

DISCOVERING A NEW IDENTITY: INFLUENCES OF THE GERMAN AVANT-
GARDE ON TRANSATLANTIC MODERNISTS FROM THE UNITED STATES

by

Joseph Sherren
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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my loving and patient fiancé, Ronald Padron, and our Betta fish BubbleGrump.

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ABSTRACT

DISCOVERING A NEW IDENTITY: INFLUENCES OF THE GERMAN AVANT-GARDE ON TRANSATLANTIC MODERNISTS FROM THE UNITED STATES

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George Mason University, 2015

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This thesis analyzes the reciprocal influence between German Expressionists and American Modernists who travelled to Germany in the years leading up to World War I. The United States and Germany underwent cultural upheaval after separate wars for unification ending in 1865 and 1871, respectively. Similarly, their national identities faced serious change that was heavily influenced by industrialization and urbanization between the mid-1870s and 1900. On an international level, status and identity was reliant on military might as well as industrial potential, both of which Germany demonstrated in the Franco-Prussian War (1870- 1871) and its Unification. The United States, though recovering from an intense Civil War that weakened its military, exhibited great potential and seemed on the same level as Germany at this time.¹ At the turn of the century the visual arts of the United States and Germany faced change as artists struggled

¹ Gatzke, 1980: 38

to express living in light of the major shift in social life and values initiated by societal upheaval and recovery. This struggle manifested in a variety of distinctive styles and avant-garde groups including the New York Modernists and independent artists in the United States as well as the Secessionist Movements and Expressionist circles of Germany; these groups sought to express the distinctive spirit of living in the modern industrialized world. This paper focuses on three American artists: Oscar Bluemner, Marsden Hartley, and Albert Bloch. They travelled to Germany between 1908 and the early 1920s and experienced both countries' struggles to establish a new cultural identity. In response to the identity struggle in both countries, their styles shifted from the academicism of their earliest instruction in the schools and academies of the United States to styles reflecting specific developments from their time in Germany where they exhibited with the German avant-garde. This noticeable shift suggests a more direct influence on these American artists by the German avant-garde than most scholars generally recognize and explains why they have often been left unexplored altogether.

The social and cultural similarities of the United States and Germany are established first, demonstrating the open lines of communication between the two countries and basing the artists' experiences on the premise of shared socio-cultural experiences between the United States and Germany. Then a brief analysis of the development of modern art at the turn of the century follows, to further contextualize the environment in which Bluemner, Hartley, and Bloch worked. These sections, combined with personal recollections and letters from the artists that express their perception of Germany and their varying degrees of involvement in the German avant-garde, provide

the foundational material for an analysis of the major shift in styles. It is evident that German Expressionist movements clearly influenced their stylistic and aesthetic development based in shared experiences of modernity between the Germans and Americans.

CHAPTER ONE: THE FOUNDATIONS OF STATE AND IDENTITY

As the foundation for modernism in American visual arts was laid in the first quarter of the twentieth century, artists “knew it ought not to look European and that it ought to correspond to the peculiarities of American society and culture.”² Even with this mentality, artists from the United States regularly maintained sustained engagement with their European counterparts through a series of transatlantic encounters. From the upheaval after the Civil War a half century before and through industrial expansion, American society and culture had undergone significant change. There were a few countries undergoing similar change and upheaval at roughly the same time, Germany is the most notable. On a socio-political level, “[the] Civil War in the United States and German Unification in 1871 sparked mutual curiosity in the two countries’ parallel constitutional development.”³ This relationship based on mutual curiosity between Germany and the United States extended into the visual arts as well, as best exemplified by interest in developing distinct cultural identities. Germany and the United States had similar goals in establishing a new modern identity based in experiences of industrialization and urbanization. Both countries also had philosophical belief systems that shared interests in the use of art in a modern society and the expression of an essential spirit in art.

² Corn, 1999: xv

³ Barclay, 1997: 10

Oscar Bluemner, Marsden Hartley, and Albert Bloch were painters on the cusp of American early Modernism. They expanded on their training and experimented with pictorial devices in the United States and in Germany, as members of anti-academic groups or independent artists. Bluemner, Hartley, and Bloch followed a trajectory that differed from their contemporaries: they eschewed the usual European experience of studying in Paris, Rome, or London and became part of movements in a country developing on a similar scale and pace as the United States. Bluemner was a German immigrant. Having studied as an architect and moved to Chicago in the 1890s, he became a nationalized citizen and ardently maintained his American identity for the rest of his life despite traveling back to Germany. Hartley initially travelled to Paris but found philosophical differences and so chose to relocate to Berlin where he found a culture and society that shared his own beliefs. Bloch was a second generation American from a German family; he had cultural ties to Germany but identified America as the major influence in his work, beliefs, and livelihood. While traveling through Germany, these artists recognized urbanization on the scale of the United States as well as the country's desire to distinguish its cultural development from the vanguard in France and Italy. These influences and cultural similarities provided an environment that promoted cross-cultural exchange which Bluemner, Hartley, and Bloch exploited.

Both American and German artists developed and borrowed distinctive pictorial devices and styles based in the context of similar socio-cultural circumstances. Additionally, they shared an aesthetic philosophy that underscored essential spirit and an emphasis on individual expression distinctive to German and American belief systems.

Bluemner, Hartley, and Bloch acted as a bridge between the German and American art cultures by adopting some of the characteristics and interests of the German Expressionists and applying them to their American outlook. These artists also experienced the similarities between the two urban industrialized cultures, which opened lines of communication between them and the German artists and provided venues to showcase their work.

Both countries' economies and populations expanded greatly during the Industrial Revolution and emerged into international prominence after hard-won unification, for the United States in 1865 and Germany in 1871. On an international level, status and identity were reliant on military might as well as industrial potential, which Germany and the United States exhibited. Germany demonstrated its military might and industry in the Franco-Prussian War (1870- 1871) and its Unification. The United States, though recovering from an intense Civil War that weakened its military, exhibited great potential in industry and seemed on the same level as Germany.⁴ Germans recognized this potential and paired that observation with the perception that America was growing and maturing as a world power and becoming more like Europe.⁵ With their goals of differentiating themselves from the traditionally dominant art cultures, their relationship resembled peers with a mutual interest in crafting a new modern cultural identity. The common goal along with the long history of cultural exchange between the United States and Germany provided international artists an environment for cooperative experimentation on aesthetics and visual arts in the new modern city.

⁴ Gatzke, 1980: 38

⁵ Barclay, 1997: 120

Literature on the development of early Modernism in the United States and Secessionist and Expressionist Germany rarely discusses the mixture of the two cultures despite the interactions between them. Often, authors discuss the topic of Germany's influence only in monographs on a particular artist, which do not contextualize the relationship between the two cultures. Wanda Corn's *The Great American Thing* focuses on the parallel movements of the artists who travelled abroad and those who refused to travel as each group attempted to settle issues of emerging national identity for the United States. The rift between the two groups expressed itself over how cultural identity should be founded: through experience of other modernist circles or through introversion and isolation. Corn's book does not address the influence German art had on early developments in American art in the same way she addresses the French, despite the focus on Alfred Stieglitz and his 291 Gallery. Stieglitz's gallery was a prominent New York hub of artistic activity in which Oscar Bluemner and Marsden Hartley participated. Most writers do not include Albert Bloch in a study of early modernism primarily because he worked independently of circles like Stieglitz and the New York Modernists.

The only text that treats all three artists as important components of a movement is Patricia McDonnell's *Painting Berlin Stories*, which relies heavily on the philosophical similarities between German and American cultures. She does not address other cultural similarities, and thereby neglects some of the contexts in which these artists were working. Further, Abraham Davidson's *Early American Modernist Painting, 1910- 1935*, which is concerned with formal analysis and comparison, obscures the social context of American artists in 1910s Berlin and Munich for the sake of clarity and cohesion in his

formalist thesis. Additionally, Albert Bloch is rarely added to a study such as this. He was an artist regarded as the American *Blaue Reiter* in the books of Henry Adams, Frank Baron, and McDonnell as well as in monographs on the artist. But only once is he included in a study of Americans who went abroad alongside Bluemner and Hartley, which was in passing in McDonnell's *Painting Berlin Stories*.

Most texts on the developing modernist tradition in the United States do not mention Germany in the same light as France or Italy, despite Germany's great influence. The literature on transcultural exchange between Germany and the United States rarely places these three artists together in a single study. Bloch defies traditional interpretation such as that of the academic or formally trained artist because he had minimal training and operated independently of the typical art circles while he was in the United States. His inclusion in a study like this demonstrates his role as a primary influence on his contemporaries through his involvement as an American artist in the German avant-garde, most notably the group *Der Blaue Reiter*. Bluemner and Hartley emulated the beliefs and work of *Der Blaue Reiter*, making the need to contextualize Bloch's involvement in that group necessary for further understanding the course American artists took while involved in the German avant-garde.

This study centers around three American artists: Oscar Bluemner, Marsden Hartley, and Albert Bloch. These artists travelled to and through Germany in the years between 1908 and 1921. All were present for the outbreak of World War I, but all were also present for the ongoing debate over German cultural identity as it played out in German Expressionist painting, sculpture, and exhibitions. Most studies are limited to the

early 1910s, usually ending at 1914 which is the accepted end date of the first wave of German Expressionist art and the point where “the ideas and theories that were to be fundamental to all the late developments during the twentieth century were fully developed and expressed.”⁶ This study spans a greater period of time and focuses on outsider involvement in German Expressionism. It expands upon research on work these three artists created during their stay in German and how they participated in German art during the reign of Expressionism.

Marion Deshmukh, in a chapter of Barclay’s edited volume, describes the German legacy in American modernism with excellent precision. After World War I, “the uneasy relationship between Germany and the United States during the first part of the 1920s and after 1933, the deteriorating political relations between the two countries had obscured German modernism’s legacy for Americans. The School of Paris, rather than German painting of Berlin or Munich, represented the avant-garde and ‘pure painting’ for most Americans.”⁷ This deterioration obscured Germany’s influence despite the impact Germany had on the cultural development of the United States. German culture still exercised some influence on American modernism, most notably through modernist architecture. Bauhaus artists, by necessity, took a serious interest in American art and culture and helped shape it through universities like Black Mountain College, Harvard, and the National Academy of Design. Most notably, leading Bauhaus figures like Marcel Breuer, Joseph Albers, and Walter Gropius fled to the United States under pressure from the Nazis in the 1930s.

⁶ Lasko, 2003: 1

⁷ Barclay, 1997: 279

The figures who assimilated into the United States, and the developments they spurred on are more readily discussed than pre-World War I influences American artists experienced in Germany. Because of this neglect, stylistic and aesthetic developments in American art as a result of direct contact with the German avant-garde during the 1910s go unaddressed in texts. The artists who took part in German art circles and exhibitions are marginalized in favor of the narrative that discusses the French and Italian schools and the American backlash against European intervention on the development of art and culture. Artists like Oscar Bluemner, Marsden Hartley, and Albert Bloch contributed to German culture and American culture, evident in their success as exhibiting artists in New York, Berlin, and Munich. But that exchange of art and culture is generally excluded from the narrative of American Modernism because of the marginalization of German contribution to American culture despite the complex and even direct interactions between artists like Bluemner, Hartley, and Bloch and the German avant-garde.

The United States and Germany

The socio-political relationship between Germany and the United States crystallized in the late-nineteenth century at a time when “the Civil War in the United States and German Unification in 1871 sparked mutual curiosity in the two countries’ parallel constitutional development.”⁸ The Reconstruction Era of the United States and unification of Germany allowed for the emergence of “mass industrial societies on both sides of the Atlantic [which] radically altered the context within which mutual images

⁸ Barclay, 1997: 10

and perceptions were evolving.”⁹ Shifting populations and growing cities reflect the parallel effects of industrialization in these countries, which spurred on some of the mutual curiosity in their respective development while at the same time establishing certain cities as cultural centers.

In the United States, New York was the most populous city between 1900 and 1920. Its population went from 3.4 million to a staggering 5.6 million in the span of only twenty years.¹⁰ New York represented the center of the population density with Chicago and Philadelphia, trailing behind at roughly half and one-third of the population of New York City, respectively. These cities represent large urban areas with strong ties to the visual arts in the same way Berlin and Munich do for Germany.

Between 1900 and 1910, the population of Berlin went from 1.9 million to 2.1 million before World War I. By the end of the war, the population had inflated to 3.7 million people.¹¹ This steep growth marks the industrial and urban boom that took place after Berlin was named the empire’s capital. Hamburg, was the second and grew exponentially as well, but never reached the same level as a cultural influence. Munich, located in the southern state of Bavaria, was the third most populated city in the German Empire at the turn of the century. Munich’s population rose from 500,000 in 1900 to 596,000 in 1910 and nearly 630,000 at the end of the war.¹² Like Berlin, Munich served as a focus for German artists

⁹ Barclay, 1997: 14

¹⁰ Hobbs and Stoops, 2002: A-6

¹¹ Mitchell, 1975: 61

¹² *Ibid*: 77

Munich's population growth was not as steep as Berlin's; however, it was still substantial compared to other German cities like Dresden or Cologne. Munich served alongside Berlin as an artistic center with many cafes and galleries that held avant-garde exhibitions open to their growing public. New York City vastly overshadowed the cultural influence of Chicago and Philadelphia and many artists saw it as the uncontested center of American modernism with a comparable number of galleries and artistic centers. New York, Berlin, and Munich's marked population growth, supported through urbanization and industrialization, informed the viewpoint of the artists working in those cities and helped artists in those cities break through as a dominant stylistic view.

Idealism and transcendentalism, German and American philosophies from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively, formed part of the foundation of modernism. In the beginning of the twentieth century the United States and Germany developed parallel philosophical discourses on spirituality based on these common roots. Patricia McDonnell asserts "Americans shaped by the legacy of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and William James therefore discovered that they had much in common with colleagues who had been nurtured by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Immanuel Kant, and Friedrich Nietzsche."¹³ American transcendentalism as well as German Idealism relied on intuitive faculties and promoted "an unshakable belief in the integrity of the individual."¹⁴ The reliance on the individual is an important tenet also underscored in the art of the early twentieth century, as Barbara Rose's *American Art Since 1900* states "[when] the American artist rebelled... the cause of individualism rather than any

¹³ McDonnell, 2003: 160

¹⁴ *Ibid*: 16

artistic cause was championed.”¹⁵ The new conception of American art recoiled from positivist European models like Impressionism and embraced Emerson and Thoreau’s individualist philosophies, which accentuated the spiritual expression in nature.¹⁶ The relationship between the United States and Germany went beyond just the cultural and philosophical level described by Patricia McDonnell as shifting populations created an urban boom. These cities provided an environment for artists to commune, exchange ideas, and stage exhibitions.

Post Bellum America transitioned from the older agrarian society to an industrial one preoccupied with urbanization. Large parts of the population, particularly in the north, relocated to the city, drawn to new industry and opportunity. This relocation started a chain reaction in which a large population spurred cultural exchange that necessitated reevaluation of American artistic culture with which urban artists struggled. After unification in 1871, Germany underwent an economic shift similar to the United States, from one reliant on agriculture to a streamlined modern state in 1890. While the shift away from agrarian society in Germany was less dramatic, post-unification industrialization and urbanization led to a German golden age and reevaluation of artistic culture much like what happened in the United States.

Germans saw the technological advances, superior societal developments, and infrastructure in the United States and concluded the country was a “formidable economic power as well as an actual potential competitor... developing at a breathtaking

¹⁵ Rose, 1967: 12

¹⁶ Gaehtgens et. al., 1992: 298

pace.”¹⁷ The Germans lauded achievements such as the Brooklyn Bridge or skyscrapers in the urban skyline and depicted them as symbolically significant and an image of the future progress in store for Europe.¹⁸ A pattern emerged that placed the United States at the head of technological progress and Germany, a nation that was going through a similar process, recognized the pattern.

America’s focus on laying the foundation for a greater infrastructure had its price though; the rapid development and focus on infrastructure created a country that was more introspective and insular. Wanda Corn asserts that this introspection in the culture of the United States helped initiate the long search for the distinctive character in American art, described by David Barclay as “a ‘search for order.’”¹⁹ The American public was less receptive to outside influence and the avant-garde, which was integral in American modernism. The overall search for a central tenet sought to devise “a national culture independent of older and still prevalent European influences”²⁰ that manifested around 1900 as writers, and artists began to criticize the institutions previously lauded.

American artists contributed to the wave of institutional criticism under the generic flag of opposition to “the authority of the entrenched establishment.”²¹ Without a specific opponent, American artists asserted their individualism rather than assembled as distinctive groups in opposition to tradition or an ideal. German Expressionist encouraged individualism, like that expressed by Oscar Bluemner, Marsden Hartley, and Albert

¹⁷ Barclay, 1997: 117

¹⁸ *Ibid*: 122

¹⁹ *Ibid*: 134

²⁰ *Ibid*: 135

²¹ Rose, 1967: 12

Bloch, and nurtured their stylistic development. German avant-garde groups worked with these artists and included them in the exhibitions at various German galleries, giving these artists opportunity and a receptive public.

German artists after Unification in 1871 placed high cultural value on the concept of *Heimat*, “homeland.” *Heimat* was the prominent style in Germany supported by the Kaiser and Chancellor, the political figureheads of the German state, and so *Heimatkunst*, “art of the homeland,” was extremely conservative. It was anti-urban, anti-cosmopolitan, and depicted peasant life in a romantic and idyllic light. Much of the work of this period was highly classicizing and highly academic. This artistic climate gave rise to the prominent Secessionist movements in the 1890s and prompted the reevaluation of German artistic culture. In the eyes of the Secessionist artists, the public held French art in high esteem. In comparison, modern German art, like American art, appeared secondary and imitative or derivative

Both countries came to understand the need to form a new cultural identity in light of their respective unification, cultural upheaval, and socio-economic development. They also sought to differentiate themselves from the culturally dominant vanguard of the French and Italian artists who critics and the public regarded as more important. The openness of communication between Germany and the United States contributed to the recognition of their mutual struggle with the need to build a modern identity to reflect its progress after industrialization and urbanization. American artists worked within German Expressionist circles, gaining the support of those artists who held similar philosophical principles and of the art galleries open to the avant-garde ideal, in a way not possible in

the United States. American artists who traveled to Germany found circles and groups of artists concerned with similar ideals and worked through issues of expression alongside their German contemporaries. The interaction between American artists and the German Expressionists was an important component in the development of American vanguardism, even as these artists sought ways to highlight their national distinctions.

CHAPTER TWO: ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

In the decades after the United States and Germany's respective unifications, an exchange of ideas occurred during this period of intense identity building. Germany's early Modernists had two major influences as sources of inspiration for the foundation of their modernism: the city as well as the primitive. The primitive refers both to tribal objects that were the result of imperialism and trade as well as objects from early Germanic cultures. American artists did not demonstrate an interest in the primitive like the Germans. Their primary concern was with the new concepts represented in the modern city and how they related to their visual culture's previous focus on landscapes. Landscape painting was the most popular genre in the United States until the last several decades of the nineteenth century and there were some artists that took landscape and reinterpreted it in light of the new modern interests. Oscar Bluemner and Marsden Hartley worked with the reinterpreted landscape, using that genre to help establish a part of the new national identity. Albert Bloch focused on images of groups of figures in their environment rather than working in the landscape genre. This is a point of divergence for these two early Modernist cultures; however, modern culture exemplified by urbanization, which Germany and the United States shared, was a common thread.

America's greatest masterpiece is modernization and its supporting infrastructure. Its development as the consummate modern nation was a cause for both its popularity and

criticism. Voiced by Duchamp, “America appeared an ultramodern country of advanced consumerism, technology, and industrially designed goods—and one might add, popular culture.”²² This quote can appear as both an accolade and a criticism. But scholars and even contemporaries overlook Germany for its potential in its development of modern art despite its comparable growth as a modern nation with infrastructure, urbanization, and even a shift in artistic focus. The United States did not have an established tradition, instead it in some ways emulated the history of Europe and altered the focus through the lens of the country’s modernization: “the United States was not an old country of traditional culture but a young nation of industry and engineering”²³ which would inform its cultural viewpoint.

At the end of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, New York, Munich, and Berlin became the central loci for cultural expansion. New York supplanted the major nineteenth century cultural centers of Boston and Philadelphia by the first decade of the twentieth century. New York became the *de facto* cultural center as an urban boon drew greater numbers of people and artists who wished to portray modern life. Berlin was similar in that “[during] the second half of the nineteenth century, Berlin had expanded at an unprecedented rate to become, after London and Paris, the third largest European city.”²⁴ Munich, through an expansion of its own, served as a cultural center of its own. After Germany’s unification in 1870, Berlin became the capital of the empire and “indemnity money from France provided the wherewithal to transform the

²² Corn, 1999: 49

²³ *Ibid*: 80

²⁴ Lloyd, 1991: 130

city into a thriving industrial metropolis.”²⁵ Between 1870 and 1910, Berlin’s population increased from roughly 826, 000 to over 2 million as almost 60% of the German populace converged on the growing industrial cities like Berlin, Hamburg and Munich.²⁶ With modernization and the growing population in the urban centers: “Berlin, a city perceived like New York, as extreme in its modernity had something of the same appeal” for artists, while Munich served as another large artistic city.²⁷

Many artists travelled and absorbed aesthetic developments from prominent avant-garde circles because Modernism was in its infancy in the United States. Those artists who travelled abroad sought new perspectives and points of view to incorporate into their own cultural idiom. They did not try directly applying the modernism distinct to Europe to American life or culture in the same way Impressionism or Realism had been directly applied. Rather, they found groups in Germany concerned with similar ideals and worked through issues of expression alongside them. This approach departed from the typical experience of American artists in Germany.

Since the early 1800s, the arts played a major role in the cultural exchange between the United States and Germany. Throughout the nineteenth century, transnational travel by American artists in particular had been an important factor in the development of their career. Of the artists who travelled to Europe, most went to Italy or France but Germany was another important destination. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Munich hosted prominent American artists including William Merritt

²⁵ Lloyd, 1991: 130

²⁶ *Ibid*: 130

²⁷ Corn, 1999: 184

Chase, Frank Duvenek, and John Henry Twachtman. They were artists who became prominent instructors at American academies as well as studio masters into the early twentieth century.

Marsden Hartley, Oscar Bluemner, and Albert Bloch travelled abroad with the desire to develop or reinforce their viewpoint on art. Transatlantic artists were “migrant artists moving back and forth across the Atlantic, carrying the ideas and values of another culture into the heart of another... [even] when they stayed abroad for a number of years, they continued to fashion themselves as non-nationals.”²⁸ Michael Howard in *Transnationalism and Society: An Introduction* states, “the arts are an important component of transnational relations. They may serve as reminders of links across borders, as symbols of ties to another place or society, and as a means of promoting a feeling of being a part of a transnational community.”²⁹ As each artist made his way to Germany beginning in 1908, he found a culture that was working towards the same goal of establishing its modern identity, but also shared the same values in art. Art circles in major German cities were even easier to join because of the Secessionists’ receptiveness to avant-garde work in the previous years.

The German public was more receptive to the avant-garde because of the popularization of galleries showcasing the newest aesthetic developments. Many of these galleries were located in Berlin and drew large crowds from around the empire and abroad. Galleries such as Paul Cassirer’s and Herwarth Walden’s *Der Sturm* helped popularize the German avant-garde. But it was the international exhibitions such as the

²⁸ Corn, 1999: 184

²⁹ Howard, 2011: 255

1912 *Sonderbund* in Cologne and the 1913 *Erster Deutsche Herbstsalon* in Berlin that were the most influential. The public of the United States, while lagging, moved towards showcasing the avant-garde in galleries in the early 1910s. The 1913 Armory Show in New York was the single greatest effort of the avant-garde community. The show emulated the 1912 *Sonderbund* of Cologne, an exhibition that Walter Kuhn, one of the fathers of the Armory Show experienced firsthand.³⁰ While the German *Sonderbund* inspired the Armory Show, representation of German Expressionist work was poor and even American modernism's representation was lacking. Despite issues of representation, the Armory Show served as a primer for the discussion on revolutionary and avant-garde art in the United States, "[it] was in fact, an attempt to legitimize revolution in art in the only context intelligible to Americans, who had no tradition of radical art."³¹ Out of the Armory Show and with the influence of the New York Modernists, led by Alfred Stieglitz, serious collecting began in communities that did not exhibit such an interest previously. This interest, then, created an environment conducive to new aesthetic and theoretical developments in the United States. With a larger, more open market there was room for more experimentation in the arts and this was due, in part, to the influences of German art culture.

The United States

The cusp of the nineteenth century was a point of great social and cultural turmoil in the United States. Kathleen Pyne in *Resisting Modernism* discusses a generational

³⁰ Rose, 1967: 69

³¹ *Ibid*: 76

“crisis in faith” in areas such as psychology, evolutionary sciences, and the church, which led to “the general willingness to embrace beliefs as dubious as Spiritualism.”³²

Spiritualism is a system of beliefs focused on communication with the spirits of the dead primarily through mediums or automatic writing. Spiritualism was an effort to resist categorizing life and identity as modernity necessitated a shift, and its popularity shows the public’s willingness to accept claims despite the lack of verifiable evidence. The turmoil and anxiety over modernization and positivist fervor manifested in painters as well: “American painters in the 1890s were, consciously or unconsciously, caught up in the issues that signify resistance to the positivist characteristic of European Modernism.”³³ Tonalism and other styles that focused on self-conscious and symbolically significant images embody this resistance to the positivist European styles. The popularity of Tonalism reveals artists at the end of the nineteenth century who “wanted to instill life and art with a sense of mystery and the infinite”³⁴ and hone in on the spiritual aspects of life. The resistance to characteristics of European Modernism and the introspective crisis Pyne outlines were defining factors of the artistic climate Oscar Bluemner, Marsden Hartley, and Albert Bloch inherited at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Interest in the urban environment as the subject for painting did not rise until after the 1890s. Leading up to the twentieth century, “the representation of the American city

³² Gaehtgens et al., 1992: 297

³³ *Ibid*: 298

³⁴ *Ibid*: 309

of technological progress [was] the domain of commercial graphics”³⁵ such as newspaper and periodical etchings as well as lithographs. As more artists came to large urban centers, they attempted representation of the city in higher order media like oil paints. Earlier representations of the American city projected a “pictorial synthesis of country and city [which] neglects modernity and superimposes its metaphors of nature on urbanity”³⁶ highlighting the preferences imbued in the landscape movement of the previous fifty years. Landscape preferences from the previous era showed a desire to present the city as an organism and artists chose to depict the city using the same vernacular of landscape: vistas, organization, and cohesion. This perception reduced description of a newer modern identity for American painting by perpetuating “the wish for unity and oneness in the face of fragmentation, complexity, and alienation of the real big city.”³⁷ American Impressionism used this mode of representation often. Childe Hassam’s *Rainy Day, Boston* (fig. 1) is an urban pastoral. Though not working from a vantage point that suggests a vista, Hassam focuses on organizing the painting and arranging the figures within an orderly construct, “striving for formal and conceptual harmonies.”³⁸

As a new perception of the city arises, the urban environment becomes the focus for an emergent modernism. According to Hubert Beck in *Urban Iconography in Nineteenth-Century American Painting*, following the 1893 White City, “every theory of

³⁵ Gaehtgens et al., 1992: 324

³⁶ *Ibid*: 325

³⁷ *Ibid*: 325

³⁸ *Ibid*: 324

modernity overlaps with a vision of the city.”³⁹ At this time, a new interest in American urban settings took on greater significance as a subject for early modernists rather than functioning as an offshoot of the Impressionist’s interest in urban development. The City Beautiful movement, for example, incorporated parks into the city and artists used these parks to observe the people in those spaces in an Impressionist manner. The fragmentation and alienation perceived in the rapidly developing American city of the 1890s, and the vision of the city closely tied with modernity, set the stage for the American artists’ experience of German Expressionism in the early 1910s. Fragmentation, complexity, and alienation are major characteristics and feelings associated with the modern state that are prevalent in German art. These characteristics emerge from the large-scale industrialization and urbanization Germany and the United States experienced.

Artists in the United States tended to migrate to and congregate in the large urban center of New York, rather the traditional cities of Philadelphia or Boston. According to Wanda Corn in *The Great American Thing*, a distinctive American quality emerged in the arts of the early twentieth century when the New York modernists and international circles “[advocated] a new machine age art.”⁴⁰ Corn describes these international circles as foreign artists, primarily French, who immigrated to the United States or American artists who spent time studying in Europe. She underscores the interconnectivity between early Modernism in the United States and the French avant-garde.

³⁹Gahtgens et al., 1992: 332

⁴⁰Corn, 1999: xv

Corn contends that in order to establish the new character of American art in the early twentieth century, artists “discarded older definitions that linked America to natural wilderness, democracy, and a ‘new Adam,’ machine age modernists focused on industrialized America, replacing the iconography of Niagara Falls and the Rocky Mountains with that of skyscrapers and billboards, brand name products, factories, and plumbing fixtures.”⁴¹ As Corn points out, the various vanguard movements in Europe including Symbolism, Expressionism, Cubism, and Dadism influenced the development of Modernism in the United States.⁴² The vanguard movements served as primers for American modernism and artists reacted to them in two ways: those artists who used some of these models to bolster their vocabulary to describe modern American life, and others who consciously fought against their influence.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, movements like the Ashcan School and The Eight, comprised of artists who depicted scenes of daily life in the poorer neighborhoods, radically shifted the vantage point of the city from fascination with the urban skyline, a vestige of landscape painting, to the lives of the inhabitants. Their work is reminiscent of the spirit of the German Secessionists from the 1890s and echoes modernistic rhetoric that claims “[urbanites] live physically very close together, while emotionally they are worlds apart.”⁴³ Similarly, their preferred vantage point as pedestrians reinforces the perception of the modern city as a fragmented sphere. The urban sprawl of New York takes precedence for these artists over other urban

⁴¹ Corn, 1999: xv

⁴² *Ibid*: xviii

⁴³ Gaehtgens et al., 1992: 332

environments because it was not only the impetus, but provided the space to connect with the ideas and philosophies emanating from Europe. “[In] the early 1910s, [New York] inaugurated contact between the new ideas of Freud, Bergson, Baudelaire, and Nietzsche, on the one hand, and latent American discontent, on the other.”⁴⁴ Discontent in these terms stemmed from fragmentation, complexity and alienation.

Alfred Stieglitz and his galleries in New York were important influences in the new character of American art that contrasted with the traditional academic system found in Europe and which had been transplanted to the United States. In 1905, he initially opened an exhibition space, called the Photo-Secession, for photography, a medium gaining popularity in the modern urban city. He called it the “Secession” because of the very self-conscious ties to German and Austrian art he wished to bring to the gallery. The success of the early gallery drew an expanding crowd of artists who had relocated to New York and his endeavor expanded into other media, becoming the foundation of his 291 Gallery. His gallery soon became the center for the New York Modernists, a group that included Oscar Bluemner and Marsden Hartley. Both spaces sought to secede from tradition in the same way the German and Austrian Secessionists of the previous decade had: for photography it meant challenging the typical interpretation of the photograph and “[similarly], the painting and sculpture eventually shown at 291 seceded from the accepted ideas of what constituted art, especially in America.”⁴⁵

Stieglitz and his 291 Gallery contrasted with other movements such as the Ash Can School lead by Robert Henri and The Eight, “whose single cause was American

⁴⁴ Gaehtgens et al., 1992: 338

⁴⁵ Rose, 1967: 35

art,”⁴⁶ Stieglitz was devoted to both “modern art and to American art.”⁴⁷ Consequently, the Stieglitz artists such as Bluemner and Hartley, were pushing boundaries while coming to understand the implications or consequences of modernity; the 291 Gallery embraced their efforts. Among the 291 artists, Corn states the most influential were “painters and sculptors who worked in the styles associated with Continental Cubism and Expressionism.”⁴⁸ In comparison to the other movements, their work placed greater emphasis on philosophical context and expression, which approached the quasi-religious and spiritual focus of Expressionist groups in Germany like *Die Brücke* and *Der Blaue Reiter*. Their idea of modernism was to transcend materiality and “the baseness of modern existence and live, if only momentarily, in the wholesomeness of beauty.”⁴⁹ Their beliefs and goals share rhetoric similar to the mandates and manifestos distributed by German Expressionists in their exhibitions and pamphlets.

Germany

The transition period of German Expressionist art from its philosophical foundation in the Secessionists groups of the 1890s to the second generation in 1915 Germany was short. Despite the short duration, Expressionist art from the 1910s and into the immediate postwar period was influential for the course of Modernism and the work of foreign artists involved in these circles. German Expressionism of the early 1900s came out of the famous Secessionist groups of the 1890s. German art in the 1880s and

⁴⁶ Rose, 1967: 38

⁴⁷ *Ibid*: 38

⁴⁸ Corn, 1999: 16

⁴⁹ *Ibid*: 18

1890s comprised of the classicizing *Heimatkunst*, the state-sanctioned academic style. This was the environment against which the Secessionists and Expressionists were rebelling. The wider public recognized French art as the progenitor of any and all new modernist ideas.⁵⁰ The Secessionist groups protested the conservatism of the German upper class and government, reacting violently to the limited tastes of these groups. The German avant-garde held an underlying belief in the necessary “alienation or exclusion of the artist from the training or supportive mechanisms of the state,”⁵¹ which supported conservatism.

Stylistically, Expressionism is difficult to define as artists under the Expressionist name demonstrated a wide array of formal characteristics. While allowing for the diversity of individual experimentation, Eberhard Roters in “Prewar, Wartime, and Postwar” distills the Expressionist style to a common formula: “the interplay of line, plane, and color [that] manifests an expressive rhythm that is constantly regenerated through the clash of contraries and thereby reveals a fundamental law of cosmic and human existence and experience.”⁵² Stephan von Wiese provides the most succinct definition, though: “[the] Expressionist movement in Germany embraces stylistic phenomena as disparate as the first abstract watercolors painted by Wassily Kandinsky around 1910 and the almost realist social criticism of the art of the Weimar period.”⁵³

In 1914, Paul Fechter, a prominent German critic, published the first book on Expressionism. In it, he focused on the development of the movement and contended that

⁵⁰ Weikop, 2011: 36

⁵¹ *Ibid*: 100

⁵² Barron, 1988: 45

⁵³ *Ibid*: 117

it was not a product of or reaction to “urban disorder” but rather deeply rooted in the metaphysical tradition of German philosophy.⁵⁴ He then split Expressionism into two poles: extensive and intensive. The extensive pole focuses on “using references from nature to evoke a higher state,” and the intensive renounces nature to evoke the transcendental.⁵⁵ Both of these poles reject rationalism and materialistic traditions such as those characteristics of the *Heimatkunst* of the late nineteenth century with its depictions of peasants and adherence to traditional German values. The art became more introspective and focused on spirituality and individual expressions.

The prominent German Expressionist groups, beginning in 1905, were *Die Brücke* in Dresden, *Die Neue Kunstlervereinigung* of Munich, out of which *Der Blaue Reiter* came, and *Die Neue Sezession* in Berlin. Through the course of their development, many groups slowly moved from their place of origin and relocated to Berlin as they discovered it could experience the best expression of modern life there; however others remained in their founding cities, but exhibited predominately in Berlin. *Die Brücke* is one of the most influential early groups. Roter conceives *Die Brücke* as the originators of Expressionist stylistic devices: “from 1908- 1911 [artists of *Die Brücke*] moved, one by one, from Dresden to Berlin, and by 1912 had gained some recognition for their work. Art historians therefore rightly regard them as the inventors of the expressive gestural brush stroke and as the founders of German Expressionism.”⁵⁶ While taking formalistic cues from *Die Brücke*, artists like those in *Der Blaue Reiter* focused on the expression of

⁵⁴ Weikop, 2011: 13

⁵⁵ *Ibid*: 13

⁵⁶ Barron, 1988: 39

metaphysics “in which spiritual and psychic vibrations were made visible through harmonies of line and color.”⁵⁷

Artists active in Berlin, whether living in the city or only exhibiting in it, frequented each other’s studios and maintained a booming social circle like those in New York. Expressionists often met members of other groups at the *Neopathetisches Cabaret* and in numerous cafes along the *Kurfürstendamm*, particularly the *Café des Westens*, known to the bourgeoisie as the ‘*Café Größenwahn*’ (Café Megalomania), which was supplanted in 1915 by *Romanisches Café*.⁵⁸ One of the more prominent venues for exhibitions and gatherings for the literary and artistic groups throughout Germany was *Der Sturm* in Berlin.

Much like Stieglitz’s 291 Gallery in New York, *Der Sturm* acted as the headquarters for the growing Expressionist community and hosted exhibitions and gatherings for local and international artists. Herwarth Walden opened *Der Sturm* gallery as a companion to the literary magazine he had been publishing in March of 1910.⁵⁹ By 1912, Walden had become the principle advocate of progressive art in Berlin by virtue of *Der Sturm* gallery and literary magazine. Beginning in 1912, Walden was positioned to stage large-scale exhibitions and soon afterwards, *Der Sturm* became the center of the German avant-garde.⁶⁰ The climax of the early exhibitions at *Der Sturm* was the *Erster Deutscher Herbst Salon* of September 1913. This event included Italian Futurists, *Der*

⁵⁷ Barron, 1988: 45

⁵⁸ *Ibid*: 42

⁵⁹ Weikop, 2011: 159

⁶⁰ Barron, 1988: 42

Blaue Reiter, expatriate artist Lyonel Feininger, Marc Chagall, and other notables who were the protagonists of European Modernism.

In 1913, many of the Expressionist groups in Germany disbanded or dissolved due to conflicts within the groups or from a sense of duty to join the growing war effort. In 1913, *Die Brücke* dissolved and *Der Blaue Reiter* and the artists of many other groups either joined the war effort, like Franz Marc, or started to work independently. Immediately after World War I, the Expressionism of the early 1910s shifted radically amid the political and social turmoil of the Weimar Republic and the second generation of Expression was born. Groups in the new generation of Expressionism joined together under the title *Neue Sachlichkeit*, the New Objectivity, or the Bauhaus in Weimar, which came to the fore in the early 1920s. As a result of the war and the dissolution of previous art groups, prewar German Expressionist art is recognizably different from the works created in the postwar period. Stephanie Barron, in *German Expressionism 1915- 1925*, attributes this difference to a generational rift:

The artists [of the second generation] were for the most part ten years or so younger than the pioneer German Expressionists; most were in their late teens or early twenties when the war broke out. Not only did many of them have life-changing wartime experiences, but they came to maturity in a Germany considered a pariah among the nations of Western Europe.⁶¹

The second generation artists lauded the abdication of the German royal family in 1918. In 1919, Friederich Burschell gave voice to the feelings of the artists and the culture after the end of the war:

⁶¹ Barron, 1988: 11

For us, my friends and myself, and for a million soldiers from the front, the abdication of the German royals and the previously existing power apparatus meant not only the end of the senseless, murderous war, not only rescue and liberation but also infinitely more: the hope, yes the assurance that from the chaos a new and better world will arise.⁶²

The artists of the second generation shared their attraction to Berlin's industrial landscape with the founding generation immediately before the war. The newer generation recognized the importance of urban modernity explored by the previous generation of Expressionist artists; however, there was a distinction. The works of the second generation of Expressionist artists are clearly separated from those of the first by their political and social motivation.⁶³ The abdication of the German royal family initially gave hope for a new beginning, but the establishment of the faulty Weimar Republic prompted the backlash from the second generation Expressionists. Artists reacted to institutional problems within in the Republic through their art, which superficially resembled the first generation Expressionists, but the focus was clearly shifted from expression of essential spirit to institutional criticism.

New York, Berlin, and Munich became cultural centers shaped by sociocultural reform through urbanization. Both groups of artists shared a belief in the potential for

⁶² "Für uns, meine Freunde und mich, und für Millionen Frontsoldaten bedeutete die Abdankung der Deutschen Herrscherhäuser und des bisher bestehenden Machtapparat aber nicht nur das Ende des sinnlosen, mörderischen Krieges, nicht nur Rettung und Befreiung, sondern unendlich viel mehr: die Hoffnung, ja die Zuversicht, daß aus dem Ursturz eine neue und bessere Welt erstehen werde." Translation done by the author. Burschell, 1997:205

⁶³ Barron, 1988: 46

spiritual renewal or transcendence based in the sociocultural reform.⁶⁴ While New York's Modernists and members of Expressionists groups were independent from one another, individuals bridged that physical distance with similar mentalities and beliefs: Oscar Bluemner, Marsden Hartley, and even Albert Bloch. Bloch was not a significant part of the New York movements, but held closely to the foundational beliefs of both New York Modernists and German Expressionists.

⁶⁴ Gaehtgens et al., 1992: 343

CHAPTER THREE: AMERICAN MODERNISTS IN GERMANY

Oscar Bluemner, Marsden Hartley, and Albert Bloch painted with the European avant-garde at a crucial point of identity-building in the United States and Germany. They explored and interacted with the Expressionist circles in Munich and Berlin at a period when their own artistic beliefs were developing alongside the aesthetic principles of early Modernism. Despite having the opportunity to travel and work in France or Italy, they spent the most time in Germany where they painted, exhibited, and saw the latest aesthetic developments in vanguard galleries. Their primary interest was in the German Expressionists, groups of artists whose outlook on modernity, from the expression of color to a belief in art's future in modern, industrialized culture, mirrored and reinforced their own aesthetics and beliefs. The presentation of these case studies is in the order of the duration these artists spent in Germany beginning with Oscar Bluemner, the artist who spent the least amount of time in Expressionist Germany, and ending with Albert Bloch who spent nearly twelve years as part of the German avant-garde.

Bluemner and Hartley are often discussed together and so the connection between the two artists and early Modernism is evident in most studies. Albert Bloch is rarely included in an analysis of early modernism because he does not fit the traditional narrative of art education and close relationships with the growing American avant-garde like Alfred Stieglitz. Albert Bloch's relationship to modernism in Germany and the

United States is distinctive and including him in an analysis of Bluemner and Hartley provides context for his influence on artists from the United States that may otherwise be overlooked. Bloch arrived in Germany early and painted with *Der Blaue Reiter*, a group that directly influenced Bluemner and Hartley. Through an analysis of their artistic development before leaving the United States, the groups and individuals they interacted with abroad, and their recollections of experiences in personal letters and journals, we can more fully understand these artists' transformative experiences in Germany.

Oscar Bluemner

Oscar Bluemner was born in Prenzlau, Germany in 1867 and attended the technical schools in order to become an architect by trade. While studying architecture at the *Königliche Technische Hochschule* in Berlin, he cultivated an interest in painting and briefly experimented with it. It was not long before he had to abandon painting in order to more aggressively pursue his career as an architect. In 1893, at the age of 25, Bluemner moved to Chicago and worked as an architectural draftsman for the whole of the World's Columbian Exposition. Bluemner regarded his expatriation from Germany as a step towards greater creative liberty. Personally, he felt Germany's environment in the early 1890s to be stifling for the avant-garde as the *Heimatkunst* of Kaiser Wilhelm II's Second Reich, exemplified by artists like Arthur Langhammer and Adolf Hölzel, repressed the development of modernism. The primary reason he relocated to the United States was its "independence from [artistic] tradition."⁶⁵ The conservative cultural environment of

⁶⁵ Haskell, 2005: 10

Wilhelmine Germany in the 1890s set the stage for the early Secessionists in Berlin, Munich, and Cologne; however, those movements took seed after Bluemner departed for the United States.

Oscar Bluemner was a German immigrant and he was raised on the aesthetic principles of philosophers like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller in Germany. In conjunction with his understanding of these philosophers, he subscribed to the Idealist philosophies of Immanuel Kant and George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel that would “form the core of Bluemner’s own aesthetic code.”⁶⁶ With his background in perception and aesthetics, he was predisposed as an artist to the transcendental philosophies and values of Americans like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and author Walt Whitman. Both schools, the German and American, examined the perception of objects or scenes through the subjective lens of the viewer. Artists influenced by transcendentalist aesthetics like that of Emerson and Thoreau sought to find the “ideal spiritual reality exists behind empirical appearances,”⁶⁷ thus faithful representation became secondary. Alfred Stieglitz and his circles of New York Modernists, significant influences on Bluemner, espoused these same values when he lived in New York City. According to McDonnell, “[the] fact that he found a circle of artists in New York receptive to his approach to art says much in itself about the ease for a translation of German ideas to an American setting and vice-versa,” which underscored the evident similarities between the growing modernist movements.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Haskell, 2005: 30

⁶⁷ McDonnell and Plante, 1995: 18

⁶⁸ McDonnell, 2003: 109

From the time he arrived in the United States, he identified himself as an American architect. He had confidence in his growing American identity, believing the transition was easy because of his grasp of the similarities between the two countries, which had both grown out of urbanization and modernization. He formally declared his citizenship in 1899 and became one of the few artists who straddled the gap between the United States and Germany, integrating German philosophy and culture with an emergent American modernism.

Finding work scarce while in Chicago, he relocated to New York City in 1900 in an effort to more thoroughly entrench himself in the architectural community. In New York, he was still unable to find steady employment as an architect but after various attempts to make his living, he managed a breakthrough in 1903. He produced the winning design for the Bronx Borough Courthouse; however, the credit went to another competitor. This led to the deflation of Bluemner's career as an architect as litigation lasted for the next decade. Because of this difficulty, he began re-cultivating his interest in painting.

His earliest attempts at painting and drawing resemble the realist images from the Barbizon School, a French movement from roughly 1830 to 1870. *Fort Lee*, 1904 (fig. 2), demonstrates the use of Barbizon influences with its loose and soft brushwork as well as the use of darker tones and realistic rendering. In the early years of his New York life, his painting combined characteristics of the Barbizon School and influences in the newer style of Tonalism (fig. 3). His view on Tonalism was that it could evoke sensation with its use of expressive color fields. Tonalism provided foundational material for his fully

formed aesthetic philosophy of “art as expression of inner consciousness and color as its agent.”⁶⁹ These early experimentations also helped to provide an avenue to the avant-garde circles of New York. By chance, he discovered Alfred Stieglitz’s Photo-Secession Gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue and quickly became one of the members of Stieglitz’s circle. Bluemner and Stieglitz were of the same generation, unlike the other artists in the 291 stable, and both men shared German heritage. Both of these characteristics contributed to their quick friendship.

With Stieglitz’s friendship and intervention, by 1910 Bluemner radically altered his perception of painting. He abandoned the realism of the Barbizon style and shifted his perception of the use of color from the evocation of sensation like the Tonalists, to an embrace of color “to support the ultimate meaning for his art.”⁷⁰ Color expression became separated from realism and color was the primary vehicle of meaning. Energetic dabs and brighter colors replaced the soft brushstrokes and muted palette, allowing color to support and express his interpretation of “subjective realization of personal vision,”⁷¹ exemplified by his 1911 painting *Old Barn at Sheepshead Bay* (fig. 4). He developed these principles alongside Stieglitz and his 291 artists based on some of the Germanic and American principles of philosophy and aesthetics that overlapped. Ultimately though, Bluemner imposed a limit on his artistic vocabulary in choosing to focus on the landscape. Beginning with this period in his artistic career, color expression becomes the primary tenet of Bluemner’s approach. He arrived the basic foundation of these beliefs

⁶⁹ Haskell, 2005: 10

⁷⁰ McDonnell, 2003: 112

⁷¹ Fogg Art Museum, 1967: 8

experimenting on his own, but his position was reinforced and expanded upon by his connections with Stieglitz and his eventual return to Germany to experience the Expressionist movement.

Bluemner's court case over the Bronx Borough Courthouse was settled in his favor in 1912, which provided the funding for an excursion to Europe. He elected to travel to Germany primarily to experience the avant-garde circles that Stieglitz had been showcasing in his 291 Gallery, but also to visit family members he had left behind. In Germany, he resided predominately in Berlin, the urban center of the empire. In his brief stay in Germany, he travelled throughout Berlin and to the *Sonderbund* exhibition in Cologne. On his return trip to the United States, he went to the Kahnweiler and Druet galleries in Paris and Roger Fry's Second Post-Impressionist exhibition in London. But it was his experiences in Germany that proved the most influential on his own painting. The pace at which he traveled meant he could not paint in oils but he maintained numerous annotated sketchbooks and kept records and noted influential paintings from which to work when he could.

Before arriving in Berlin, Bluemner arranged for a one-man exhibition of his work at the Galerie Fritz Gurlitt. This gallery had introduced Berlin to the woodcuts of *Die Brücke*, one of the Expressionist groups from Dresden, two months earlier and even hosted an exhibition of *Der Blaue Reiter* from Munich. Bluemner provided fifteen pieces: seven watercolors and eight oil paintings including *March Wind, Passaic River, N.J.*, 1911- 17 (fig. 5) and *Old Canal, Red and Blue (Rockaway River)*, 1911- 17 (fig. 6). The earliest sketches of these paintings show Bluemner kept the original compositions and

applied color contrast outside of realistic rendering of the scene for the exhibition. Later revisions he made to the canvases served to reinforce the basic theory of color and expression he put into these paintings from 1911. As he refined his techniques and theories between 1912 and 1917, he refined these paintings; however, the images he exhibited at the Galerie Fritz Gurlitt demonstrated his concerns over pictorialism beginning in 1911.

Despite a public familiar with Expressionist work, his exhibition had a lukewarm reception and it resulted in no sales. He arranged an exhibition at the Galerie Fritz Gurlitt because of its ties to *Die Brücke* and *Der Blaue Reiter*, groups he knew through their publications in *Der Sturm* magazine, which Stieglitz had introduced him to, and the circulation of *Der Blaue Reiter's* Almanac and Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, publications. These publications were gaining greater popularity in Germany as the groups grew and exhibited in Munich and Berlin. While in Berlin, he painted understanding that the work of Expressionists reflected his own thoughts on aesthetic principles and theories. He used these Expressionist groups' exhibitions and understanding of *Der Blaue Reiter* through their numerous publications to work out issues of representation and modernity with which he had been grappling. He did this at the same time that these groups were beginning to figure out the solutions to similar issues for themselves.

In June of 1912, Bluemner went to the *Sonderbund* exhibition in Cologne. The *Sonderbund* was one of the earliest comprehensive surveys of modern European art. The organizers focused on the Expressionist groups juxtaposed with works by Vincent van

Gogh, Paul Cézanne, Edvard Munch, and Paul Gauguin; these were artists who helped to inform some of the earliest Secessionist and Expressionist artists in their efforts to establish a cultural identity through Expressionism. Due to his experience at the *Sonderbund* and interaction with other artists who saw the exhibition, Bluemner gained the confidence to approach aesthetics and the expressive application of color in a new way.

After several months travelling through Germany and attending foundational Expressionist exhibitions, he visited Paris and explored the museums there. He found more works by Paul Gauguin and discovered Gauguin's "consideration of color as the language of expression and his use of recognizable imagery as a point of departure for the depiction of an alternative reality."⁷² Bluemner felt that Gauguin was concerned with composing paintings without directly referencing a particular scene or moment. His subjects were invented; however, his paintings had a firm basis in reality and the color, though close to reality, held the expressive quality Gauguin fully realized through his later paintings. Without directly referencing a specific painting in his journals, Bluemner recognized the expressive quality of Gauguin's color and its application of Barbizon style technique. A painting such as *Te Poipoi* from 1892 (fig. 7) was typical of his radical departure from naturalistic color to expressive color while adhering to the soft brushwork and darker tones. Gauguin's use of color supported Bluemner's interpretation of Expressionist art, an interpretation he carried with him back to the United States.

⁷² Haskell, 2005: 39

Returning home to the United States after only seven months, he reevaluated his own work in light of his travels through Europe. His time with the German Expressionists proved the most influential, especially on the formal characteristics of his work as he began to change his painting strokes from energetic dabs or brushwork like Gauguin (figs. 2-4) to larger, fragmented planes of color like Franz Marc's *Tiger* from the *Sonderbund* (fig. 8). His efforts were rewarded as five pieces of his were accepted into the 1913 Armory Show. *Hackensack River* (fig. 9) represents his "positively identified entry into the Armory Show" that combines all the aspects of his German experience.⁷³ In late 1912, he retouched and finished the painting for submission to the Armory and it stands as his most distinctive contribution to the Armory. In this painting, space is collapsed and he combined straight and curving lines along with planes of varying tones. He focused on the large planes of local color such as the reds, blues, earthy browns, and whites to draw the relationship of those particular colors away from the "ephemeral" effects of light to more solid and "elemental" relationships.⁷⁴

As Bluemner's style developed and matured beginning with his pieces accepted into the Armory Show, he understood the significance of expressive color over subject matter. The need to closely represent reality, as exemplified by his Barbizon-style paintings, dissipated as Bluemner simplified and reduced objects to abstracted planar forms. *Illusion of a Prairie, New Jersey*, of 1915 (fig. 10) exemplifies this conception of collapsed space and compositional organization with the expressive color fully developed in his mature style. He never fully embraced non-objective painting or non-

⁷³ Hayes, 1988: 53

⁷⁴ *Ibid*: 53

representational painting despite his belief that “subject matter was irrelevant except as a conduit” because “he also believed that art must be based on the real world in order for it to communicate with viewers.”⁷⁵

Bluemner focused on representational art and landscape for the entirety of his career. Marsden Hartley’s landscapes served as bookends for his career, during his trips to Berlin, he worked in a non-representational manner and shifted his focus to coded, symbolic language based on his observations in wartime Berlin. Like Bluemner, Hartley then applied Expressionist color theories to the landscapes that occupied the latter half of his career.

Marsden Hartley

Marsden Hartley was born Edmund Hartley in 1877 in Lewiston, Maine. He grew up predominately on the east coast of the United States, a part of the country that harbored a large German immigrant population, but in 1893 he moved to the Cleveland area to be with his father and stepmother. In 1898, he was awarded a scholarship to the Cleveland School of Art where he was introduced to the writings of Transcendental philosophers like Emerson, Thoreau, and the author Walt Whitman. These American philosophers made a distinctive impression on him, which manifested in the aesthetics of his paintings as he incorporated their sense of spirituality into his early landscape paintings.

⁷⁵ Haskell, 2005: 45

After studying for only a year in Cleveland, a patron, Anne Walworth, a trustee of the Cleveland School of Art, funded his relocation to New York with an annual stipend of \$450.⁷⁶ With his patron, he was able to study under William Merritt Chase, a painter who had studied in Munich at the Academy of Fine Arts during the mid-1870s with the previous generation of American transatlantic artists. Hartley was at the New York School of Art for roughly a year, from 1898 to early 1900. After a year of study with Chase, Hartley sought instruction at the National Academy of Design where he finished his studies in 1904.⁷⁷

During his instruction and after leaving the academy, he was drawn to Impressionism and its emphasis on representing nature and the city. He recognized the momentum of the American Impressionist movement, but, like many, regarded it as secondary to European manifestations of the style and therefore supplemented his painting with a study Italian Impressionism. Due in part to his interest in the transcendentalists, landscape, and his training in New York, Hartley's early works were composites rather than purely French, American, or the Munich style of painting he learned from Chase. His landscape paintings like *Carnival of Autumn*, from 1908 (fig. 11) show a more critical approach to Impressionism, combining Italian Impressionistic "stitch" strokes to fill the canvas with the darker, more somber tones of Chase's Munich style.⁷⁸ The paintings he produced tended to stay within realistic and Impressionistic modes. During this time, the "identification of divine forces manifest in nature" was

⁷⁶ Scholz et al., 2014: 9

⁷⁷ McDonnell, 2003: 65

⁷⁸ Rose, 1967: 54

primary to Hartley's vision and he relied on the subject matter to express his belief in the spirituality of nature.⁷⁹ He was contended expressing these ideas through the styles he was taught.

After finishing his studies in New York, Hartley relocated to his native Maine, and the natural landscape provided the necessary subject for experimentation with expression of the spiritual through painting, briefly discussed with *Carnival of Autumn*. Departing from the somber tones of *Carnival of Autumn*, Hartley developed a modernist palette "of local color and high value contrasts" with a gestural brushstroke.⁸⁰ The canvases he painted, like *Song of Winter, No. 6* from 1908- 1909 (fig. 12), demonstrate some of his early attempts at the next step of his development: reducing abstracted imagery to its basic essence and imbuing imagery with spiritual expression. In these earlier paintings, he demonstrated his ability to "[translate] his religious longings into landscape painting and approached nature as a therapeutic source for the human psyche."⁸¹ He drew this search for spirituality from the writings of Whitman and the philosophy of Emerson and Thoreau, imbuing his landscape painting with a significance and spirituality matched in the work of Oscar Bluemner. He began refining his viewpoint through landscape imagery like *Song of Winter, No. 6*, which became more abstract as he sought to transcend strict empirical appearances. During this period of intense identity formation in 1908, Hartley took on his stepmother's maiden name, Marsden, as his own to further differentiate the new persona and aesthetic he was adopting.

⁷⁹ McDonnell, 2003: 66

⁸⁰ *Ibid*: 67

⁸¹ Gaehtgens et al., 1992: 308

While he drew his subject from the Maine landscape, he knew New York was where he would have access to the newest aesthetic developments. In April, during a trip to New York, he visited Alfred Stieglitz's 291 gallery and showed Stieglitz some of the paintings he had been making in Maine. Hartley's expression of spirituality in his work at this time drew Stieglitz's and he hosted the artist's first one-man exhibition at 291 from May 8th to the 18th in 1909. Hartley's 291 debut proved successful and he used this as an opportunity to distance himself from New England imagery in order to develop more as an artist. Stieglitz and 291 provided the environment for Hartley to more closely examine the European avant-garde and discuss it with colleagues. For several years, Hartley was an actively entrenched member of the 291 circle. He became promising enough that Stieglitz and Arthur B. Davies, another 291 artist, raised funds for Hartley's European excursion. They ensured that he would be able to leave for Paris in April of 1912.

Hartley stayed in Paris for a short period and struggled to find the essential spirit for which he was searching; he felt "philosophically at odds with contemporary French art and theories."⁸² After arriving, he chanced upon a group of people who prompted him to think more deeply about relocating to Germany. A young Prussian officer, Karl von Freyburg, whom he had met in June of 1912 and described as "[a] most charming and excellent young German officer"⁸³ introduced him to a small group of Germans in Paris: "[von Freyburg's] cousin Arnold Rönnebeck, a sculptor from Berlin; Rönnebeck's

⁸² McDonnell, 2003: 70

⁸³ Letter from Hartley to Stieglitz, July 1912; quoted in Scholz et al., *Marsden Hartley the German Paintings: 1913- 1915*, pg. 21

fiancée, American opera singer Alice Miriam; and poet Siegfried Lang from Basel.”⁸⁴

Hartley forged a deeper friendship with the Germans than he had with any other acquaintance while in Paris.

Hartley’s artistic and cultural desire to relocate to Germany came from his newly found interest in Wassily Kandinsky, the avant-garde artist active primarily in Munich. Hartley had learned of Kandinsky through his German contacts in Paris and read some of Kandinsky’s work in the newspaper *Rhythm*. Because of Kandinsky’s work in *Rhythm*, he found Kandinsky’s treatise *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, and the *Blaue Reiter* Almanac, which discussed the spiritual development of German Expressionist art. The illustrated Almanac made its impression on him by introducing Hartley to abstraction and coded symbolism in art, which manifested in 1913 (figs. 13-14). Hartley felt the immediate need to go to Germany, a need he realized through a series of trips between Munich, Berlin, and the United States.

Hartley arrived in Berlin for the first time on January 4, 1913. To him, Berlin was “so alive and ultra modern,” an impression that lasted his lifetime and drew him back several times.⁸⁵ At the outset, the culture and the city life of Berlin enticed Hartley; yet the art was not his primary interest. His formal style and taste had been formed in the New York academies, but his Impressionistic leanings, and his interest in Kandinsky’s work drew him to Munich, the headquarters of *Der Blaue Reiter*. Berlin served as the modern city *par excellence* and he believed it would suit his malleable artistic identity.

⁸⁴ Scholz et al., 2014: 21

⁸⁵ Letter from Hartley to his niece, Norma Berger, January 8, 1913; quoted in Scholz et al., *Marsden Hartley, the German Paintings: 1913- 1915*, pg. 23

He sought an essential spiritual aspect of the city, which manifested in his painting in the same way that the landscape of Maine had previously. He also saw the opportunity to settle and advance in Berlin, arguing that the significantly lower cost of living made it easier to thrive in the city.⁸⁶

Hartley spent his first trip to Berlin visiting traditional museums and seeing the conservative *Heimatkunst*. His response to *Heimatkunst*, the accepted artistic style of the Second Reich, was overwhelmingly negative like Oscar Bluemner. He soon discovered the gallery culture of Berlin exemplified by Paul Cassirer's gallery and Herwarth Walden's *Der Sturm*. During his first stay in Berlin, he managed to attend the *Neue Sezession* exhibition at *Der Sturm*, which showcased work from the Expressionist groups of *Die Brücke* and the *Neue Künstlervereinigung, München*, a group that produced Franz Marc, Kandinsky, and *Der Blaue Reiter*.

Hartley's first trip to Berlin lasted several weeks, but it made a significant impression. On the return trip to Paris in late January 1913, Hartley made a brief stop in Munich and met Kandinsky for the first time. This meeting with Kandinsky helped Hartley gain a better understanding of Kandinsky's work and the ideals he expressed in *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*. Because of these meetings and discussions, Hartley deduced a fundamental aspect of German Expressionism that differentiated it from American modernism of which he was familiar. American modernism articulates spirituality in a way that is descriptive, in the same way landscape of the mid-nineteenth century was descriptive of the landscape in order to evoke feelings of fear and awe in the

⁸⁶ Scholz et al., 2014: 21

sublime and American Impressionism was descriptive of visual reality. Instead of evoking feeling or spirituality or providing a description of visual reality, German art expresses the divine through color and form, a notion Kandinsky brought to his early non-objective pieces.

Kandinsky's position on expression formed the foundation for his non-objective experiments, but Hartley used it as a counterpoint. Because of this position, Hartley expressed the need to anchor his imagery in symbolism, thereby forging a middle ground between his earlier landscapes and Kandinsky's radical non-objectivity.⁸⁷ Formally, Hartley borrowed the expressionistic quality of color he saw in artworks by members of *Der Blaue Reiter* and other German Expressionist groups he came to know through *Der Sturm* and other galleries. As these groups progressed toward abstraction, Hartley applied their foundational tenets to an aesthetic philosophy in which symbolism, rather than abstracted imagery, was primary (figs. 13-14). This became his most significant theoretical development produced during his first visit to Germany. He incorporated expressionistic color and Kandinsky-like abstraction while rooting his imagery in recognizable shapes, a style he fully developed in July of 1914.

In the first six months of 1913, Hartley spent most of his time in the urban metropolis of Berlin, but travelled extensively to Munich and Paris. He returned to Berlin in May of 1913 and began renting an apartment, believing he would settle in the city for an extended period. The work he made during his time in Berlin reflects a more sincere attempt at the abstracted, symbolic language he had been experimenting with since seeing

⁸⁷ Rose, 1967: 54

the *Neue Sezession* exhibition several months earlier. What influenced him most in this second trip was the military spectacle in Berlin. He used it as his primary resource for creating a symbolic language and became a more active member of the art community. Walden of *Der Sturm*, knowing Hartley's desire to remain in Berlin and his strides in fashioning a new modernist aesthetic, helped him secure a position in the *Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon* in mid-September, 1913. With his popularity, due in part to Walden's intervention and his participation in the *Herbstsalon*, Hartley briefly returned to Stieglitz's 291 in the United States for his second exhibition in early 1914.

On the merits of his increasingly abstract paintings from mid-1913, Hartley's 291 exhibition managed to convey the idea of art as an act of individual expression that is both intuitive and spiritual, tenets fundamental his newly formulated perception of art.⁸⁸ The Expressionists of Berlin and Munich, particularly Kandinsky and *Der Blaue Reiter*, influenced Hartley's understanding of modernist theory. With success at 291, growing popularity in the United States, and blessings from Stieglitz, Hartley returned to Berlin in May 1914. This time in Berlin, he saw Germany that was on the brink of war. Berlin was in the grips of *kultur*, "the high esteem accorded to the military establishment and the authoritarianism that characterized political and social life."⁸⁹ *Kultur*, a distinctively German cultural product of the early 1910s, provided Hartley with the components to create one of his most famous series, the War Motifs (figs. 15- 17).

In July, shortly after his return to Berlin, World War I began and he used the pictorial language and symbols of *kultur* to create vignettes that express both what he saw

⁸⁸ Cassidy, 2005: 2

⁸⁹ Barclay, 1997: 141

and felt. The vignettes of the War Motifs series employ an emblematic color composition with large blocks of color and familiar shapes to reflect the culture of Berlin—more specifically that rampant militarism and nationalistic fervor that was a crucial component of national identity in Germany at the outset of war. Wartime Berlin became a major subject for Hartley and he devoted most of his 1914 and 1915 works to paintings of these war images. In the War Motifs, Hartley took a non-partisan view to *kultur* and militaristic Germany that was partial to the German people. His experiences manifested in most of his compositions, but most notably *Portrait of a German Officer*, 1914 (fig. 17) the “numbers, stars, geometric shapes, checkerboards, and wavy lines represent insignias, epaulets, regimental shoulder boards, and other paraphernalia... as the soldiers marched though the streets” of Berlin.⁹⁰ Historians place *Portrait of a German Officer* as his most sympathetic painting from his War Motifs series, incorporating the formal elements described above in their analysis, but also including the interpretation that the piece is a memoriam to Karl von Freyburg. In the War Motifs series, Hartley painted his impressions and experiences of the immediately recognizable symbols of *kultur*, the insignia, etc., which were ubiquitous, in the language fashioned through interpretation of Kandinsky’s work in a visual expression of the spirit of wartime Berlin.

In 1915, Hartley was forced to leave Berlin “when wartime conditions impeded money transfers from the United States and his cash reserves had dwindled.”⁹¹ When he returned to the United States, he abandoned this symbolic language of the War motifs within a year and applied himself to landscapes once again. He used his experiences

⁹⁰ Scholz et al., 2014: 124

⁹¹ McDonnell and Platte, 1995: 10

expressing himself with symbolism in Berlin to re-examine the transcendental aesthetics he grew up with, creating landscapes in which the expression is more important than the subject matter of his paintings. The landscape scenes, whose subject matter was unrelated to his time spent abroad, is best exemplified by a painting from his New Mexico excursion *Arroyo Hondo N. M.*, 1918 (fig. 18).

Albert Bloch

Albert Bloch was born in St. Louis, Missouri in August of 1882. He was the second of five children born to Emilie Scheider and Theodor Bloch. With a population of 572, 238 at the turn of the century, St. Louis had a strong immigrant population. Roughly 19.7% of the population was born outside of the United States and 41.6% of the population had foreign-born parents.⁹² St. Louis was a city where roughly half of the immigrant population was German at the turn of the century, a characteristic that drew the artist's parents to the region.

Scholars know little about Bloch's life before he turned 16, when he left school. Bloch demonstrated hostility towards art schools and academies, a hostility he carried with him throughout his career as an artist and, ironically, even while he served as a drawing instructor with the University of Kansas. He pursued a career in the arts without graduating public high school because it "had so taken possession of [him] that an enforced occupation with anything else amounted to mere drudgery."⁹³ Bloch's formal

⁹² Primm, 1998: 345

⁹³ Letter from Bloch to Harold Butler, June 23, 1923; quoted in Bloch et al., *Albert Bloch, the American Blue Rider*

training consisted of an extracurricular drawing class in high school and two years at the St. Louis Academy of Fine Arts with instructors and a program he resented. He expressed his resentment through satirical drawings of his professors that allude to his conflicts with them as well as through an essay he wrote in June, 1910 “in which he protested that ‘the incompetents of our art school faculty at home’ could not stimulate ‘independence of thought and expression.’”⁹⁴ Bloch remained on the fringe of the avant-garde, preferring independent experimentation.

After leaving art school, from March 1901 until December 1903, Bloch was a contributing artist to the St. Louis *Star*. In 1903, discontented with his employment at the *Star*, he moved to New York to become a cartoonist and freelance illustrator and instructor. Bloch moved to New York City two years before the opening of Stieglitz’s Photo-Secession gallery and several more years before he establishing the 291 gallery. Bloch managed to support himself and produce “technically proficient” work; however, it left him little chance to express himself.⁹⁵ In March of 1905, during a brief return to St. Louis, William Reedy hired Bloch to illustrate the weekly St. Louis *Mirror*. The opportunity he had working for the *Mirror* allowed him to experiment to a greater degree than he had with the *Star* or as a freelance illustrator in New York. James Penney, in a forward written for an exhibition catalogue, believes the cartoons and satirical drawings Bloch was producing for William Reedy in St. Louis, before settling in Munich in 1908,

⁹⁴ Bloch et al., 1997: 18

⁹⁵ *Ibid*: 19

demonstrated “an early and apparently unconscious similarity of spirit with the Expressionists.”⁹⁶

As a cartoonist, Bloch distinguished himself from others by drawing on ideas from German sources. Many of Bloch’s drawings done for the *Mirror* stem from two draftsmen from the German satirical magazine *Simplicissimus*: Olaf Gulbransson and Thomas Theodor Heine.⁹⁷ Bloch made use of the heavy black shapes juxtaposed with the slender outlines and distinctive pear-shaped heads of Gulbransson (fig. 19). He combined the heavy shapes with the flowing rhythmic movement of line, deemphasizing the contrast between light and dark blocks. He adopted this rhythmic style from Heine (fig. 20) and would further refine it by reducing line and form to near abstraction. Bloch’s early adoption of the formal characteristics of Gulbransson and Heine, allowed him to be more receptive to the ideas of other artists in *Der Blaue Reiter*, like Franz Marc, and Wassily Kandinsky who advocated for a reduction of form to its essential components and spirit.

For several years, Bloch served as cartoonist and writer for the *Mirror*. As a writer and burgeoning artist, 1908 was a watershed year for him because he travelled back to New York for 291’s exhibition of Henri Matisse paintings staged by Alfred Stieglitz. The show was Bloch’s first exposure to modern art and helped to expand his ideas about the use of color in art. Upon his return to St. Louis, Reedy agreed to fund a trip to Europe for Bloch and his young family. He even offered to provide a small stipend.

⁹⁶ *Albert Bloch 1882- 1961*, 1963: 6

⁹⁷ Bloch et al., 1997: 18

Eschewing tradition and the earlier travels of his contemporaries, Oscar Bluemner and Marsden Hartley, Bloch decided to settle immediately in Munich rather than Paris. One factor was decisive in helping him choose where to settle: he was already conversant in German. His interest in the satirical cartoon culture of Germany was secondary to the practicality of speaking German.

Between the time he settled in Munich in 1909 and December 1911, Bloch produced cartoons for the *Mirror*, all of which were met with hesitation and eventual rejection (fig. 21). In those two years, Bloch managed to sell twelve of his cartoons to the Berlin weekly publication *Lustige Blätter*, which had a readership and public more receptive to his work. He contributed to the German publication semi-regularly until December 1911 at which point he stopped producing cartoons all together.

Bloch did not begin to experiment with oil paints in earnest until he arrived in Munich. He had taken some instruction in oil painting at the St. Louis School of Fine Arts, and throughout most of his professional life he harbored an admiration for the French Impressionists and the Post-Impressionists, which began with the 291 Matisse exhibition. He admired their use of representation and color in their paintings; however, he had a preference for the Post-Impressionists, much like Bluemner and the early German Expressionists. For the most part, these interests in Post-Impressionists works waned as his focus shifted and he became more aware of the contemporary art community in Germany and also focused on his own development. He felt his contemporaries, who were exhibiting in the galleries of Munich and Berlin, were creating unadventurous work. He thought their work was tied too closely to the French ideal of

modernism. He did admire the work of the Munich Secession, though, such as the *Neue Künstlervereinigung, München* and others who experimented in creating the consciously “unpretty” painting.

Of his early pieces, *Portrait of a Boy* from 1910 (fig. 22) comes the closest to emulating contemporaneous German painting he admired, particularly the work of the *Künstlervereinigung*. He even exhibited this painting at the Berlin Secession Exhibition of 1911, the first of his paintings shown in Europe. Bloch executed the painting with broad, gestural strokes that lend an abstract quality to the figure and the environment. His combination of complementary colors and handling of the colors is reminiscent of the Impressionists, but the painting remains distinctly German. The dullness of the colors makes it appear muddy and somber, a marked departure from the Impressionists, but this dullness harkens back to Munich portraiture of the late-nineteenth century. Despite the insecurity of his direction in his early oil painting, Bloch’s early attempts are both radical and bold. The hard line and sense of bold pattern he developed as a cartoonist and caricaturist, his admiration of French Post-Impressionism, and the growing abstract qualities contribute to the character the German avant-garde was interested in.⁹⁸

In December 1911, Albert Bloch became officially acquainted with Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, then members of the influential *Neue Künstlervereinigung, München*. Shortly after their official meeting, Kandinsky and Marc broke off from the *Künstlervereinigung* and formed a new group called *Der Blaue Reiter* with Bloch as one of the principal members. The *Blaue Reiter* exhibition staged immediately after the break

⁹⁸ Bloch et al., 1995: 24

from the *Künstlervereinigung* was one of the earliest international modern art shows, in which Albert Bloch, recruited by Kandinsky and Marc, was the only American artist taking part. Unlike his contemporaries Bluemner and Hartley, “Bloch did not simply study and observe in Europe... Kandinsky and Marc, leading figures of modern art, recognized Bloch as an important painter and a kindred spirit; they invited him to join them in their first Blue Rider exhibition.”⁹⁹

Bloch’s involvement in *Der Blaue Reiter* also allowed him to experiment with illustrating the intense feelings and emotions using rhythm and movement he otherwise would not have experienced as an “earnest, bumbling, uninstructed” independent artist.¹⁰⁰ In this new environment, Bloch railed against the French Impressionism he had previously admired, which he saw as a dry, repetitive, and a purely visual offshoot of nineteenth century positivist endeavors. Bloch notes that when Marc and Kandinsky approached him, he was attempting to find his own point of departure for Modernism, feeling Impressionism “had reached the end of the road.”¹⁰¹

Like many other artists, Marc and Kandinsky were the greatest influences on Bloch’s development; however, unlike others, he worked side-by-side with these two artists. As a result, Bloch’s compositions underwent significant change because of his time working directly with *Der Blaue Reiter*. According to Hirmer, “[elements] of Kandinsky’s compositions acted as immediate sources of inspiration for the more-or-less abstract background of [Bloch’s] figural scenes. However, Bloch was critical of

⁹⁹ Bloch et al., 1997: xviii

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Bloch to Edward A. Maser, June 20, 1955; quoted in Bloch et al., *Albert Bloch, the American Blue Rider*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*

Kandinsky's approach."¹⁰² Bloch never abandoned figural scenes like Kandinsky did and Marc almost did. Instead, he forged a relationship between figure and environment that was a key tenet of his expressive style. Bloch adapted the abstract rhythms of Kandinsky and Marc and the expressive use of color from the Expressionist movements; however, he kept his own compositional arrangement. *Duel* from 1912 (fig. 23) best exemplifies Bloch's approach to figural paintings with abstracted backgrounds like Kandinsky and the broad places of color like Marc. He flattened the picture plane like abstract painters, but he used this composition to create a rhythmic background to "form a closer connection with the figures."¹⁰³

The style and philosophy Bloch crafted while he was in Munich with *Der Blaue Reiter* appealed to many in the German avant-garde community. Most importantly, Bloch found a patron and energetic supporter in Herwarth Walden of *Der Sturm* in Berlin. Walden had taken a particular interest in the direction of *Der Blaue Reiter* and focused on Bloch's work in particular. Between March 1912, the first *Blaue Reiter* exhibition at *Der Sturm*, and 1917, Bloch's work featured in no fewer than seventeen exhibitions at *Der Sturm*.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, Walden included Bloch's paintings like *The Green Dress*, *Lied I*, and *Figures on Dark Ground* (figs. 24- 26) in exhibitions that toured Germany, gaining both Bloch and Walden popularity in the avant-garde community. Bloch's exposure to the highly influential circle of *Der Sturm* helped him hone the expressive quality of his paintings and absorb ideas from other artists Walden promoted.

¹⁰² Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus München et al., 2010: 21

¹⁰³ *Ibid*: 21

¹⁰⁴ Bloch et al., 1995: 38

In 1913, William Reedy financially cut off Bloch, causing the artist to return to the United States for a very brief period of time to beg for money from his wife's affluent family. He managed to secure a stipend that would allow him to remain in Europe for the next two years. Soon thereafter, he found lucrative patronage through Walden and *Der Sturm*. Like Marsden Hartley, the war made life for Bloch in Europe difficult and almost forced him out of Germany, it "again reduced Bloch to a precarious state since it disrupted transportation, slowed the mails, and frightened off many collectors."¹⁰⁵ He managed to remain for several years, though. Throughout the war years, his artistic output remained high, but he expressed the difficulty of remaining in Germany. He desired to leave Germany because of the political climate and rampant xenophobia. He was an artist that maintained his American identity with fervor so he felt personally effected. He left briefly in 1918, but returned in 1919 to exhibit and set all of his affairs in order. He returned to the United States for good in 1921.

After several years of uncertainty after his return from Europe, he secured a job as a professor and administrator with the Drawing and Painting Department at the University of Kansas. The irony was not lost on him as he often remarked on his institutional training in comparison to what he was offering his own students as an instructor and art history professor. In this new life, eventually, "[he] cut ties with galleries and dealers, turned his back upon the 'art world,' and exhibited only upon invitation."¹⁰⁶ He exhibited an outright rejection of the commercial art world for the instruction of the next generation with whom he shared his experiences as an independent

¹⁰⁵ Bloch et al., 1995: 41

¹⁰⁶ Mohr and Bloch, 2003: 72

artist in the German avant-garde. He continued to paint during his time as instructor and lecturer; but most of his output reflected his time with the Expressionist circles of the 1910s. He maintained his position at the University of Kansas until he was forced to retire after a heart attack in 1947.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

The United States and Germany followed a parallel path into modernity through urbanization and industrialization that greatly informed the development of their visual arts. The American Civil War and German Unification, taking place within several years of each other, provided an opportunity for the foundation of a new cultural identity because “[debates] about the nature of national identity arise especially during periods of rapid social change and instability.”¹⁰⁷ The need for a new cultural identity was especially important as the concept of a national identity is fluid and constantly in a state of change. The identity that was being crafted for early modernism in both the United States and Germany was not just rapidly changing, but also taking on multiple meanings simultaneously as the pace of life post-industrialization was shortening the time a cohesive cultural identity was accurate.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, artists in both countries believed their cultural expression should reflect urbanization and express aspects of spirituality in art at the turn of the century. To contextualize their burgeoning cultural identity, an analysis of their parallel developments and their prominent artistic expression is necessary in order to explore the complex and nuanced transatlantic exchange.

Oscar Bluemner, Marsden Hartley, and Albert Bloch were painters on the cusp of American early modernism who employed and exchanged distinctive pictorial devised

¹⁰⁷ Cassidy, 2005: 112

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*: 112

with the German avant-garde. Bluemner, Hartley, and Bloch acted as a bridge between the German and American artistic cultures by adopting some of the characteristics and interests of the German Expressionists as well as influencing the development of the German avant-garde through their numerous exhibitions at prominent German galleries.

These American artists consciously applied the aesthetic theories of artists working towards abstraction, like Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky, to the work they exhibited in the United States. These exhibitions helped to grow the public and avant-garde's awareness of the theoretical issues addressed by the German Expressionists. So the influence of the German avant-garde on their work and their involvement in and influence of Expressionist culture demonstrates that this was a period in which both artistic and cultural identities were highly malleable. Transatlantic artists affected the outcome of this search for a cultural identity because German influences entered the United States through these artists. Conversely, these American artists helped initiate and further the aesthetic dialogue between German Expressionist groups and American art. The symbiotic relationship Germany and the United States shared in the 1910s, though marginalized, is evident and should be more thoroughly discussed.

FIGURES



Figure 1: Frederick Childe Hassam (1859- 1935) *Rainy Day, Boston*, 1885. Oil on Canvas. Available from: The Athenaeum, <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/> (accessed December 8, 2015)



Figure 2: Oscar Bluemner (1867- 1938), *Fort Lee*, 1904. Watercolor and Pencil on paper. Smithsonian Learning Lab, Washington DC. Available from: <https://learninglab.si.edu/resources/view/174359#> (accessed November 27, 2015)



Figure 3: Oscar Bluemner (1867- 1938) *Sunset, Gutenberg, N.J.*, 1909. Watercolor on Paper. Skinner Auctioneers and Appraisers, Boston, Massachusetts. Available from: <http://www.skinnerinc.com/auctions/2817B/lots/292> (Accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 4: Oscar Bluemner (1867- 1938) *Old Barn at Sheepshead Bay*, 1911. Oil on Canvas. The Crystal Bridges Museum, Arkansas. From The Crystal Bridges Museum, <http://www.crystalbridgescollection.com/> (accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 5: Oscar Bluemner (1867- 1938), *March Wind, Passaic River, N.J.*, 1911- 1917. Watercolor on Paper. The Orlando Sentinel, Orlando, Florida. Available from: Orlando Sentinel <http://www.orlandosentinel.com> (accessed November 29, 2015)

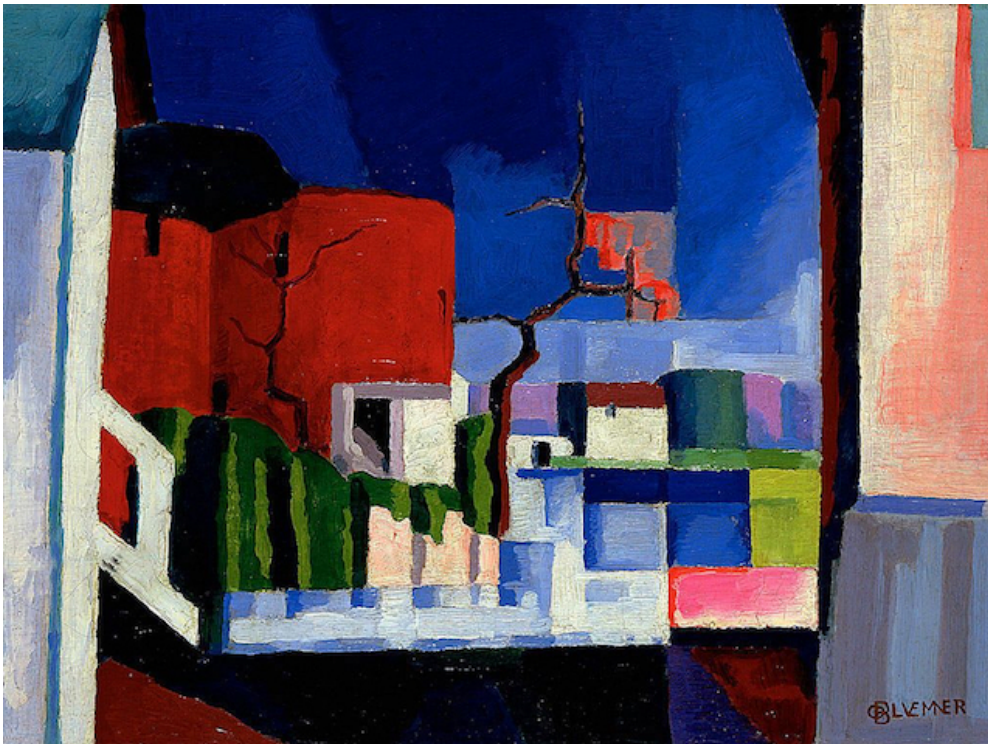


Figure 6: Oscar Bluemner (1867- 1938), *Old Canal, Red and Blue (Rockaway River)*, 1911- 1917. Oil on Canvas. Smithsonian Learning Labs, Washington, DC. From: Smithsonian learning Labs, <https://learninglab.si.edu/resources/view/58378#> (accessed November 29, 2015)



Figure 7: Paul Gauguin (1848- 1903), *Te Poipoi*, 1892. Oil on Canvas. Available from: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paul_Gauguin_-_Te_Poipoi.jpg (accessed November 27, 2015)



Figure 8: Franz Marc (1880- 1916), *Tiger*, 1912. Oil on Canvas. Available from: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Franz_Marc_027.jpg (accessed November 27, 2015)



Figure 9: Oscar Bluemner (1867- 1938) *Hackensack River*, 1912. Oil. New York Historical Society Museum & Library, New York. From New York Historical Society Museum & Library, <http://armory.nyhistory.org/hackensack-river/> (accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 10: Oscar Bluemner (1867- 1938), *Illusion of a Prairie, New Jersey*, 1914. Oil on Canvas. Smithsonian Learning Lab, Washington, DC. From: The Smithsonian Learning Center, <https://learninglab.si.edu/resources/view335734#> (accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 11: Marsden Hartley (1877- 1943), *Carnival of Autumn*, 1908. Oil on Canvas. Available from: The Athenaeum, <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/> (accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 12: Marsden Hartley (1877- 1943), *Song of Winter, no. 6*, 1909. Oil on Board. Available from: The Athenaeum, <http://the-athenaeum.org/> (accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 13: Marsden Hartley (1877- 1943), *Abstraction*, 1913. Oil on Canvas. Available from: The Athenaeum, <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/> (accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 14: Marsden Hartley (1877- 1943), *Abstraction with Flowers*, c. 1913. Oil on Canvas. Available from: The Athenaeum, <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/> (accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 15: Marsden Hartley (1877- 1943), *Collection of Numbers, Designs, and Letters*, 1914. Oil on Canvas. Available from: The Athenaeum, <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/> (accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 16: Marsden Hartley (1877- 1943), *Abstraction (Military Symbols)*, 1914- 1915. Oil on Canvas. Available from: The Athenaeum, <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/> (accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 17: Marsden Hartley (1877- 1943), *Portrait of a German Officer*, 1914. Oil on Canvas. Available from: The Athenaeum, <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/> (accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 18: Marsden Hartley (1877- 1943), *Arroyo Hondo, N.M.*, 1918. Oil on Canvas. Available from: The Athenaeum, <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/> (accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 19: Olaf Gulbrannson (1873- 1958), *Conrad Dreber as a Hunter*, 1910. Pencil Drawing. From: Bloch et al., 1997. *Albert Bloch, The American Blue Rider*. Munich; New York: Prestel. Fig. 4

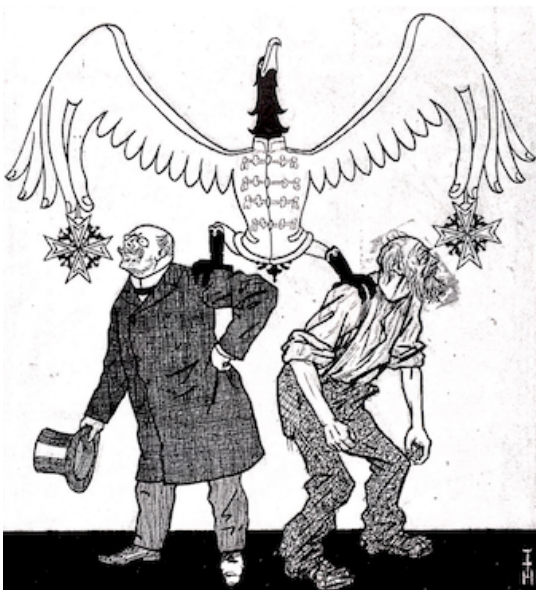


Figure 20: Theodore Heine (1867- 1948), *Neutrality*, 1905, No. 45. Pencil Drawing. From: Bloch et al., *Albert Bloch, The American Blue Rider*. Munich; new York: Prestel, 1997: Fig. 5



Figure 21: Albert Bloch (1882- 1961) *Munich Sketches: Among the Students*, April 1909. Pencil drawing. From: Mohr, Werner and Albert Bloch. *Albert Bloch: Caricaturist, Social Critic, and Translator of Karl Kraus*. Riverside, California: Ariadne Press, 2003. Fig. 13

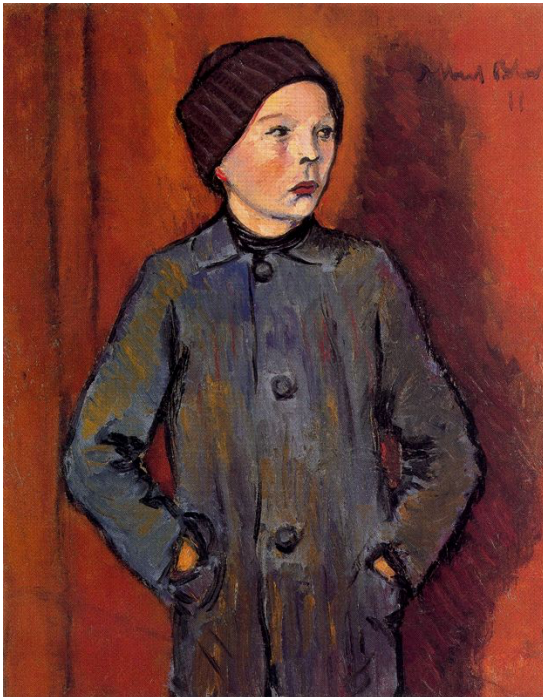


Figure 22: Albert Bloch (1882- 1961) *Portrait of a Boy*, 1910. Oil on Canvas. Available from: Wikiart, Visual Encyclopedia, <http://www.wikiart.org/> (accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 23: Albert Bloch (1882- 1961) *Duel*, 1912. Oil on Canvas. Available from: Wikiart, Visual Encyclopedia, <http://www.wikiart.org/> (accessed November 21, 2015)

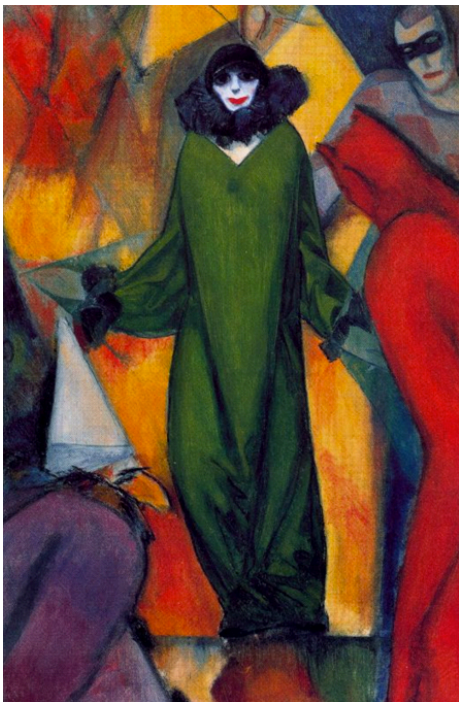


Figure 24: Albert Bloch (1882- 1961) *The Green Dress*, 1913. Oil on Canvas. Available from: Wikiart, Visual Encyclopedia, <http://www.wikiart.org/> (accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 25: Albert Bloch (1882- 1961) *Lied I*, 1914. Oil on Canvas. Available from: Wikiart, Visual Encyclopedia, <http://www.wikiart.org/> (accessed November 21, 2015)



Figure 26: Albert Bloch (1882- 1961) *Figures on Dark Ground*, 1916. Oil on Canvas. Available from: Wikiart, Visual Encyclopedia, <http://www.wikiart.org/> (accessed November 21, 2015)

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Joseph Sherren graduated from DeMatha Catholic High School, Hyattsville, Maryland, in 2006. He received his Bachelor of Science in Biology from Mount St. Mary's University in 2010. He was briefly employed as a biological science technician with the United States Department of Agriculture but after feeling discontent with those career options and watching "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade," he decided to switch focus to art history and visual culture. He took courses at the University of Maryland, College Park to establish a new skill set as an art historical researcher and found an interest in Modernism. He is expected to receive his Master of Arts in Art History from George Mason University in Fall 2015.