

Stuart Davis
American, 1892 - 1964

Multiple Views

1918

oil on canvas

overall: 120.02 x 89.54 cm (47 1/4 x 35 1/4 in.)

framed: 132.72 x 102.87 x 7.62 cm (52 1/4 x 40 1/2 x 3 in.)

Inscription: lower right: STUART DAVIS 1918

Gift of Earl Davis 2008.124.1

ENTRY

Stuart Davis had been deeply impressed by the modern art he had seen at the Armory Show in 1913, and spent the remainder of the decade patiently investigating avant-garde styles, especially the high color and thick impasto common to both Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853 - 1890) and the fauves, but also certain kinds of geometric abstraction. Although he would not make explicitly cubist paintings until 1921–1922, he had certainly seen cubist works at the Armory Show, and the complex space and relatively subdued palette of *Multiple Views* may reflect that interest. Davis would come to consider cubism the most important of all modern styles.

In February 1918 Davis was one of 20 painters invited to participate in the *Exhibition of Indigenous Painting* at Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's (Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney) Whitney Studio Club at 8 West Eighth Street in Greenwich Village. The artists, including John Sloan (American, 1871 - 1951), George Luks (American, 1866 - 1933), William Glackens (American, 1870 - 1938), Gifford Beal (American, 1879 - 1956), and Guy Pène du Bois (American, 1884 - 1958), were asked to draw lots for prepared and framed canvases and then to spend three days painting them on-site. Whitney provided art supplies, whiskey, tobacco, food, and gingham smocks. Davis's contribution to the raucous event was *Multiple Views*, an unusual composite of paintings and sketches that he had made while working in the historic fishing town of Gloucester, Massachusetts, and that he apparently managed to recall or consult while working on the painting.

Gloucester played a significant role in Davis's career. He had first visited the town in 1915 at the recommendation of Sloan, and pronounced it "the place I had been

looking for”:

It had the brilliant light of Provincetown, but with the important additions of topographical severity and the architectural beauties of the Gloucester schooner.

The schooner is a very necessary element in coherent thinking about art. I do not refer to its own beauty of form, but to the fact that its masts define the often empty sky expanse. They function as a color-space coordinate between earth and sky. They make it possible for the novice landscape painter to evade the dangers of taking off into the void as soon as his eye hits the horizon. From the masts of schooners the artist eventually learns to invent his own coordinates when for some unavoidable reason they are not present. Another very important thing about the town at that time was that the pre-fabricated Main Street had not yet made its appearance. Also the fact that automobiles were very few and their numerous attendant evils were temporarily avoided. [1]

Davis returned to Gloucester almost annually until 1934.

In 1953 the artist recalled the unusual circumstances under which he had painted *Multiple Views* at the Whitney Studio Club, explaining that it was “made out of things I had been painting recently and had in my mind. . . . I had done that kind of composition before that time. . . . composing things that you don’t usually see at one time. I have drawings done in that manner.” [2] John R. Lane has pointed out that combining vignettes to create a sense of simultaneity was a common technique in cartooning and that Davis had employed it in the drawing *Forty Inns on the Lincoln Highway No. 2*. [3]

Although the rules of the *Exhibition of Indigenous Painting* required artists to work entirely from memory, Davis may have secreted some previously executed sketches of Gloucester into the event. In short, *Multiple Views* was not an impromptu effort on his part. [4] Despite his self-professed aversion to automobiles, he incorporated a car and car-related imagery into the picture, imagery derived from two 1917 paintings: *Garage No. 1* [fig. 1] and *Garage No. 2* [fig. 2]. This method of using previous imagery in a new composition would become characteristic of

Davis's later work. [5] A critic for the *New York Sun* noted of *Multiple Views*: "Stuart Davis has painted all of his past life into his picture besides a great deal of mere hearsay. He has fitted countless scenes into one picture, somewhat in the style of children's puzzle pictures, and painted them in with vigor. Mr. Davis's neighbor artists at the time of the competition must surely have been splattered with much paint." [6] However, if there was any paint splattering it would have come from the intoxicated Luks, whose efforts to add some strokes to *Multiple Views* had to be fended off by Davis. [7]

Multiple Views is an ambitious but awkward work that has stimulated much discussion among art historians. To quote Philip Rylands, "What appears to be a fairly straightforward realist work actually embodies modernist strategies of contradiction and ambiguity." [8] Jane Myers has observed that "its composition is not completely resolved; the discrepancy between illustrative space and abstract space is disturbing, and despite the artist's efforts to stress the physical reality of the whole painted surface, the various parts do not coalesce." [9] Perhaps the tension in *Multiple Views* arose from the fact that Davis had only a partial understanding of cubism at this point. John R. Lane has stated that the artist "developed a solution involving a montage of vignettes to the problem of infusing the dimension of time into painting that did not rely on the cubist vocabulary." [10] In Diane Kelder's opinion, Davis combined all the disparate images of Gloucester "in an effort to create an effect of simultaneity. The formal and procedural contradictions so evident in this painting resulted from a desire to impose a new conceptual order on the observed world, an order that Davis was beginning to identify with cubism but which he was not yet capable of expressing." [11]

Karen Wilkin recently wrote that although *Multiple Views* "seems timid and undistinguished," Davis "almost inadvertently explored essential cubist concepts of discontinuous space and shifting viewpoints, not by replicating the look of a cubist image but by juxtaposing a series of self-contained vignettes." She also noted, "Davis's pictures of this type, while problematic, embody, too, cubism's generating idea of 'collaging' together a range of perceptions. . . . Such works might be described as a kind of conceptual cubism, intellectually inventive but still wedded to naturalistic appearances." [12]

Brian O'Doherty, one of the best writers on Davis, sidesteps the nagging issue of cubism and the charges of irresolution. Instead he regards *Multiple Views* as "Davis's key early picture," one that reveals an additive compositional habit (the juxtaposition of distinct parts) that stayed with him throughout his career, whether

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those parts were words, objects, or words standing for objects. For O’Doherty, the result was a species of “concrete poetry” that foreshadowed the stenciled letters of Jasper Johns (American, born 1930) and the rebuses of Robert Rauschenberg (American, 1925 - 2008). [13]

Robert Torchia

September 29, 2016

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Stuart Davis, *Garage No. 1*, 1917, oil on canvas, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Knoll International, 1980. Image: Cathy Carver

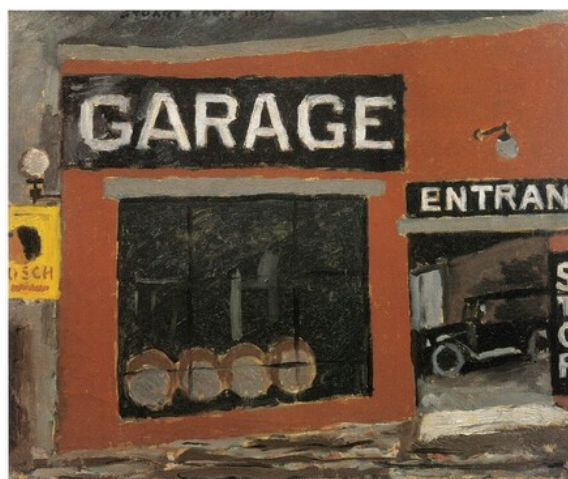


fig. 2 Stuart Davis, *Garage No. 2*, 1918, oil on canvas, private collection

NOTES

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- [1] Stuart Davis, “Autobiography” (1945), in *Stuart Davis*, ed. Diana Kelder (New York, 1971), 25.
- [2] Stuart Davis, “Recollections of the Whitney” (transcript of an interview by John I. H. Bauer and Herman More, for broadcast on WNYC, American Art Festival), Sept. 29, 1953, unpublished typescript, artists’ files archives of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Quoted in Patricia Hills, *Stuart Davis* (New York, 1996), 46.
- [3] John R. Lane, *Stuart Davis: Art and Theory* (New York, 1978), 90.
- [4] Avis Berman, *Rebels on Eighth Street: Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of American Art* (New York, 1990), 151.
- [5] In 1952 he stated, “Work on an old picture is as valid as to make a wise statement and increase its mass in the image of experience.” Stuart Davis Papers, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Index, June 17, 1952, quoted in Jane Myers, ed., *Stuart Davis: Graphic Work and Related Paintings with a Catalogue Raisonné of the Prints* (Fort Worth, TX, 1986), 4.
- [6] “Mrs. Whitney Has an Art Marathon: Well-known Painters Turn Out Works in Rapid Fire Style,” *New York Sun*, Feb. 5, 1918.
- [7] Avis Berman, *Rebels on Eighth Street: Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of American Art* (New York, 1990), 151.
- [8] Philip Rylands, *Stuart Davis* (Venice, 1997), 7.
- [9] Jane Myers, ed., *Stuart Davis: Graphic Work and Related Paintings with a Catalogue Raisonné of the Prints* (Fort Worth, TX, 1986), 4.
- [10] John R. Lane, *Stuart Davis: Art and Theory* (New York, 1978), 12.
- [11] Diane Kelder, *Stuart Davis: Art and Theory, 1920–1931* (New York, 2002), 2.
- [12] William C. Agee and Karen Wilkin, *Stuart Davis: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 3 vols. (New Haven and London, 2007), 1:109.
- [13] Brian O’Doherty, *American Masters: The Voice and the Myth*, 2nd ed. New York, 1988, 51.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting is executed on a plain-weave, lightweight canvas. The priming is presumed to be oil-based and ranges from yellow to slightly beige in color. It is lined with a heavy fabric using a wax adhesive that is stretched on a four-member, mortise-and-tenon, keyable stretcher that is probably original. The original tacking margins are intact, indicating that the painting retains its original dimensions. Infrared examination shows no underdrawing. [1] X-radiography shows no

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significant artist changes. The paint (thought to be oil) has been applied in multiple layers using brushes and a palette knife. The paint has been worked in a variety of techniques, including wet into wet and scumbling. The thickness of the paint layers varies throughout the composition. In some instances the ground can be easily detected through the thin, scumbled layers of paint, while in other sections the paint is extremely thick and heavily impastoed. The paint surface is generally cracked, with wider aperture craquelure found in the most thickly painted areas. There are only a few tiny losses scattered around the painting, most notably a concentration of small losses in the lower left corner. The painting was cleaned in 2011 at the National Gallery of Art, when a heavily discolored varnish containing oil was removed and replaced with a fresh, thin layer of synthetic varnish. The small losses were inpainted during this treatment as well.

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] The infrared examination was conducted using a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with a K astronomy filter.

PROVENANCE

The artist's son, Earl Davis; gift 2008 to NGA.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1918 Exhibition of Indigenous Paintings, Gertrude Vanderbilt (Mrs. Harry Payne) Whitney's Studio Club, New York, 1918, pamphlet no. 10.

1973 Portrait of a Place: Some American Landscape Painters in Gloucester, Cape Ann Historical Association, Gloucester, 1973, no. 25, repro.

1978 Stuart Davis: Art and Art Theory, The Brooklyn Museum; Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978, no. 4, repro.

1978 William Carlos Williams and the American Scene 1920-1940, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1978-1979, unnumbered catalogue, fig. 30.

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1982 *The Gloucester Years*, Grace Borgenicht Gallery, New York, 1982, unnumbered catalogue, repro.

1986 *Stuart Davis: Provincetown and Gloucester Paintings and Drawings*, Grace Borgenicht Gallery, New York, 1986.

1990 *Stuart Davis: Scapes*, Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, Inc., New York, 1990, no. 34, repro.

1991 *Stuart Davis, American Painter*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Art, 1991-1992, no. 23, repro.

1995 *Stuart Davis: Retrospective 1995*, Koriyama City Museum of Art; The Museum of Modern Art, Shiga; Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum, 1995, no. 21, repro.

1999 *Stuart Davis in Gloucester*, Cape Ann Historical Museum, Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1999, unnumbered catalogue, pl. 4.

2002 *Stuart Davis in Gloucester*, Alpha Gallery, Boston, 2002, checklist no. 13.

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- 1962 Nordness, Lee, ed. Text by Allen S. Weller. *Art USA Now*. 2 vols. Lucerne, 1962: 1:opp. p. 70.
- 1965 *Stuart Davis Memorial Exhibition*. Exh. cat. National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.; Art Institute of Chicago; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Art Galleries, University of California at Los Angeles. Washington, D.C., 1965: 17, as *Gloucester Tour (Multiple Views)*.
- 1971 Kelder, Diane, ed. *Stuart Davis*. New York, Washington, and London, 1971: 6, fig. 6.
- 1973 O'Doherty, Brian. *American Masters: The Voice and the Myth*. New York, 1973: 51, 52, repro.
- 1979 Baigell, Matthew. *Dictionary of American Art*. New York, 1979: 88.
- 1979 Kelder, Diane. "Stuart Davis: Pragmatist of American Modernism." *Art Journal* 39, no. 1 (Fall 1979): 30, fig. 2, 35.
- 1984 Marks, Claude. *World Artists 1950-1980*. New York, 1984: 183.
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- a Catalogue Raisonné of the Prints*. Exh. cat. Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, 1986: 3-4, 8, repro.
- 1987 Agee, William C. *Stuart Davis (1892-1964): The Breakthrough Years 1922-1924*. Exh. cat. Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, Inc., New York, 1987: n.p.
- 1987 Wilkin, Karen. *Stuart Davis*. New York, 1987: 71, pl. 71.
- 1988 O'Doherty, Brian. *American Masters: The Voice and the Myth*. New York, 1988: 51.
- 1990 Berman, Avis. *Rebels on Eighth Street: Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of American Art*. New York, 1990: 151.
- 1991 Polcari, Stephen. *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991: 13 fig. 7, 14.
- 1996 Hills, Patricia. *Stuart Davis*. New York, 1996: 42, 46, 47 pl. 34, 49.
- 1997 Rylands, Philip. *Stuart Davis*. Exh. cat. Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; Palazzo delle esposizioni, Rome; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C. Milan, 1997: 30 repro., 94.
- 2002 Kelder, Diane. *Stuart Davis: Art and Theory, 1920-1931*. Exh. cat. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, 2002: 2-3, fig. 2.
- 2007 Boyajian, Ani and Mark Rutkoski. *Stuart Davis, A Catalogue Raisonné*. 3 vols. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007: 1:6, 76, 109, 130; 3:71-73, no. 1418, repro.
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