

The paintings of Gerald Murphy

[by] William Rubin with the collaboration of Carolyn Lanchner. Foreword by Archibald MacLeish

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THE PAINTINGS OF GERALD MURPHY

The Museum of Modern Art, New York





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WILLIAM RUBIN

with the collaboration of Carolyn Lanchner

Foreword by Archibald MacLeish

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

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In the ten years since his death, the American painter Gerald Murphy has achieved a considerable fame for reasons having nothing to do with his work or even with the art he practiced. He is an object of interest because he lived in Paris at a time when, retrospectively, living in Paris was the thing to do and because, while other Americans lived there meanly or without imagination, he lived there well. His house at Saint-Cloud was Gounod's old house, above the railroad cut, with a view of Montmartre through the snow. His friends were the principal men of the twenties—Picasso and Stravinsky and Fernand Léger and, among the Americans, Dos Passos and Hemingway and Fitzgerald. He was the first summer resident of Cap d'Antibes where, before him, the Hôtel du Cap had been kept open through that dangerous season only for the Chinese Ambassador, who could not be expected to understand that he was endangering his health and the lives of his children. And all this, given the nostalgia for the twenties which now afflicts a sadder, wiser generation, has turned Gerald Murphy into a kind of literary figure—a character in a novel everyone has read but no one has yet written. Indeed, it is often asserted that Murphy was the model for Fitzgerald's Dick Diver in *Tender Is the Night*, if not the model for Fitzgerald himself. People who have never seen or even heard of a Murphy painting know all about that famous party he and his wife Sara gave on a barge upon the Seine. They talk about the Count de Beaumont's automotive ball and how Murphy got himself welded into a costume of stainless steel the afternoon before and how the night wore on. They even quote a darkly ambiguous saying attributed to Murphy which seems to justify a Fitzgerald universe: Living well is the best revenge. But because they have yet to learn that Murphy was a painter, a very serious painter, they have had no occasion to consider the tone in which a phrase of this kind might be spoken.

To any artist, and to a painter above all, the best revenge upon life, or more precisely upon death, is not living either well or badly but creating works of art, and Gerald Murphy, whatever he may have said upon the subject, knew it. His life, though he and Sara lived as bravely and as gracefully as humans can, was far from constituting a revenge on anything. It was a deeply tragic life, a life which sometimes seemed intentionally tragic, as though an enemy had planned it, and those luncheons on the thick blue plates under the linden tree at the Villa America were not a compensation for the suffering but almost an aggravation. The Murphys had three children. They were beautiful children: Honoria, an Alice in Wonderland little girl who melted with tenderness for animals, particularly horses;

Baoth, a golden boy with a laughing delight in the world; Patrick, a child with the grave intelligence of a grown man—"un monsieur," as Picasso put it, "qui est par hasard un enfant." At the end of the Paris decade Patrick developed tuberculosis, and his father, then deeply committed to his art, dropped everything, took the family to Montana-Ver-mala in the Swiss Alps, devoted himself, with Sara, to the struggle for the boy's life, and seemed, for a few miraculous months, to have won it. But the Great Depression followed, and the family business on which Gerald's sister, his sister-in-law, and his own family were dependent began to founder; he had no choice but to put his work aside again and devote himself as best he could to learning the trade. "Merchant Prince" he called himself with a black Irish grin.

It was then that Patrick fell ill again and had to be sent to Saranac. Yet it was not Patrick but Baoth who died first. He was away at school. He was just sixteen. And he died of spinal meningitis. And two years later, when he too had turned sixteen, Patrick followed. There was a bleak, blank memorial service in an empty New York church—a service in which the silences were like the confrontation with the Voice out of the Whirlwind in the Book of Job—and then the three survivors moved into an apartment near the family business (near also, ironically enough, The Museum of Modern Art, which Gerald passed in the mornings, turning his head away). There Gerald took for himself a small bedroom, bare as a monk's cell, where he seemed to close the door on his life. He was in his late forties. He never, so far as I know, painted again.

And yet his life as a painter had not ended. It had, indeed, only just begun. The paintings of the twenties existed and were beginning to make their existence felt. Several were exhibited in galleries as far away as Texas. One was acquired, just before Murphy died, by The Museum of Modern Art, the word reaching him, thanks to Alfred Barr and René d'Harnoncourt, while he could still understand what was being said to him. This picture was later exhibited at the Tate in London along with another work by Murphy. And subsequently, even during the period of his irrelevant fame as a character in contemporary fiction, the canvases continued their labor of establishing Gerald Murphy as what he really was and always had been, a painter of his time.

But a painter of his time in a rather particular sense of that phrase. Certainly at the time the pictures were painted they were quite unlike the work appearing in dealers' windows along the Rue La Boétie. Murphy's greatest admiration at that period was Piero della Francesca, most scientific

and precise of fifteenth-century painters, and his passion was not for the abstraction of experience but for experience itself, "the thing itself"—the "thing" so like "itself" that it would become its implications. David Cecil tells us that Philip of Spain spoke of the young Elizabeth, radiant on horseback in the London streets, as "full of incantation." Murphy would have borrowed the words. He painted an Edwardian cigar box so totally representative of itself that it became its world; he painted a wasp so like a wasp that no one looking at it could take a wasp for granted ever again.

Toward the end of his life Murphy began to teach himself poems as he shaved. There was always a poem by the mirror, and it was always the work of the same man, Gerard Manley Hopkins. But it was never a poem chosen for that mastery of rhythms, that mysterious management of the English tongue, which brings later poets back and back to Hopkins' work. On the contrary, Murphy's choices were made for those images within the images, those images of the images, with which Hopkins' work abounds. In Hopkins too the world is "full of incantation."

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH

"... for me only the *invented* parts of our life had any real meaning."

—Gerald Murphy

Gerald Murphy was not a born painter. He did not possess the easy ability to draw that spurs youthful desires to become an artist. Indeed, Murphy was thirty-three years old, married, with three children when he experienced the revelation that led to his commitment to painting—a commitment more profound than accounts of the man and his limited oeuvre indicate. Until his trip to Europe, Murphy had considered painting strictly an art of verisimilitude;¹ what he disliked in it was epitomized in a pet hate of Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, which he had been taken to the Metropolitan Museum to see as a child.² Shortly after arriving in Paris in September of 1921, he saw, quite by chance, some paintings by Picasso, Matisse, Braque, and Gris³ in the Paul Rosenberg Gallery on the Rue La Boétie. His response was intense. "I was astounded," Murphy recalled. "My reaction to the color and form was immediate. To me there was something in these paintings that was instantly sympathetic and comprehensible." He remembers telling his wife, Sara, "If that's painting, that's what I want to do."⁴

The Murphys had arrived in Europe with the intention of settling there. They had a comfortable, but by no means extraordinary, income from Sara's portion of the fortune her father had recently divided among his three daughters, as well as some funds from Gerald's father, a successful merchant and the head of Mark Cross and Co. Many of the Americans the Murphys came to know, the Dos Passos, Hemingway and his wife, and friends whose names are not remembered, had arrived in Paris separately but with the same idea "of getting out of the U.S.A."

There was a sort of unconscious discontent about life [in America], but that wasn't all of it. Everybody who went, of the people we knew, were writing, or painting or composing, or interested in the arts, and they were all young couples with children, so they all had, in a sense, settled down there. We were not tourists, not just people on a spree . . .⁵

However discontent Murphy may have been with life in America, he never tried to become European as have so many expatriates. On the contrary, he used the distance to filter out what displeased him about things American and to insist upon the rest. He cultivated American friends, he adopted, for the most part, specifically American subjects

for his art, and he christened the home he purchased and remodeled on the Garoupe Beach near Antibes, "Villa America." "Although it took place in France," Murphy later wrote, "it was all somehow an American experience. We were none of us, professional expatriates, and Paris and the French seemed to relish this."⁶

The pictures Murphy saw at Rosenberg's acted as the catalyst for the lessons that he and Sara began taking from Natalia Goncharova. Murphy had never before painted, and his only experience in drawing had been limited to mechanical drawing—largely architectural renderings—that he had learned to do in a course in landscape architecture at Harvard graduate school.⁷ Goncharova's teaching method was exclusively concerned with abstraction, and this was to have a particular effect on a student who had never drawn from the motif. Unlike most modernists of the time who, beginning with the motif, arrived at their image through a process of abstraction, Murphy conceived of his compositions as abstract arrangements, to which he accommodated his motifs. With Goncharova he would start by subdividing the canvas into nonfigurative shapes. Then, dependent on their profiles, sizes, and placements, these shapes would be colored, the "weak" ones given "striking, stronger color"⁸ in order to hold their own on the plane of the picture. Goncharova never permitted the representation of recognizable motifs in these exercises. In the long periods of gestation for each of Murphy's later pictures, the objects selected as motifs were so persistently contemplated that they became "abstractions" to Murphy, and in the process of being assimilated to a governing design ended as "objects in a world of abstraction."⁹

Murphy's earliest known painting—preserved only in a photograph—is *Engine Room*, which was executed shortly after he stopped his lessons with Goncharova toward the spring of 1922. As in much of the machine imagery of the American Precisionists, its economy, stylization, and generalized surfaces were "sanctioned" by Cubism, but the picture was not informed by the structural concepts of that style. Within a few years, however, Cubism was to play a more organic role in Murphy's painting, although it was less the Cubism of the painters he most admired—the originators of the style—than of the Purists which was to influence him. "The first impact of Cubism was finished," he later wrote about the Paris of the early twenties, "but it was still in the very air one breathed. It had been digested and gone into the bloodstream of each painter who was working independently."¹⁰

Murphy worked daily at regularly appointed hours in his Paris studio and, later, in the one at the bottom of his

garden in Antibes. That he found time to do much else was not because his relation to painting was amateurish; many other painters participated in the cultural effervescence of twenties Paris that swept up Gerald and Sara Murphy. That his hours were regular was a matter of personality—a function of his methodicalness, his love of order. Murphy's systematic approach to painting permitted no random sketching; his drawings all related to his paintings and were part of the months-long, painstaking process of building up his pictures. The final study for the actual work was a tempera "maquette" which Murphy transferred in pencil to his canvas (actually airplane linen) by a grid method, carefully inscribing each detail of the image. Murphy destroyed most of his preparatory drawings as he worked, and almost none of those that may still exist have been found.¹¹

The "cultural effervescence" of Paris in the twenties alluded to above fired Murphy's energies and led to his friendships with Léger, Picasso, Stravinsky, and many other great creative artists. It is not, however, my intention to dwell upon that milieu here, as it has already been sympathetically portrayed in Calvin Tomkins' biography of the artist,¹² which Murphy himself found especially praiseworthy for its "discerning and sensitive recording of an era . . . which came and went so quickly." I cannot, however, insist enough on the meaning of being in Paris then for a neophyte painter. As Murphy described it:

Every day was different. There usually was an event . . . an exhibition or several, or a concert, or the Dadaists were having a manifestation . . . or a new play, always something. The activity was something extraordinary . . . The café is where you got your news . . . There was such a passionate interest in everything going on, and it seemed to engender activity . . . The material at hand was invaluable to anyone the greater part of whose reactions were aesthetic."¹³

The picture we have of Gerald Murphy from these years suggests something of the dandy. However informal it may have been, he was extremely conscious and precise about dress—"almost self-mockingly elegant."¹⁴ Even when it was whimsical, everything in his apparel, as in his art, was economical—like the one-word titles of all his paintings.¹⁵ Although warm and easy with friends, Murphy always maintained a certain distance—a quality Scott Fitzgerald found frustrating.¹⁶ Murphy's characterization of his pictures as "intimate but not personal"¹⁷ applies equally to his relations with people.

Murphy's work is imprinted with this fastidiousness

and reserve. Many of his subjects—as in *Razor*, *Watch*, and *Wasp and Pear*—are seen close-up, from an intimate perspective, but are viewed impassively. His manner—the forms precisely contoured and smoothly brushed—shows no trace of the artist's hand. Such facture reflects no less personality than does the painterliness of the Abstract Expressionists; it simply asserts a contrary one. Aside from *Portrait*, not one of Murphy's pictures alludes to the human figure. *Engine Room* has no crew, *Boatdeck* has no passengers, *Library* is empty, and the bar utensils in *Cocktail* betray no trace of human use. Murphy identified *Portrait* as a self-portrait, but the "self" has been suppressed in the imagery as it has in the title, and the Cubist dislocation is not only the result of Murphy's growing sophistication as a painter but also the means to disguise his own image. *Portrait* is "intimate" insofar as it contains Murphy's actual footprint; but it is not "personal," since telling features such as his eye and mouth are isolated, generalized, and devoid of expression.

If Murphy was a dandy, he was in the mold that Baudelaire termed "heroic" in characterizing the dandy's creation of a life style that transcends social norms.¹⁸ The life that Murphy invented for himself and his family, especially once they left Paris for Antibes, was a private vision of paradise, imbued with warmth, beauty, intellect, and taste. His concern for detail rarely succumbed to the conventional "good taste" that is measured against received values. Rather, Murphy was an inventor of taste, a maker of manners.

The sunny, well-ordered world of the Murphys' life at Antibes constituted an "America" of their own making, symbolized by the "abstract design"¹⁹ of an American flag that Gerald had affixed to a wall near the gate of Villa America. There Murphy dreamt of a "native classicism . . . what Emerson meant when he wrote, 'And we [Americans] shall be classic unto ourselves.'"²⁰ This vision is not unrelated to the "idealized state of absolute order" that has been defined as the goal of the Precisionists.²¹ But the classic aspirations of the Precisionists were modified by the actualities of life in America. The Eden of the as yet unspoiled Riviera represented neither the actuality of America nor that of France. Murphy's "native classicism" was not a perception of order within American life, nor a triumph over its turbulent heterogeneity. Rather, it was the projection of a private ideal upon an already idyllic world. This Riviera ambiance had already been established in modern painting as a locus of a classicism which comprehended the senses in a manner more French than Greek. Matisse had used the Mediterranean picnic as the point of departure for

an image of classic harmony, choosing for his title a fragment of Baudelaire's famous refrain, "Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, / Luxe, calme et volupté."²² In the twenties, a revival of classicism—epitomized by Cocteau's *Rappel à l'Ordre*—permeated most levels of French modernism. Cubism was seen increasingly in purely classical terms and coexisted comfortably with out-and-out Neo-Classicism. Picasso, for example, painted *Three Musicians* and *Three Women at the Spring* side by side. Indeed, many of Picasso's most beautiful Neo-Classic images grew out of his sojourns at Antibes where he picnicked daily on the beach with the Murphys, and the image of Sara Murphy recurs among his drawings.

The Murphys' happy existence in the south of France was destroyed by a series of tragedies that began in 1929 with the discovery that their son Patrick was suffering from tuberculosis. They closed the Villa America and installed themselves at Montana-Vermala in the Swiss Alps, where Patrick was hospitalized. Murphy never painted again. He decided that his family obligations came first, and these took on a more embracing character as Mark Cross and Co., on which many members of the family depended, was collapsing in the Depression. Murphy returned to America and successfully turned Mark Cross around financially, moving it to its present Fifth Avenue location. After a brief remission, Patrick became sick again and entered a sanatorium at Saranac (where Léger visited him, bringing the "prepared" postcards included in the exhibition). But Patrick's death in 1937 was preceded by the sudden loss of the Murphys' other son, Baoth, in 1935, as a result of spinal meningitis. "There is something about being struck twice by lightning in the same place," Murphy later wrote a friend. "The ship foundered, was refloated, set sail again, but not on the same course, nor for the same port."²³

From 1929 onward, Murphy lived not by design but in response to events. He might have found some time to paint despite his family and business obligations, but he could not accept art as anything less than a total occupation. "Painting should not share one's time with anything else," he wrote.²⁴ Murphy had made his choice, or better, accepted the choice that was forced upon him, inasmuch as his family responsibilities predated his commitment to painting. But the sacrifice was not made without great anguish, and the repressed anger it generated caused him, during the thirties and forties, to try to suppress all memories of his life as a painter. In a deeply moving letter written to Robert Benchley in 1929 from Montana-Vermala, where she too was a patient, the Murphys' friend Dorothy Parker described him in the first throes of this change.

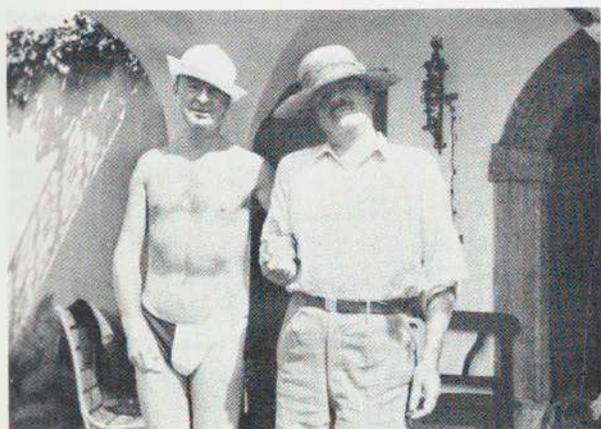
Gerald has absolutely isolated himself with [Patrick]—does every single thing for him . . . [It is] the most touching thing I have ever seen. [All his energy] has been put into inventing and running complicated Heath-Robinson sick-room appliances, and he is simply pouring his vitality into Patrick, in an endeavor to make him not sick . . .

But Miss Parker also noticed "something else" in his behavior—"that morbid, turned-in thing that began with his giving up his painting and refusing to have it mentioned . . ."²⁵

Murphy's ambivalence about his accomplishments and aspirations as a painter was to endure until near the end of his life. Lillian Hellman, who knew him in the late thirties, was especially struck by his unwillingness to talk about his art—indeed, his dislike of hearing it mentioned—and remarked that his attitudes must have changed considerably to have allowed an exhibition of his work in 1960.²⁶ By the early forties, Murphy's attitude toward his former occupation had become tinged with a self-deprecating black humor.²⁷ The paintings had been left, mostly rolled up, in the Villa America until after World War II; Murphy had brought none of them with him when he returned to assume control of Mark Cross. Toward the end of his life, when he agreed to discuss and exhibit them, he admitted having "not been able to submerge entirely my consciousness" of them.²⁸ He had, he told Alfred Barr, "no illusions about [their] value," but he did modestly suggest that they might be "interesting historically."²⁹ "There is nothing to add," he summed up in a letter to Rudi Blesh, "except that I was never happy until I started painting, and I have never been thoroughly so since I was obliged to give it up."³⁰

Incredible as it may seem, given the fact that Gerald Murphy died only ten years ago, the chronology of his painting and, indeed, the contours of his oeuvre are remarkably difficult to establish. The records of the Salon des Indépendants, in which he exhibited annually from 1923 through 1926, are helpful, and there are some references to his work during those years in avant-garde magazines and in the European edition of the *New York Herald*. But most other contemporary records of Murphy's paintings seem to have disappeared. His correspondence for the twenties has not been recovered and may have been lost in the Villa America during the war. There are, to be sure, some observations about his pictures in his post-World War II correspondence with Calvin Tomkins and with the late Douglas MacAgy, who in 1960 showed five of the six Murphy





Opposite:
Gerald Murphy,
Pablo Picasso.
Garoupe Beach,
Cap d'Antibes, 1923

Top left:
Honorina and Baoth
Murphy, Paulo Picasso,
Gerald and Patrick
Murphy. Cap
d'Antibes, 1923

Top right:
Sara Murphy,
Gerald Murphy,
Pablo Picasso.
Garoupe Beach,
Cap d'Antibes, 1923

Bottom left:
Gerald Murphy,
Fernand Léger. Bad-
Aussee, Austria, 1931

Bottom right:
Sara Murphy, Fernand
Léger, Ada MacLeish.
Hartford,
Connecticut, 1936

paintings that have survived in a group exhibition entitled "American Genius in Review" at the Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts.³¹ But the chronology MacAgy formulated at that time and amplified three years later in the article "Gerald Murphy: 'New Realist' of the Twenties"³² is in many respects at odds with the early evidence.

Since Murphy had exhibited only in Paris in the twenties and then returned to live in America, references to his work disappeared from French accounts of modern art. By the same token, since he had studied and worked only abroad, he was unknown to the American Precisionist painters and their admirers, who were intrinsically closest to his art. It is to MacAgy's great credit that through him the American public was first made aware of this group of pictures.³³ All the more, therefore, I regret that I find myself forced by what scant documentary evidence exists, and by judgments of style, to take issue with some facet of almost every entry for the catalog of the ten paintings which MacAgy believed to comprise the corpus of Murphy's work.

MacAgy clearly did not have Murphy's notebook at his disposal. This *cahier*, in which the artist jotted down—among other texts—brief descriptions of a large variety of motifs that he thought might serve for paintings, was subsequently available, however, to Calvin Tomkins when he was preparing Murphy's biography; Tomkins also had some conversations touching the paintings with Murphy himself. But much of the information given him corresponded to that given MacAgy, and since Tomkins' interests were biographical rather than art-historical, it is not surprising that he accepted MacAgy's catalogue raisonné for the last chapter of his biography, the résumé of Murphy's work entitled "Ten Paintings."

The records of the Salon des Indépendants and the contemporary references to Murphy's offerings to those exhibitions in magazines such as *L'Art Vivant* and *L'Effort Moderne* raise even more questions about the "ten paintings" than does the notebook. Collating these sources, we find that certain entries of the MacAgy catalog which make little sense in terms of Murphy's style can be untangled and reassigned, and that Murphy's oeuvre consequently alters both in its size and in its development. We discover, for example, that instead of ten paintings there were unquestionably twelve, and almost certainly fourteen. Moreover, the order of the paintings, especially the first five, emerges as very different from the prevailing conception.

That a catalog established by MacAgy on the basis of conversation with Murphy himself should contain so many errors is not so surprising as it might appear. One must take into account that at the time of their conversations, the

painter was in his mid-seventies, terminally ill with cancer, and had stopped painting more than three decades previously. In recollecting events that had taken place, in some instances, almost forty years before—especially in view of his negative attitude toward painting in the interim—an error of a few years, such as Murphy's attribution of *Watch* to 1923 (on his Dallas loan form) even though the painting is inscribed 1925, is perfectly understandable. But a two-year displacement of the date of a painting, especially in an oeuvre that spanned only eight years,³⁴ makes a considerable difference. It may be that Murphy's genuine if excessive modesty about his work—late in life he wrote of being "at a loss" to understand the revival of interest in it—led him to feel that such issues were of no importance.

Murphy's *cahier* contains notations for forty-two possible pictures (plus an entry for a "construction in frame").³⁵ Each of these begins with the word "picture," which is followed by telegraphic phrases describing the main motifs of the projected work, occasionally with color indications. Nine are accompanied by summary sketches of an aspect of the motif; otherwise, drawing plays no role in these projects. Here are several typical entries for works that were never to be realized:

Picture: fly (colossal) on lump sugar, or through a windowpane or glass seen from beneath, feet first

Picture: Canaries in cage, hung near figue de Barbari [*sic*] in flower against sky, bars, yellow bird, head down, reddish pink eye

A comparison of notebook entries (for works later realized) with the paintings themselves shows that the iconography was at times wholly identified, in the case of *Razor*, for example:

Picture: razor, fountain pen; etc. in large scale nature morte big match box

More often, however, the written text is incomplete, motifs having been added or eliminated in the work itself. Compare these entries, for example, with *Library* and *Cocktail*:

Picture: *Globe* blk fond with objects of library, books (gilt edge, stamped levant titles)

Picture: nature morte cocktail tray, shaker, glasses, stemmed cherries inside lemon knife *corkscrew* plate

bottle red white black grey (cut by lemon yellow?)

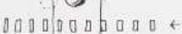
In addition to the forty-two notebook jottings marked "picture," there are some sixteen marked "detail" or "note," a few of which are accompanied by sketches. These are reminders of motifs of visual interest, many of them small in size, which Murphy thought he might subsequently work into the context of a picture. For example:

Detail value

Use line pattern on cover of this blank book

Detail: dots around form such as in italian papers.



Detail: 

in whirling long Dunhill cig'ette holder white spot in passing plays against faster speed of work [sic] Dunhill cut in stem below

Note: corks of file on water scalloped by currents



Only one such reminder—"*(use tracing of a foot in a picture)"—was later assimilated into a painting. It was added to a project, appearing earlier in the notebook, that was to become *Portrait*.

Beyond the fifty-eight entries for "pictures" and "details," the only indications in the notebook perhaps intended as ideas for pictures are a series of miscellaneous observations of New York street scenes, signs, bridges, etc., made during Murphy's visit to the city in October 1926 (and so dated). These, however, are probably indications of subjects and camera angles for photographs or a motion picture.³⁶ In addition, there are two brief scenarios—one a "ballet of meters," the other a somewhat Surreal vision (also probably for a ballet) of figures climbing giant furniture—and a one-paragraph outline for a play set in "family headquarters life at a stock farm," which Murphy was to proffer to his friend Philip Barry.³⁷ The last part of the *cahier* is given over to abstracts from Ernest J. Simmons' book on Pushkin,³⁸ Emil Ludwig's biography of Napoleon (who, surprisingly, seems to have held a special fascination for Murphy), Shakespeare's *Richard III*, and William Bolitho's *Twelve against the Gods*.

The notebook is of greater value for revealing Murphy's ways of thinking and working—and for the study of his iconography—than for any help in establishing the chronology of his work. There are only two relevant dates in it. The first, "New York: Oct. '26," occurs well along into the

project notations; it is followed by a section that begins with the thirty-fourth project, a picture "down into shops," from the Third Avenue Elevated. Three pages later come the last entries in this section. The final painting project, "State Fair," is dated July 14, 1936,³⁹ and is followed by the "construction in frame," marked "August" of the same year. Since Murphy had stopped painting before 1930⁴⁰—and all the earlier project entries seem to predate the turn of the decade—these two isolated entries were probably precipitated by a trip to Europe in 1936. In revisiting Paris he seems to have toyed momentarily with the idea of painting again, but nothing ever came of this.

Although Murphy did not inscribe the date when he began the notebook, I believe that we can safely place its first entries no earlier than the last months of 1923 and no later than the first months of 1924. I arrive at this conclusion first because there are no references to any of the pictures—*Engine Room*, *Pressure*, or *Boatdeck*—that can definitely be assigned to 1922 or 1923, his first years as a painter. Second, there are no references to Murphy's ballet, *Within the Quota*, on which he worked in the late spring and summer of 1923, and which was first performed in October of that year. At the same time, the notebook opens with two ballet scenarios—a field of interest that never recurs again, and which, therefore, suggests a date in proximity to the successful launching of *Within the Quota*. Since these ballet scenarios come *before* the notes for *Razor*, which was executed in the course of 1924 (probably being completed by autumn of that year), the *terminus ante quem* for the first notebook entries becomes early 1924.

After he had executed it as a painting, Murphy very methodically checked off each project in his notebook. Every entry relating to work listed by MacAgy is so marked. There are, however, three projects checked off in the notebooks which do not appear in MacAgy's listing at all. The first of these pictures was to show a "group of chemical retorts . . . Laboratory table as setting." It seems to me inescapable that this entry in fact represents a painting called *Laboratory*, the existence of which is confirmed by its having been listed in the catalog of the Salon des Indépendants for 1926. In discussing his work with MacAgy, Murphy seems to have completely overlooked *Laboratory* as, indeed, he had *Pressure*, which was shown in the Indépendants of 1923. MacAgy's account of damage to *Library* while en route to the Indépendants certainly must relate to *Laboratory*, as *Library* was not entered in the 1926 (or any other) Salon and, indeed, could not yet have been executed.⁴¹

If, then, the first of the three notebook entries checked by Murphy as "executed" but missing from the MacAgy

catalog can be shown through corroborative evidence to have existed, it would seem extremely likely that the other two existed also. Both of the latter projects were for still lifes; one describes fruit "cut into sections to show strata and construction," the other a windowsill with potted hyacinths.⁴² Adding these two pictures to Murphy's oeuvre, as I believe we should, we find that with *Pressure* and *Laboratory* the list of paintings expands to fourteen. (No photographs survive of any of these four additional pictures. Among the very few sketches that remain, however, are two that can be associated with the hyacinth still life.)⁴³

Pressure and *Laboratory* can be dated 1922 and 1925 respectively on the basis of external evidence. The notebook tells us that the ideas for the two lost still lifes were jotted down sometime (about midway) in the period that separated the first notebook entries of the 1923–24 winter from those made in New York in October 1926. But this provides no necessary date for the actual execution of the paintings. The fact that neither was offered to the Indépendants—Murphy's last offering to the Salon was shown in March and April of 1926—and that fewer paintings can be securely assigned to 1927–29 than to earlier years, lends some weight to my conjecture that they were executed in the later rather than in the middle twenties.

Drawing on the documentary evidence we possess, used in conjunction with judgments of style, I should now like to offer an alternative chronology to the one established by MacAgy and used by Tomkins (see Note 32).

Razor was identified by MacAgy as Murphy's first painting, supposedly executed in 1922, followed by *Boatdeck* a year later and *Engine Room* in 1924. This seems to me exactly to reverse the actual order of the three works. The photograph of the lost *Engine Room* shows that it not only had a deep, oblique perspective space but contained vestiges of conventional modeling. Such recession is also to be found in *Boatdeck*, where, however, it is much less marked because of the elimination of the almost Baroque contrasts which characterized *Engine Room* and the use of more stylized modeling (as in the highlights of the smokestacks). This tendency toward flattening is reinforced by the virtual absence of modeling in the vents and "cubified" deck superstructure. *Boatdeck* was painted in 1923, the same year in which Murphy conceived the backdrop for his ballet, *Within the Quota*, and relates to it in theme and in its almost "stage-flat" size. What Murphy said regarding the style of the ballet decor seems to me equally applicable to *Boatdeck*: "It is not Cubism, but its composition is inspired by Cubism."⁴⁴ *Razor*, on the other hand, is an essentially Cubist picture. The centralized, almost iconic still-life

objects are seen against a structure of abstract forms which establish a shallow "relief" space. None of the surfaces are modeled and, except for a hint of diagonal recession in the razor, the spatial structure and configuration are very different from those of the other two pictures.

Are we to believe that the painter of *Razor* devolved in such a way as to execute *Engine Room* two years later? It seems to me obvious on the basis of style that *Engine Room* must have been among Murphy's earliest essays, and should hence be placed in 1922, his first year of work. This view is, in any case, confirmed by the fact that it was exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants which opened in February 1923.⁴⁵ Murphy had also executed *Pressure* by that time, and this oil, as well as a watercolor (*Taxi*) and a pencil drawing (*Crystals*), was also shown in the Salon. No photographs of these three images have been found, nor do contemporary reviews of the Salon refer to the pictures; such references—and, of course, the photograph—do exist in the case of *Engine Room* (which was entered in the Salon as *Turbines*).

It seems to me reasonably safe to assume that the lost *Pressure* dealt with machinery—probably also that of an ocean liner—and that its configuration was related to that of *Engine Room*. Thus *Engine Room*, *Pressure*, and *Boatdeck* would all have been pictures of massive machinery associated with a sea voyage, that is, the literal means to the change of state which culminated in Murphy's new life in Europe and his beginnings as a painter.

The next—and in many ways best—group of Murphy's paintings, *Razor* and *Watch* of 1924–25, was separated⁴⁶ from the earlier trio of pictures by *Within the Quota*, the very theme of which—the experiences of a European who emigrates to America—may be seen as a response to Murphy's own "crossing over." Given his slow and circumspect manner of working, the realization of the immense *Boatdeck* (which was eighteen feet high) and the backdrop and costumes for *Within the Quota* is quite sufficient to explain how Murphy spent his painting time in 1923.

Much of 1924 was taken up with *Razor*. The rest of that year was certainly spent in early work on the most complex and, for me, best painting, *Watch*. Completed early in 1925, *Watch* was entered in the Indépendants, which took place rather late that year (March and April). Before sending it to the Salon, Murphy inscribed the date, "1925," on the lower right corner. Knowing, however, the pace at which he painted, we must conclude that a good deal of the work on *Watch* had been accomplished during the previous year.

Razor and *Watch* constitute a second iconographic and

stylistic grouping in Murphy's work. While MacAgy's date for *Watch* is correct (as regards its completion), his juxtaposition of it to *Engine Room* obscures the nature of this grouping. The iconography has now shifted from the theme of the machinery of travel (or change of state) to a focusing-down on familiar intimate objects, represented monumentally and dispassionately—but also nostalgically, insofar as the objects were specifically American and, even more, directly associated with the family business. The manufactured objects are still "machines," but they serve private rather than public purposes, and in their choice and use belong to the realm of the personal aesthetic. Although monumental in size, *Boatdeck* represented a motif much larger than the picture surface. *Razor* and *Watch* are images of objects much smaller than their colossal renderings.

We have only to compare *Engine Room* and *Watch*, both of which depict flywheel-type machinery, to see how much Murphy's style had evolved in the three years between 1922 and 1925. Whereas *Engine Room* has a diagonal perspective space with Baroque lighting and traces of modeling, *Watch* is flat, totally centralized in design, and contains no play of light—and, hence, no modeling or shading. This is largely true of *Razor* also. Its objects are iconically presented, the crossing of the pen and razor lined up with the central star of the matchbox virtually on the vertical axis of the image. *Razor* does, however, contain orthogonals suggesting a shallow, forward-thrusting space. But as is common in such Cubist-derived formulations, the surfaces are not shaded to conform with the orthogonal movement, so that the diagonal planes are spatially ambiguous and equally readable as being parallel to the picture plane. In *Watch*, all vestiges of perspective are eliminated and the corners of the composition are brought right up to the surface.

Though *Boatdeck* was stylized and simplified in a way that reflected elliptically the influences of Cubism, it was no more a Cubist picture than were the American Precisionist works it resembles. With *Razor*, however, Murphy really entered the world of Cubism. In its monumental isolation of pedestrian objects this picture owes something to Léger, but its spatial structure more closely resembles formulations favored by the Paris Purists, such as Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), Ozenfant, and Herbin. *Watch* is still very much a Cubist picture in its layout and form-language, but it is less obviously dependent on mid-twenties Cubist models than *Razor*.

While the frontality, simple geometricity, and precise impersonal execution of these two pictures can be found in many "iconic" still lifes of twenties Cubism, these same

stylistic properties are also to be found in American naïf art, which was one of Murphy's great passions. ("He knew all about Early American folk art . . . long before the museums started collecting it," Archibald MacLeish recalled.)⁴⁷ Consider, for example, the famous nineteenth-century *Cat* (p. 29). Here we have a centralized composition, a simple facture, and an obsessional aggrandizement of the main motif which seem to me very much to anticipate the spirit of Murphy's work in general, and of the years 1924–25 in particular. Indeed, I would suggest that the particular appeal of *Razor* and *Watch*—as against what Murphy painted before and after—lies in the precise (and no doubt unconsciously effected) stylistic equilibrium between the naïveté of American primitivism and the sophistication of French Cubism, two sources that surprisingly shared more common ground than one would think. (Or perhaps not surprisingly, given the relation of the Douanier Rousseau to Cubism.)

This combination is not entirely absent in some work of the American Precisionists, but the equation is different. Despite trips to Paris, such painters as Demuth and Sheeler were literally further from the sources and influence of Cubism than Murphy, and at the same time were more experienced, more skilled painters, whose training had allowed them to subsume a great deal more of past painting in their work. As he later told Léger, Murphy "had no facility and painted with much difficulty." His first lessons in painting had taken place less than three years before he executed *Razor*, and that training with Goncharova had started from pure abstraction, never recapitulating any of the traditional art-school techniques or studies of past art. As regards the experience of laying out and executing a picture, Murphy was, in 1924, almost a naïf, and one who looked to models exclusively within the narrow range of the Cubist painting he admired.⁴⁸

The balance of naïveté and sophistication that characterizes *Razor* and *Watch* dips in favor of sophistication in *Doves* and *Library*, the only two paintings that remain from at least four executed (after the completion of *Watch*) in 1925, 1926, and the last months of 1927. (No photographs exist of *Laboratory* or *Ball Bearings*, two lost pictures also definitely assignable to these years.) *Doves* and *Library*, alone among Murphy's known pictures, contain architectural motifs—columns, capitals, pilasters—and these are handled so as to constitute the structural members of the compositions. In the treatment of space and in the fragmentation and relocation of its forms, *Doves* is essentially a Cubist picture. The obsessional closing-in on the subject which characterizes *Razor* and *Watch* is, in *Doves*, carried to another level, producing a poetic, nearly Surreal effect

not unlike that in certain of Max Ernst's monumental "Dove" paintings of the same period. But as with naïf painters, Murphy's fantasy is an unintentional by-product of the quest for "reality." *Library*, inspired by recollections of Murphy's father's study, has a Cubist underpinning, but is otherwise rather straightforward and relatively unmarked by Murphy's particular imagination; objects are depicted in sizes consistent with their distance from the picture plane. In both *Library* and *Doves* the tonalities are more subtle, the color less bold than in the pre-1925 work, and there is an air of private reverie about them that is new. Enhancing the poetic ambiance of *Doves* are its comparatively elusive colors: soft grays, pale beige, aquamarine, and pink, whose use recalls a fragment from Murphy's notebook entry for the lost *Laboratory* of 1925, ". . . tender colors, sure graceful forms . . ." Although muted, the dark green, browns, whites, and blues of *Library* are, compared with the colors in *Doves*, relatively realistic.

Only two paintings, *Cocktail* and *Wasp and Pear*, plus a photograph of a third, *Portrait*, remain from the years 1927 through 1929, when Murphy ceased painting. Since, however, this is a considerably smaller production than the almost two pictures per year that Murphy had averaged from 1922 through 1926, there is a reasonable basis for assuming that the still lifes of fruit and of hyacinths, checked off in Murphy's notebook as having been executed, date from these last years.

Cocktail, *Portrait*, and *Wasp and Pear* are related in their Cubist-derived layouts—a continuation of Murphy's explorations in *Doves*—and in their collage-like discontinuities and juxtapositions. No contemporary documentation exists for the assignment of these pictures to specific years within the 1927–29 period. MacAgy assigned *Wasp and Pear* to 1927, and *Cocktail* and *Portrait* to the succeeding two years. To place *Cocktail* before *Portrait* seems to me correct, but I am convinced that *Wasp and Pear* was not the first but the last of the trio. Not only is it a more subtle and complex composition, but certain formal devices—notably the "interior frame," with which Murphy had been experimenting since *Library*—are seen in *Wasp and Pear* in their most advanced state. My assumption is supported by a remark made by Murphy in his correspondence with MacAgy, in which he described this picture as "illustrating the direction in which my work was going when I was obliged to stop painting."⁴⁹

No underlying iconographic theme unites these last three paintings. *Cocktail*, which we know is based on the bar tray in Murphy's parents' home, would by that fact be related to the private nostalgia that informs *Library*. *Por-*

trait, Murphy's only painting to deal—however elliptically—with the human figure, is ironically the most Cubistically fragmented of all his compositions and the most inorganic as regards the handling of the motif. *Wasp and Pear* is something else again. Here the monumentalizing tendency, exemplified by the huge wasp, is carried even further than in *Razor* and *Watch* in its microscopic closing-down on the wasp's foot. The unexpected and slightly unnerving motif of the wasp "battening on the pear" (to use Murphy's words) in combination with a newly sophisticated exploitation of a particular aspect of Cubist syntax (in the treatment of simultaneous interior and exterior views of the pear) endows this picture with a kind of pictorial and ideational richness not found in the immediately preceding paintings. Its intimate character is of a very different order from the factual, bold, and almost public modalities of a picture such as *Razor*.

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Engine Room (Turbines), 1922. Oil on canvas, c. 44 x 60" ⁵⁰ (Lost)

Despite the American firm name inscribed on the machinery, this picture was probably inspired by a visit to the engine room of one of the two European ocean liners—the "Paris" of the French Line and the "Olympic" of the White Star Line—that served as models for *Boatdeck* a year later. The inscription refers, in any case, to a Philadelphia company, Smith and Forbush, which made textile rather than marine machinery. Murphy's playing with the spelling of the name—the joining of the I and T of Smith by a diagonal and the substitution of an H for the U of Forbush—is not unrelated to the "Chicogoa" and other spelling and word games played in the backdrop for *Within the Quota*. Murphy was a lifelong addict of such games; the last of his preserved documents is a poem, written shortly before his death, on a piece of paper intended to be folded in four different ways to produce four readings.

The space of *Engine Room* unfolds along a diagonal beginning with the small cogwheel in the lower right corner and progressing to the left rear. A large turbine casing forms an arc over the composition, summarizing the circle analogies of the flywheels by which the configuration is held together. The turbine casing is realized with a conventional kind of modeling that would disappear from Murphy's work the following year. Most of the other forms are shown theatrically, as contrasting highlights and shadows, in an alternating rhythm superimposed upon the composition and seemingly inconsistent with any real light source. Schematized images of machines were not uncommon in the work of many artists who, like Murphy at this stage in his development, were more in sympathy with the modernist cultural implications of Cubism and Futurism than they were either able or anxious to understand and assimilate the pictorial principles of these movements. William Agee has compared *Engine Room* to the work of the Precisionists in the "American objectivity and meticulous surface finish" of its execution.⁵¹

As *Engine Room* was shown in the Salon des Indépendants of 1923, which opened on February 10 of that year, it cannot be assigned to 1924 as in MacAgy, but must be given to 1922 (choices for the Salon were certainly made by the end of that year). Moreover, this placement of it in Murphy's first year of painting is consistent with its less Cubistic composition relative to Murphy's other known works. In the Paris *Herald's* report of the Salon, Murphy's "very personal point of view in the study of machinery" was characterized as "centrifugalist."⁵² *Engine Room* (called by its title of the time, *Turbines*) was identified as his most

interesting entry. (The others were *Pressure*, the watercolor *Taxi*, and the drawing entitled *Crystals*.) These works revealed, the anonymous reviewer continued, "a feeling for mass and a sense of decorative effect."⁵³

Pressure, 1922. Oil on canvas (Lost)

Nothing is known of this oil except that it was listed in the catalog of the same Salon des Indépendants (February 1923) in which Murphy showed *Engine Room*.

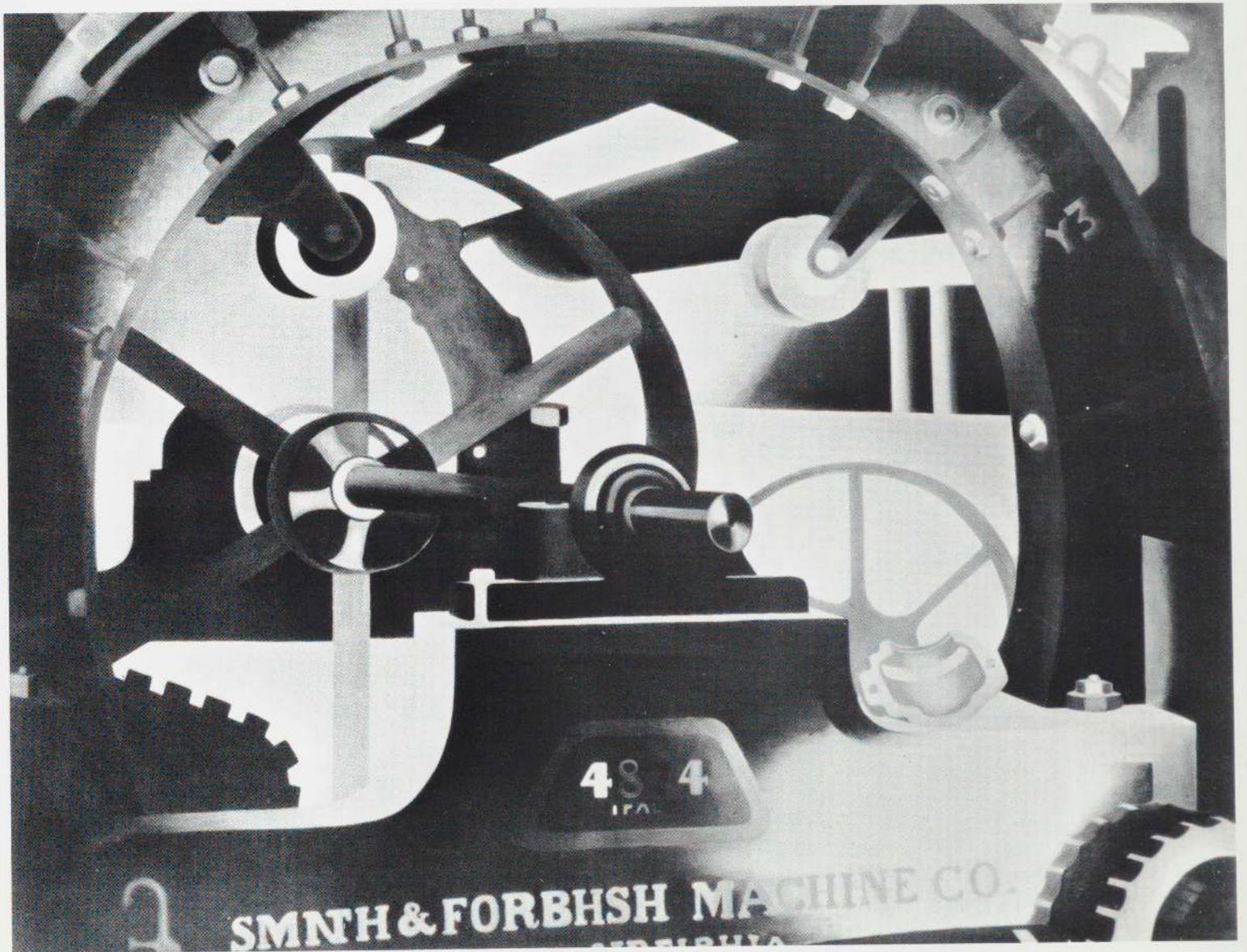
Boatdeck, 1923. Oil on canvas, c. 18 x 12' (Lost)

Given Murphy's manner of working, it is extremely doubtful that the conception, planning, and execution of this immense picture could all have taken place in the period between the opening of *Within the Quota* (October 1923) and the formation in early 1924 of the catalog for the Salon des Indépendants in which it is listed. (The exhibition itself opened on February 9.) Hence, although it is not impossible that the final phases of the picture date from early 1924, the first sketches and maquettes would have to date from the spring of 1923, before Murphy began work on the ballet. There exists a photograph of the giant canvas taken just before actual painting began; every detail of the motif appears, precisely drawn in pencil, within the grid of squares that Murphy had employed to transfer and enlarge the image from his final maquette.

The giant size of the painting, which initially might have been inspired by the motif itself, also relates to Murphy's work in the same period on the scenic backdrop for his ballet. Indeed, the motif itself could have served for a curtain, relating to the arrival of the immigrant of *Within the Quota*. When Murphy brought the painting to the Grand Palais for installation, its large size—which caused it to be hung separately from the rest of the Salon's American contingent, near the lobby staircase—provoked considerable controversy among the committee of organizers. Murphy kept cool—"If they think my picture is too big, I think the other pictures are too small," he dryly told the press.⁵⁴ Paul Signac, President of the Committee (not Dunoyer de Segonzac, as Murphy later recalled),⁵⁵ and two other members resigned in anger on the spot, but they reconsidered and rejoined the following day.

Boatdeck was well received in avant-garde circles and was reproduced in *L'Effort Moderne*.⁵⁶ It was to be reproduced again two years later in *L'Art Vivant*, accompanied by an admiring text which described Murphy's art as "*net comme un gentleman*." "In the history of the beginnings of the American aesthetic," wrote Jacques Mauny, "Gerald Murphy holds an alluring place . . . [his art] explains the

Engine Room
(*Turbines*), 1922.
c. 44 x 60" (Lost)



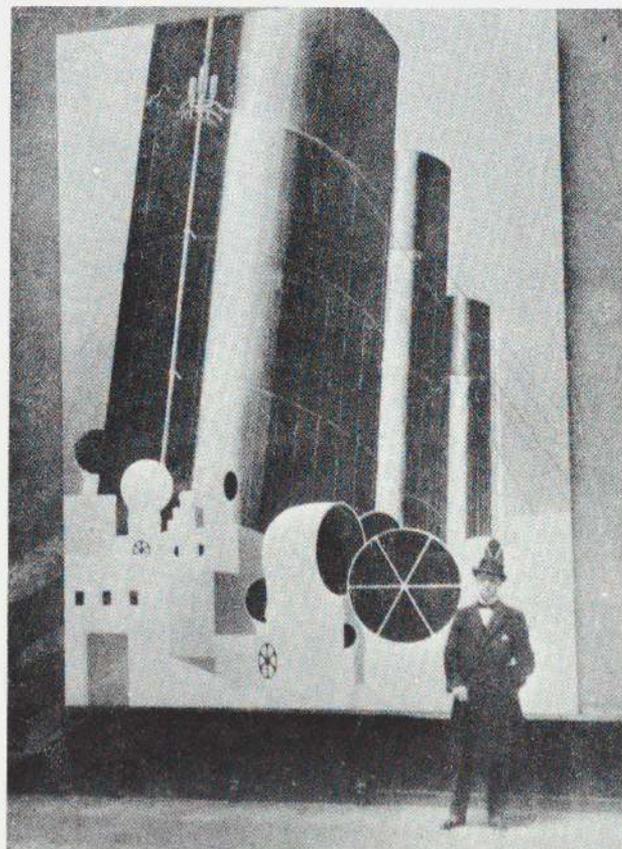
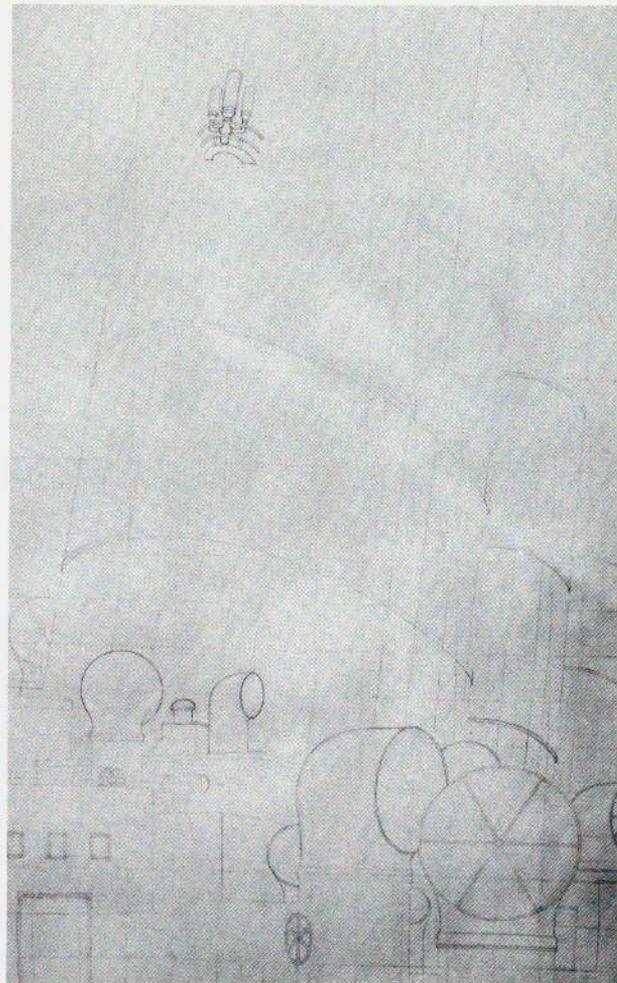
new American taste; like a stroll on Park Avenue it shows us the instruments of prosaic life executed to perfection. His taste for the mechanical is engaging."⁵⁷

It has been incorrectly stated that *Boatdeck* shows the liner "Aquitania,"⁵⁸ and in the MacAgy catalog the painting is given the erroneous title *Boatdeck, Cunarder*. According to Murphy at the time, it was a composite of the "Olympic" and the "Paris"⁵⁹—more nearly the latter to judge by the number of smokestacks. A large model of the "Paris" (and numerous maquettes for its superstructure and decor) was the main attraction of the Decorative Arts section of the Salon d'Automne of 1921,⁶⁰ which Murphy would probably have visited during his first season in Paris.

Murphy's affinity with American Precisionist painting is a very general one; his work demonstrates a kinship with certain aspects of that of Demuth, Sheeler, and Spencer. The closest resemblance, in some respects, is that of *Boatdeck* to Demuth's *Paquebot Paris*, painted about a year before Murphy's picture. Demuth visited Paris (for his third stay) in the summer and fall of 1921, and left about three months after Murphy's arrival in the city. (Demuth worked while there, and sold two watercolors through his representative, Léonce Rosenberg, who in his magazine *L'Effort Moderne* would soon show interest in Murphy's work.) Returning to the United States on the "Paris," Demuth made the sketches which, at the very end of 1921 or more probably early in 1922, were used in *Paquebot Paris*. In his first months in Paris, Murphy was not yet involved with the Parisian avant-garde scene nor, it appears, did he then have friends in common with Demuth. The two men were not dissimilar. (Demuth has been described as a dandyish man "moving [through society] with great cool"⁶¹ and a "Gentlemanly Johnny of his profession";⁶² and such terms as "perfect taste" and "impeccable" recur frequently in discussions of his work.)⁶³ But it does not seem likely the two ever met. It seems even less likely that Murphy could have seen *Paquebot Paris* or any reproduction of it during the year that separates the two pictures.⁶⁴

Demuth's *Paquebot Paris* is more sophisticated than *Boatdeck* in its composition and in the airy translucency of its surface. Its incorporation of abstract transparent planes reveals a more specifically Cubist debt than anything in Murphy's picture. Indeed, *Boatdeck* is a more realist picture in the hardness and opacity of its surfaces, and in the blandness and directness of its confrontation with the motif—closer to a travel poster or Pop painting than to Demuth's work.

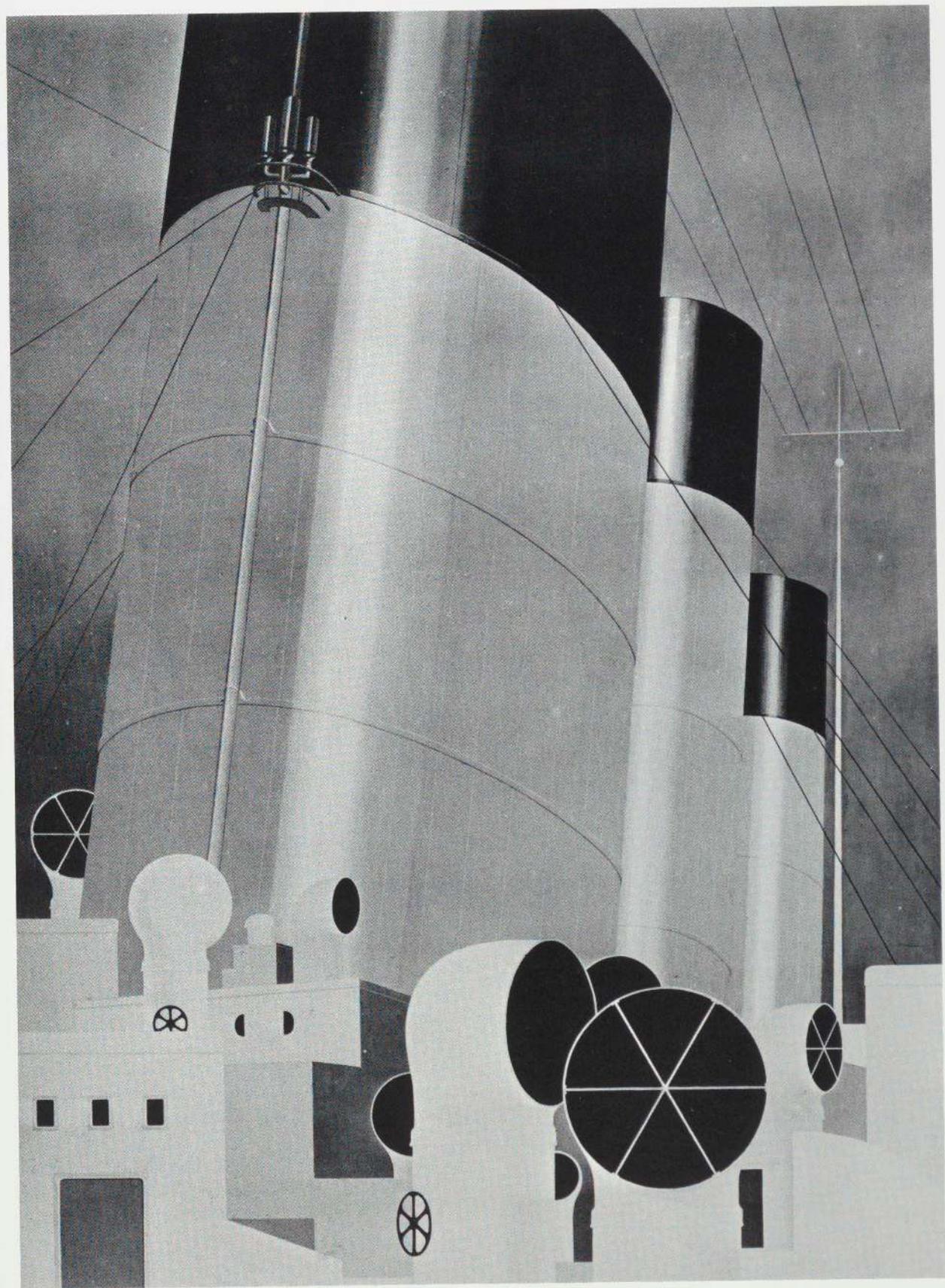
Although *Boatdeck* was painted before Murphy began his *cahier*, he wrote about it years later in a manner remi-

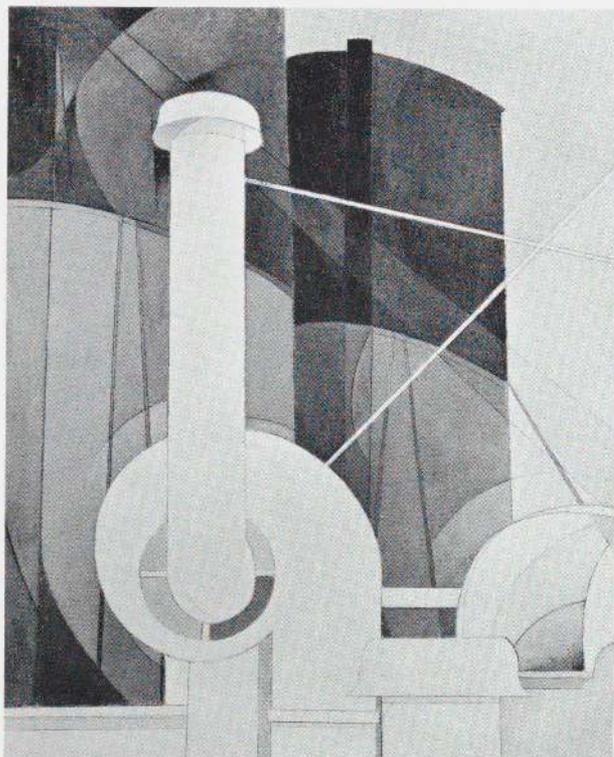


Boatdeck, canvas
before painting, 1923

Murphy and *Boatdeck*.
Salon des
Indépendants, 1924

Boatdeck, 1923.
c. 18 x 12' (Lost)





The "Paris," French Line

Charles Demuth,
Paquebot Paris,
c. 1921. Oil on canvas,
24¾ x 19⅞". The
Columbus Gallery of
Fine Arts, Ohio, Gift
of Ferdinand Howald

Performance, *Within
the Quota*, 1923

niscent of his notebook entries:

"Boatdeck" so much struck by the look (especially with flood lights at night) of the huge almost vertical red-lead-coloured smoke-stacks against the sky and the wires of the radio-telegraph, at their base the squat conglomeration of rectangular, ships-white-with-black-trim officers' cabins, dead-white mushrooming ventilators with black, gaping pure-circle mouths cut across with white rods spaced into six geometrical segments. Gray, white, black & red-lead: the whole⁶⁵

Boatdeck was never exhibited again after its appearance in the 1924 Salon des Indépendants and is presumed lost. The canvas was rolled and left in storage with René Lefebvre-Foinet et Cie⁶⁶ and was apparently lost during World War II. M. Lucien Lefebvre-Foinet, present director of the firm, has no recollection of it, nor can any trace of it be found.⁶⁷

Within the Quota

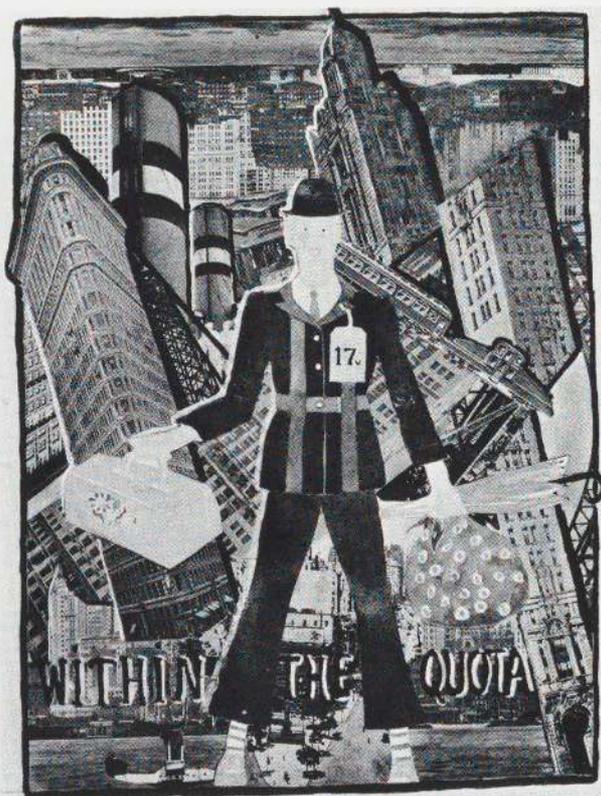
Produced by Les Ballets Suédois; premiere, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, October 25, 1923

Scenario, decor, and costumes by Gerald Murphy; music by Cole Porter; choreography by Jean Börlin

Sometime during the spring of 1923, the young Swedish ballet impresario Rolf de Maré asked Murphy to create an "American Ballet." Murphy was by then well known in dance circles. He had come in contact with many painters and composers involved with ballet shortly after his arrival in 1921; at the suggestion of his teacher, Goncharova, who designed sets for Diaghilev, he and Sara Murphy had helped repaint the Ballets Russes scenery damaged by fire. De Maré wanted a curtain raiser⁶⁸—it turned out to be eighteen minutes long—and Murphy proposed a scenario based on the impressions and adventures of a Swedish immigrant newly arrived in the United States. The protagonist has a series of encounters with American stereotypes, with whom his relationships are opposed by a kind of "spoiler":

A millionairess, bedecked with immense strings of pearls, ensnares him; but a reformer frightens her away. Then a Colored Gentleman appears and does a vaudeville dance. He is driven away by a "dry agent" who immediately thereupon takes a nip from his private flask and disappears, to the immigrant's increasing





"The Immigrant,"
cover, souvenir
program, *Within the
Quota*, Les Ballets
Suédois, 1923-24
Season

Costume study,
"America's
Sweetheart," *Within
the Quota*, 1923

Costume study, "The
Cowboy," *Within the
Quota*, 1923

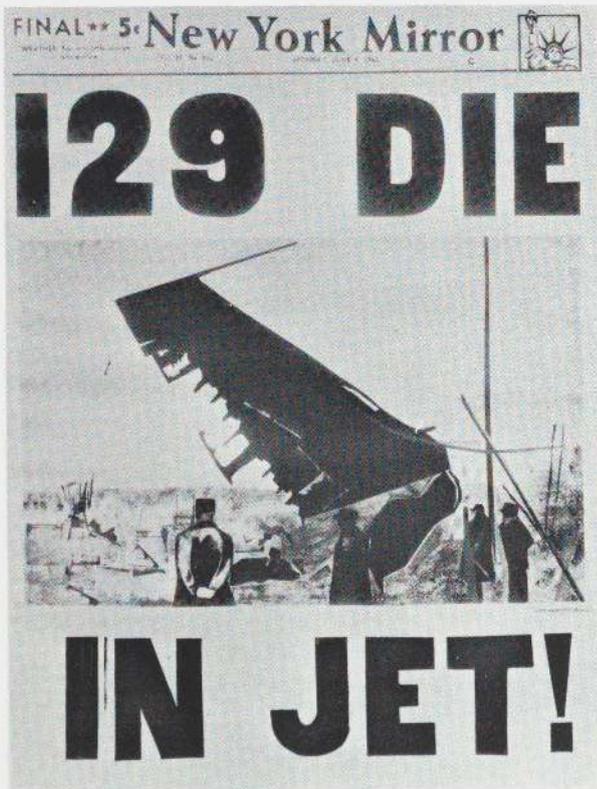
Costume study, "The
Jazz Baby," *Within
the Quota*, 1923





Gerald Murphy, Ginny
Carpenter, Cole Porter,
Sara Murphy. Venice,
1923

Costume study, "The
Colored Gentleman,"
Within the Quota,
1923



Maquette with collage for curtain, *Within the Quota*, 1923

Andy Warhol, *Plane Crash*, 1963. Oil and silk screen on canvas, 100¼ x 71⅞". Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne, Collection Dr. Peter Ludwig

astonishment. The Jazz Baby, who dances a shimmy in an enticing manner, is also quickly torn from him. A magnificent cowboy and a sheriff appear, bringing in the element of Western melodrama. At last the European is greeted and kissed by "America's Sweetheart"; and while this scene is being immortalized by a movie camera, the dancing of the couples present sweeps all troubles away.⁶⁹

Murphy proposed that his Yale college chum, Cole Porter, compose the music. Porter's wealthy socialite wife had always had high hopes he would be a "serious" composer, but he needed no encouragement to accept this ballet commission, a project far more ambitious than the popular songs for which he was just beginning to be known in America. Murphy spent three weeks at the Porters' rented palazzo in Venice in the early summer, and the two worked out the project.

Porter conceived the score as a musical parody paralleling the satire on the stage. The agon between silent-screen types—Socialite and Social Reformer, the Colored Gentleman (who danced with a champagne bottle and cane) and Revenue Agent, etc.—was reflected in the battle between the "flickers"-type piano solo and the orchestra. The score has a jazz base—Les Ballets Suédois was thus the first such company to dance to this new music—and includes (and even superimposes) elements as diverse as a Salvation Army chorale, a fox trot, a Swedish waltz, and an allusion to New York taxi horns. Despite all this, the music "smacked of . . . Darius Milhaud rather than George Gershwin."⁷⁰ The reason no doubt was that Porter, who had not learned to orchestrate, had turned over his score to Charles Koechlin, "who made Debussy out of it."⁷¹ *Within the Quota* was paired with *La Création du Monde*, a ballet for which Léger did the costumes and decor, and Milhaud the music; both had their premiere on October 25, 1923, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées before an audience "in which society and Montmartre were mingled."⁷² Both enjoyed immediate success.

The major feature of Murphy's contribution—the costumes were attractive but relatively conventional—was the backdrop, which was a giant parody of the front page of a sensationalist tabloid. It featured the liner "Paris" upended next to the Woolworth Building, and a series of headlines, in which Murphy indulged his delight in playing with words to a far greater extent than he had in tinkering with "Smith and Forbush" in *Engine Room*. The newspaper, published in New York and "Chicagoo," is both an "Extra" and a "Final Edition." Journalistic word-compounds are kidded in the headline "Ex-Wife's Heart-Balm Love-Tangle," and the column headlines are arranged to read across as well as down, as in "Rum Raid Romance" and "Mammoth Throngs at Deal"—a whimsy not unrelated to *double entendres* in Picasso's collages. The headlines have no direct relationship to the ballet scenario (except, perhaps, for "Boycott All Syndicate Hootch") but establish an ambiance of extravagance and hyperbole with regard to

American life that is summarized in the main banner, "Unknown Banker Buys Atlantic."

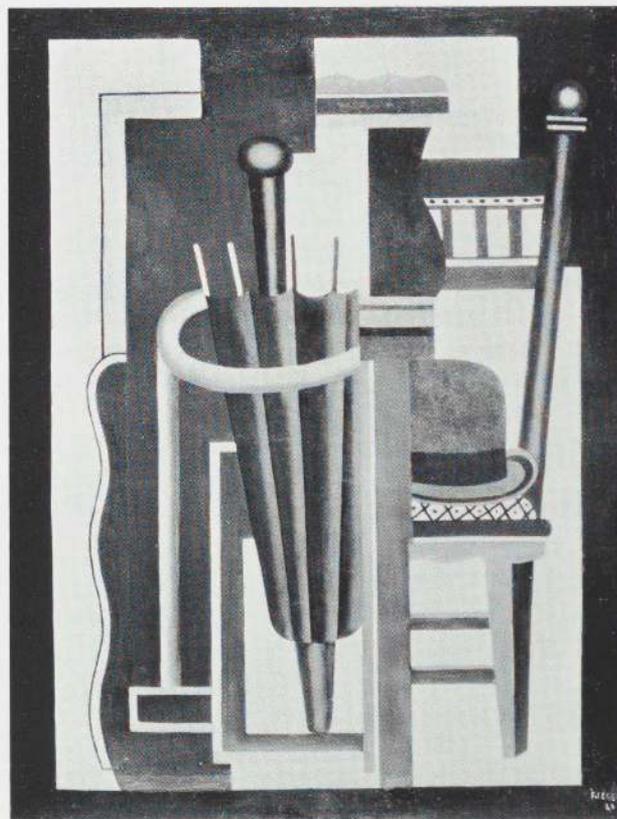
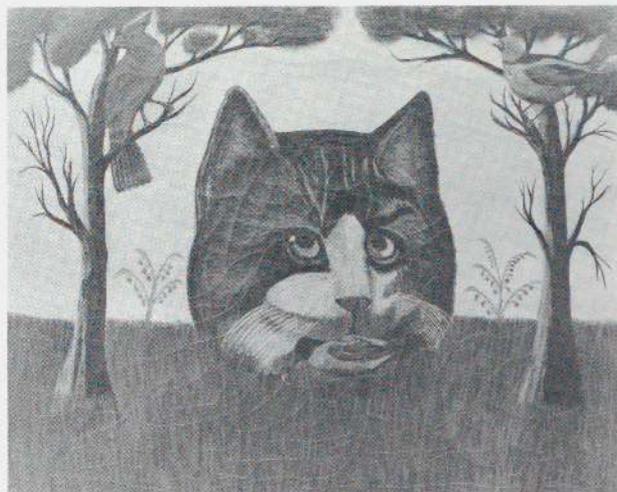
As noted earlier, Murphy told a reporter that the decor was "not Cubism, but its composition was inspired by Cubism." He probably had in mind both the particular layout he devised (although all newspaper layouts are inherently "Cubist") and its affinities to the Picasso collages with newsprint. Picasso was at the premiere and, on seeing the backdrop, remarked, "C'est beau, ça."⁷³ (Murphy, tongue in cheek, told gullible reporters it was "a composite of 250 American newspapers that I have studied . . . The object is to get the quintessence of Americanism out of its newspapers.")⁷⁴

The huge blowup of a tabloid front page in some ways anticipated the modalities of Pop art. Indeed, Murphy's paintings—*Razor* in particular—have been called the "true ancestor"⁷⁵ of Pop, of which they "stunningly foreshadow the best."⁷⁶ But a comparison of Murphy's backdrop with Warhol's *Plane Crash* quickly reveals their differences and clarifies the elements that belong to Murphy's epoch and his personality. The Warhol picture depends on blowups of an actual masthead and photograph, the processes of abstraction and reorganization entering more marginally than in the Murphy, through the silk-screening of the photo, and in the aggrandizement and slight changes in the format.⁷⁷ By contrast with Murphy's set, *Plane Crash* is far more bland and deadpan—anesthetized rather than ebullient—and it is not "composed" with regard to the sense of the words or the aesthetic of the layout. When these two works are juxtaposed, we become more aware of what Murphy meant in describing the backdrop as "inspired by Cubism."

Razor, 1924. Oil on canvas, 32 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 36 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Foundation for the Arts Collection, Gift of Gerald Murphy

At a remove of three years since his departure from the United States, the prosaic objects of American life seemed literally to loom large in Murphy's imagination. That he then chose to make them the subjects of his paintings—replacing the earlier imagery of travel—probably resulted from a combination of nostalgia and an insistence on his American identity. It was the latter that not only separated him from many "assimilationist" expatriates of the twenties, but made him especially appealing to such friends as Picasso and Léger, who were always predisposed toward Americans.

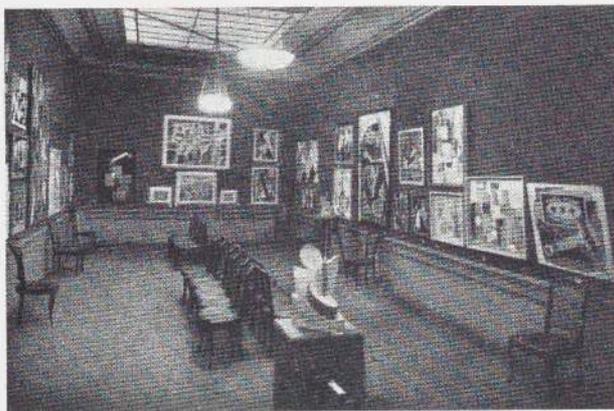
Razor is the first painting for which an entry exists in Murphy's notebooks, and its iconography is identical with



The Cat, by unknown artist, c. 1840, New York. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20". Collection of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch

Fernand Léger, *Umbrella and Bowler*, 1926. Oil on canvas, 50 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 38 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, A. Conger Goodyear Fund

those notations. Then more than now, the safety razor and the fountain pen were considered specifically American objects,⁷⁸ and were, besides, the sort of merchandise which the family store was purveying. Indeed, some years before, Murphy's father had designed a safety razor, which he planned to patent, but Gillette perfected his sooner and



beat Mark Cross and Co. to the market. At the very time Murphy conceived his painting, Gillette was beginning a publicity campaign in Paris to popularize his invention among women as a means for removing body hair—a view of the personal aesthetic that struck Frenchmen as hygienically American. “Underarm hair, so provoking in the novels of the late nineteenth century, was to be shaved. A revolt against Cupid . . . annulling five centuries of Western eroticism,” writes a chronicler of the period.⁷⁹

In *Razor*, the isolation of objects from their familiar contexts created not only an unexpected still-life but a design that could almost have served Mark Cross as a blazon or escutcheon. The grouping also recalls the art of window-dressing, in which heterogeneous objects are organized in a delimited space behind a rectangular transparent pane of glass that functions like a picture plane. American displays were considered far in advance of those in Europe, and if Murphy did not have any direct contact with this design activity in the family store before he left for the Continent, he certainly must have speculated about it. He was to spend many hours with Léger promenading through Paris inspecting storefronts, which the latter considered a major popular art, and he presumably supervised the dressing of windows after returning to take over Mark Cross.

All the above should be kept in mind in interpreting the comments of Picasso and Léger in regard to this period of Murphy's work. On the occasion of the first showing of *Razor* in an exhibition entitled “L'Art d'Aujourd'hui” in December 1925⁸⁰ (see photo), Picasso—whose work was also exhibited—dropped Murphy a complimentary note, seconding a review⁸¹ which singled out *Razor*. Murphy recounts this in a letter to Philip Barry, which the latter preserved. It was “all very satisfactory to me, I assure you,” Murphy continued. “He [Picasso] apparently meant it, saying that he liked very much my pictures, that they were simple, direct and it seemed to him Amurikin—certainly not

European.” It was around this time that “Léger announced that Gerald Murphy was the only *American* painter in Paris.”⁸²

I have already insisted on the more Cubist character of *Razor* as compared to Murphy's earlier work: the flat, box-like abstract forms which constitute the middle ground of a shallow space and which drop away on all four sides to the flat back plane. What appears to be an effect of foreshortening in the razor is actually a result of the Cubist device of representing elements of the same object from different angles. The rear of the razor's circular handle is shown head-on, forming a series of concentric circles parallel to the picture plane; the cylinder of the handle is shown from the side; and the neck and head of the razor, rather than being represented at an oblique angle consistent with the handle, are shown parallel to the picture plane. Murphy summarized this presentation as treating the razor “mechanically, in profile and section, from three points of view at once.”⁸³

If the razor projects visually as a result of this scheme, which here amounts to a naïve form of foreshortening, the fountain pen, which has a less engaging profile, gets its “relief” from its brilliant red and yellow coloring. (Its somewhat orangeish red is purposely and grindingly at odds with a more bluish red and the red-brown of the matchbox front and sides, asserting a kind of “bad taste” and giving an individual note to what threatened in Murphy's art—and perhaps in his personal aesthetic—to descend to “good taste.”) In a postcard Murphy sent to Ellen Barry, he spoke of strengthening “weak” forms with “striking, stronger colors,” and pointed to the reds which Picasso had used to bring out certain areas of the landscape on the other side of the card.

At the time of the Dallas exhibition, Murphy mistakenly dated *Razor* “1922,” and this no doubt forms the basis of MacAgy's catalog entry for the work. But in the 1926 letter to Philip Barry cited above, Murphy indicates that *Razor* was a later work. A few months after its inclusion, as *Nature Morte*, in the exhibition “L'Art d'Aujourd'hui,” it was entered, under the same title, in the Salon des Indépendants. In 1965 it was shown at the National Collection of Arts, Washington, D.C., and in 1966 was included in the opening exhibition of the new Whitney Museum building in New York.⁸⁴

Watch, 1924–25. Oil on canvas, 78½ x 78⅞”. Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Foundation for the Arts Collection, Gift of Gerald Murphy

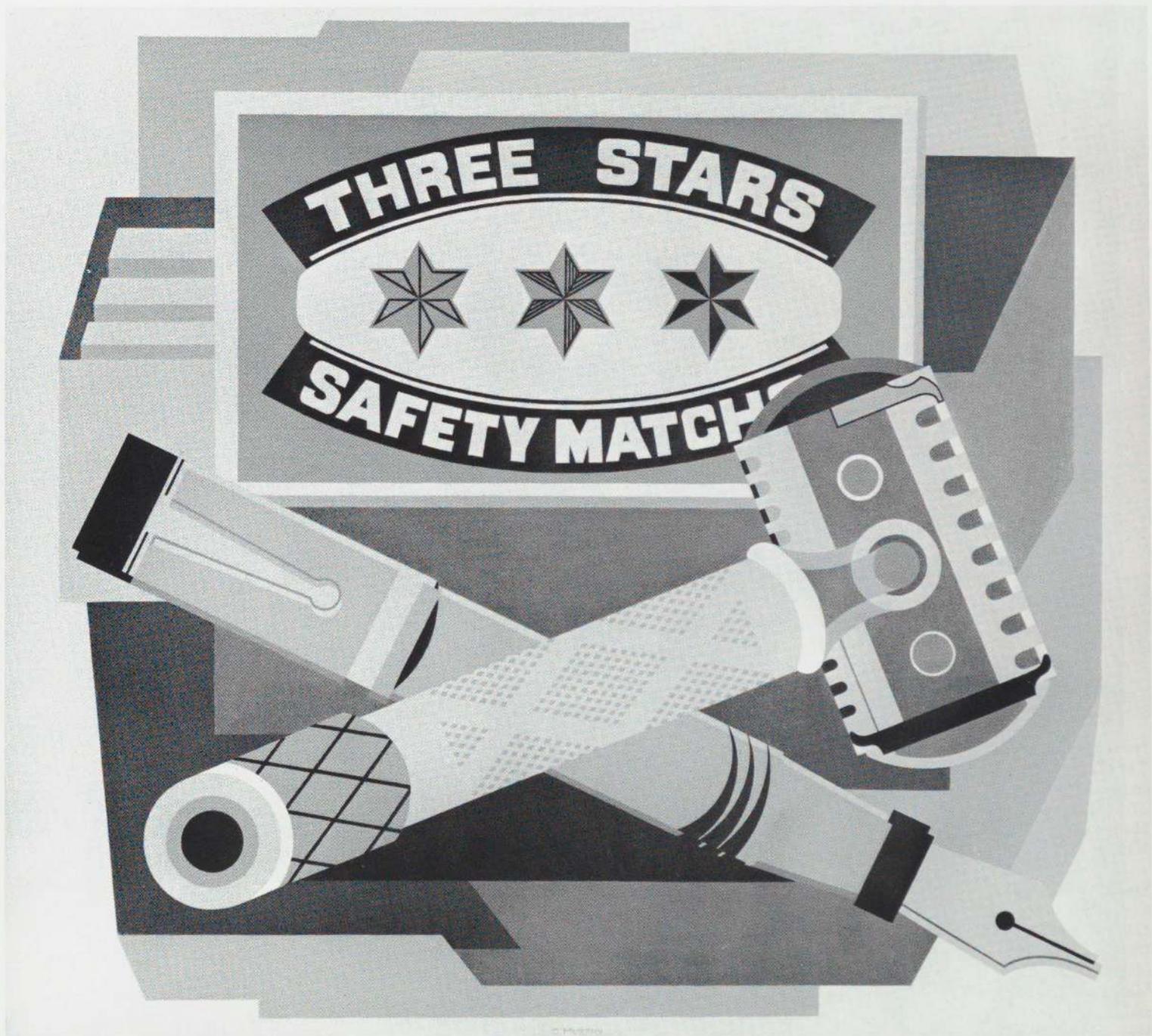
By the time Murphy executed this work, the watch—or clock—mechanism had already played an important role

“L'Art d'Aujourd'hui,”
December 1925

Razor, 1924.
32⅞ x 36½”

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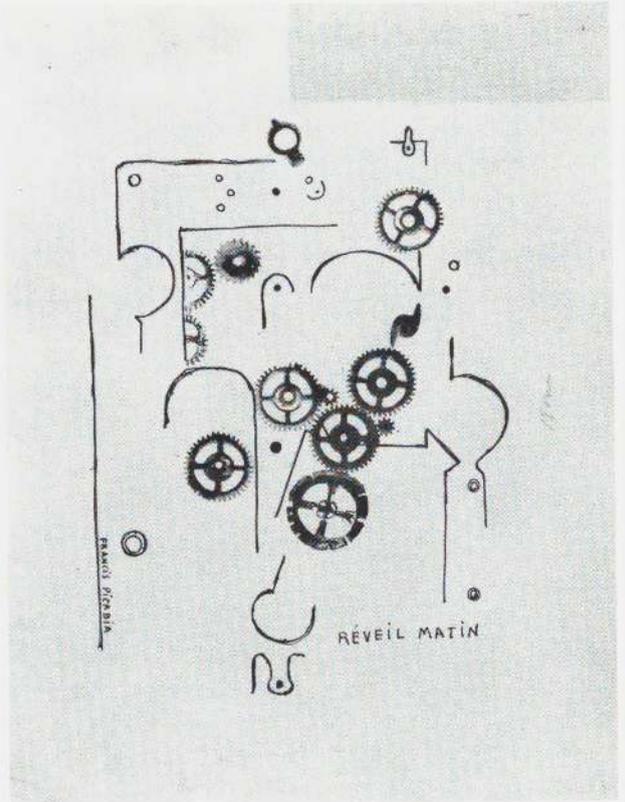
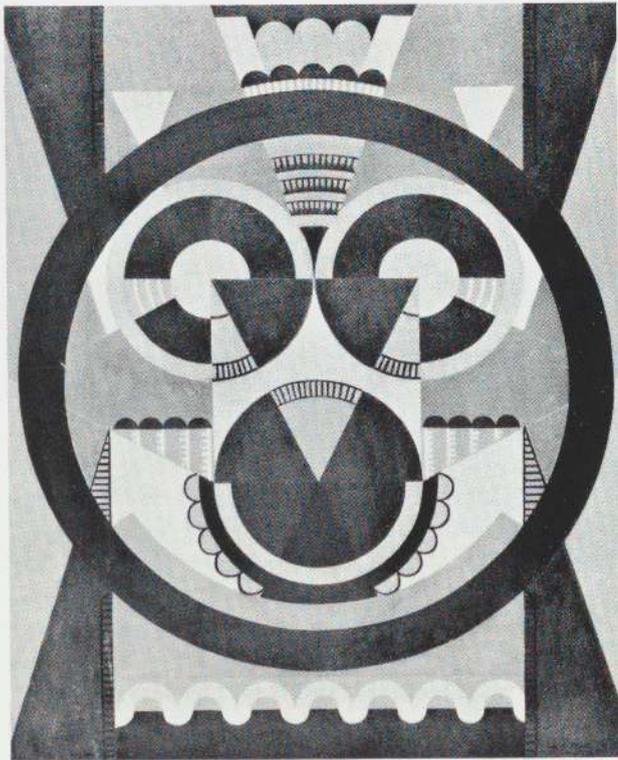


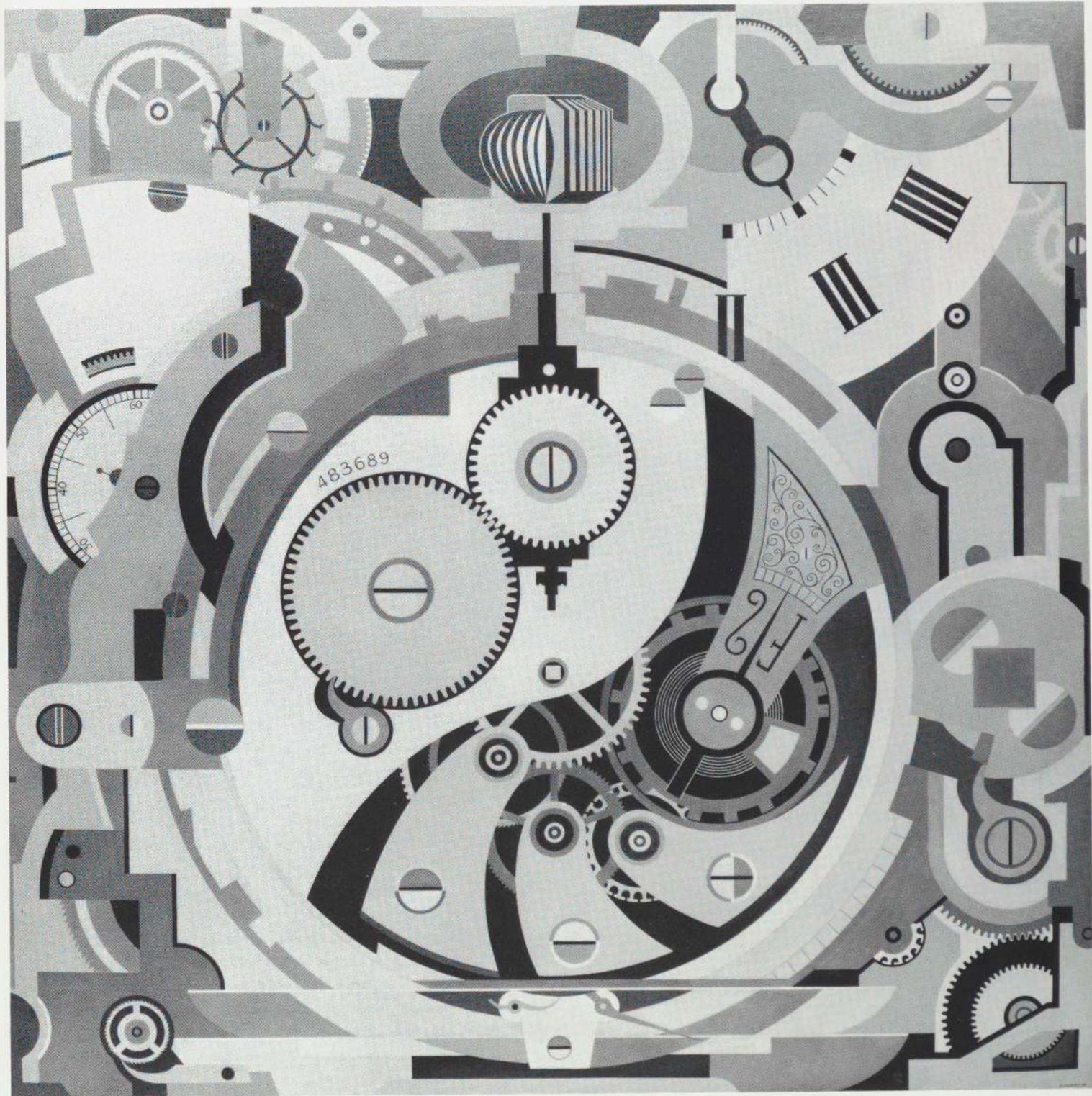
Natalia Goncharova,
The Clock, 1910. Oil
on canvas, 41 $\frac{3}{8}$ x
31 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Staatliche
Museen,
Nationalgalerie, Berlin

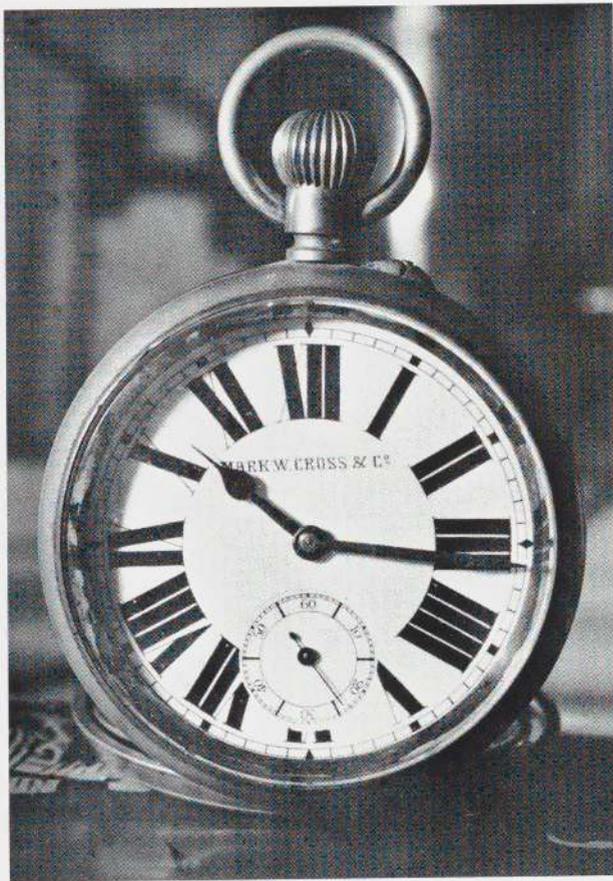
Francis Picabia, *Alarm
Clock*, 1919. Ink,
12 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 9". Collection
Dr. and Mrs. Barnett
Malbin, Birmingham,
Michigan (The Lydia
and Harry Lewis
Winston Collection)

Auguste Herbin,
Composition, 1920. Oil
on canvas, 81 x 65"

Watch, 1924–25.
78 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 78 $\frac{1}{2}$ "







in modernist iconography. Murphy probably knew Goncharova's *Futuristic Clock*, the flywheels of which suggest *Engine Room* more than *Watch*. He was certainly aware of such extrapolations of watch mechanisms as Picabia's *Reveil-Matin* and *Machine Tournez Vite*, and it has been suggested that *Watch* is "indebted" to the former.⁸⁵ But the kind of Dadaist irony and the analogies to human anatomy (more particularly sexual functions) which such works embodied were entirely alien to Murphy's detached and meditative, if no less fascinated, involvement in the motif. The inherent complexity of the mechanism led him to the most elaborate of his pictorial configurations, one in which the Cubism somewhat self-consciously employed in the multiple perspectives and forward-coming relief space of *Razor* is subsumed in a more personal paraphrase. At the same time, Murphy's Precisionist interest in the complex profiles of the watch mechanism itself sets the picture apart from contemporary Purist versions of the same subject (such as Herbin's *Composition* of a watch, with which it shares flat, overlapping patterns and centralized geometrical shapes).

With *Watch*, Murphy's iconography grows still more personal. The picture is an amalgam of two objects that were very familiar to him. One was a railroad watch specifically designed for Mark Cross. (Murphy's father had designed and marketed the first wristwatch, at the suggestion of a British officer who found pocket watches too cumbersome for trench warfare.)⁸⁶ The other was a small gold pocket watch that, according to Murphy's daughter, Honoria, he especially loved and kept propped up on a table with its mechanism showing. Despite and perhaps because of the monumental rendering of the motif—magnified well beyond that of the objects in *Razor*—*Watch* becomes a more intimate, more personal picture. It represents an object Murphy had frequently pondered. He spoke of being "always struck by the mystery and depth of the interiors of a watch—its multiplicity, variety and feeling of movement, and man's grasp at perpetuity."⁸⁷

Murphy established the design for *Watch* by setting his subject, seen from behind and parallel to the surface, squarely in the center of the canvas. The interior mechanism rests almost on the bottom of the field, with the neck, winding screw, and ring reaching almost to the top. The area around the circular casing has been filled with extrapolations of the interior mechanism as well as sections of a watch face (whose Roman numerals are perversely shown counterclockwise), including the "seconds" dial. An obsessional quality, expressed in the aggrandizements of *Razor*, becomes almost maniacal here in the multiplication and jigsawing of these forms.

The greater subtlety and more marked formal abstraction of *Watch* as compared to *Razor* is seconded in the coloring. Gray, the color of steel watch parts, prevails. There are at least fourteen different nuances of gray distributed over the image, ranging from a cool steel gray to warmer tones that have been inflected slightly toward the yellow and ochre that represent respectively the highlight and shadow of the gold watchcase. These latter hues, which bridge the middle values of the picture, are used to define the rim of the circular case and then are distributed within and without this circle in an irregular, inventive pattern right to the edges of the field. The autonomy of color within the configuration, encouraged no doubt by the nature of the motif itself, is of a more abstract order than anything in Murphy's painting before or after *Watch*. The distribution of the color—indeed, of the forms themselves—constitutes a kind of proto-allover design, which indicates that Murphy's assimilations had now gone beyond the twenties versions of Synthetic Cubism that provided the underpinning for *Razor* to include configurations derived from high Analytic Cubism.

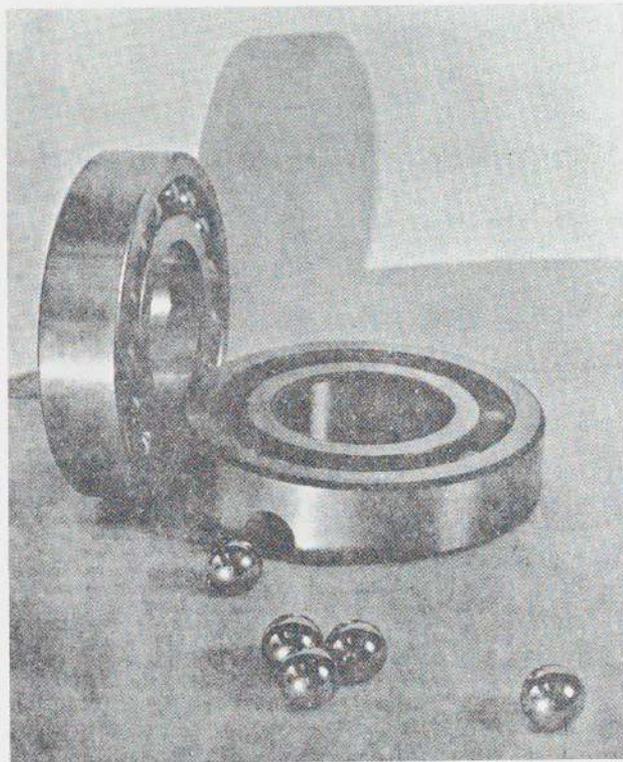
Late in life, Murphy misdated *Watch* as "1923," but we have seen that the painting (although dated 1925 on its face) must have been begun in 1924 and completed early in 1925, in time to be entered in the Salon des Indépendants of that year. Reaction to it at the Salon was very favorable. Florent Fels, referring to Murphy as a "poet and painter," spoke of *Watch* as "first astonishing and soon seducing." Murphy, he continued, has revealed that the motif of a watch is "as plastically exploitable as . . . Cézanne's apples."⁸⁸ In December 1925, *Watch* was shown along with *Razor* in "L'Art d'Aujourd'hui." It was subsequently purchased by Archibald MacLeish, but unable to hang it satisfactorily because of its size, MacLeish exchanged it for *Wasp and Pear* in the early thirties. It lay rolled up in Murphy's Antibes studio and then in his home on Long Island until it was stretched and framed for its showing in Dallas in 1960. *Watch* was exhibited again in "Léger and Purist Paris" at the Tate Gallery from November 1970 to January 1971.

Doves, 1925. Oil on canvas, 48½ x 36". Collection Mr. and Mrs. William M. Donnelly

Late one afternoon the Murphys' yacht, "Honorina," put into the port of Genoa. When he went into town to buy provisions, Murphy saw an old church in Ionic style, in the niches of which doves were resting. "I was struck by the relationship," he told Tomkins, "and took notes."⁸⁹ The notebook entry reads:



Railroad watch
(front and back)
manufactured for
Mark W. Cross & Co.,
from the estate of
Gerald Murphy



Picture: Capital, ionic, corinthian in large scale with deep shadow (constructive)—with one or more pigeons clustered flat on it.

The delicate, almost pastel colors of *Doves* recall the early evening light and give a nostalgic sense of distance and even a certain mystery to the scene. The architectural members, shown in relief, and as shadowy profiles, are all segmented and relocated over the surface in Cubist fashion—maximal relief toward the center of the image falling away to flatness at the sides.

The three doves (or pigeons), drawn in profile and also segmented, are entirely flat. But the difference in size between the trio schematically suggests varying levels in space. The isolation of the largest bird's head, as in a window, lends an almost Surreal quality to the image.⁹⁰

Doves was not publicly exhibited until the Dallas exhibition of 1960.

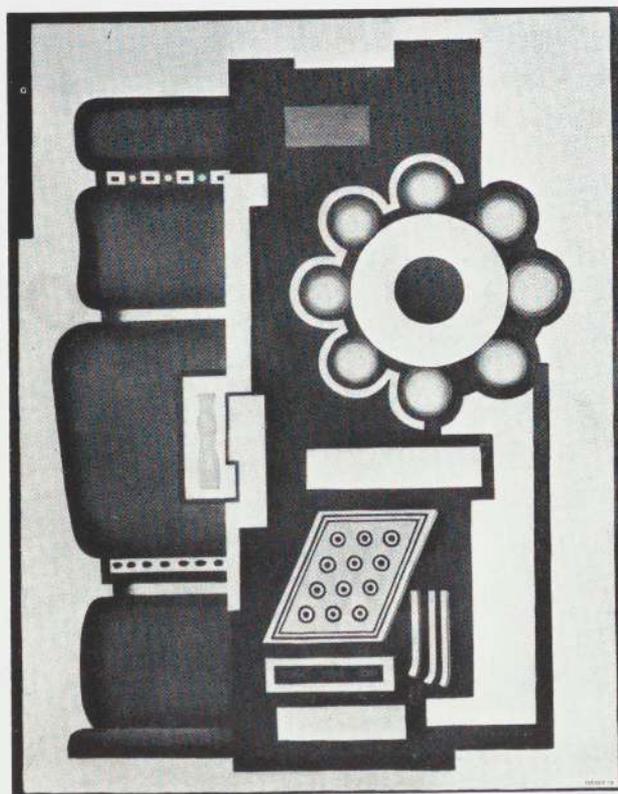
Laboratory, 1925 (Lost)

No trace remains of this painting, which was apparently damaged en route to the 1926 Salon des Indépendants. It is listed in the catalog of the Salon, but was probably not shown because of the damage.⁹¹ The notes for it in the *cahier* are as follows:

Picture: group of chemical retorts—diaphanous, *white line*, *profile shapes*, tender colors, sure graceful forms, ghosted. On glass, *transparent paint*, with colored paper background. Laboratory table as setting.

Ball Bearings, 1926. Oil on canvas, c. 60 x 40" ⁹² (Lost)

As this picture is the only one aside from *Watch* not mentioned in Murphy's notes,⁹³ we may presume that the idea of painting it followed directly from an encounter with the object itself. Walking down the Champs-Élysées, Murphy happened on a display of "S.K.F." Swedish ball bearings. He was so struck by them that he purchased the largest one and mounted it as a revolving sculpture. Later, he was delighted by the fact that the same object had been selected—indeed, had been chosen as the catalog cover—for Philip Johnson's famous "Machine Art" exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in 1934.⁹⁴ Even earlier, the aesthetic beauty of ball bearings was realized by Paul Strand in a photograph used as the frontispiece of the November 1922 issue of *Broom*, a magazine with which Murphy was undoubtedly familiar. Léger also made a painting of the motif, in the same year as Murphy.



Frontispiece to November 1922 issue of *Broom*, based on photograph by Paul Strand

Fernand Léger, *Ball Bearing*, 1926. Oil on canvas, 57½ x 45". Kunstmuseum, Basel, La Roche Bequest

Doves, 1925. 48⅞ x 36"

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Ball Bearings was never exhibited. No contemporary references to it, or trace of it, have been found.

Library, 1926–27. Oil on canvas, 72 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 53". Collection Mr. and Mrs. William M. Donnelly

Insofar as it represents objects in a large interior space, rather than in isolation as in *Watch* or in limited staged groupings as in *Razor*, *Library* was a more ambitious undertaking than anything Murphy had painted since 1923. He now faced the classic problem of assimilating the data that spell out a deep space with the requirements of a two-dimensional configuration, and his solution was conventionally Cubist. Space is suggested only schematically—through overlapping and diminution—and the motifs are locked into the embracing surface design. The books, the globe, and the sculptured bust of Emerson contain only slight hints of relief—in the bust, the middle values of the shading are suppressed in favor of simple black and white—and the forms of all the objects are made maximally assimilable to the surface design by being shown only frontally or in absolute profile. The identification of the pilaster as the central axis, combined with the spotting of the objects within discrete quadrants of the field, establishes a thoroughgoing geometricity that is echoed by the interior framing devices.

The notes for *Library*, which I have already cited, occur in Murphy's *cahier* after the entries for the October 1926 trip to New York. Consequently it cannot have been begun before late autumn of that year and was certainly completed in 1927. The picture had been rolled and placed in a garage where it lay forgotten until the early sixties. This is its first public exhibition.

Cocktail, 1927. Oil on canvas, 28 x 29". Collection Mrs. Philip Barry

The rigorous geometry manifest in *Library* is sustained in *Cocktail*; even in the curved lines of the glasses and the segmented circles of the lemon there is no trace of the sinuous arabesques of *Doves* or *Watch*. In *Cocktail*, however, the will to geometry is put in the service of an economy not to be found in *Library*. The compression of its forms into a narrower and shallower space gives it a comparative tautness, paralleled in the manner that its few high-keyed colors, the yellow of the lemon and the reds of the cherry and cigar box, "cut," as Murphy put it in his notes for *Cocktail*, the prevailing *grisaille* of the composition.

One imagines that the bar tray of Murphy *père*, which inspired *Cocktail*, was more casually arranged than in this picture. The manner in which objects are regimented here

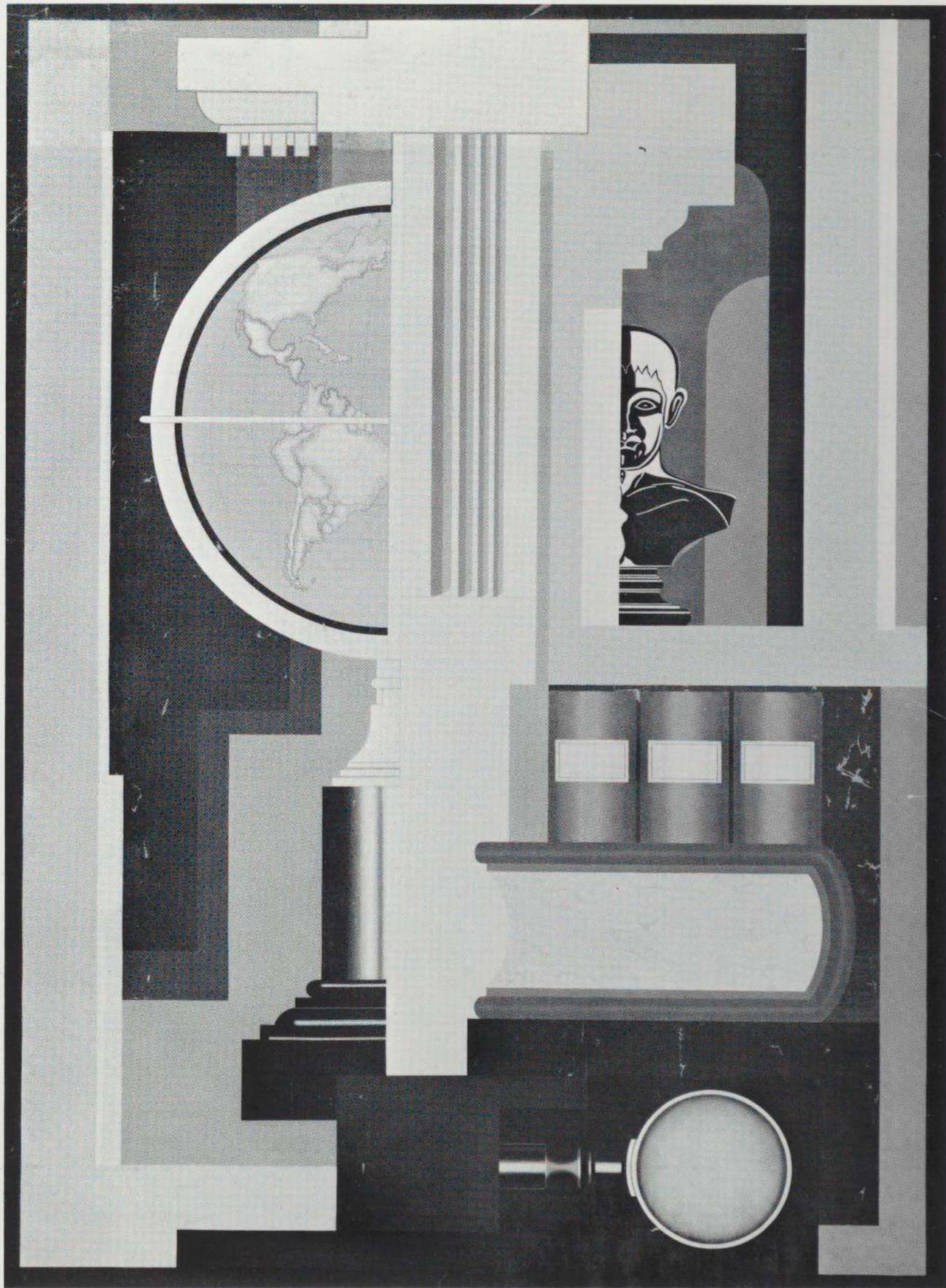
—the cigars are like so many tin soldiers, and only the whimsically segmented corkscrew relieves the seriousness—argues a highly stylized attitude toward the amenities of life. But such formalization derives more probably from purely aesthetic interests—that Cubistic pressing-together and overlapping of the forms which would reach its apogee in Murphy's next painting, *Portrait*. These Cubist devices are assimilated to a conception of layout which, in its rigorous frontality and centrality, is also like that of the naïf painter—and, indeed, the four months' labor Murphy expended in the precise rendering of the image on the cigar box (which has been preserved) is very much in the naïf spirit. It is tempting to read into Murphy's choice of this particular cigar-box image a kind of visual pun or private allegory summing up his own interests and endeavors; there is the globe, which appeared in *Library*, the flywheel seen in *Engine Room* and *Watch*, the compass, which alludes to mechanical drawing, the schooner that reflects his love of yachting, and, of course, the palette.⁹⁵

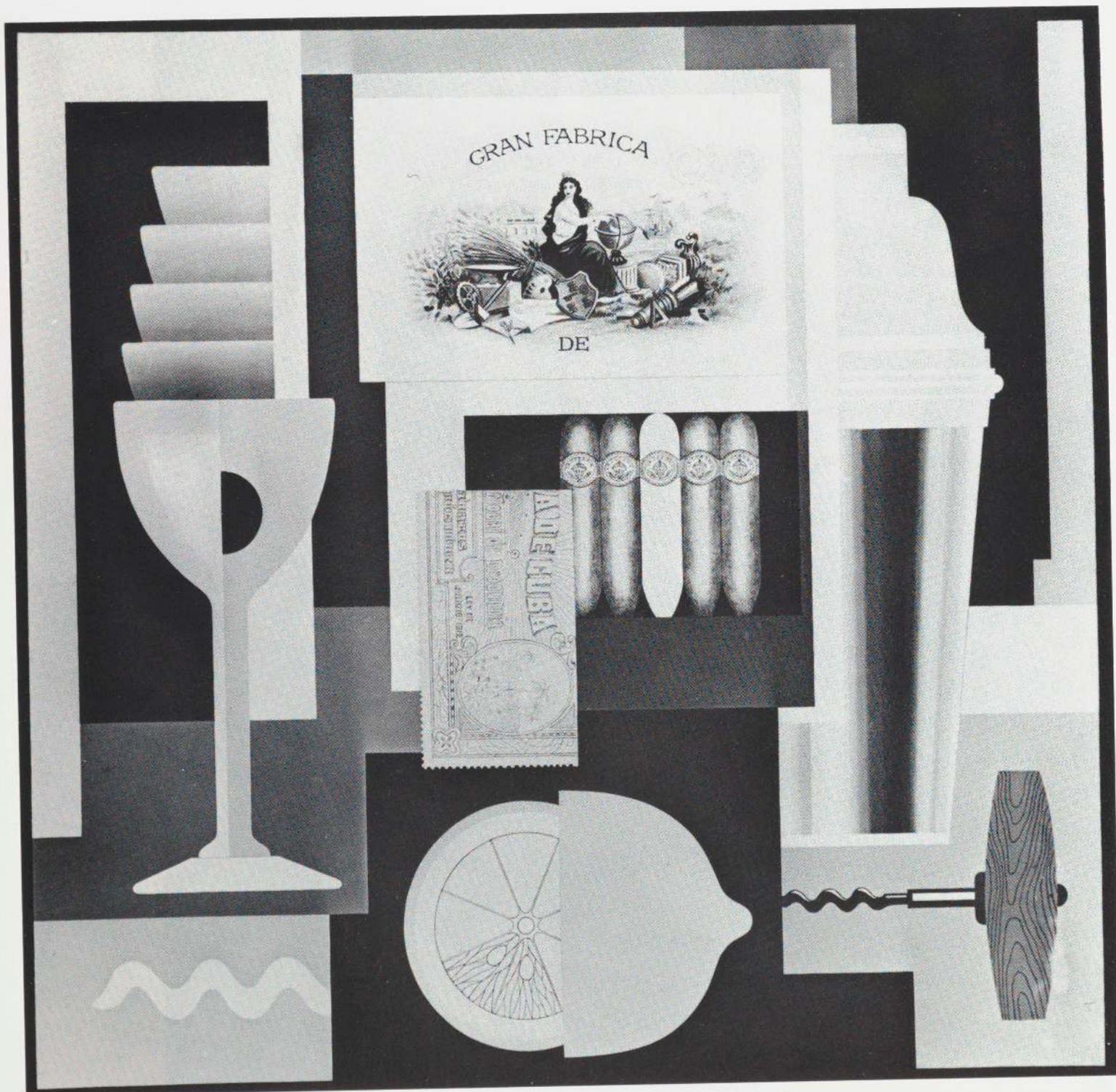
Cocktail was exhibited for the first time in 1960 in the Dallas exhibition and shown again during that year at the North Carolina Museum of Art.⁹⁶

Library, 1926–27
(before restoration).
72 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 53"

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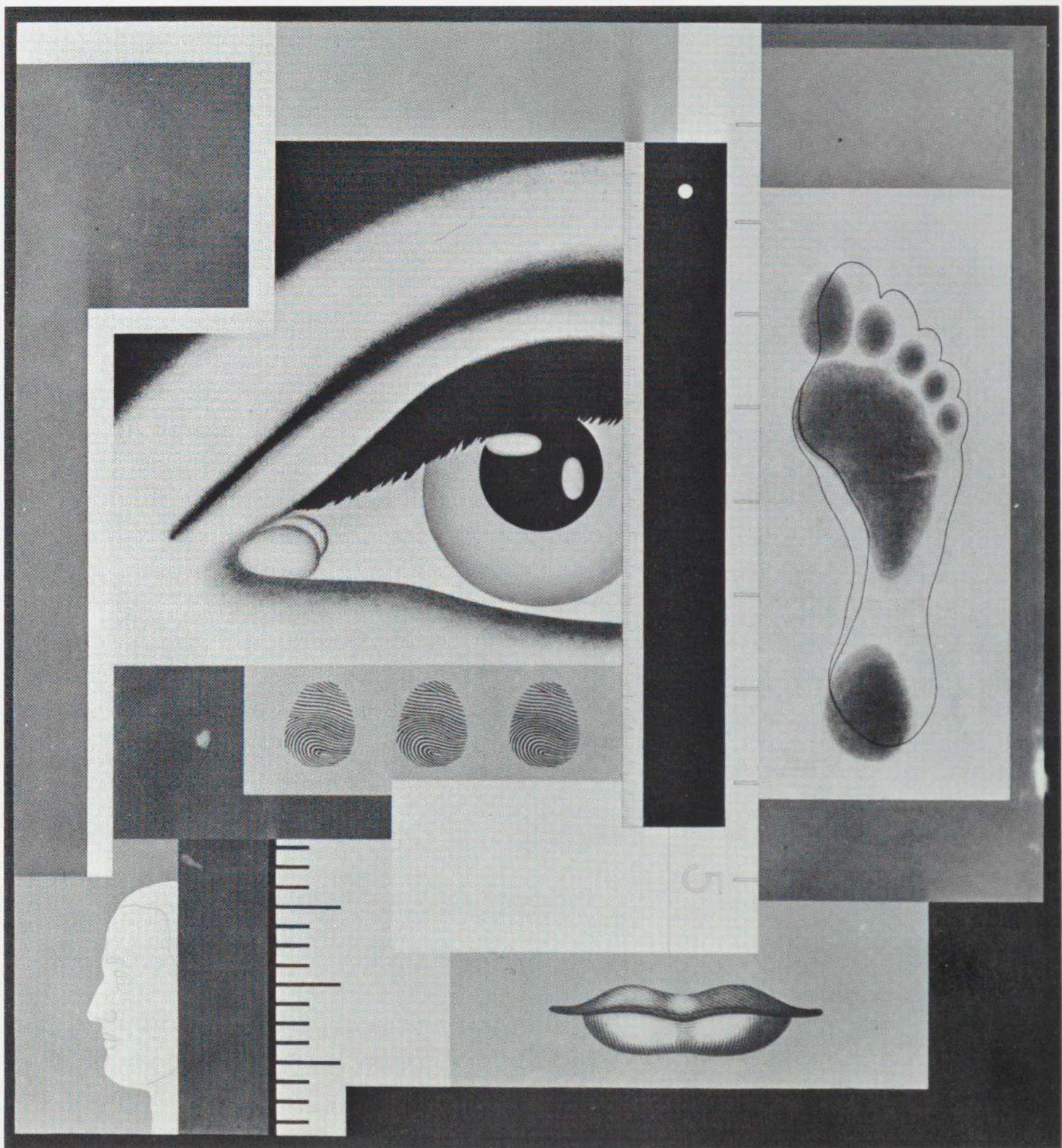
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Cocktail, 1927. 28 x 29"

Portrait, 1928. c. 32 x 32"



Portrait, 1928. Oil on canvas, c. 32 x 32" ⁹⁷ (Destroyed)

Cubist displacement, introduced subtly if marginally in *Watch*, stated as a leitmotif in *Doves*, and further modified in *Cocktail*, was carried to its furthest point in Murphy's work in *Portrait*—where the isolation of incongruously scaled elements in separate panels recalls certain of Léger's paintings of 1926–27. The "witty juxtaposition" of these elements may represent, as has been suggested, "a sardonic comment on Cubist 'displacement.'" ⁹⁸ But in the very degree of their displacement, these constituents of a self-portrait present one of the most detached and impersonal images an artist has ever made of himself. Murphy is physically present. He printed his foot directly on the canvas, drawing a contour line around it, and with a brush pared down to a single camel's hair, ⁹⁹ he painted thumbprints that are replicas of his own. But the eye and lips are no more revealing or expressive than Murphy's foot, the artist's psychology remaining shielded from us by the impersonality of both the conception and style. The depersonalization is summarized by the profile of the lower left corner, which is not that of Murphy himself but a "conglomerate standard facial profile of Caucasian Man from the archives of the Bibliothèque Nationale." ¹⁰⁰

Two entries in the notebook are relevant to this painting; both are checked as "executed":

Picture: an eye,—lashes, brow, lids, etc.
big scale,—even pores, hairs

*(Use tracing of a foot in a picture)

Portrait was never exhibited. Murphy gave it to his friend, the painter Vladimir Orloff, who designed Murphy's schooner, the "Weatherbird." The painting was destroyed when Orloff's cabin at Pampelonne, near Saint-Tropez, was razed during a World War II landing of American troops.

Wasp and Pear, 1929. Oil on canvas, 36¾ x 38¾". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Archibald MacLeish

Murphy considered *Wasp and Pear* "probably the best" of his pictures, and in some respects it is. Though it lacks the impact of the more declarative *Razor* and *Watch*, it equally if not more rewards sustained perusal. The framing devices and geometrical ground extend Murphy's explorations in *Cocktail* and *Portrait*. In those pictures, however, the underlying geometricity is reinforced in the rectilinear contouring of the foreground objects, whereas in *Wasp and Pear* the insect and fruit have more freely invented arabesqued silhouettes, for which the background acts rather as a foil. The progression through a shallow space from the rear planes where the insect's comb is located to the bulging surface of the pear in the center of the field is more consistent and more controlled than in previous works, and indicates a surer grasp of Cubism.

The notebook entry for *Wasp and Pear* reads:

Picture: hornet (colossal) on a pear (marks on skin, leaf veins, etc.)

(battening on the fruit, clenched . . .

This is Murphy's only convincing rendering of an organic, living thing. His doves are poetic ciphers, and the human features in *Portrait* resolve into textbook illustration. Murphy had always been a careful observer of nature—"Have you ever seen the lining of a potato bug's wings?" he wrote Sara during their courtship ¹⁰¹—and he "never forgot the large technically drawn and colored charts" of fruits, animals, and insects which he had encountered by chance during his wartime training. ¹⁰² But despite the precision of his drawing and the accuracy of the textbook-like microscopic enlargement of the wasp's leg, ¹⁰³ Murphy had no Audubonesque scientific concern in this image. His emphasis is on inventive patterning, as in the head and transparent wing of the wasp, and to that end he was perfectly content to omit the insect's rear wings.

Wasp and Pear was acquired in exchange for *Watch* by Archibald MacLeish, who gave it to The Museum of Modern Art shortly before Murphy's death. It was exhibited in Dallas in 1960, at the University of Maryland in 1968, and was included in an exhibition circulated within the United States in 1969. In late 1970 and early 1971 it was exhibited at the Tate Gallery, London. ¹⁰⁴

Wasp and Pear, 1929.
36¾ x 38¾"



1. Although he had seen Cubist paintings in 1913 at the Armory Show, he had not responded to them. In a postcard to Frances Myers Brennan, November 11, 1949, Murphy wrote: "I may have given you the impression that I had some info. on the 1913 Armory Show, I shouldn't have. I recall going—but I was not sufficiently perceptive to have harboured many memories. Sara, on the other hand, felt v. strongly and longed to buy, but was dissuaded by reactionaries . . ."
 2. Douglas MacAgy, "Gerald Murphy: 'New Realist' of the Twenties," *Art in America* (New York), vol. 51, no. 2 (April 1963), p. 50.
 3. Murphy's account of this event dates from October or November of 1962. (Correspondence with the late Douglas MacAgy, whose papers are on deposit with The Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.) It is unlikely that paintings by Matisse, whose dealer was Bernheim Jeune, or by Gris, whose dealer was Kahnweiler, would have been hanging in Paul Rosenberg's gallery. Murphy undoubtedly saw work by Matisse and Gris elsewhere in Paris at about the same time he remembers going to Rosenberg's.
 4. Cited by Calvin Tomkins in *Living Well Is the Best Revenge* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), p. 25.
 5. Taped conversation with Calvin Tomkins, c. 1960.
 6. In conversation with Calvin Tomkins, 1962.
 7. MacAgy, "'New Realist' of the Twenties," pp. 50, 52.
 8. Murphy, in a postcard to Ellen Barry, October 27, 1963.
 9. Murphy, in response to a questionnaire from MacAgy, October or November 1962.
 10. Letter to Calvin Tomkins, September 12, 1963.
 11. During the preparation of this exhibition, the artist's daughter, Honoria Murphy Donnelly, and the Murphys' close friend, Frances Myers Brennan, made careful searches of Murphy's effects both in Washington, D.C., and in East Hampton, N.Y., but were able to turn up only two very tentative sketches (see p. 16). There is the possibility that other drawings may still exist among the unsifted material in Murphy's estate.
 12. See Note 4.
 13. From a taped conversation with Calvin Tomkins, 1960.
 14. Lillian Hellman, *An Unfinished Woman* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1969), p. 78.
 15. *Engine Room* might appear to be an exception, but its original title was *Turbines*.
 16. Tomkins, p. 95.
 17. Undated letter to Tomkins (1960?).
 18. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), p. 28.
 19. Nathaniel Benchley in conversation (March 1, 1974) with the author.
 20. Tomkins, p. 144.
 21. Martin L. Friedman, in the catalog for "The Precisionist View in American Art," The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 13–December 25, 1960, p. 12.
 22. Matisse had spent the summer of 1904 west of Antibes at Saint-Tropez, then a tiny fishing village that could be reached only by boat. The sketches he made of bathers and picnickers on the beach suggested the composition of his *Luxe, Calme et Volupté* of 1904–05, which in turn provided a model for the more mythologized images of classical serenity such as *Bonheur de Vivre* (1905–06).
 23. Tomkins, pp. 125–26.
 24. Letter of December 17, 1952, to Katharine Kuh (in the files of The Museum of Modern Art, New York).
 25. From Tomkins' files and printed with the consent of Nathaniel Benchley.
 26. In a telephone conversation with the author, February 1974.
 27. In 1941, in a note congratulating a young artist friend on her first solo show, Murphy wrote: ". . . it reminds me of the state I was in when I suddenly saw a poster on the poteaux along the Blvd. St. Honoré reading [here follows on the verso of the note a sketch of the poster] Murphy—Exposition—Bernheim Jeune—1 rue de la Boétie [sic]."
- Bernheim Jeune, whose records are intact, deny that they ever held a Murphy show, pointing out that the nature of the work was alien to the taste of their gallery (they showed Bonnard and Matisse but, according to the Director, "detested" Léger), adding that an exhibition of only nine pictures would never have interested them. It seems doubtful that Murphy could have mistaken the name of a gallery where he had a one-man show only five years after the event was supposed to have taken place. In any case, extensive inquiries have turned up no Murphy one-man exhibition in any other galleries in Paris, nor have any reviews or advertisements been found in contemporary magazines or newspapers. None of the people closest to Murphy remember a one-man exhibition of his work. Archibald MacLeish has no recollection of such an exhibition and feels that had one taken place he would certainly have been aware of it.
- Nevertheless, in June of 1955, Murphy told Rudi Blesh of a one-man show of his work at Bernheim Jeune in 1935, a fact which Blesh duly published in his book, *Modern Art USA* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 95. In 1962, in response to a questionnaire from Douglas MacAgy, Murphy wrote: "B. J. Show: They had approached me to exhibit as no American painting had been shown at the large galleries on the Rive Droite, either on the r. de la Boetie or the Faubourg St. Germain [sic] quarter." MacAgy published this (see Note 32) in his *Art in America* article with the new date, 1936, given him by Murphy. When Tomkins was writing his biography of Murphy, the latter confirmed the accuracy of MacAgy's data, and Tomkins published the MacAgy listing unchanged in the catalogue raisonné forming the last chapter of his book.
- Opinions among Murphy's friends differ as to how to explain this apparent mystery. Some feel that it was Murphy's own sly spoof of himself. Others feel that Murphy's penchant for fantasy and invention was such that, having invented this exhibition as an ironic touch in writing his young artist friend in 1941, he eventually came to believe in its existence.
28. Letter to Douglas MacAgy, October 27, 1960.
 29. Undated note to Tomkins (c. 1962).
 30. Blesh, p. 95.
 31. "American Genius in Review No. I," May 11–June 19, 1960, Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts, Texas. The other four artists in this exhibition were: Tom Benrimo, John Covert, Morgan Russell, and Morton L. Schamberg. MacAgy states in his introduction to the catalog of this show that "it is possible to trace the glimmerings of the idea [for the exhibition] to con-

versations with Mr. Rudi Blesh," and, more specifically, in his unpublished correspondence credits Blesh's book, *Modern Art USA*, with having introduced Murphy's work to him.

32. MacAgy's chronology (p. 56) follows:

1922 . . . *Razor*, 32 x 36"; exhibited: Indépendants 1923; Bernheim Jeune 1936; Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts 1960. Collection of Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts.

1923 . . . *Boatdeck, Cumarder*, 18 x 12'; exhibited: Indépendants 1924; Bernheim Jeune 1936. Collection of the artist.

1924 . . . *Engine Room*, 60 x 44"; exhibited: Indépendants 1924; Bernheim Jeune 1936. Collection of the artist.

1925 . . . *Watch*, 78 x 78"; exhibited: Indépendants 1925; Bernheim Jeune 1936; Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts 1960. Collection of Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts.

1925 . . . *Doves*, 47 x 35"; exhibited: Indépendants 1926; Bernheim Jeune 1936; Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts 1960. Collection of Honoria Donnelly.

1926 . . . *Roulement à Billes*, 60 x 40"; exhibited: Indépendants 1926; Bernheim Jeune 1936. Collection of the artist.

1926 . . . *Bibliothèque*, 6 x 4'; damaged en route to the Indépendants and never shown. Collection of the artist.

1927 . . . *Wasp and Pear*, 35 x 37"; exhibited: Bernheim Jeune 1936; Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts 1960. Collection of Archibald MacLeish.

1928 . . . *Cocktail*, 28 x 29"; exhibited: Bernheim Jeune 1936; Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts 1960; North Carolina Museum of Art 1961. Collection of the artist.

1929-30 . . . *Portrait*, 32 x 32"; exhibited: Bernheim Jeune 1936. Collection of Vladimir Orloff.

33. Although *Library* had not been found at the time of the 1960 exhibition in Dallas, it was located sometime in the succeeding three years and is listed but not reproduced by MacAgy in "New Realist' of the Twenties" (p. 56).

34. Murphy most often spoke of having painted "only during seven years," which would be the normal way of expressing what I believe to be the correct time-span, 1922-29. This, however, would mean that he had actually been painting during eight years.

35. It is difficult to fix the exact dates of Murphy's trip to Europe in 1936, but, as there is no other project in his notebook for constructing an object, it is not illogical to assume that he may have been there during or after the exhibition of Surrealist objects ("Exposition Surréaliste d'Objets"), held at the Galerie Charles Ratton May 22-29, 1936, which caused great excitement and provoked a wave of object-making among artists in Paris. Murphy's notebook entry reads: "August: '36 / Construction in frame: rug-beater (rattan), sickle, parts of recognizable household objects, such as hammer (handle sawed 1/2 off?),—use (of color on some?)." Murphy was apparently fascinated by the forms of the type of rug-beater he describes as he had earlier conceived it in one of his projects for a picture in his notebook, "Picture:—Batterie de cuisine on a table,—rug-beater in rattan on the wall behind, use half-toile of kettle. (flat-iron?)," and, almost three decades later, he decorated the walls of his East Hampton house with rug-beaters in graduated sizes.

36. It is known that Murphy was something of an amateur

photographer, and the theory that these New York notations may have been intended to indicate camera angles is supported by the use of the word "shot"—for example, "shot down Madison getting lighter (silhouette gradually with Met Tower lightest value & gold cupola on it." The notation itself evokes photographic images by Sheeler, with whose work Murphy was certainly familiar; not only was it frequently reproduced in contemporary periodicals such as *Broom*, but in January of 1926, the very year of these "New York" projects, his own *Boatdeck* and *Watch* were reproduced by Jacques Mauny in an article, "New York—1926" (*L'Art Vivant*, Paris, vol. 2, no. 25, January 1, 1926, pp. 53-58), which also included photos by Sheeler.

37. The letter is undated, but the play's outline is so expanded and amplified that it must have succeeded the notebook entry. The plot juxtaposes the attitudes prevalent in American culture toward animal biological function with those held about human sexual function. He remarks to Barry, "Is there dramatic material in the fact that intelligent people, taking a frank interest in the workings of sex and its results in animals are at a loss and unable to see or act clearly as regards sex in the case of human beings. / I was once trying to explain the characteristics of American marriage and divorce to Picasso, and he said: 'but it seems that Americans fear only one thing: the physical fact.'" 38. In this section Murphy quotes a passage that is probably connected with Pushkin's first proposal to his future wife, Natalia Goncharova (for this information the author is indebted to Marina Ledkovsky, Professor of Russian at Barnard College). Knowing it was to the painter Natalia Goncharova (descended from the same Goncharova family) that Murphy first presented himself as a pupil when he wished to become a painter, one may attribute his excerpting and underlining this passage to his own, very personal feelings: "(1st call on N. Goncharova) He was modest and awkward at this first visit, *confused by the importance and conviction of his own intentions.*"

39. The third and only other date in the notebook, "November, 1931," relates only to his notes on William Bolitho's *Twelve against the Gods*.

40. No one knows the exact date when Murphy completed his last picture (which I take to be *Wasp and Pear*), but that it was 1929 and not 1930, as MacAgy asserts in assigning *Portrait* to 1929-30, is confirmed by Tomkins: "In October, 1929, soon after the Fitzgeralds left for Paris, the Murphys' youngest child, Patrick, then nine, developed a persistent fever, which was first diagnosed as bronchitis and then found to be tuberculosis" (p. 120). "Murphy no longer painted; he had stopped abruptly when Patrick first became ill, and he never took it up again" (p. 123).

41. See Note 91.

42. Murphy's notations appear in his *cahier* as follows:

"Picture:—whole canvas given to one flower, its *construction*, parts, pistons [*sic*], stamens, its run of colors, its own shapes: just the FLOWER. (with insect, etc.)

"Picture:—same as preceding with an insect, caterpillar

"Picture:—same with a fruit,—cut into sections to show strata and construction

"Picture:—a sill of potted hyacinths, pane at angle, cornice, window sash, curtain, etc."

43. While these tentative sketches do not exactly conform to

Murphy's notebook description, they do show hyacinths on a support in front of a window and are clearly related to the checked entry in the notebook.

44. Cited in "American Ballet Will Give Paris All the Latest Broadway Whims / 'Within the Quota' Has Jazz, Shimmies, and All the Best in Strictly Home-Grown Make-Up," *New York Herald, European Edition* (Paris), October 25, 1923, p. 6 (anonymous).
45. The exact opening date was February 10, and it seems certain that the catalog, in which *Engine Room* is listed as no. 3439, had to be formed at least a month before the opening date of the exhibition.
46. For a discussion of the dates of work on *Within the Quota* in relation to the chronology of *Boatdeck*, see p. 20.
47. Cited by Tomkins, p. 96.
48. He spoke of being "nourished on Léger's, Picasso's, Braque's and Gris' abstractions" (cited in MacAgy, *American Genius in Review*, n.p.), but his work was more immediately influenced by Léger and the Purists.
49. Cited in MacAgy, *American Genius in Review*, n.p.
50. Although no sizes are given in the catalog of the Salon des Indépendants, the above size was given by Murphy to MacAgy, and since it approximately corresponds to the proportions of the existing photograph, the author presumes it to be close to the original dimensions.
51. William Agee, "New York Dada, 1910-30," *Art News Annual* (New York), vol. XXXIV, 1968, p. 111.
52. "American Art in Salon," *New York Herald* (Paris), February 9, 1923.
53. *Ibid.*
54. "American's Eighteen-Foot Picture Nearly Splits Independent Artists," *New York Herald* (Paris), February 8, 1924, pp. 1-2.
55. See MacAgy, "New Realist of the Twenties," p. 50, and Tomkins, p. 26.
56. No. 4, April 1924, n.p.
57. Mauny, p. 58. See Note 36.
58. Although Murphy himself told Tomkins (p. 26) that the "Aquitania" had been *Boatdeck's* model, he did so in a conversation held some forty years after the fact.
59. The *New York Herald* (Paris, February 8, 1924, p. 2) cites Murphy: "My painting is an authentic work, based on 100 photographs of the Olympic and the Paris which I took on recent sea voyages."
60. See De Fayet, "Le Salon d'Automne," *L'Esprit Nouveau* (Paris), no. 13, no date, p. 1506. (*L'Esprit Nouveau* was published in twenty-eight numbers between 1920 and 1925.)
61. Phyllis Plous, "Charles Demuth and the Twenties," in the catalog *Charles Demuth: The Mechanical Encrusted on the Living* (Santa Barbara and Berkeley: University of California, 1971), p. 8.
62. Paul Rosenfeld, "American Painting," *The Dial* (Chicago), vol. LXXI (December 1921), p. 663.
63. Plous, p. 8.
64. It has been impossible to determine if Murphy visited the United States during his first year abroad, but, had he done so, it is unlikely that he would have seen *Paquebot*; the painting apparently was not exhibited during that year, nor was it reproduced in any contemporary magazines. Ferdinand Howald

bought *Paquebot* in March 1923 from the Daniel Gallery in New York, and it may have been with Daniel for at least part of 1922; there is, however, no reason to believe that Murphy would have visited this gallery.

65. Response to questionnaire from MacAgy, October or November 1962.
66. This information comes from Honoria Murphy Donnelly, the artist's daughter.
67. In 1964, in response to a proposal that he have a one-man exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery, Gerald Murphy asked Vladimir Orloff to locate *Boatdeck* through Lefebvre-Foinet; that firm, however, could find no record of Murphy's picture. During the preparation of the exhibition for which this book serves as a catalog, the author asked M. Lucien Lefebvre-Foinet to try to trace Murphy's painting in his files, but again no information could be found.
68. The order of performance was in fact switched, as "Léger . . . appeared to feel that the spirited curtain raiser might attract too much attention away from the main work" (Tomkins, p. 40).
69. Artur Michel, "Swedish Ballet Celebrated Folk Form," *Dance Magazine* (New York), vol. XVII, no. 5 (April 1943), p. 38.
70. Cited in Michel, p. 38, as being from "the critic of 'New York Tribune.'"
71. Rosenfeld, "Musical Chronicle," *The Dial* (Chicago), vol. LXXVI (April 1924), p. 389.
72. *New York Herald* (Paris), October 26, 1923, p. 1.
73. Tomkins, p. 40.
74. *New York Herald* (Paris), October 25, 1923, p. 6.
75. Dore Ashton, "Commentary from Washington and New York," *Studio International* (London), vol. 171, no. 874 (February 1966), p. 79.
76. "Artists / The Seven-Year Itch," *Time* (New York), vol. 84, no. 18 (October 30, 1964), p. 80.
77. Warhol made the format of *Plane Crash* only 7 percent narrower in its proportions than the newspaper.
78. In his correspondence with MacAgy, Murphy wrote: "Razor": the first Gillette razor and the first Parker pen (of red rubber) were real objects (not gadgets) 'no bigger than a man's hand.' They had weight and construction. Same with the early 'sulphur' matches and their generous classic 'Three Star' box. They suggested a 'Nature Morte' to me *tho'* *American made*. In 'heroic scale' of course" (italics added).
79. Armand Lanoux, *Paris 1925* (Paris: Encyclopédie Essentielle, Robert Delpire, Editeur, 1957), p. 20.
80. For this information I am indebted to Malcolm Gee.
81. Charensol, "Les Expositions," *L'Art Vivant* (Paris), vol. 2, no. 25 (January 1926), p. 35.
82. Tomkins, p. 26. Later, Stuart Davis, to whose work Murphy's has sometimes been compared, remarked, "Léger is the most American painter painting today." Cited in James Johnson Sweeney, *Stuart Davis* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1945), p. 13.
83. Undated letter to Philip Barry cited in Note 37.
84. "Roots of Abstract Art in America," National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C., December 2, 1965-January 9, 1966, and "Art of the United States, 1670-1960," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, September 28-Novem-

ber 27, 1966.

85. Agee, "New York Dada, 1910-30," p. 111.
86. Tomkins, pp. 11-12.
87. Cited in Tomkins, p. 139. Although Tomkins gives as his source "Gerald Murphy, Notebook," no such entry appears in the frequently cited *cahier* from which all the other notes for projects have been excerpted, but does occur in an unpublished letter of October or November 1962 written by Murphy to MacAgy.
88. "Le Salon des Indépendants," *L'Art Vivant* (Paris), vol. 1, no. 6 (March 20, 1925), p. 27.
89. Tomkins, p. 140.
90. This effect is not unlike that of certain works from Max Ernst's series, *Monuments aux Oiseaux*, which he began in 1925. During this period Ernst made a number of decorative panels for the home of Comte Etienne de Beaumont, who was a friend of the Murphys and whose fabled parties they attended.
91. Murphy himself was the source for MacAgy's assertion ("New Realist' of the Twenties," p. 56) that it was *Library* which was damaged en route to the Indépendants; however, there is no listing in any Salon catalog for *Library*, and it has been determined on the basis of examination by the Museum's Conservation Department that the damage sustained by *Library* was caused by leaving it rolled and exposed to extreme changes of temperature over a prolonged period. There is no evidence of any tear or related kind of injury which would have made its exhibition impossible. As we know that details in Murphy's accounts given many years after the fact are sometimes inaccurate (see Note 58 and p. 20), and since there is a listing in the 1926 Salon catalog for *Laboratory*, it is not illogical to conclude that Murphy was actually referring to *Laboratory* when he said *Library*. That *Laboratory* is not among Murphy's surviving works supports the theory that it was this painting, not *Library*, which was damaged on the way to the Salon.
92. The catalog information for this painting was supplied in October or November of 1962 by Murphy in response to a questionnaire sent to him by MacAgy, who was then preparing his article, "New Realist' of the Twenties."
93. Both motifs, the ball bearings as a sculpture on Murphy's piano and the watches (see p. 34), were constantly before him, and thus Murphy would have had no need to make notes on them.
94. "Machine Art," The Museum of Modern Art, New York, March 6-April 30, 1934.
95. This observation was made by my colleague, Sara Mazo, after examination of a photograph of the label on the still-existing cigar box.
96. "Tobacco and Smoking in Art," North Carolina Museum of Art, October 14-December 4, 1960.
97. These dimensions were given to MacAgy by Murphy and no doubt represent an approximate estimate, but they are demonstrably inaccurate, as the existing photograph makes plain.
98. Tomkins, p. 147.
99. *Ibid.* The account of the components of *Portrait* is Murphy's own, and is to be found in MacAgy's papers.
100. *Ibid.*
101. Tomkins, p. 144.
102. MacAgy, "New Realist' of the Twenties," p. 54.
103. John C. Palester, Research Associate-Entymology, at

the American Museum of Natural History, New York, kindly verified the accuracy of this detail and pointed out the absence of the wasp's rear wings.

104. "American Still Life: 1913-1967," University of Maryland Art Gallery, College Park, October-November 1968; "Inflated Images," sponsored by The Museum of Modern Art and circulated within the United States and Canada from January 1969 to January 1970; "Léger and Purist Paris," Tate Gallery, London, November 18, 1970-January 24, 1971.

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Archibald MacLeish not only wrote the sensitive Foreword of this catalog, but was kind enough to give his opinions on certain of the problems that arose and to recollect events from his long friendship with Murphy. In unraveling these problems—among them the complicated task of establishing a chronology for Murphy's paintings—the painter's daughter, Honoria Murphy Donnelly, and Frances Myers Brennan, an old family friend of the Murphys, have been of invaluable assistance, spending winter days in an unlit and unheated barn in the quest for material. Others who have searched their memories and files to aid us are: Mrs. Richard E. Myers, Francis Brennan, Mrs. Betty MacAgy, Mrs. Philip Barry, Mrs. John Dos Passos, Lillian Hellman, and Nathaniel Benchley.

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W.R.

C.L.



