 5.14

John Sloan (1871-1951)

Christian Soldiers, 1930, tempera and oil on panel, 33 5/6" x 23 1/4"

Location unknown

Fig. 5.15

John Sloan (1871-1951)

Corpus Christi Procession on the Alameda, 1930, tempera and oil on panel, 24" x 32 1/8"

Collection of Gil Waldman, Scottsdale

Fig. 5.16

John Sloan (1871-1951)

Old Jemez Mission, 1922, oil on canvas, 18" x 22"

Roswell Museum and Art Center

Fig. 5.17

John Sloan (1871-1951)

Knees and Aborigines, 1927, etching, 7" x 6"

Collection of Gil Waldman, Scottsdale

Fig. 5.18

John Sloan (1871-1951)

Indian Detour, 1927, etching, 6" x 7 1/8"

Collection of Gil Waldman, Scottsdale

Fig. 5.19

Sheldon Parsons (1866-1943)

The Santa Fe Has Brought Invaders (Ever So Sharp), after 1924, oil on canvas, 18 3/4" x 22 1/2" Collection of Sarah and Hiram Moody, Wickenburg, Arizona

Fig. 5.20

Joseph Henry Sharp (1859-1953)

Sunset Dance—Ceremony to the Evening Sun, 1924, oil on canvas, 25 1/8" x 30"

Smithsonian American Art Museum

Fig. 5.21

John Sloan (1871-1951)

Indian Art by the Highway (Better Mouse Traps), 1936, tempera and oil on panel, 24 ¼" x 30 ¼" Thomas Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa

Fig. 5.22

Morris Kantor (1896-1974)

Leaving Town, c. 1930, oil on canvas, 22" x 27"
Franklin-Riehlman Fine Art, New York

Fig. 5.23

O. Louis Guglielmi (1906-1956)

Vermont, c. 1931, oil on canvas, 18" x 24 ¼"
Private collection

Fig. 5.24

Helen Spang Pearce (1895-1994)

New Mexico Ribbon, 1946, oil on canvas board, 21 ¾" x 27 7/8"
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. William P. Albrecht

Fig. 5.25

Ralston Crawford

Overseas Highway, 1939, oil on canvas, 28" x 45"
The Regis Collection

Fig. 5.26

Edward Hopper (1882-1967)

Solitude #56, 1944, oil on canvas, 32" x 50"
Private collection

Fig. 5.27

Stuart Davis (1892-1964)

Mobil Oil, 1917, oil on canvas, 23" x 19 1/8"
Private collection

Fig. 5.28

Stuart Davis (1892-1964)

Garage No. 1, 1917, oil on canvas, 23 1/8" x 19 1/8"
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution

Fig. 5.29

Stuart Davis (1892-1964)

Early American Landscape, No. 2, c. 1929, oil on canvas
location unknown

Fig. 5.30
Stuart Davis (1892-1964)
New York – Paris, No. 3, 1931, oil on canvas, 39” x 52”
Private collection

Fig. 5.31
Stuart Davis (1892-1964)
Landscape with Garage Lights, 1931-32, oil on canvas, 32” x 42”
Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester

Fig. 5.32
Stuart Davis (1892-1964)
Gasoline Pump (Abstract Vision of New York), 1932, oil on canvas, 21” x 14”
Collection of Patricia Burrows and Milton Wolfson, Weston, Connecticut

Fig. 5.33
Stuart Davis (1892-1964)
Men Without Women, 1932, oil on canvas (mural), 10’ 8 7/8” x 16’ 11 7/8”
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 5.34
Edward Hopper (1882-1967)
Gas, 1940, oil on canvas, 26 ¼” x 40 ¼”
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 5.35
Edward Hopper (1882-1967)
Portrait of Orleans, 1950, oil on canvas, 26” x 40”
De Young Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco

Fig. 5.36
Edward Hopper (1892-1967)
Four Lane Road, 1956, oil on canvas, 27 ½” x 41 ½”
Private collection

Fig. 5.37
Paul Cadmus (1904-1999)
Set Design for Filling Station, 1937, cut-and-pasted paper, gouache, and pencil on paper,
8” x 10 7/8”
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 5.38
Wanda Gág (1893-1946)
Progress!, 1936, lithograph, 8 1/8” x 11 7/8”
Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Fig. 5.39
Maynard Dixon (1875-1946)
Standard Oil Bulletin Cover, 1929
Location of original painting unknown

Fig. 5.40
Maynard Dixon (1875-1946)
Standard Oil Bulletin Frontispiece, 1929
Location of original painting unknown

Fig. 5.41
Jerry Bywaters (1906-1989)
Oil Field Girls, 1940, oil on board, 29 5/8" x 24 1/2"
Blanton Museum, University of Texas at Austin

Fig. 5.42
Fred Shane (1906-1992)
Entrance to Pike's Peak Region, 1940, mixed media on canvas mounted on board, 26" x 32"
Collection of Jason Schoen

Fig. 5.43
Will Shuster (1893-1969)
Curb Service, 1941, oil on board, 20" x 24"
Collection of James Parks, Los Angeles, California

Fig. 5.44
James Peter Cost (1923-2002)
Americana No. 2 (Manhattan Beach All Night Truck Stop and Diner), c.1950, oil on canvas
Collection of Clint Selleck

Fig. 5.45
Victor Higgins (1884-1949)
New Mexico Landscape Through Auto Window, c.1935-37, watercolor, 15" x 21"
Eugene B. Adkins Collection at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art and the Philbrook Museum of Art

Fig. 5.46
Theodore Torre-Bueno (1914-1991)
Behind the Wheel, c. 1940, etching, 3" x 6"
Private collection, Phoenix

Fig. 5.47
Eugenie McEvoy (1879-1975)
Taxi! Taxi!, 1933, oil on canvas, 36" x 32"
Collection of Jason Schoen

Fig. 5.48
Edward Hopper (1882-1967)
Jo in Wyoming, 1946, watercolor, 13" x 20"
Whitney Museum of American Art

Fig. 5.49
Stuart Davis (1892-1964)
Windshield Mirror, 1932, gouache and ink on paper, 15 1/8" x 25 1/8"
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Fig. 5.50
Stuart Davis (1892-1964)
Untitled (Black and White Variation on Windshield Mirror), 1955-56, casein on canvas
54" x 76"
Collection of Jan and Marica Vilcek, New York

Fig. 5.51
Benton Spruance (1904-1967)
The 1930s – The Windshield, 1939, lithograph, 9" x 14 1/4"
Library of Congress

Fig. C1
Andy Warhol (1928-1987)
Twelve Cadillacs, 1962, silkscreen ink on canvas, 46" x 42"
Montclair Art Museum

Fig. C2
Claes Oldenburg (b. 1929)
Soft Airflow, 1966, canvas filled with kapok, impressed with patterns in sprayed enamel,
multiple sizes
Various collections

Fig. C3
Margarita Cabrera (b. 1973)
Vocho (Yellow), 2004, hand-sewn leather with metal auto parts, 60" x 72" x 78"
Collection of William J. Hokin

Fig. C4

Claes Oldenburg (b.1929)

The Profile Airflow, 1969, Molded polyurethane relief over lithograph in aluminum frame, 33½" x 65½" x 4"

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Fig. C5

Mel Ramos (b. 1935)

Kar Kween, 1964, oil on canvas, 60" x 48 1/8"

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

Fig. C6

John Salt (b. 1937)

Desert Wreck, 1972, oil and airbrush on linen, 47 ½" x 71 ½"

Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University

Fig. C7

Allan D'Arcangelo (1930-1998)

Hello and Good-Bye, 1964, mixed media, 20" x 24"

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College

Fig. C8

Allan D'Arcangelo (1930-1998)

June Moon, 1969, serigraph, 23 ½" x 25 ½"

Smithsonian American Art Museum

Fig. C9

Ed Ruscha (b. 1937)

Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas, 1963, oil on canvas, 64 ½" x 121 ¾"

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College

Fig. C10

Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008)

Auto Tire Print, 1953, ink on paper, 16 ½" x 264 ½"

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

Fig. C11

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986)

Canyon Country, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"

Phoenix Art Museum

Fig. C12

Wayne Thiebaud (b. 1920)

24th Street Intersection, (Twenty-Fourth St. Ridge), 1977, oil on canvas, 35 5/8" x 48"

Private collection

Fig. C13

Wayne Thiebaud (b. 1920)

Urban Freeways, 1979-1980, oil on canvas, 44 3/8" x 36 1/8"

Private collection

Fig. C14

David Hockney (b. 1937)

Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio, 1980, acrylic on canvas, 86" x 243"

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

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