



American Federation of Arts

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**AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS INTRODUCES *DEBATING AMERICAN MODERNISM: STIEGLITZ, DUCHAMP, AND THE NEW YORK AVANT-GARDE*
AN EXHIBITION EXAMINING THE DEBATE BETWEEN DUCHAMP AND STIEGLITZ
ABOUT THE ORIGINALITY AND DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN ART**

PREMIERING AT GEORGIA O'KEEFFE MUSEUM, SANTA FE,
NEW MEXICO, JANUARY 24–APRIL 19, 2003,
FOLLOWED BY TOURS TO DES MOINES AND CHICAGO

October 16, 2002 (New York, NY) – Organized by the American Federation of Arts (AFA), a leading arts organization and originator of acclaimed traveling art exhibitions, *Debating American Modernism: Stieglitz, Duchamp, and the New York Avant-Garde* examines the debate between Alfred Stieglitz and Marcel Duchamp about the true nature of American art, a debate that would profoundly influence American Modernism. The exhibition opens at the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and will be on view from January 24–April 19, 2003, followed by a tour to the Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa, May 10–August 3, 2003, and the Terra Museum of American Art in Chicago, Illinois, August 29–November 30, 2003.

Curated by Debra Bricker Balken, *Debating American Modernism* focuses exclusively on the dialogue between the two artists and their circles, and proposes a new reading of American Modernism. Diverse media such as painting, sculpture, photography, watercolors, drawings, prints and film are featured in this presentation.

This exhibition is a project of ART ACCESS II, a program of the AFA funded with major support from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. Additional support is provided by the National Patrons of the AFA.

From the years 1915 to 1929, American Modernist art underwent a profound process of redefinition. Alfred Stieglitz and the cadre of artists shown at his '291' gallery in New York had relied, in part, upon the latest aesthetic inventions and theories spawned in Europe to direct their work. This situation dramatically changed around 1915 with the arrival of a number of artists in New York, first and foremost, the French artist Marcel Duchamp.

Drawing on articles and documents from this historic period, the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue examines the controversy that ensued from Duchamp's reaction to the state of American art. In 1915, disappointed by the predominantly nature-based abstraction he observed, Duchamp proclaimed in newspapers and magazines that American artists were too dependent on outmoded European traditions and had overlooked far greater subjects: the skyscraper and the machine. Duchamp's comments spawned a critical discussion that lasted through 1929, prompting Stieglitz and his circle to define what made their work innovative, original, and American.

The exhibition also addresses the appearance of sexualized imagery in nearly all of the work created during this remarkable period, a phenomenon that provides evidence of common ground between the two seemingly opposed camps. It traces the many corollaries between these works of art and Sigmund Freud's theories of sexuality, which found broader reception in the U.S. during this period than anywhere else in the world.

For this presentation, Ms. Balken has selected approximately seventy-five paintings, sculptures, photographs, and works on paper by the following artists: John Covert, Jean Crotti, Stuart Davis, Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove, Marcel Duchamp, Albert Gleizes, Marsden Hartley, Man Ray, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, Francis

Picabia, Morton Schamberg, Charles Sheeler, Joseph Stella, Florine Stettheimer, Alfred Stieglitz, John Storrs, Paul Strand, Max Weber, Beatrice Wood, and Marius de Zayas.

Highlights of the show include Marcel Duchamp's readymade, *Fountain*, 1917 (1964 version); *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, 1915 (1964 version); and *Hat Rack*, 1917 (1964 version). In addition to six prints from Stieglitz's *Equivalent*s photographic series, the show also includes his photograph of Duchamp's original *Fountain* from 1917. Other key works are Georgia O'Keeffe's *Blue Line*, 1919 and *From the Lake No. 1*, 1924; Arthur Dove's *Fog Horns*, 1929; Marsden Hartley's *Portrait*, ca. 1914–15; Max Weber's *Rush Hour, New York*, 1915; Morton Schamberg's *Painting VIII (Mechanical Abstraction)*, 1916; Charles Demuth's *Lancaster*, 1921; and John Marin's *Telephone Building, Lower New York*, 1926.

The exhibition is organized in three thematic sections. The first presents the work of Stieglitz and his circle, foregrounding the development of abstraction in the United States. Included are a grouping of works from Stieglitz's celebrated *Equivalent* series, his photographic studies of clouds and the sky; a selection of Arthur Dove's abstracted landscapes; and sensuous oil paintings of natural phenomena by Georgia O'Keeffe. Devoted to Duchamp and his colleagues, the second section illustrates the appeal of mass-produced and mechanical objects.

Many of the works—for example, a selection of Duchamp's readymades, the mechanomorphic imagery of Francis Picabia and Marius de Zayas, and the charged sculptural forms of Man Ray—suggest an aversion to the gestures and expressions of the artist's hand. The third segment of the installation focuses on the art of a group of young artists active during the 1920s, the last phase of early American abstraction that eventually gave way to the regionalism of the following decade.

In this final section, the works of Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler, and John Storrs (whose pristine architectonic aesthetic later came to be known as Precisionism), as well as the proto-pop images of Stuart Davis synthesize visions of the two distinct groups that preceded them.

A fully illustrated exhibition catalogue, published by the AFA in association with Distributed Art Publishers Inc., featuring an essay by Ms. Balken that traces the threads of the public debate throughout the teens and twenties, and writings on the work of Stieglitz, Duchamp and their circles by Jay Bochner, professor of English at the University of Montreal, accompanies the exhibition. Additional materials created and published by the AFA in conjunction with the exhibition include an illustrated brochure and chronology, promotional materials, a student guide and suggested activities for the classroom, as well as a special link, that will include additional background information to compliment the exhibition, on the AFA's Web site, www.afaweb.org.

Debra Bricker Balken is an independent curator and writer who specializes in modern and Contemporary art. Some of her most recent curatorial projects include *Arthur Dove: A Retrospective*, which opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1998 and *Alfredo Jaar: Lament of the Images*, which was organized by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology List Visual Arts Center in 1999. In addition, she recently wrote a book entitled *Philip Guston's Poor Richard* (2001) published by University of Chicago Press. The images from the Guston project travelled in 2002 to MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts, and will appear at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor and Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Ms. Balken, who has taught at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, was an Inaugural Clark Fellow at the Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, in 2001 and is the 2002 recipient of a Senior Fellowship from the Dedalus Foundation. She is currently at work on two other exhibitions, *The Park Avenue Cubists* for the Grey Art Gallery, New York University, and *Edna Andrade* for the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia.

For nearly a hundred years, the **American Federations of Arts** (AFA) has originated and developed travelling art exhibitions in partnership with member museums both nationally and internationally. Under the leadership of Director Julia Brown, the AFA serves the museum community via its exhibition, education, and professional development programs. Current and upcoming AFA exhibitions include *Degas and the Dance*; *Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum*; *The Sensual and the Sacred: Chola Bronzes from South India*; *American Modern, 1925–1940: Design for a New Age*; and *Millet to Matisse: Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century French Painting from Kelvingrove Art Gallery, Glasgow*.