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**Stanton Macdonald-Wright (1890–1973): From synchronism to
the Federal Art Projects**

South, Will, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1994

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STANTON MACDONALD-WRIGHT (1890-1973):
FROM SYNCHROMISM TO THE FEDERAL ART PROJECTS

by

Will South

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1994

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While an undergraduate studio art major at Loyola Marymount University at Los Angeles, I became aware of Stanton Macdonald-Wright in the painting classes taught by Pauline Khuri-Majoli, one of Wright's last private pupils. My interest was such that I chose Wright as a term paper subject for one of the obligatory art history courses, hardly realizing then (1978) that this discipline would eventually consume far greater energy. Over the years, academic pursuits gradually encroached upon time spent painting, yet Wright never became part of any formal academic study. It was only at the very end of doctoral course work that the idea of a dissertation on Wright occurred to me, and, when it did, the subject seemed rather obvious and even necessary. My first acknowledgment is to Stanton Macdonald-Wright himself, a brilliant man and passionate artist, with full apologies for any way in which I may have inadvertently misrepresented aspects of his life and art.

The present study could not have been accomplished without the generous and gracious assistance of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright. Mrs. Macdonald-Wright made available a great deal of previously unavailable material, including, but not limited to, unpublished articles, letters, diary entries and memoirs by her husband. In addition, she provided valuable personal insights and recollections.

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Gallery owners and employees as well as private collectors freely shared indispensable information. First among these was Joseph Chowning, owner of the Joseph Chowning Gallery, San Francisco. Mr. Chowning represents the Stanton Macdonald-Wright Estate, and was from the inception of this project cooperative, generous and supportive. Galleries and private dealers who provided much needed assistance were Toby C. Moss and Karen Willis of the Toby C. Moss Gallery, Beverly Hills; Richard Campbell, Los Angeles Art Association; the staff of the Daniel Grossman Gallery, New York; Janis Conner of Conner-Rosenkranz, New York; the staff of Kennedy Galleries, New York; Charlotte Houghton of Adamson-Duvannes Gallery, Los Angeles; David Howard, San Francisco; and Roger Genser, Los Angeles. Private collectors include James and Linda Ries, Los Angeles; Dr. Barry King, El Paso; Mr. and Mrs. Roy Neuberger, New York; Cynthia Hazen Polsky, New York; Dr. A. Jess and

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Very personal acknowledgments go to my wife and daughter; Allison and Sara, who encouraged and supported me in innumerable and essential ways.

The members of my dissertation committee refined and improved the present text. Percy North, Professor of Art History at Montgomery College, Virginia, was a conscientious and insightful reader. The groundbreaking work on Synchronism by Professor William Agee of Hunter College of the City University of New York preceded and opened

the door for this study and others that will follow. My committee chairperson, Marlene Park, Professor at John Jay College and the Graduate School of the City University of New York, guided this project from its inception to its completion. It was an honor to work with a scholar as fair, open-minded and dedicated as Dr. Park. Finally, William H. Gerds, Professor at the Graduate Center, never expected nor accepted less than absolute thoroughness and diligence, and made a scholar of me, despite myself.

This dissertation is dedicated to John C. Combs (1940-1992); with affection, gratitude, and inestimable debt.

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INTRODUCTION

Stanton Macdonald-Wright (1890-1973) contributed to the emergence of modern painting in both Europe and America. Along with Morgan Russell (1886-1953), he founded Synchronism, the only recognized vanguard movement of pre-World War I Europe established by Americans. In Paris, Macdonald-Wright associated with some of the most dynamic figures of the art world, including Leo and Gertrude Stein and Matisse; he fought aesthetic battles with Robert Delaunay; and at age twenty-three he wrote a brash manifesto declaring the primacy of the new painting of which he and Russell were the sole representatives. After the fiery debut of Synchronism first in Munich and then in Paris in 1913, the artist returned to the United States and continued to paint for a full sixty years. Indeed, he painted and remained influential long after the Synchronist movement is commonly alleged to have expired in 1918 in New York City, but this he did on the other side of America. Macdonald-Wright's substantive and eventful career in Southern California between the two world wars, from 1918 to 1943, is therefore a primary focus of this dissertation.

Despite the attention early American modernism has received in the past quarter century,¹ Stanton Macdonald-Wright remains a shadowy figure, with the details of his life poorly documented and his aesthetic priorities little understood. Because of its international significance, Synchronism has received far more study than the separate and later careers of either of its co-founders. Beyond this already narrowly

circumscribed interest in Wright and Russell, critical assessments of Synchronism routinely characterize it, if not dismiss it, as an offshoot of the better known earlier modern "isms": Cubism, Orphism, and Futurism.² In addition, the more inquisitive scholarly analyses of Synchronism regularly cast Macdonald-Wright in a supporting role to Morgan Russell.³ In all cases, the full and complex methodology of Synchronism has not been accounted for, nor the pivotal role played by Macdonald-Wright in its conception and evolution. The present study begins by providing a much-needed biographical sketch of Macdonald-Wright's formative years, and proceeds to explain the intricacies of Synchronist theory which too often unnecessarily intimidate both the lay person and the professional art historian. The Synchronist project unfolds as one far more dependent on classicism and aestheticism, as well as one far less dependent on scientific color theory, than previously assumed. In addition, the artistic personality and activity of Macdonald-Wright belie a limited role in the movement by virtue of his tremendous ego, insatiable intellect, and formidable creative power.

Stanton Macdonald-Wright brought his forceful personality and his first-hand knowledge of modernist painting to Southern California in 1918. Although poised on the verge of explosive growth, Los Angeles at that time was conservative and quotidian in its social and aesthetic outlook, and remained so for decades. Stanton's older brother, the brilliant and eccentric writer Willard Huntington Wright, deemed Los Angeles "The Land of the Chemically Pure" in a bit of outrageous social satire for the *Los Angeles Times* in 1913. Into this land of the chemically pure, Stanton injected not only contempt for conventional thinking and behavior, but offered an array of intellectual and artistic alternatives from

which to choose. The relocation of Stanton Macdonald-Wright to Los Angeles was, in fact, the single most important factor in the development of modernist painting in the Southland.

Prior to and continuing long after Macdonald-Wright's arrival, the dominant style of painting in Southern California was a regional variant of American Impression. Nick-named the "Eucalyptus School" by *Los Angeles Times* critic Antony Anderson for their frequent choice of that subject matter, some of the better-known painters of this group included William Wendt (1865-1946), Guy Rose (1867-1925), Granville Redmond (1871-1935), and Maurice Braun (1877-1941). Like the French Impressionists upon whom their work depended, the California Impressionists interpreted landscape with a keen sensitivity to light, atmosphere and the subtleties of color perception. Their work, often handsomely crafted and expressive of more than simple sensual gratification, appealed to the decidedly conservative ethos of Southern Californians. Collectively, the Eucalyptus School painters provided continual confirmation for their patrons of California's status as a new Eden of seemingly limitless natural beauty; in their images could be found grandeur, lyric tenderness, and, above all, an optimistic confidence in the land and its people.

Macdonald-Wright had painted, albeit briefly and as a student, in the Eucalyptus School mode before he left for Paris in the fall of 1909. When he returned to Los Angeles almost ten years later, he vigorously advocated alternate methods of expression. Exhibiting the fractured and swirling surfaces of his own Synchronist canvases would have been enough to cause consternation in the local art community, but Wright did much more than challenge and disrupt the established local order with

disturbing paintings: he wrote articles, organized exhibitions, and lectured widely for the next two decades, thereby challenging in a variety of ways the conventional modes of thinking about art and its function. Deeply moved by Oriental art and philosophy, Macdonald-Wright believed that an authentic knowledge of art would lead to self-revelation, an awareness which in turn would confirm the unity of all things physical and spiritual. "Expression," he wrote in 1919, "is merely the restatement of the rhythmic order from which we spring and to which we return."⁴

Even a skeletal list of Macdonald-Wright's activities in 1920s Los Angeles suggests his cultural vitality and provides evidence for his artistic notoriety: he organized the first-ever exhibition of modern art in Los Angeles in 1920; he headed the Los Angeles Art Students' League most of the decade and into the 1930s; he wrote and published a treatise on color; experimented with color film; wrote and directed "Synchronist Theater" for the Santa Monica Theater Guild; and organized the area's most important modern exhibiting entities—the Group of Independent Artists of Los Angeles in 1923 and the Modern Art Workers 1925 (and wrote manifestoes for each).

In the 1930s and early 1940s, Macdonald-Wright's aesthetic ideology, as well as biases, conditioned his tenure first as a supervisor for then as director of the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project for Southern California during the Great Depression. To his high cultural profile of the previous decade was thus added the imprimatur of government sanction. He continued to write, exhibit and lecture, and in addition organized thematic exhibitions under the aegis of the WPA/FAP. In short, Macdonald-Wright remained into the 1930s the integral cultural figure he was in the 1920s.

A central intellectual theme of the following study is that the idea of "modernism" is not dependent upon issues of newness, originality, uniqueness, or rejection of the past on the part of its practitioners, though these words are often crucial to other discussions of modernism. The concerns of many a so-called modernist are often strikingly similar to those of a so-called old master (indeed, in a separate and longer study, the modernist tendencies of many old masters could be identified). Rather, what is modernist results from a perception that past formulae are insufficient to the expansion of experience in the present. Past knowledge and practice are then necessarily modified, built upon, altered or otherwise changed and adapted to the circumstances at hand. Change and adaptation as phenomena in and of themselves are never new, unique or revolutionary; they are simply germane and fundamental to the human condition. Leonardo was a modern, as was Goya. The Impressionists were moderns in their drive to broaden the tactile properties of paint and simultaneously ways of seeing. All modernists, from whatever historic period or discipline, seek to broaden experience, from which we collectively derive understanding and affix meaning, and upon which we base future action.⁵

Within the context of the above definition of modernism, Stanton Macdonald-Wright played an important role in the early cultural development of Southern California, a region that would become one of the most populated, ethnically diverse, economically productive and socially volatile in late twentieth century America.

¹The first serious and fruitful study of Synchronism was William C. Agee's *Synchronism and Color Principles in American Painting, 1910-1930* (New York: M. Knoedler & Co., Inc., 1965). The subject has since been regularly addressed in catalogues and surveys, notably Barbara Rose's now standard text, *American Art Since 1900* (New York: Praeger, 1967), and

Abraham A. Davidson's *Early American Modernist Painting, 1910-1935* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

²Of numerous possible examples, the following assessment of Synchronism is typical: "...Synchronism in practice was no more than a synthesis of several current styles and contained little, if anything, that was fundamentally original. Russell's handling of sculptural volumes was based on the spiraling forms of Michelangelo and grew out of his study of sculpture with Matisse. His fragmentation of physical forms was derived from the Cubism of Picasso. His use of color to define and even to generate compositional forms had already been carried out by the Orphists, such as Franz Kupka and Robert and Sonia Delaunay." Henry Adams, "Morgan Russell," in *American Drawings and Watercolors in the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute* (Pittsburgh: Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, 1985), 182.

³The most comprehensive examination to date of Morgan Russell is Marilyn Kushner's *Morgan Russell* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, New York, 1990). Kushner devotes two chapters to the development and maturation of Synchronism, but limits her discussion of Macdonald-Wright to one paragraph on page 103. Macdonald-Wright received more attention in Gail Levin's *Synchronism and American Color Abstraction, 1910-1925* (New York: George Braziller in Association with the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978), though he clearly is assigned a subordinate role to Russell in this study as well.

⁴Stanton Macdonald-Wright, "Influence of Aviation on Art: The Accentuation of Individuality," *Ace: The Aviation Magazine of the West* 1, no. 2 (September 1919): 12.

⁵It must be made clear that the author does not support a "linear model" of art history, in which one movement necessarily and inevitably "evolved" to the next, as in Cubism becoming Abstract Expressionism, or anything else. Modernism, however, does reflect the various impulses of our species, which include exploitation, destruction and consumption as well as creation and adaptation. The linear model of art history is vitiated by the fact that human aspirations and behavior take place in the physical world, and therefore are not exempt from a basic tenant of quantum mechanics—randomness. Einstein rejected quantum mechanics over the idea of randomness and said that "God does not play dice with the universe." Stephen Hawking, a modernist to my way of thinking, convincingly countered and has demonstrated that Einstein, another modernist, was wrong on two counts—God not only throws dice, but often dice that cannot be seen.

CHAPTER ONE
STANTON MACDONALD-WRIGHT, BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE TO 1918

I had been in France more than a year when I met my next friend. This one was to be the only artist in all my life who, as an individual, was able to get past my suspicions of bright and clever people and to have an influence on my ways. Stanton MacDonald-Wright, the California painter, was the most gifted all-round fellow I ever knew.

Thomas Hart Benton, painter¹

It's impossible to say in words what anything is.

Stanton Macdonald-Wright²

Stanton Macdonald-Wright never questioned that he was a great painter. History, he felt, would validate this self-assessment. Even in his last years, when he believed that the ego should be sacrificed for the fruits of Zen contemplation, his own ego was very much intact. "There have been four great American painters," Macdonald-Wright declared, "Whistler, Ryder, Russell, and Wright."³ This tremendous self-confidence was underpinned by a brilliant intellect and an enviable technical facility, by an historically felicitous participation in the birth of modern art, and by formative years in which his father and mother supported their son's artistic ambitions.

The artist's parents, Archibald Davenport Wright and Annie van Vranken, were married in New York City in 1884. Annie Wright, related

by marriage to industrial tycoon Collis Huntington, was, by all accounts, a sober and conservative individual. She descended from a long line of Dutch ancestors who had arrived in America in the mid-seventeenth century. Like Annie, Archie Wright subscribed to the Victorian mores of his time, though was less inclined than she to consistently abide by them. Archie included in his genealogy a Spanish grandfather who had been banished from Spain circa 1810, allegedly by Manuel Godoy, court favorite of Charles IV and Maria Louisa. Hardworking and determined to succeed financially, Archie's kindness and generosity, if not business naivete, prevented him from ever earning more than a moderately comfortable income.

Their second son, Stanton, was born July 8, 1890 in Charlottesville, Virginia. He was named by his mother in honor of her friend, the abolitionist and social reformer Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), which proved to be something of an irony as both her boys later opposed women's suffrage. His father had proposed a Spanish variant of the name, "Estantone," to be followed by a string of what he considered to be historically relevant appendages: Estantone Francisco d'Este Delimpalisado Van Vranken y Macdonald Wright.⁴ (As an adult, Stanton hyphenated his last name with Macdonald to avoid constantly being asked if he was related to Frank Lloyd Wright, or the Wright Brothers of aviation fame.) Annie could hardly take her husband's suggestion seriously, and had her way in the naming. However, she herself simply called her son "Tony."

The Wrights had lived in Fayetteville, North Carolina for a year, but Archie's drive for ever-greater opportunity led him to Charlottesville, Virginia, then in 1894 to Lynchburg. Archie Wright made his living as a

hotel and restaurant owner/manager, and it was within this colorful environment that Stanton and his older, and eventually equally famous brother, Willard (1888-1939), spent their early years. When it came to their children, the otherwise socially conventional Archie and Annie rejected most traditional child-rearing techniques. Art critic and biographer John Loughery provides an accurate summary of Stanton and Willard's childhood experience:

...the Wrights didn't believe in discipline or anything approaching an authoritarian rule in the house. By the time they decided that they had been too lax in raising Willard and Stanton, it was late in the day to effect any change. There was a wild streak, as well as a creative impulse, in both boys. More playful than mean-spirited, at home they were apt to take their prerogatives for granted. They delighted in being irreverent and sarcastic.⁵

The Wrights complemented this parental indulgence with private tutors for their sons' education. This included instruction in languages (at which Stanton was particularly adept), art (which commenced for him at the age of five) and literature (eventually Willard's forte). In addition, the family employed servants who prepared the meals, tended to the chores and saw to the personal needs of the boys. Annie occasionally took Willard and Stanton to New York where they ate in fine restaurants, visited the zoo, and attended the theater. As a small boy, Stanton believed that he was a prince.⁶ With the panorama of people coming and going at Wright's Hotel and Junction Restaurant, with every want provided for, and with an imagination fueled by tutors, as well as adventures with brother Willard, such an assumption is not surprising.

A trip to Southern California in 1899 greatly impressed Archie Wright, and in the following year he moved his family. The Virginia hotel and other holdings were sold at a loss, though the income was still enough to purchase beachfront property in California.⁷ Amidst what was commonly described as a Mediterranean paradise, the hotel business was destined for boom times. Archie Wright became a manager for the large and elegant Arcadia Hotel on the coast at Santa Monica, and it was there that Willard and Stanton entered their teen-age years.

In 1900, Santa Monica was a quiet community of 3,000 inhabitants, located thirty-five minutes by train from downtown Los Angeles. Still largely unspoiled by development (the train connecting San Francisco to Los Angeles was completed in 1903), the Southland was, indeed, something of a paradise. A warm climate prevailed over large open fields of California poppies and pristine beaches. It was also an area more ethnically diverse than Virginia. There was a culturally vibrant Mexican-American population, as well as a thriving Oriental community.⁸ Willard and Stanton both were well aware of the opportunities beyond the usual intrigues of the hotel, and here begins a series of exploits that punctuates the biographies of each.⁹

Stanton remembered the California of his youth as a "land of human romance." In his words, it was "a new land of mountains and endless horizons and sea."¹⁰ With the Pacific shore literally outside his window, he "practically lived in the sea," swimming, boating and diving. A few miles north of the Arcadia Hotel was the Long Wharf, where windjammers from all over the world docked. He often made the trek to talk to the sailors and climb about the decks.

When it came to making friends, Stanton went out of his way to choose those who contrasted most with the children of Mrs. Wright's social circle which met at teas and garden parties, rituals which he despised: "...my preferences were for the 'far-out,' the *déclassé*, the unreconstructed, the unconventional. On every opportunity I sought out the Mexican boys who lived in the cañons, whose fathers were peons, whose mothers were generally fat and loud. These boys had a liking for drink, nasty words, some hunting, and they were past masters at escaping supervision."¹¹

At the Arcadia, Stanton learned the rudiments of cooking from the hotel chef, and the love of wine from his father. The luxury of private tutors for the boys also continued, including Stanton's lessons in painting. The earliest extant oil by him is a 1903 oil on board, most likely a view of Santa Monica or the neighboring vicinity (fig. 1).¹² Macdonald-Wright, only thirteen years old at the time,¹³ had a precocious understanding of color and its application. This early work held its own with the standard fare of Impressionist-derived *plein air* work then dominating the California art scene. Little wonder that Archie Wright, himself an amateur painter, would later be supportive of his son's plan to pursue an art career.

Willard, meanwhile, had rejoined his family in Santa Monica after a brief and unsuccessful stint in military school during 1900. His influence on Stanton, then and later, is not to be underestimated. Stanton recalled, often in the form of lamentation, the "*néfast*" influence of Willard. It was he who caused a considerable amount of destruction in a local bar for which Archie had to pay.¹⁴ More positively, it was Willard who delved deeply into world literature, compelling Stanton to do the same:

...Willard, more than schools or libraries, formed, if I can use so loose and hap-hazard a term, my reading background, and that most of it consisted of the *fin de siècle* English poets, the great Frenchmen of the middle and late nineteenth century, and such writers as George Moore and Nietzsche, Santayana, William James and his brother Henry, Murger, Goethe, Poe, Dostoevski, Tolstoy and Ibsen, Sainte-Beuve and Gautier and Ruskin, and their contemporaries.¹⁵

Both boys also developed a fascination with the English aesthete, Oscar Wilde. The notorious poet had just died in 1900, and the scandalous details of his life were well enough known for the virtuous to avoid any association with his work. For Stanton and Willard, however, Wilde was a crucial influence. Willard's early essays were fully derivative of Wilde's.¹⁶ Such was their obsession with him that, soon after going abroad, the staunchly heterosexual and blatantly macho Stanton wrote "...that he [Wilde] was a sodomist proves that sodomy is correct and if he had brain disease then it is a desirable malady."¹⁷ An overlooked factor in Macdonald-Wright's gravitation to modernism was this early receptivity to the Wildean notion that art could serve as a path to transcendence, that art exists for its own sake and need not slavishly imitate nature.

In 1903, Willard enrolled at St. Vincent's College (now Loyola Marymount University), a very small, very conservative Jesuit school. His tenure there was as brief and unsuccessful as his time in military school. Willard's unconcern with formal education and the decorum required to finish it led to expulsion in March of 1907 from Harvard University, which he attended on a non-matriculated basis. His cavalier attitude toward authority, whether attributable to his lenient rearing or

not, bolstered Stanton's own vigorous disregard for rules and regulations, be they domestic or otherwise.

At the Arcadia Hotel, Archie Wright gave Stanton classic books in philosophy and history, which were absorbed with equal enthusiasm along with Wilde: "My father had given me Balzac and Ovid, Villon and Cooper, some of the older philosophers as well as the Spanish great, Don Quixote, and the novelle of Boccaccio."¹⁸ Though never close to his father, it was Archie who commanded Stanton's respect and admiration. The family situation, according to Macdonald-Wright, was divided along parental lines:

Our family was really bipartite: the reigning part was my mother and her elder son, the secret part, my father and I. The one thing that filled my mother's life was my brother, an attachment that discounted both my father and me, and that lasted, even increased, during her life.¹⁹

Stanton's unqualified admiration for his father was equaled by an emotional distance between him and his mother. "My mother was always looking down her nose at everybody, and I'm certain no one felt any intimacy toward my mother, even I never felt any. My brother did, but not me."²⁰ By contrast, in 1934, when Stanton executed a series of murals for the Santa Monica Library under the auspices of the Public Works of Art Project, he included a portrait of his father in the mural not as a business man, but as a painter. Still later in life, he confided to a correspondent that he had never recovered from the death of his father.²¹

The chronology of Stanton's formal education is uncertain. He began study at the Art Student's League of Los Angeles at the time that small organization moved into the Blanchard Building in 1906,²² and was

headed by Warren Hedges (d. 1910), though he may have been associated with that artist earlier. Another League art instructor was Joseph Greenbaum (1864-1940), who had come to Los Angeles after the San Francisco fire of 1906. Macdonald-Wright's instruction here consisted of Hedges' dissemination of the method used by Robert Henri at the Art Student's League in New York, where Hedges had formerly been a student as well as teacher. The significance of this cannot be overlooked in light of the dominance, again, of regional Impressionists who sought poetic moods in their paintings along with sparkling surface effects of light and color. Hedges countered this approach with an introduction to, albeit second-hand, Henri's philosophy of embracing life in all of its imperfections and allowing personal experience to imbue the work of art.²³ Unfortunately, no student work of Macdonald-Wright's from this period survives that would show a shift to an Ash Can-type of realism, or at least a shift from the then current mode of landscape painting. Wright sympathetically recalled Hedges:

The master teacher [at the ASL] was Warren Hedges, a hunchback, a very liberal-minded man, and a top-notch illustrator. He painted portraits, male and female models, young and old, and what drew his admiration, his compliments was the ability to make flesh that 'could sweat'. His technique was a cross between Henri and [William Merritt] Chase, leaning a bit on the Henri side, and he was adept at limning heads and in making charcoal drawings that were not only characteristic of the N. Y. Art Students' League, where he had studied and taught, but were extremely clever. I never missed a day in attendance. After the classes we would sit about and develop our young ideas with Hedges acting as master of

ceremonies. We always drank and often our talks ran into the night, more than once until the next day. Hedges was a hard drinker, perhaps not through natural inclination but for the definite purpose of forgetting his deformity. He was a charming fellow, and after knowing him an hour one never noticed his bent, protruding back or his small stature. He was my single contact with that generation of artists who had founded the American Scene "Ashcan" school and, I believe, the fading link of the last group of dedicated painters America ever produced.²⁴

Wright had met Hedges while painting with Joseph Greenbaum, a painter whose work Stanton recalled as "a sticky brown, entirely academic and he [Greenbaum] hated it and longed to emerge from his own conditioning." Still, the two painted out-of-doors together in the then current style of regional impressionism: "We were very 'sot' in our ways then, and anything that deviated from what was later jeeringly referred to as the 'Eucalyptus' school of landscape and the Chase school of figure painting was ridiculed."²⁵ Wright's study with Hedges no doubt tempered to some degree the self-righteous orthodoxy of the California *plein-air* painters.

Another important influence on Stanton during his tenure at the League was fellow-student, Rex Slinkard (1887-1918). Slinkard has been justly cited in recent scholarship as "the earliest Los Angeles painter to work in a distinct, strongly modernist mode."²⁶ According to Stanton's recollections, Slinkard's modernist impulses were already in evidence during their student days with Hedges: "After all these years and all the thousands of pictures I have since seen, there still remain in my memory three or four head studies he painted—remembered for the verve and

dash of their technique and the sheer love Slinkard had for his medium."²⁷ After a brief stint studying at the Art Students' League in New York, Slinkard returned to Los Angeles where he took over instruction at the Los Angeles League. His highly personal and symbolic images were arguably the first vanguard images ever painted in Southern California.²⁸

The years 1906 to 1909, that is, from roughly the time Stanton attended the ASL in the Blanchard Building (renamed The Music Arts Building) to the time he left for Paris, were crowded with important events. The exact succession of these events remains clouded as of this writing. Apparently, following the example of his older brother, Stanton was expelled from two private schools in succession, his interest being more in the painting he was doing, the young girls he was pursuing, and drinking, which he "took up in a big way."²⁹

The first private school to expel young Wright did so "ostensibly for gambling, but actually because the headmaster and owner got the idea his wife, twenty-five years his junior, had become too interested in me."³⁰ From there, it was off to military school. On March 5, 1907, Archie Wright received a letter from the Headmaster of Harvard Military School in Los Angeles, advising him that Stanton was being expelled:

Dear Mr. Wright:

Stanton will come to you today, and will tell you that his connection with the Harvard School has come to a close....I will simply say here that he has been careless of our wishes about heeding our regulations, and about the lessons, ever since he came back, but we have hoped to get him thro' the year, until yesterday when he in connection with Darling, an expelled boy, and Head,

concocted and giggled over a scheme to fire off a fire extinguisher in Arnold Hall. This they accomplished. We consider it, and rightfully, I am sure, an outrage, and are dealing with it accordingly.³¹

Following Macdonald-Wright's own recollection of this period, he then attempted to get into some public schools, though these schools knew of his reputation and would not have him. He managed to convince one principal that he had experienced a change of heart, though this was merely a ruse to make the acquaintance of an attractive student. After making said student's acquaintance, he quit that school and once again took to a life comprised of painting, drinking and carousing. At this young age, Wright maintains, he was an habitu  of Chinatown and a regular customer of the local brothel, where he was rather attached to one of its employees.

Archie Wright tired of financing his son's indolence and determined to force him onto a career track. At his father's urging, Stanton attempted work in a medical office, but quickly lost interest. This episode was followed by a short stint in a department store, where Archie had business connections. Again, Stanton's longevity amounted to perhaps weeks. After that, he worked in an art supply store, but was terminated for giving discounts to art students. "By then hope of ever becoming a normal pillar of society was abandoned and I was left more or less to my own devices."³²

Resigned to a casual existence, Macdonald-Wright continued to read voraciously, as well as paint. During this period he discovered Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Hobbes and Locke, though most influential was the

Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, which "made an agnostic of me...[and] a socialist to boot."³³

Perhaps influenced by an immature understanding of Nietzsche's *übermann*, or more simply due to any one of his numerous rebellious impulses, Stanton decided to strike out on his own. With what little money he was able to raise, he signed on a wind-jammer bound for Nagasaki with a stop in Honolulu. This experience proved brief as well. Stanton was apprehended in Hawaii through the efforts of private detectives hired by his father. He returned to Los Angeles, most likely in the late summer or fall of 1907, "ragged, lame, and mad as hell." Archie Wright counseled him that there would come a day "when you cannot fall back on your old father."³⁴

The time following Stanton's return to the mainland was decisive. In conference together, he and his father agreed that Stanton's future did not lie in a conventional lifestyle. His interest was solely in art, a condition wisely accepted by the elder Wright. It was decided that he would go to Paris and study. Though Archie Wright could have contributed to the finances of this study, the money came from another source entirely:

My [Stanton's] intentions were to play the races. I had for a year been studying the 'dope sheets' on the Emeryville track, across the bay from San Francisco. I knew every horse, stable, and jockey, and was well acquainted with the tricks and habits of owners, and I had worked out a 'system' I felt certain would make me money, but I needed about five thousand dollars to put it in practice. I got it by marriage. I didn't marry for money, but that is what it amounted to.³⁵

Ida Wyman, a native of Wisconsin, was an attractive woman about ten years Stanton's senior. She and her mother had been visitors to the Arcadia Hotel, where Stanton would have had ample opportunity to lay groundwork for a future relationship. The actual courtship lasted two weeks. The two were married on January 14, 1908 in Los Angeles³⁶ without fanfare and without informing Archie and Annie Wright. Though Stanton was just seventeen, he reported his age as twenty-two, as did the older Ida.

The newlyweds spent most of the next year in San Francisco before leaving for Europe in the company of Ida's mother. Willard himself had found a new bride while travelling home by way of the State of Washington. When Willard arrived home, he had few plans for his own future and had a wife to support, while Stanton was focused for the first time in his life, and in the company of a woman wealthy enough to support the pursuit of his dream.³⁷

PARIS

Macdonald-Wright arrived in Paris in the fall of 1909, a most opportune historical moment. Past traditions were being challenged as radically different approaches to the art of painting were being developed. It was an environment rich in examples of past art and unparalleled in the production of the new. To this tempestuous environment, the young artist brought a wide-eyed enthusiasm: "I felt from the start, from the first day, that I had come home."³⁸

Initially, his relationship with his new wife was one of romantic bliss, as evidenced by an early entry in his Paris journal:

Ida devient chaque jour meilleure et je ne pourrais vivre sans elle. Elle est si douce, chère et bonne qu'il semble que tout le monde trouve son repos dans ses yeux. Elle est mon inspiration et mon assistante, et voir son amour pour moi dans toute ses actions est la plus grande joie de mon existence.³⁹

Whatever domestic harmony was shared among Stanton, Ida and Ida's mother, who was living with them at this time, was short lived. Unconstrained by the need to work for his art education, Stanton was free to revel in exhibits, long hours of uninterrupted painting, study at the Louvre, reading, and, inevitably, the cafés, bars and dance halls. Any sincere notions of building a long-term relationship with Ida, let alone raising a family, were distant from his mind. Recalling his marriage to Ida, he wrote years later: "There was so little understanding in me for the feeling of others, so much feeling in me for my own ambitions, for the necessity to release the ability I knew I had, to attack life and make it full by my own efforts."⁴⁰

Macdonald-Wright did, indeed, "attack life" in terms of taking advantage of what his European residency had to offer. He was able to afford a studio separate from his residence with wife and mother-in-law, and enter into the well-known and established art schools of Paris. These included the Académie Julian, the Colorossi, and the Académie Castelvuccho.

From his own account, Macdonald-Wright's experience at the Julian was confined to a small amount of time leading up to an altercation with Jean Paul-Laurens, an academy instructor.⁴¹ His disdain for authority figures, rules and regulations revealed itself in Paris much as it had in Los Angeles. It is important to note, however, that from the beginning of his

tenure in Paris, Macdonald-Wright was unimpressed with the long-revered academic tradition, and the pronouncements of its representatives.

At the Colorossi, Wright seems to have adapted to a somewhat regular schedule. In an undated Paris journal entry, he notes that "[I] Have been at Colorossi 2 for a month and a half drawing in the morning. Have changed my style completely." It is certain that Wright's study at the Colorossi came before his meeting fellow American Morgan Russell (1886-1953) and study with the Canadian Percyval Tudor-Hart (1873-1954), so this entry would be no later than 1910, and most likely dates from 1909. That he has "changed his style completely" is significant. The methods learned in Los Angeles working with Joseph Greenbaum and Warren Hedges were easily abandoned, indicative of little profound attachment to them on the part of Wright. Also, one might speculate that he was affected instantly by his initial contacts with progressive art, as the word "completely" suggests.

There is, unfortunately, no record of when Wright studied at the Casteluccho, or what his experiences there were. Immersed in an art student's life, it is not surprising that Wright would experiment with a number of possible educational options, staying only with those he found in keeping with the standards set by his own ambitions. It is doubtful that he studied there for any extended period.

Important to his development were his travels in 1911.⁴² In the company of his wife, and most likely his mother-in-law, Wright toured London, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Dordrecht and Brussels. Perhaps his Dutch ancestry on his mother's side made Stanton curious about Holland, though the lure of Rembrandt would have been sufficient for him to have directed their travels to the Rijksmuseum.

In London, he admired Whistler and Turner (but not Rossetti), as well as a Japanese exhibition that "was as good as any in London."⁴³ Of Turner, Macdonald-Wright wrote: "Then there is Turner and really, enough cannot be said of this man the world's greatest landscape painter. He has wonderful color, uses it pure, has taken all the gross materialism out of objects and has given me the essence of the beautiful without the *avoirdufois* weight."⁴⁴ The pictorial phenomenon of dematerializing nature, observed also in Monet and the Impressionists, would be of great importance to early modernists.

Wright bought an 1894 copy of the *Yellow Book* while in London, knowing it was out of print and soon would be rare. His interest in aestheticism as exemplified by Wilde was still very much intact: "When I get back to Paris, I am going to write a book or long article on the Life of Oscar Wilde--Later perhaps."⁴⁵

Upon his return to Paris, Stanton resumed his studies with diligence. He also began an affair with a young woman he met at the Colorossi, identified in his autobiographical drafts as "Louise."⁴⁶ One gathers from Wright's recollections that the affair was not only passionate, but ultimately as destructive as his marriage to Ida would turn out to be. Louise knew of Ida's existence, but was evidently so deeply attached to Wright that she wished their relationship to be sanctified by marriage. Like institutional rules and regulations, the laws governing marriage, both civil and ecumenical, were of no concern to Wright. Feeling no sense of traditional obligation, he entered into his first bigamist marriage on a trip to Italy, Louise's native country. When he left Europe in 1913, he did not even bother to apprise her of his departure. As an old man,

Macdonald-Wright himself was baffled by his youthful callousness, selfishness and emotionally brutal treatment of women:

In those years, gaudy with the colors of youth and easy conquests and utterly filled with the love and worship of art, everything else lost all importance, nothing had significance, my own marriage, my mistresses, my amusements. The deathlessness of a physical integrity that real women invariably feel was outside my world, mental and material--I ask myself how such feelings, so evident by their tenderness, concern for inconsequential things, signs of suffering or grief--the touch of a hand, the lowering of eyelids, the full gaze into my eyes, the ready acquiescence to any suggestion, the full and often breathless agreement with ideas about the beauty of a statue or the light on a landscape--how could such feelings escape me?⁴⁷

Louise was not the last woman to become unprofitably involved with Stanton Macdonald-Wright. Her attempted suicide over the affair did not alter his cavalier attitude toward relationships. By his own admission, this process required a good deal of time.

In the fall of 1909, Wright met fellow American art student Thomas Hart Benton (1889-1975), who became a close friend, and, eventually, a follower of Synchronism. In fact, Benton is the only associate discussed by name in Stanton's Paris journal.⁴⁸ Their association would continue later in New York, and sporadically for the remainder of their careers.

In addition to an active schedule of drawing and socializing, Macdonald-Wright attended lectures at the Sorbonne.⁴⁹ It was here that he came in contact with Henri Focillon⁵⁰ (1881-1943), who introduced him to Oriental art and philosophy. Already receptive to Oriental art, as

evidenced by his admiration for the Japanese exhibition he saw in London, Wright began what would become a life-long study of Oriental philosophy. These early forays into Eastern thought were neither as deep or as intensive as they would later become, though they were memorable enough for Wright to note them in future interviews.⁵¹

Wright's attendance at the Sorbonne, however sporadic it may have been, is further evidence of the strong academic inclination he had in common with his brother.⁵² Willard and Stanton, kicked out of more schools than most people ever attend, both flourished autodidactically. Both had an intense interest in history and philosophy, and were not content to merely theorize extemporaneously. Stanton studied art from the perspective of an historian, as well as from the perspective of the studio. It was, as shall be demonstrated, Stanton who actually wrote Willard's 1913 article for the Forum magazine, *From Impressionism to Synchronism*. Throughout his life, he would continue to publish and lecture on a variety of historical and aesthetic issues.

The more Macdonald-Wright read about, argued about, and looked at art, the more he gravitated toward modernism. He discovered Matisse, Gauguin and Cézanne in rapid succession. And, each of these modern masters hastened Wright's development in modernist painting.

The privileged conditions under which Stanton was living in Paris were evident in a letter written to his parents in the spring of 1911: "...Don't think because I am often grouchy that I'm a pessimist. The contrary. I find life perfect, there is not one thing I'd change, not one, everything is as it should be."⁵³ In that year Stanton and Ida moved to the Bouches-du-Rhone in the south of France, renting a villa called the *Rose du Ciel* in Cassis:

The house had thirteen rooms, quite small, and the garden had four or five different kinds of grapes, quinces, small oranges, figs both black and green and nuts on its wide terrace that sloped steeply to a beach, all our own and from which we bathed in the icy waters. We had our furniture sent down from Paris and I began an intensive period of work free from all romantic allurements....Life was idyllic.⁵⁴

Lee Simonson, an artist Willard Wright had met at Harvard, lived with the Wrights at *Rose du Ciel* during this period (fig. 2). Their relationship was somewhat strained over Stanton's refusal of Lee's request that American artist Marsden Hartley be allowed to live there, too. Wright simply disliked Hartley, whom he considered "a ham and a thirty-sixth rate painter."⁵⁵ According to Wright, Simonson wrote to his Harvard friends that if he were found murdered to look no further than Wright for the responsible party. Tensions mounted to the point where Simonson accused Stanton of training his monkeys (Wright loved pets, and monkeys were a favorite) to defecate in Simonson's smoking pipes (fig. 3).

Eventually, Wright again felt the need to return to Paris, and so packed up, leaving Ida in Cassis. Lee Simonson had also returned to Paris, and it was in his studio that Wright first met the artist, Morgan Russell, with whom he would collaborate on Synchronism:

Simonson had invited me to tea, and present were two hoity-toity English girls, a couple of young English literary intellectuals and Russell. A rather heated argument began when I overheard a glibly derogatory remark anent Balzac's lack of style and prolix introductions, for to me Balzac is as sacrosanct as Michelangelo. I

became somewhat sarcastic, asking them questions they could not answer and finally becoming fairly personal. As my host became more and more nervous and Russell more and more jocular the two girls decided it was time to leave. They and their escorts were ushered out and Russell, who had always disliked Simonson, began to expatiate with lurid details, practically with diagrams, on what should be done for these girls to awaken in them a sense of life and passion.⁵⁶

By coincidence, Wright and Russell lived next door to each other, with studios across a courtyard from one another. The two soon discovered that their researches in modernism were leading in similar directions, and began spending their time together experimenting, studying and, of course, socializing. Over the years, Wright always spoke of Russell with the greatest respect, and never missed an opportunity to advocate for Russell the recognition he felt his collaborator deserved:

Russell had one of the best minds I have ever encountered, and among the artists of that period I think that none, with the possible exception of Braque, could have minimally held their own with him. His whole outlook was so utterly the complementary of my own that we took great pleasure in each other's company. He had as complete a consciousness of certain subjects that interested him as anyone I've ever known, and his whole thinking processes were penetrating in anything that he tackled. He was an extremely practical man.⁵⁷

Though the two artists took to the cafés together, boxed together (Russell broke Wright's nose twice, and Macdonald-Wright knocked him

through a window), and exhibited together, a part of Russell's personality remained hidden from Stanton for years: Morgan's transvesticism.⁵⁸

Aside from Benton and Russell, Wright had few other acquaintances among the Americans studying in Paris. Joseph Stella impressed him as "a sincere and concentrated man," and Arthur Lee as being "avid for information."⁵⁹ It was Russell who became his steady accomplice in adventure. It was Russell who introduced Wright to Matisse and Rodin. Russell had been a student of Matisse and an admirer of Rodin. He was also an intimate of Gertrude and Leo Stein, and took Wright to the famous salons at 27, rue de Fleurus.⁶⁰ There, Wright saw more examples of work by Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso, among others. Wright was unimpressed with one of Gertrude's observations on paintings by Cézanne ("They seem to float"), and even less with her personally: "To me, Gertrude was not an uncommon type of woman. She was amusing, full of energy and ambition and exhibitionism, easy effects and pretense....She reminded me of a circus tent gently moved by a lazy breeze, or as she swayed slowly from side to side when talking, of an elephant contemplatively curling its trunk about some wisps of hay."⁶¹ According to Wright, Russell always referred to her as a "competent, but unconscious clown." In Stanton's journal of the period, he wrote: "Steinitis: the Disease of Paris." Throughout his life, Wright had no tolerance for those he felt were making a mere pretense to philosophical inquiry. Leo Stein, on the other hand, he felt to be a man of "sensibility and intelligence," and took an immediate liking to him. They corresponded in later years, and Wright retained a fondness and admiration for Leo, despite concluding that he was ultimately a failure as an aesthete.

Finally, it was Russell who introduced Wright to Percyval Tudor-Hart, the Canadian painter and color theorist then teaching in Paris. Wright and Russell realized that among their mutual interests in art was a desire to move away from the achromatic palette of Cubism, though neither wished to repeat the work of the Fauves, which they perceived as decorative. They sought a more elemental use of color, a method which would reveal the basic expressive powers of color, light and form. For both Wright and Russell, music was an art form that achieved expression most directly and yet most abstractly, unencumbered by illustrative or narrative content of any kind. Tudor-Hart was deeply involved with experimenting in the field of color/sound equivalents, a relationship that would be of great importance to the development of the color abstraction movement known as Synchronism.

Numerous influences and sources combined in the development of Synchronism, including the then current and highly innovative work of Robert and Sonia Delaunay, the Italian Futurists and, of course, the pervasive formal vocabulary of Cubism. Both Wright and Russell allowed their openness to historical precedent to play a large role in their evolving sense of the new potentials for painting. These precedents included for both the overwhelming figure of Michelangelo, the advances in representing optical sensation made by Delacroix, Turner, the Impressionists and Seurat, and an investigation of color theory which did not exclude, for Wright, Leonardo's *Trattato della Pittura*. There was no desire in either painter to overthrow tradition or deny the credibility of past art, but to build a new vision upon it, to synthesize and extract the most vital aspects. In this respect, they were like numerous other painters consciously seeking new forms of expression. And, in their interest in the

correspondence between music and color, they again were not alone, and again there existed historical precedent of which they were aware. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, it was the method in which Russell and Wright, working in tandem with Tudor-Hart, applied a system of color application to their images which made them distinct from the Orphic Cubism of the Delaunays. This method, more mystical than previously assumed, was really a summation of nineteenth century aestheticism rather than a challenge to the future, although, in many respects, Synchronism was that, as well.

Also important to an understanding of Synchronism as a "movement" in an era of endless "isms" is that there were only two members, and these two had distinct approaches to painting. So, too, was the personality of each different, leading inevitably to dissimilar goals.

Much has been written of the atmosphere of pre-War Paris in which Synchronism developed: the competitive spirit among artists, the tremendous enthusiasms, the revolutionary pictorial achievements. Russell and Wright were fully aware of the context, and it may well have been a feeling of intimidation that contributed toward their overly-aggressive launching of their aesthetic manifesto, as they were the only Americans to write one in this era. Of course, Wright's acerbic self-confidence and arrogance was, according to Stanton, outdone only by Russell's. Combining two such egos resulted in a brash debut, though, in fairness, it might be argued that two such strong wills were required to confront the Parisian establishment:

When Russell and I decided early in 1912 to exhibit together, we knew what a terrible hurdle we had to surmount to gain any recognition in Paris, where the general idea still obtained that all

Americans were dressed-up savages incapable of any sensibility. To counteract such a fate our first consideration was to launch ourselves so that we could not be drawn into the aegis of any French movement. *Que faire?* We finally decided to coin a name that would have a distinct relation to our aims. The immediate danger to us was Guillaume Apollinaire, who was in process of launching Delaunay and the school of Orphism, also rebelling against the brown, black and white of the Cubists, and we foresaw that at the very least we would be sucked into the wake of this powerful publicity.⁶²

Russell claimed to have actually coined the word "Synchromism" while thinking up a title for his Salon entry of 1913.⁶³ Synchromy, as a term, was also used by the Delaunays at approximately the same time. It appeared in a Robert Delaunay article of 1913,⁶⁴ and the word itself as image in a painting dated by Sonia as having been done in that same year.⁶⁵ Its earliest documented usage, however, was by Paul Sérusier, who used the term to title three paintings he exhibited at the Salon des Indépendents in 1910.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, both the French Orphists and the American Synchromists claimed priority in both the use of the word and the development of color abstraction. What is certain is that Wright and Russell were well aware of the high-keyed palette and fractured surfaces in the paintings Apollinaire had termed "Orphic Cubism." Wright was greatly impressed with Robert Delaunays's *City of Paris* of 1912:

There is no question of the color of Delaunay. He has beyond doubt great talent. His canvas is the most important in 1912 Salon des Independents. But, his color lacks depth. He is still soaked with classic ideal—he has really done nothing new, his style counts for

nothing in art but I certainly got an emotion before his *Ville de Paris*....⁶⁷

Wright made the acquaintance of Delaunay at around the time of the first Synchronist exhibition in Paris in 1913. He anecdotally recalled that Delaunay approached him at a café and asked, "So what is this Synchronism business all about?" To which Wright replied, "It would require a man of intelligence to understand." A brawl ensued, which, unfortunately, did not establish definitively the ascendancy of either movement. In later years, Wright always included Delaunay in his lectures as one of the most important figures in the development of early modernism. Still, he and Russell believed their approaches to color to be very different, and not merely the paraphrasing of Orphism that the vast majority of future critics have deemed it to be.

Russell and Wright made impressive progress in the years 1912 and 1913 as painters, both working with an obsessive zeal. Stanton remembered the time as one of personal elation, of real joy, "so full of desire to paint that it was bursting out into song..."⁶⁸ Russell, too, in the years following the demise of Synchronism, wrote to Stanton in tones of nostalgic reverie. Their youthful ebullience, replete with the misjudgments and overestimations inherent in their age, was a motivating factor they never completely regained in their future respective circumstances.

By June of 1913, the Synchronists had secured an exhibition at the *Neue Kunstsalon* in Munich, hoping to try out their new work in the "provinces" before making a Paris debut. A small catalogue was printed that included their individual statements, and a hand-colored poster printed (fig. 4) to advertise the show. The poster proved so popular that

all were stolen from the kiosks where they had been mounted. In the joint preface for the catalogue, the extraordinary claims made by Russell and Wright were first set forth, claims that would soon earn them the epithet of arrogant upstarts:

In freeing ourselves from certain previous restraints and stepping boldly into the unknown, we have been able to wrest from nature its secret in order to bring painting to its highest point of intensity. Although painting is a step intellectually ahead of music, it leans closer to reality, for vision brings us with stronger ties to nature than does our hearing. It is impossible in our art to arrive at greater heights when we have finally reached that point...⁶⁹

The artists sold nothing at this exhibition, but were gratified by a few complimentary notices in the press, and by the reaction of artists which was so much better than no reaction at all. The exhibition also coincided with a reunion between Stanton and his brother Willard, whom he had not seen in years.

Willard had taken a job in New York as editor for the *Smart Set* magazine, a circumstance brought about with the aid of H. L. Mencken.⁷⁰ A productive and highly visible tenure as critic at the *Los Angeles Times* had enabled Willard to establish a reputation as a critic, and to thereby gain the attention of Mencken. He was in Europe to purchase stories and poetry for the magazine owned by John Adams Thayer that Willard was intent on turning into the leading vanguard publication of its time. Stanton recalled their meeting:

He had gained flesh and wore a Kaiser moustache that pointed heavenward, on which he wore a sort of laced corset at night, was money-arrogant and struck me as having become very

vulgar and alien. And I, who wore a blondish beard, no neck-tie and sandals, made him cringe whenever I came into his very fancy hotel or accompanied him to restaurants. However, this all did not lessen his long encouragement of my work. I was 'new', and he was a disciple of all that was *avant-garde*. I gave him the German girl I had annexed on my arrival and our relations were, at least on the surface, friendly.⁷¹

While in Munich, Morgan and Macdonald-Wright admired the frieze from the pediment of the temple of Aphaia at Aegina. Also, Macdonald-Wright copied Rubens' *Four Corners of the World* in the Synchronist mode that he later sold to Hugh Breckenridge (1870-1937),⁷² a teacher at the Pennsylvania Academy of Arts in Philadelphia.

Once back in Paris, Willard and Stanton suspended professional pursuits momentarily to enter into what Stanton called "a galaxy of man's depravities, some elegant, some sordid, all repugnant to me..."⁷³ Macdonald-Wright's own penchant for womanizing apparently did not include the same sorts of amusements that attracted his brother. Once back to business, Stanton helped him meet some literary figures, including Eugène Brieux (1858-1932, author of *La Femme Seule* and *Maternité* in 1913), from whom Willard purchased some pieces. From there, the two went on to London, where they met Ezra Pound, and where Stanton encountered the English Vorticist Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957)⁷⁴ and his manifesto in the publication, *Blast*. True to form, Stanton was unimpressed with either Pound or Vorticism, which he found to be lacking in "either wit or sting." He and Willard parted ways in London; Willard returned to New York, and Stanton returned to Cassis and Ida to

make final preparations for the Synchronist exhibition to be held at the prestigious Bernheim-Jeune gallery.

The Munich exhibition had cost both Wright and Russell financially, and they predicted the same lack of sales at their Paris debut. The difference was that the Bernheim-Jeune show could establish their reputation as serious components of the modern movement at large. Stanton worked diligently on his statement for the catalogue hoping to make each phrase "impeccable as logic, philosophy and art..."⁷⁵ It was also at this time that Stanton wrote an article for Willard that would eventually be published as *From Impressionism to Synchronism*.⁷⁶ At the time he saw the Armory Show in New York, Willard knew nothing of modern art.⁷⁷ By 1915, he would be, by virtue of the education facilitated by his younger brother, a recognized authority in the field.

In their Paris manifesto, the arrogance of Russell and Wright's Munich statements swelled to the hyperbolic. Orphism was attacked and Picasso dismissed. It is difficult in retrospect, even knowing the Synchronists wished to distinguish themselves from other modernists, to understand their political strategies. Attention in an era of outrageousness demanded, perhaps, as yet unheard of pretensions. What the Synchronists risked was credibility. Confident of their talent and sincere in their aesthetic beliefs, the two moved brashly ahead. Though the Synchronists never benefited in Paris from a sympathetic critic such as Apollinaire was for the Orphists, they were Americans in a French-dominated milieu, and while their paintings fell far short of their fiery rhetoric, the show was, in the words of art historian Virginia Spate, "curiously, the single most important exhibition containing non-

figurative art in Paris before the war, for Delaunay exhibited his non-figurative works only in Germany."⁷⁸

Contemporary critical assessments were harsh. Willard Wright recapped them in his (and Stanton's) 1915 *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning*:

The Munich critics were the first to attack it. Later in Paris André Salmon wrote, "The public will believe that Synchronism is the final movement of which it has learned. Synchronism is the worst of backward movements, a vulgar art, without nobility, unlikely to live, as it carries the principles of death in itself." *Les Arts et Les Artistes* summed up Synchronists with: "The house painter at the corner can, when he wishes, claim that he belongs to this school." *La Plume* discovered the fact that "Macdonald-Wright copies with a dirty broom the Slave of Michelangelo."⁷⁹

Of course, criticism of this kind does not keep away either the curious or other artists, and the Bernheim-Jeune show was well-attended. However, such criticism no doubt fueled the perception that Synchronism was a bastard step-child of Orphism, a perception that continued to haunt them and one which eventually became a "truism" within the litany of modern art history.

Before the opening of the Bernheim-Jeune exhibit, Stanton wrote to his parents apologizing for not having written, and explaining his numerous labors. In that letter, he indicated that he and Ida were set to sail for America on the 25th of November, apparently not to repatriate, but to visit, as he also wrote that "All I need is another year and a half of quiet study and I will take care of myself O. K...."⁸⁰ From the tone of the letter, in combination with Wright's lamentations over having no funds for

current projects, it appears that he had spent his wife's resources. Ida's mother was no longer with them in Paris, either. The return to the States may well have been to raise funds for a return trip to Europe. All of Stanton's plans, and his personal emotional stability, were upset by the death of Archie Wright in September, 1913. In a letter postmarked November 12, 1913, he wrote:

We got your letter today telling about pop...To tell you I'm sad is so inadequate that it's ridiculous. I've never before had any idea what sorrow was. I feel that there is nothing to live for. I went into the country in the afternoon where I could be alone.⁸¹

Stanton left Europe at the end of November. He was unhappy for several reasons; the thought of going back to America after five years in Paris was unpleasant, his money was depleted (though he stood a chance of inheriting a portion of his father's estate), and his relationship with Ida was finally irreparably strained. Once in New York in December, Stanton separated from Ida. She went off to live with relatives, and the couple would see each other only once more.

Also in that month, the article on Synchronism that Macdonald-Wright had written appeared in *The Forum*. It would have been extremely impolitic to put his own name on an essay that blatantly served a propagandistic end, that is, the advancement of Synchronism as a movement and himself as a painter. There was no mention that the signed author was the subject's brother. The article did accomplish some immediate goals: it made Willard appear more erudite in art criticism than he then was, and it prompted an exhibition invitation for the Synchronists from the Carroll Gallery in January of 1914.

On his own, freshly returned from a high-profile exhibit in Paris, and with a show scheduled in New York, Stanton's circumstances might have been ideal had it not been for his lack of money, a new and disturbing situation for him. His father had left him and Willard only a dollar each in his will, the rest of the estate going to Annie Wright. Stanton did not go on to visit his mother in Los Angeles. He moved in with Willard, and looked for work. He landed a job as a translator, but detested the monotony of it. Desperate, he appealed to Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (Russell's benefactor) for money, and Willard appealed to their mother on his brother's behalf: "I have had this letter in mind some time, but have hesitated about sending it to you. It is about Stanton. Now, is there any possible way that you could furnish him with a little allowance for a year or so—say about \$75 a month? Since he has been in New York he has gone to pieces...for him to drop out now would be suicide, not only to him as a significant artist but the whole movement of Synchronism."⁸² Mrs. Whitney declined to support Stanton, though Annie Wright, never able to refuse Willard anything, eventually sent along a modest stipend. In the meantime, with a meager income insufficient to his more refined tastes, Stanton found solace in the resumption of drinking and carousing.

The decadent lifestyle of the brothers Wright took on a more ominous nature in 1914. Stanton began smoking opium, a habit with which Willard had already become regular. The debilitating effects of drug addiction would have serious consequences for Willard. Stanton gradually increased his use of opium until nearly five years later when he realized the destructive nature of his problem, and managed to quit without assistance. Willard was not so fortunate.

Aside from Willard, Stanton saw old friend Tom Benton on a regular basis, and critic Thomas Craven. Benton and Wright discussed where Synchronist theory had been and where it was going. Of Wright, during his New York years, Benton recalled that:

Wright was a welcome addition to the life of New York. Talk in his society was lively. He had come home with the intention of taking New York by artistic storm, and when the city failed to capitulate he wandered around from studio to studio full of picturesque blasphemy. He was the most devoted skirt chaser among us and our most continuous philosopher on the perplexities of sex. He was the originator of many great and hilarious statements pertaining to the ladies, and the father of many excellent tactical precepts directed to the conquest of the more reluctant among them.⁸³

By the time the Synchronist show went up in March, there had already been unfortunate trouble connected with it. Arthur Lee and Andrew Dasburg, friends of Russell's, wrote to him that Wright was claiming all the credit for the founding of the movement, to which Russell responded in self-defense:

When I tell you how W. started at the twelfth hour to do something new because I had naturally arrived at doing so, and got a variation on mine as Carlock, Stein, and many others know. W. offered to pay the expense of a show if I would consent to expose with him otherwise there would never have been a show of two or a movement called Synchronisme or, if so, it would have been connected alone with my name.⁸⁴

Macdonald-Wright smoothed over the incident as best he could, assuring Russell that he was making every effort to spotlight his work under the limited conditions, time constraints and budgetary realities hampering the exhibit.

The Carroll Gallery show flopped commercially. It must have been extremely disheartening to Wright, who had really believed while still in Paris that Synchronism would sell in New York. He may have overestimated the effect the 1913 Armory Show had on elevating local appreciation for modern art. However, dealers and collectors were able to dismiss Synchrony due in no small measure to strident Synchronist rhetoric. Stanton always felt that it was Willard who had somehow botched things up, never accepting any degree of fault for his own antagonistic statements. Willard may, indeed, have been responsible for getting Benton to dress up like an Apache and skulk around the gallery after having planted stories in the press about alleged threats against the Synchronists.⁸⁵ Cheap sensationalism to be sure, but it was the awareness of Morgan and Stanton's joint superior air that cost them sympathy even before they could be fairly judged.

Willard's own editorial position at the *Smart Set* had been in jeopardy for some time, because the magazine was steadily losing its readership under his guidance. With his termination eminent and certain, Stanton was able to convince him that one could live much more cheaply in Paris, a much greater city. Stanton cared little for what he considered to be the artificial quality of life in New York.⁸⁶ The combination of his memories of dedicated work in Paris and his smug dismissal in New York must have played a part in his desire to return to Europe. The brothers left together on March 28, 1914 on the *Olympia*,

though Willard had some difficulties in obtaining the balance Thayer owed him on his contract. It required some strong arm tactics on the part of the Wrights, but the much needed money was secured before leaving New York.⁸⁷ Stanton, reinvigorated to be returning to Paris, wrote Russell: "I shall start life all over again and to everybody but you and Dracopoli (the only two friends I want or have) I'm permanently incarcerated in a bughouse."⁸⁸

PARIS AGAIN

Once in Paris, Willard and Stanton found meager living accommodations 14 rue de Moulin de Buerre. Willard wrote his mother the lies she needed to hear in order to send them money:

There is a spirit of work and a congenial atmosphere here I have never felt before. I have stopped smoking and so has Stanton; we find it's a great saving. We get up every morning at seven or seven-thirty and are to bed early every night. For breakfast we drink a quart of milk between us, two hardboiled eggs and four rolls (all left for us at the door--entire cost--fourteen cents for both of us.⁸⁹

Stanton recalled a very different mood, one of torpor and that he "desultorily painted and drew." Still, this was the year in which he produced *Abstraction on Spectrum (Organization No. 5)* and the first version of *Conception Synchrony*, two major works. He was receiving financial support from his mother, and back in the company of Morgan Russell, who also painted several of his most important works in this year.⁹⁰ This was also the time he was perhaps closest to his brother, a time in which they shared numerous visits to the Louvre and to galleries, as

well as spending time collaborating on literary projects envisioned by Willard. Stanton painted a portrait of Willard during this period (fig. 5), derived from a painting by Cézanne, *Portrait of Gustave Geffroy*, in the Louvre.⁹¹ Willard is depicted seated at table with a stack of books, his hands on an open book, and a row of books behind him. That this portrait mimics Cézanne's *Geffroy* is perhaps no accident: "Geffroy was one of the first journalists to write in support of the Provence master, predicting that the artist, then outrageously neglected, would one day grace the Louvre. Willard, it seems, was to be the Geffroy to Stanton's Cézanne. He was being groomed for a lofty part."⁹²

Stanton's re-entry into the artistic milieu of Paris was cut short by the advent of World War I. Along with Willard, and thousands of others, he left France for London. Here, the two found the cheapest possible accommodations run by a landlady "whose life ambition it was to own a bathtub." Checks from Annie Wright may have been interrupted by the boys sudden move, for they were once again in financial straits. Willard wrote her of their desperation in a manner Stanton described as his brother's "literary efforts to wheedle money from my mother..."⁹³

The time in London dragged. Willard worked on drafts of his future novel, *The Man of Promise*, and the brothers also collaborated on some short detective stories published, via Willard's connection with Mitchell Kennerly of *The Forum*, under the pen name "Albert Otis." It was in this very literary genre that Willard later gained fame as murder mystery novelist, S. S. Van Dine.

Stanton attempted to join the Foreign Legion, but, as he put it, "...my health, or rather my debilitation, made me a poor recruit, but that's another story."⁹⁴ This "debilitation" may have been the unsalutary effects

of opium smoking, which, one might argue, also gave him the idea of joining in the first place.

Unable to paint, and with Willard nearing completion of his manuscripts and no end to the war in sight, Stanton saw repatriation to the States as the only alternative to his continued malaise in London. Willard borrowed enough money for the two of them to make the trip. On their last night in London, Stanton, Willard and Jean Dracopoli stayed up into the night smoking Turkish opium as they listened repeatedly on an old phonograph to Tschaikovsky's *Danse Arabe*.

NEW YORK AGAIN

Stanton and Willard arrived in New York, completely broke, on the *Lusitania* in March of 1915. Willard borrowed more money from a New York acquaintance, and the two moved into a small place on Kelly Street in the Bronx. It was at this time, according to Stanton, that he and Willard collaborated on *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning*: "...I was to furnish notes on the well-known men and movements and he was, as he said, to translate them into civilized English."⁹⁵ They worked for some time in the Bronx before Willard took an apartment of 58th Street in Manhattan. Once there, Willard moved a mistress in and his brother out.

Stanton found a studio in the old Lincoln Arcade, populated at that time with all manner of the unconventional:

It was a dismal place, cold and dirty, but all I could afford, and this with difficulty. I remember buying soup in a tin pail when I first moved in, drinking it, and setting the pail aside. The next morning I had occasion to move it and it felt heavier than an empty

pail should. I thought, pleasurably, that I had left enough soup for another meal. Not so. It was crammed to the top with cockroaches.⁹⁶

This was Wright's situation when his mother came to New York to visit. She was, not surprisingly, shocked at Stanton's circumstances. Willard appeared not much better. He was working obsessively on *Modern Painting*, as well as on an anthology of Nietzsche. As Loughery has pointed out, Willard was at the "height of his Germanophilia, which put him at odds with most of his countrymen" and "seemed to be suffering the effects of a prolonged drug withdrawal."⁹⁷ Mrs. Wright could only lament the dire condition of her sons, and in a letter to Willard's essentially abandoned wife back in Los Angeles, she wrote: "Their 'careers' are taking too heavy a toll, and both Willard and Stanton love themselves so better than anything in the world that there is no compassion."⁹⁸ After this trip, Annie Wright no longer supported either one.

Stanton, himself no longer able to tolerate the degeneracy of the Arcade, moved to the top floor of a flat in Hell's Kitchen. He still had no heat in winter, and no bathroom. He and Tom Benton used to frequent a swimming pool equipped with showers in order to bathe. Macdonald-Wright bought a dog and, as in more luxurious days in Cassis, a monkey. His opium use increased, as did his painting:

When I wasn't smoking, my palette was never at rest. From the moment I arose in the morning I felt the need of creating, and with my monkey, Ajeeb, contented and quiet on my neck, I stood before my easel and turned out canvas after canvas. One of my most productive periods was the three years I spent in New York, a

period relatively free from technical or 'approach' problems. I painted in the momentum of the 1912-13 years and most of the work I did was of the human figure.⁹⁹

Indeed, Wright continued to paint in the color scales he devised along with Russell and Tudor-Hart in Paris. A close analysis reveals that he followed the scale system more closely than did Russell, who, by his own admission, deviated from them and then quit using them altogether after 1916.¹⁰⁰ Benton's curiosity about the system was aroused when Wright first came to New York in 1914. At that time, he failed to inquire about it, but did get Wright to show it to him in this period:

Stanton, who was, as in our Paris days, disposed to forward my interests, indicated that if I could produce the pictures, I would be included in the [Forum] exhibition. As I had not lost my curiosity, aroused the year before, about the Synchronist color system, I asked to have it revealed so that I might explore its possibilities for my own work. This system, invented by Tudor Hart, a Canadian scientist-painter residing in Paris, took the form of a spectral wheel so divided that triads of harmoniously related colors could be automatically determined. I was immediately taken by its complete rationality and with my usual enthusiasm for a new painting theory set about experimenting with it.¹⁰¹

It is also most likely here that Wright expounded to Benton upon the "bump and hollow"; the necessity of having the projections and recessions in an image in the rhythmic manner of Michelangelo's figures. The bump and hollow, for Wright, was more than just simple contrapposto, it involved the concept of an overall balance of color and forms in space. Benton adopted the concept and, though he dropped

modernism completely in his own painting, he later taught this idea learned from Wright.¹⁰² When Stanton moved back to Santa Monica, he espoused the bump and hollow immediately to those who would listen, even though his own work shifted back to objectivity.

To support his opium, monkey, and dog, Wright finally did what he said in his first New York period that he would never do, prostitute his talents. He made pen and ink illustrations for what he termed a "fly by night" magazine, and signed them with the pseudonym "d'Este." (fig. 6) He also did some color poster illustrations to support the war effort, and taught art part-time for the Young Women's Hebrew Association. Occasionally, the Daniel Gallery sold a piece, but this was rare and at least once a "sold" painting was never paid for. Despite limited sales, Wright recalled the dealer fondly: "Daniels was always honest with his men and had a good sense of humor."¹⁰³

In March of 1916, Willard Huntington Wright combined forces with dealer Alfred Stieglitz, artist Robert Henri, arts activist Dr. John Weichsel, critic Dr. Christian Brinton and editor of the *International Studio*, W. H. de B. Nelson, to organize an exhibit that would spotlight the best of American vanguard painting. Held at the Anderson Gallery but sponsored by the *Forum Magazine*, where Willard served as art critic, a total of sixteen artists were selected who might best rekindle the public intensity generated by the Armory Show. Included were Ben Benn, Thomas Benton, Oscar Bluemner, Andrew Dasburg, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Alfred Maurer, Henry McFee, George Of, Man Ray, Morgan Russell, Charles Sheeler, Abraham Walkowitz, Marguerite and William Zorach, and Macdonald-Wright. Each artist was

allowed to write his (and her) introduction, and to have one reproduction in the catalogue.

Stanton wrote to Russell in optimistic terms of projected sales and enhanced reputations ("After the Armory Show," he wrote, "it will be the most talked of exhibition ever given here...").¹⁰⁴ Further, he took responsibility for the stretching and framing of pieces shipped by Russell, and, it seems, found the money to bring Morgan over for the show.¹⁰⁵ Whatever animosities had been generated over the Carrol Galleries show in 1914 were not sufficient to prevent their close collaboration.

The Forum Show was not the financial success the Wrights hoped it would be. The relationship of modernist painting to its European antecedents should not be overlooked as part of the public's unenthusiastic reaction, as this was a time of increased nationalism and suspicion of things foreign. More germane to the preponderance of negative critical reaction was the publication of Willard's *Modern Painting* in November of 1915, which had aggravated critics and set the stage for a hostile reception to any show sponsored by Huntington Wright and stemming from ideas proposed in his book.¹⁰⁶ Well-known writers Royal Cortissoz and Kenyon Cox, only recently attacked by Huntington Wright in an article for the *Forum* magazine, predictably returned fire regarding the Forum Exhibition. Joining them in negative response were J. E. Chamberlain of the *Evening Mail*, Leo Stein of the *New Republic* (which is perhaps why Stanton thought of him as a "failed aesthete"), Frederick W. Eddy of the *New York World*, R. J. Coady of the Washington Square Galleries and Frank J. Mather of Princeton. Writing positively of the show were Charles Caffin of the *New York American* and Henry McBride of the *Sun*. However, even Caffin's generally favorable

comments were hedged with skepticism. On Macdonald-Wright specifically, Caffin felt that while looking at the work "...the impression began to grow less and less vivid and the painting assumed the suggestion of being highly systemized scientific formulae."¹⁰⁷

In 1917, Macdonald-Wright was involved, though minimally, with The People's Art Guild, a communal project organized by Dr. John Weichsel (who had been a member of the Forum Exhibition committee) to support artists.¹⁰⁸ Wright felt that Weichsel was, contrary to his rhetoric, a man motivated by self-interest, and he distanced himself from the Guild. At meetings hosted in Weichsel's home, Wright listened to arguments over the activism required to improve the artists' lot, but "...politics interested me as little as mathematics."¹⁰⁹ However, Stanton did exhibit in a Weichsel-organized show in February 1917, along with thirty-two other American and European modernists.¹¹⁰

Near destitute after paying off debts incurred by the Forum Exhibition, Wright approached Alfred Stieglitz about a possible exhibition. This occurred in March. The show generated enough money for Wright to subsist well into the next year, and provided an opportunity for Stieglitz and Wright to solidify a working relationship that would result in future collaborations, including a travelling exhibit of 291 artists to Los Angeles.

By way of appreciation, Wright gave Stieglitz a painting that he had done during the March 1917 show: "He [Stieglitz] was deeply touched and told me that it was the first time a painter had ever given him anything. Later he sold the picture, endorsed the check and gave it to me. And I gave him another picture. And this went the same way, and in time several others."¹¹¹ This is perhaps how Stieglitz acquired *Aeroplane Synchrony in Yellow and Orange*,¹¹² now in the collection of the

Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Wright later recalled all-night sessions of non-stop talk with Stieglitz.

The most noted collector to have purchased work by Wright from his 291 exhibit was the "noble buyer" and New York attorney John Quinn¹¹³ One of the most important early patrons of modern art, Quinn purchased three Wrights, all now lost, from Stieglitz.¹¹⁴ In 1917, a fourth painting was acquired from Wright, the *Interior, Synchronomy in Yellow-Orange*,¹¹⁵ also unlocated. Quinn proposed an exchange for one of the paintings purchased at 291, entitled *Synchronomy in Orange*, and thereby acquired *Synchronomy in Blue-Green*, the only work owned by Quinn which can be now be identified.¹¹⁶ Still, sales were generally few and life in Hell's Kitchen continued to be, in Stanton's words, "miserable," and a decision was made in 1918 to leave the city:

...I was ready for other scenes. I was fed up with the battle for a living and the battle that I had maintained, without relaxation, with American painters and the near silence of the critics and dealers vis-a-vis my work. I was convinced of my own importance in the field of American art, having been a pioneer of modernity in Paris, and I knew that I was the only painter in the entire country sure of what he was doing. I had paid my debts, thanks to the show Stieglitz had given me in 1917, and withal I had a clean slate. With my last dollars I bought a ticket on the Southern Pacific Railway, gave everything I owned, my drawings, half-finished pictures, even my brushes and canvas, to a young singer who was on his uppers and had been staying with me awaiting the moment when he should become a cantor, and entrained for Los Angeles.¹¹⁷

Discouraged with the art scene in New York but not at all with the depth of his own vision, Macdonald-Wright arrived in California in the fall of 1918 fully prepared to continue his researches and experiments.¹¹⁸ The stifling garret in Hell's Kitchen was replaced by the Mediterranean climate to which he would always return.

¹Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, fourth rev. ed., 1983), 35-36.

²Jan Stussy Papers, The Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution [AAA in subsequent reference] from a taped interview with between Stussy and Macdonald-Wright, on cassette three of five, 1970.

³Will South, interview with Henry Reed, Montclair, New Jersey, 23 May 1990. Reed related that Wright said this to him during a visit to the artist in the late 1960s.

⁴Francisco was for St. Francis, to which the non-Catholic Annie objected. Delimpaliso was the name of Archie's grandfather. Macdonald was arbitrarily added to balance the Spanish and Dutch with an Americanism. Stanton Macdonald-Wright quoted in Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright, *Serenade in Blue*, unpaginated, hereafter cited as *Serenade*. A biography in progress on her late husband, chapters and page numbers provided to the author vary in format. Citations in this study are taken directly as provided from xerox of drafts in the possession of the Mrs. Wright. Numerous citations to follow are unpaginated.

⁵John Loughery, *Alias S. S. Van Dine* (New York: Scribner's, 1992), 37.

⁶Jan Stussy, "Manuscript about Stanton Macdonald-Wright," in the Jan Stussy papers, roll 3976, frame 753, AAA.

⁷The following advertisement appeared in *Land of Sunshine* 3, no. 1 (June 1895): 58: "A Home by the Sea—Choice Lots at South Santa Monica (Ocean Park) Only \$100—Easy Terms..." On this same page, a photograph of the Hotel Arcadia appears, described as "The only first-class hotel in this, the leading coast resort of the Pacific. 150 pleasant rooms, large and airy ball room, beautiful lawn and flower gardens. Magnificent panoramic view of the sea. First-class orchestra. Surf bathing unexcelled, and private salt water baths in bath house belonging to Hotel."

⁸In the late nineteenth century, the Chinese community in Los Angeles produced a weekly paper, which, though it did not survive, was a testament to the size and vitality of the local population. San Francisco in 1902 had four Chinese daily newspapers. See Ednah Robinson, "Chinese Journalism in California," *Outwest* 16, no. 1 (January 1902): 33.

⁹Here also begins the difficult and often frustrating task of sorting fact from fiction in the life of Stanton Macdonald-Wright. In numerous interviews dating from later life, in information provided to museums and galleries, in his voluminous personal correspondence, and, not least of all, in his own journals, the details and chronology of Macdonald-Wright's development are often contradicted, mis-remembered or simply erroneously reported. The following biographical sketch is drawn from every available source, and every attempt has been made to avoid error. Still, the reader is advised that the subject, keenly aware of

his role in history and sensitive to its future evaluation, is one not immune from self-aggrandizement, nor is he unlikely to embellish the facts of his life, even when those facts are singularly impressive and important in an unaltered state.

¹⁰*Serenade*, 1.

¹¹*Serenade*, Chapter two, 2.

¹²[*View of Santa Monica*] 1903, oil on board, 16 x 8 in. Joseph Chowng Gallery, San Francisco, California. This gallery has represented the Estate of Stanton Macdonald-Wright since 1980, and is hereafter referred to as the Chowng Gallery.

¹³The dating of this painting, derived from a handwritten notation verso by Annie Wright, seems certain.

¹⁴Loughery, *Van Dine*, 41.

¹⁵*Serenade*, 67.

¹⁶Loughery cites Willard's 1910 essay, "The Uselessness of Art" as being "straight out of Wilde," *Van Dine*, 58.

¹⁷Stanton Macdonald-Wright, typescript of his Paris Journal, c. 1909-1913. Willard Huntington Wright Papers, Special Collections, The Alderman Library of the University of Virginia.

¹⁸*Serenade*, 67.

¹⁹*Serenade*, 8 .

²⁰Jan Stussy, interview with Stanton Macdonald-Wright, tape three of five. Jan Stussy papers, AAA.

²¹Henry Weeks papers, roll 690, frame 49, AAA.

²²The history of the Art Students' League in Los Angeles has not been documented, and there are conflicting accounts of its origins. One account gives 1890 as the founding year: "It is affiliated with the Art Students League of Los Angeles, which is the oldest art school in that city, having been founded by Antony Anderson, former art critic of the Times, about 1890." from undated newsclipping, "Student's League Grows," AAA LA 5, reel 152. Nancy Moure reports the founding year as 1906, see *Publications in Southern California Art: 1,2 & 3: 6*. For a founding date of 1906, also see the Los Angeles Times, July 8, 1906. The Art Students' League of Los Angeles was most likely the result of a gradual organization involving Puthuff, Anderson and others, making the identification of any precise commencement date impossible.

²³See Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit* (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1923).

²⁴*Serenade*, 12.

²⁵*Serenade*, 14.

²⁶William H. Gerdts, *Art Across America: Two Centuries of Regional Painting*, vol. 3 (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), 322.

²⁷SMW, "Art Stuff," *Script* 29, no. 661 (28 August 1943): 24.

²⁸For additional discussion of Slinkard, see Charles C. Eldredge, *American Imagination and Symbolist Painting* (New York: Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University, 1979).

²⁹The following sequence is taken from Macdonald-Wright's autobiographical account, quoted in *Serenade*, chapter two. His reference to liquor from page 18.

³⁰*Serenade*, 9.

³¹Xerox in author's possession of original letter in the collection of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

³²*Serenade*, 17.

³³*Serenade*, 18.

³⁴*Serenade*, 23.

³⁵*Serenade*, 28.

³⁶Certified copy of their marriage license, provided to the author on 4 July 1992 by the Registrar-recorder/County Clerk for the County of Los Angeles, State of California.

³⁷"Stanton Macdonald Wright, a student of the Art Student's League, will start for Paris this week, to be gone for five years of study." in Antony Anderson, "Art and Artists," 27 June 1909, *Los Angeles Times*: 2. This report, in combination with the fact Wright was married in 1908, would seem to nullify Macdonald-Wright's claim to having left for Paris in 1907. In addition, Thomas Hart Benton recalled meeting Macdonald-Wright "in the late autumn of 1909" when Wright had "recently arrived from California." See Benton, *An American in Art* (Lawrence, Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1969), 18. In Wright's Paris journal, numerous entries can be dated with certainty from 1909 forward, though none earlier.

³⁸*Serenade*, 58.

³⁹Paris Journal, unpaginated. Stanton's French has been edited here for clarity. English translation: "Ida becomes a better person with every passing day and I could not live without her. She is so sweet, dear, and good that it seems everyone finds [tranquility] when they look into her eyes. She is my inspiration and my assistant, and to see her love for me in her every action is the greatest joy of my existence."

⁴⁰*Serenade*, 53.

⁴¹SMW, lecture at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Jan Stussy papers, tape five of five, AAA.

⁴²Los Angeles *Times*, 16 July 1911, sec. 3, p. 14, col. 2. Notes Wright is in London, and is about to travel through Holland and Italy.

⁴³Paris Journal, unpaginated.

⁴⁴Paris Journal, unpaginated.

⁴⁵Paris Journal, unpaginated.

⁴⁶*Serenade*, 121.

⁴⁷*Serenade*, 121-122.

⁴⁸Specifically, in the Paris Journal typescript in the Alderman. As of this date, the original hand-written diary has not been inspected.

⁴⁹SMW's attendance was most likely non-matriculated and sporadic.

⁵⁰*Dictionnaire de Biographie Française* (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1979), 160-161. A scholar in the field of Renaissance studies as well as the Orient, Focillon published *Hokousai (peintre japonais)* in 1914, indicative of his early interests in the art of the East.

⁵¹"I had studied Zen since before I left Paris, as a matter of fact..." SMW to Fred Wight, in *Stanton Macdonald-Wright* (Los Angeles: The UCLA Art Galleries/The Grunwald Graphic Foundation, 1970), 5.

⁵²SMW remarked in a lecture delivered at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art that he received his Doctorate from the Sorbonne. Jan Stussy Collection, tape five of five, AAA. However, this is a prime example of Wright's propensity for exaggeration. A search of the Archives de France on both possible surnames for Wright shows no record of him in official attendance at the Sorbonne between 1907 and 1913. Correspondence dated 2 April 1992 from the Ministère de la Culture de la Communication, des Grands Travaux et du Bicentenaire, Direction des Archives de France (request for this information originally made to the Université de Paris-Sorbonne, Bureau des Affaires général, which referred the request to the Archives). Correspondence author's file.

⁵³SMW, letter to his parents, spring, 1911. Quoted in *Serenade*, 61-62. Original in the possession of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁵⁴*Serenade*, Chapter four, unpaginated.

⁵⁵*Serenade*, Chapter two, 4.

⁵⁶*Serenade*, Chapter one, unpaginated.

⁵⁷*Serenade*, Chapter one, unpaginated. For biography of Russell, see Marilyn Kushner, *Morgan Russell* (Montclair, New Jersey: The Montclair Museum of Art, 1990).

⁵⁸Though Russell's transvesticism and its possible significance for his art is not analysed in any depth, see Kushner, *Russell*, 169. fig. 143, for a self-portrait in what Russell himself called "beautiful dresses."

⁵⁹*Serenade*, Chapter one, unpaginated.

⁶⁰For the relationship of American artists to the Steins, see Gail Stavitsky, *Gertrude Stein: The American Connection* (New York: The Sid Deutsch Gallery, 1990).

⁶¹*Serenade*, Chapter one, unpaginated.

⁶²*Serenade*, 48-b.

⁶³Morgan Russell, letter to Andrew Dasburg, 12 March 1914, private collection. Quoted in Gail Levin, *Synchromism and American Color Abstraction: 1910-1925* (New York: George Braziller, 1978), 28.

⁶⁴Levin, *Synchromism and American Color Abstraction*, 20.

⁶⁵Sonia Delaunay, *Simultaneous Poster for Smirnoff's Lecture, "The Simultaneous,"* 1913, watercolor, 25 3/16 x 19 3/8 in., formerly collection of Sonia Delaunay, Paris. Illustrated in Sherry A. Buckberrough, *Sonia Delaunay: A Retrospective* (Buffalo, New York: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1979), 136.

⁶⁶As reported by William C. Agee, "Morgan Russell, Then and Now: Notes on an American Modernist," in Kushner, *Russell*, 18. Agee credits Linda Henderson for the provision of this information.

⁶⁷Paris journal, unpaginated.

⁶⁸*Serenade*, 43.

⁶⁹*Ausstellung Der Synchromisten Morgan Russell, S. Macdonald-Wright, Der Neue Kunstsalon*, June 1-30, 1913.

⁷⁰See Loughery, *S. S. Van Dine*, for details of Willard Wright's New York career.

⁷¹*Serenade*, 76.

⁷²On Breckenridge, see Wilford W. Scott, "The Artistic Vanguard in Philadelphia, 1905-1920," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Delaware, 1983.

⁷³*Serenade*, 79.

⁷⁴Vorticism is the name given to the doctrines of the first organized movement toward abstraction in the years just prior to World War I. The term "vorticism" was coined by Ezra Pound, a member of the group, to suggest the idea of a force that would draw out and then consolidate the most viable ideas among the explosive innovations of those years. The first number of *Blast* appeared on 2 July 1914, edited and with an Vorticist manifesto by Lewis.

⁷⁵SMW, letter to his parents, fall 1913. Quoted in *Serenade*, 83. Original in collection of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁷⁶Stanton indicated to his parents in the letter cited above that he had "written a nine-thousand word article for Willard..." Also, Willard himself recorded the request for the article: "Will be glad to get the article as soon as you can get it out. If it is to be published in the fall I ought to have the copy as soon as possible. Make the article run into about six thousand words. Fill it full of names and make it as definite as you possibly can..." WHW to SMW, 15 August, 1913. Quoted in *Serenade*, 84-85. Original collection of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁷⁷"Willard had taken time off from his duties at *The Smart Set* office to see the show at the Lexington Avenue and 26th Street armory in March of 1913, but his responses to the new art had not been particularly enlightened. In fact, the four jocular postcards he mailed to Katharine are straight out of Babbitt. On the back of a card reproducing Sousa-Cardoza's Parade, Willard scrawled, 'This is not a plate of tripe, but a street parade as seen by a Futurist'....It was characteristic of Willard Huntington Wright that he might be woefully ignorant of the principles of modern art in 1913 but ready to declare himself an expert two years later." Loughery, *Van Dine*, 69.

⁷⁸Virginia Spate, *Orphism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 51. Spate qualifies this assessment, however, by noting that the Synchronists "did not attract anything like the attention the Futurists had," who had shown at Bernheim-Jeune in 1912.

⁷⁹WHW, *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1915), 338.

⁸⁰SMW to his parents, fall, 1913. Cited in *Serenade*, 82-83. Original in collection of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁸¹SMW to his mother, 12 November 1913, cited in *Serenade*, 94-95a. Original in collection of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁸²WHW to his mother, 13 February, 1914. Quoted in *Serenade*, 107.

⁸³Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 38-39.

⁸⁴Letter, Morgan Russell to Andrew Dasburg, postmarked 12 March, 1914, Private Collection, New York. Quoted in Levin, *Synchronism and American Color Abstraction: 1910-1925*, 28.

⁸⁵See the undated *New York Sun* clipping, *Artist Advertises for Apache*, in vol. 48 of Willard Huntington Wright's scrapbooks, Gift of Mrs. Willard Huntington Wright to the Rare Book and Manuscript Division of the Firestone Library, Princeton University.

⁸⁶"I was reminiscing today on my life back in 1914 in New York where I stayed for three months before going back to Paris with Willard. A sort of hotel life, in overheated rooms, plushly furnished, where one could look out over the avenues at night at the blinking neon colors—where thousands hurried, breathing white mists in the cold—to their allotted destinations—where girls were legion and dressed in silk and furs, all smelling like imported perfumes—where the best (and last food) was served in properly lighted dining

rooms and restaurants--where actresses and writers congregated until the small hours, talking shop and pseudo-philosophy and where there was always some excitement to relate--the parties--the drinking--the opium--the amours--all so artificial and agreeable, with plenty of everything--good clothes, spirited conversations, theaters and a vivacious cynicism. Willard fitted in admirably with every activity. But the taste for it soon palled on me--it was an interlude after years of hard work and spontaneous and ever-present enthusiasm for art and everything that meant, and after three months I could stand New York no more. We left for Paris." SMW, diary entry, 7 December 1949. Xerox in author's file, original in collection of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁸⁷That Stanton and Willard were not above scheming to get what they felt they needed was well-known to their acquaintances. As H. L. Mencken recalled: "Stanton was a fellow of some talent, but his paintings were so advanced in manner that he could not sell them, and so he was even more short of money than Willard. A touch of the nefarious was in him, as there was indeed in Wright, and I recall a time when he hinted broadly that he was raising the wind by arranging fake accident claims against the Third Avenue street railway." H. L. Mencken, *My Life As Author and Editor*, ed. Jonathan Yardley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 208.

⁸⁸SMW to Russell, undated (circa March 1914), quoted in *Serenade*, 115.

⁸⁹WHW, letter to his mother, 1914. Quoted in *Serenade*, 119. Original in collection of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁹⁰Macdonald-Wright, in his autobiographical drafts, recalled that he did not even inform Morgan of his return. See *Van Dine*: 81. This may have been true initially, though such a recollection directly conflicts with the 1914 letter he wrote Morgan from New York City, as well as research by Loughery that suggests Willard and Stanton actually lived with Russell for a short time upon their arrival in Paris.

⁹¹Loughery records this work as being done in New York City, prior to the brothers' departure for Paris. Stanton recalled this portrait specifically in his diary, and wrote that he painted it in Paris.

⁹²Loughery, *Van Dine*, 81.

⁹³SMW, diary entry 18 December 1955, xerox author's file. Original collection of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁹⁴*Serenade*, 125.

⁹⁵*Serenade*, Chapter VI, 131.

⁹⁶*Serenade*, Chapter VI, 138.

⁹⁷Loughery, *Van Dine*, 195.

⁹⁸Quoted in Loughery, *Van Dine*, 110.

⁹⁹*Serenade*, Chapter VI, 148.

¹⁰⁰Morgan Russell to SMW, 7 September 1920, SMW papers, AAA. Restricted. Used by permission of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

¹⁰¹Thomas Hart Benton, *An American in Art: A Professional and Technical Autobiography* (Lawrence, Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1969), 36.

¹⁰²A. Horn, "Jackson Pollock: The Hollow and the Bump," *Carleton Miscellany* 7 (Summer 1966): 81.

¹⁰³*Serenade*, Chapter VI, 151.

¹⁰⁴SMW to Morgan Russell, early 1916. Quoted in William C. Agee, "Willard Huntington Wright and the Synchronists: Notes on the Forum Exhibition" *Archives of American Art Journal* 24, no. 2 (1984), reprinted in volume 30, nos. 1-4 (1990): 88-93. Agee notes: "Given his [Macdonald-Wright's] leadership in organizing the 1914 Synchronist exhibition at the Carroll Gallery in New York, it may well be that he originally suggested the idea for the show that became the Forum Exhibition.": 89.

¹⁰⁵Willard Huntington Wright, *Vanderveer*. The subject of this unpublished novel is Macdonald-Wright, and many of the characters are identifiable artists, such as Russell and Benton. This episode is described therein. Draft copy in collection of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright. Also see Hertz, interview with SMW: "Now, I brought Russell over to New York in 1916, and that was the time of the Forum Show."

¹⁰⁶For critical reaction to the Forum Exhibition, see chapter 8 in Marilyn Claire Baker, "The Art Theory and Criticism of Willard Huntington Wright," Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1975.

¹⁰⁷Charles Caffin, "Last Week: Forum Exhibit of Modern American Painters," *New York American* (20 March 1916): 7.

¹⁰⁸See Gail Stavitsky, "John Weichsel and the People's Art Guild," *Archives of American Art Journal* 31, no. 4 (1991): 12-19. Stavitsky provides an alternative assessment of Weichsel: "As the guiding spirit of the nonpartisan People's Art Guild, which engaged the sympathies of most of the progressive figurative and abstract artists during the years 1915-1918, John Weichsel was a major figure in the New York art world, truly the peer of his better-known contemporaries.": 18.

¹⁰⁹*Serenade*, 164.

¹¹⁰Stavitsky, "Weichsel": 15.

¹¹¹*Serenade*, 165.

¹¹²*Aeroplane Synchrony in Yellow and Orange*, 1920. Oil on canvas, 24 1/4 x 24 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 49.70.52.

¹¹³See Judith Zilczer, "Alfred Stieglitz and John Quinn: Allies in the American Avant-Garde," *The American Art Journal* 17, no. 3 (Summer 1985): 22-23.

¹¹⁴Judith Zilcer, "Alfred Stieglitz and John Quinn: Allies in the American Avant-Garde," *The American Art Journal* 17, no. 3 (1985): 18-33. See especially footnote no. 23, which reads in part: "Of the four paintings by Macdonald-Wright that Quinn acquired, only *Synchromy in Blue-Green* (see fig. 13) can be identified with certainty."

¹¹⁵SMW, letter to T. E. Hobbs, 6 October 1917, The John Quinn Memorial Collection, Rare Book and Manuscripts Division, reel no. 23, The New York Public Library.

¹¹⁶*Synchromy in Blue-Green*, 1916. Oil on canvas, 36 x 27 3/4. Private Collection. Illustrated in Zilcer, "Stieglitz and Quinn" : 30.

¹¹⁷*Serenade*, 175-176.

¹¹⁸In a letter to Alfred Stieglitz, SMW stated that "My worries consist of the certainty of my having to go West & its proximity. I shall leave the first of October, & God knows how long I shall have to stay..." The difference in feeling described here regarding his move to California is not surprising, since SMW undoubtedly wished Stieglitz to feel that his [SMW's] relocation was undesirable compared to remaining in New York. He may, in fact, have told Stieglitz that his relocation was necessary for health reasons, as suggested by a letter of 22 October 1918: "Here I am in Los Angeles, slowly but surely recuperating in the sunshine." In a letter of 16 August 1919, SMW admits to Stieglitz that his health and his dislike for New York combined in his decision to move to Los Angeles. Letters in Stieglitz Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

CHAPTER TWO
SYNCHROMISM: AN OVERVIEW

Art is a combination of the paternal and maternal world, of spirit and blood; it can begin with sensation and lead to extreme abstraction, or begin in a pure world of ideas and end in quivering flesh. All works of art that are not mere sleight of hand have this dangerously smiling double face, this male-female quality, this mixture of instinct and pure spirit.

Hermann Hesse¹

Aesthetics are higher than ethics. They belong to a more spiritual sphere. To discern the beauty of a thing is the finest point to which we can arrive. Even a colour-sense is more important, in the development of the individual, than a sense of right and wrong.

Oscar Wilde²

Can anyone imagine anything in the arts that would surpass the visible rendering of sound, which would enable the eyes to partake of all the pleasures which music gives to the ears?

Louis Bertrand Castel, SJ³

Synchromism was an art "movement" with only two members, each possessed of decidedly different temperaments. It had no official followers, and arguably few unofficial ones. Having occurred at the moment when color abstraction was at its height in terms of innovation, exploration and experimentation, past scholarship has rightly examined

Synchromism in its relation to Cubism, Futurism, and especially Orphism as represented by Robert Delaunay. This scholarship has focused on the role of Morgan Russell, not surprisingly, due to the extensive archival material left by the artist which was brought to this country from France.⁴ However, it is this very useful archive, among other documentation, which points up the significant differences between Russell and his slightly younger collaborator, Stanton Macdonald-Wright.

Russell's mercurial mind compelled him to record his thoughts compulsively, though often in something of a nervous frenzy. The result was a compendium of thousands of documents and sketches compiled in no particular order. While many are crucial to understanding Russell's development, numerous others are marginal and still others incoherent. By contrast, the academically inclined Macdonald-Wright favored finished summaries of his thought, his 1913 article, *From Impressionism to Synchromism*, being an early and important exemplar. Order and discipline characterized Wright's approach to both painting and writing throughout his career, in contrast to the more unsystematic Russell.

While he left no archive similar to Russell's that includes records of initial experimentation, of false starts and innovations, Wright did record the Synchromist method in documents of the early 1920s that have been largely neglected in reconstructing his early method in Europe and his formidable contribution to the development of abstraction in this country. These texts, in combination with a reexamination of Wright's New York Synchromies of 1915-1918, provide ample source material for the reevaluation of this artist's deep commitment to modernism. Macdonald-Wright emerges in this period as an artist at once fiercely intellectual, yet drawn to ancient mysticism, the mysteries of intuition,

and the alogical mandates of Romanticism. His dependency on scientific color theory has been exaggerated as has his dependency on Delaunay. It will be suggested here that his early involvement with modernism was more a response to the past than a challenge to the future, though it was that as well in its demand for a fusion of modern concerns with the universal truths he perceived as imbedded in tradition.

MACDONALD-WRIGHT AND AESTHETICISM

Macdonald-Wright had more than a mere infatuation with the aestheticism of Oscar Wilde: his attraction to the amorphous and decadent litany of the aesthete shaped his view of art and the artist. For Macdonald-Wright, the primal forces of nature were a mystery beyond the reach of our species: "Western philosophy has tried to solve the universal mystery by means of finding an absolute rather than accepting the mystery as *fait accompli* & working toward a greater fluency or amalgamation with things themselves, as the Chinese have."⁵ His acceptance of this notion, i.e., of real yet unknowable powers, predisposed him to a life-long study of Zen and accelerated his entry into and growth in modernist painting.

The Wright brothers' privileged upbringing, replete with private tutors and material advantages, left both boys with a disdain for the ordinary and what might have remained mere youthful braggadocio evolved into an arrogant cultural elitism. An uncontrollable youth in California with a disdain for authority and a penchant for hedonism, Macdonald-Wright found precedent for his behavior in the literature given him by his father and older brother. There was ample material in Wilde to support the adoption of wit and style as virtues in place of hard

work and thrift. Though Stanton was weaned on a regional Impressionist style and then on an Ash Can type of realism, the narrative sensibility of both of these approaches was easily dismissed. Art, as eloquently discussed by Wilde, was something rarified, elegant and altogether out of the reach of the unrefined. Part of Whistler's magnificence, from Wilde's point of view, was his inaccessibility due to his independence from routine illustrative formulas: "[Whistler] rejected all literary titles for his pictures; indeed, none of his works bore any name but that which signified their tone, and colour, and method of treatment. This, of course, is what painting ought to be; no man ought to show that he was merely the illustrator of history."⁶ Upon his first trip to London, Stanton seemed to echo Wildean criticism in his journal entry that declared Whistler's work seemed to "enter the realm of symphony" (this is perhaps Wright's first documented analogy of sound and color).⁷

An important literary discovery for Stanton, perhaps via Wilde, was *A Rebours* (published 1884) by Joris-Karl Huysmans, a novel crucial to Wilde and aestheticism in general. In Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*, the character of Dorian reads a novel that is, in fact, *A Rebours*, and is profoundly moved: "The hero, the wonderful young Parisian...became to him [Dorian] a kind of pre-figuring type of himself. And indeed, the whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it."⁸

The main character of *A Rebours* (translated *Against Nature*) is Des Esseintes, a figure often mentioned by Wright in subsequent years as a kind of prototype for the lifestyle he himself had adopted in Paris. Though not nearly as isolated from ambition as the character of Des Esseintes, Stanton nonetheless emulated the former's aloof demeanor and

casual intellectuality. Des Esseintes used women like any other sensual prop, a studied callousness practiced by Stanton to which he later confessed. Des Esseintes decorated his boudoir with the art of the symbolist painter, Gustave Moreau, and delighted in the bizarreness of these images. Macdonald-Wright, before he looked for the work of Cézanne, looked for the Symbolists. During his first travels in Europe circa 1910, Stanton noted in his journal of that time: "Then to Munich for Franz Stuck and [Lovis] Corinth. I even enjoyed Leo Putz."⁹

Des Esseintes indulged in reading esoteric poetry. From Stanton's journals, we know that he did much the same. In his Paris journal, Stanton wrote: "The one poem of Oscar Wilde's, *The Harlot's House*, will place him in the first rank of the world's greatest poets, and add to this *Salome* and *A Florentine Tragedy* and he goes ahead of everyone. Rossetti perhaps comes next with Swinburne and Keats, Edgar Allen Poe and Shelly, Shakespeare...."¹⁰ And, perhaps most significantly, Des Esseintes recognized the value of color in creating moods and sensations throughout his carefully appointed home. Throughout *A Rebours*, the character of Des Esseintes describes in detail the emotional and psychological ramifications of color choice. In chapter four, the issue of the effects of color contrasts in creating mood is discussed. The implications of such a text would not have been lost on Macdonald-Wright.

Another literary source for Stanton's aesthetic attitude and psychological disposition must be noted, and that is Balzac. The figure of Honoré Balzac is mentioned over and over again in Macdonald-Wright's memoirs and letters. It was Stanton's father who first gave him Balzac to read. When he reached Paris, the young artist already considered Balzac to

be "as sacrosanct as Michelangelo."¹¹ Of his earliest days in Paris, Stanton wrote: "The life Balzac wrote of, the amusements of medieval castles, the vulgarity of an era of Villon and the French courts under the Louis's—these were normal to me, and I regarded my brother more than my father as a sort of spiritual *cicerone*."¹² If Stanton saw himself to be the incarnation of Lucien de Rubempré, then surely Willard was his Vautrin.¹³

The comparison here is significant. In *Illusions perdues*, itself a part of Balzac's larger literary feat, *La comédie humaine*, Lucien de Rubempré leaves the provinces to establish himself in Paris, not at all unlike Stanton leaving Los Angeles for the same city. According to Donald Adamson, a major theme of *Illusions* is that of the artist: "Balzac believes in the fraternity of all those—poets, novelists, chemists, philosophers and even men of action—who seek through the exercise both of imagination and of will-power to create new worlds."¹⁴ In the novel, Lucien emerges as egoistic, ambitious and unconcerned with the feelings of others, much as Macdonald-Wright would later describe himself when recalling his own Paris years.

Finally, there is an odd coincidental fact which supports the importance of recognizing a Macdonald-Wright/Lucien de Rubempré parallel, and that is the phenomenon of each having changed his surname. Balzac's Lucien changes his surname from Chardon in part because, as Adamson suggests, he was ashamed of the memory of his dead father.¹⁵ Compelled to make his own way in the world, though confused and frustrated by events beyond his control, Lucien takes on a new name. Likewise, Stanton began hyphenating his last name in Paris. Though he always maintained it was to avoid confusion with the architect Frank

Lloyd Wright, the similarities to Lucien's predicament are striking. In his old age, Stanton wrote a posthumous letter to his father which revealed both his strong feelings for the elder Wright, but also his awareness of his father's weakness: ""You became a lonely man, an harassed man and in your face I saw a sort of hopelessness. It shocked me and made me miserable....Also, father I knew you were a weak man, wholly unfit by temperament to assert yourself vis a vis mother. You had become for her little more than a material stabilization for her one passion, my brother."¹⁶

Stanton's own tremendous ego, which took him to Paris in the first place, in combination with his affinity for the rarified and mysterious in art as evidenced by his attachment to Wilde and *A Rebours*, together, too, with his ambition reminiscent of Lucien de Rubempré, help explain both his adoption of modernism and the tenets of Synchronism.

MACDONALD-WRIGHT AND MODERN PRECEDENTS IN PAINTING

In August, 1973, Macdonald-Wright briefly outlined the sources of Synchronism in an unpublished document entitled, "The Roots of Synchronism."¹⁷ The first two influences noted are the British painter, J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851) and French Impressionism. It was Turner, in Macdonald-Wright's view, who first used color in a non-traditional manner. In his view, the Impressionists' use of color supplanted old master glazing techniques (Wright included Georges Seurat (1859-1891) as part of the Impressionist school). To both of these influences, Wright added the color researches of Delacroix (1798-1863), especially in the area of complementaries.¹⁸ It is significant that Macdonald-Wright and Russell began their respective careers with Impressionism, but even more

important that they were aware of Turner, Seurat and Delacroix, all of whom studied the phenomenon of color intensely. It was color that became the primary interest of Macdonald-Wright and Russell during their Paris years: color could be used to create form, induce emotional states, and, finally, color could serve by itself as subject matter for a work of art. Though neither Russell nor Wright painted in the Impressionist idiom very long, the surviving visual evidence suggests they understood the approach of using small, broken strokes to activate the picture plane, as well as using adjacent complementaries to intensify areas of color and to create greater visual realism (see figs. 7 and 8).

A number of other influences mingled with Wright's admiration for and practice of Impressionism prior to his meeting with Russell in 1911. One of the earliest was his discovery of Gauguin and primitivism, sources which he also included in his "Roots of Synchronism" summary. In 1911, Wright wrote in his journal: "In many ways I have made progress since last writing in this book. I have read, regarded, and appreciated Gauguin."¹⁹ Another entry, no doubt related to his musings on Gauguin, reads: "A natural man, emotional of course, would paint simply. Naturally. We, thru the opaque veil of conventional hypocrisy, have to fight free of its tangles to really find out what we are." Still another: "Why shouldn't all art be primitive?" Gauguin divorced his images from academic drawing and used color in strong, evocative terms that were not tied to describing nature. Eventually, however, Wright felt Gauguin's use of color to be decorative precisely because color was an appendage to shapes, and not itself the generative factor. Still, Gauguin's work no doubt appealed to Wright's pre-existing taste for Symbolism and esoteric expression.

A major reason Wright could note having made progress in 1911 was because of his discovery of Matisse in 1910. In 1910, he saw Matisse's *Dance II* and *Music* at the Salon d'Automne: "...Matisse has two immense abortions hanging in the most conspicuous place. Large red figures dancing on a green plane with blue tone behind. A certain feeling of abandon running through it. Painting qualities nil..."²⁰

Though the twenty-year-old irreverent Wright termed these works "abortions," and saw no "painting qualities" to them, he recognized an emotional content that attracted him, that of abandon. Matisse was an artist Wright looked at ever more studiously, until finally meeting him. Later, he recalled that it was seeing these paintings by Matisse that enlivened his artistic aspirations: "It shook me out of a sort of calm and uneventful attitude and acted as a gentle liberator from a humdrum outlook, opening my eyes to a more extended art world."²¹

The greatest influence on Wright's awakening to a "more extended art world" was Cézanne. Wright purchased four watercolors by Cézanne during these first two years in Paris.²² Cézanne was, for him, as he was for so many artists, far more than an inspiration. Wright discovered in Cézanne the potentials of shape, line and color. More so than any other artist, it was the work of Cézanne that facilitated Wright's speedy progress toward abstracted expression. The formal innovations he discovered in Cézanne were described by Wright in 1973:

Cézanne—first use of color as a functioning element—not for decor, not for light, not for *images chinoises*. His synthesis of liberation of academic draftsmanship—introduction of a certain tonal use in creation of form and strict use of objective color, as he analyzed each relationship—and its restricted use for the

production of form in space, viz., the supplanting of tonal disaggregation (old masters) by color disaggregation.²³

In simpler terms, whereas the old masters created the illusion of advancing and receding space by means of tonal variation, Cézanne accomplished this same thing with color. With Cézanne, color did not describe objects literally (preparing Wright for Gauguin and Matisse), rather, color passages became compositional elements in their own right.

When Macdonald-Wright returned to California from New York in 1919, he gave an extensive newspaper interview in which credited the creation of color scales to the trio of Wright, Russell and Tudor-Hart, with a major debt to Cézanne:

...his [Cézanne's] color harmonies and his studies in color volume, while never wholly achieved, form the basis, if you will, of Synchronism. These color harmonies, limited in number with Cézanne, but of singular justness of vibration, we three [Wright, Russell and Tudor-Hart] made precise in studying the solar spectrum, and it is now as easy for a painter to strike a perfect chord in any color scheme on his palette as for a pianist to do the same thing on the piano.²⁴

The most significant advances upon the innovations of Cézanne were made by the Cubists, Picasso (1881-1973) and Braque (1882-1963). The fragmented picture plane arrived at by Picasso and Braque wherein forms are rigorously analyzed and restructured had an inescapable impact on all modern artists of the time. Wright listed Cubism as a source for Synchronism, though noted that he, Russell and Robert Delaunay revolted against the achromatism, the colorlessness, of Cubism. Delaunay, like Wright and Russell, placed a premium on color in his creative

process. For Macdonald-Wright, a fundamental difference between the Synchronists and Delaunay was that "Delaunay followed the path of Gauguin—decor—Synchronists the path of Cézanne—form in space, 1912-1913."²⁵ This distinction will be taken up later in this chapter.

Prior to meeting Morgan Russell, Macdonald-Wright had experienced a formidable introduction to modernist painting. His own work, in an embryonic phase in 1910-11, was considerably influenced by his collaboration with Morgan Russell.

MACDONALD-WRIGHT AND MORGAN RUSSELL

As previously noted, it was Morgan Russell who introduced Wright to the Steins and to Matisse, and whose own vibrant temperament appealed to and stimulated his younger colleague. In his memoirs, Macdonald-Wright described their shared intentions which existed from the first:

A the time I met Russell, I had begun to conceive of color as the *prima materia* of my painting, and I was happy to find that he, who had passed through all the academic phases, agreed with me. In Russell I found a man who, as was I, entirely wrapped up in art; our intellectual *rapport* was just about as complete as two minds could be. He was primarily interested in creating a form more solid than tonality alone could give him, and after a month or so we began to talk about our own sallies into theory and to show each other our essays. Russell and I were six to ten years younger than the leaders of the modern movement, but we were certain that we

were ahead of them all in our intelligent approach to a new area of art sensation.²⁶

In the process of sharing the results of experimentation, Macdonald-Wright and Russell covered some very fundamental territory in terms of how color functions. One such basic color axiom is that warm colors (red, yellow, orange) advance toward the eye, and cool colors (blue, violet, green) recede from the eye. That is to say, if one were to look at a canvas whereupon was painted a circle of red and another circle of blue, the red circle would appear closer to the eye than the blue one. This phenomenon is explained by Faber Birren: "Red normally focuses at a point behind the retina, causing the lens of the eye to become convex and to pull the red forward, making it appear both nearer and larger. Blue normally focuses at a point in front of the retina, causing the lens of the eye to flatten and to push the blue back, making it appear farther away and smaller."²⁷ Artists for centuries had made this observation, the most notable being Leonardo da Vinci,²⁸ and it was, in fact, a common bit of information by the nineteenth century, let alone the twentieth. Both well aware of this visual phenomenon, Macdonald-Wright and Russell nonetheless wanted to go farther than had the Impressionists, Delacroix or Turner in its application. Though Synchronism would entail much more theory before expiring, this desire, to use color alone to define advancing and receding planes, was the genesis of Synchronism. The two painters approached the problem with subtle but crucial differences in method, but both based their initial researches on this single optical maxim regarding warm and cool color.

Russell regarded himself as a *sculpteur manqué*, a painter who ought to be sculpting as his primary interest was in three-dimensional form. Russell had enrolled in a class with Matisse (prior to meeting

Wright) where he studied sculpture (fig. 9). He also greatly admired the work of Rodin (1840-1917), and knew that artist personally. To his own work, Russell wished to apply a knowledge of color toward the goal of creating form that possessed a feeling of sculptural solidity. In Wright's view, Russell expanded upon and completed the Impressionist method of painting sunlight yellow and shadows violet:

Russell's method, stated very generally, was where the brightest light struck an object he would paint it daffodil, in the deepest shadows he used violet or blue-violet, reserving all the other hues of the spectrum as degrees of tone, etc., quarter tone, half tone, three quarter tone, etc. As the object rounded toward shadow, on one side he would grade down through the spectrum, through yellow-orange and red-orange and purples, darkening each until he met the deepest shadow, dark violet. On the other side of the retreating planes he used a degradation from the yellow through yellow-green, green, blues, etc. to violet. The overall effect was that of looking at an object through a prismatic lens, that is to say had he followed his theory mechanically which, of course, he did not. The colors he used were often neutralized or changed or degraded through a color he felt necessary to his composition.²⁹

Like Russell, Macdonald-Wright began his first researches into color and form, inspired as they were by Cézanne, by examining the relationship between color and space:

I began by wondering what color seemed nearest the eye, in other words had the solidest and most salient character. The near complement of violet, diaphanous in nature, was it, yellow-orange, the most opaque of colors, and this, as with Russell, made me

research which [colors] fill the places of half-distance and three quarter distance, etc. My first essays along these lines gave me objects all of which, on the foreground, should be theoretically yellow-orange and these degraded toward distance—not through spectral suites but more variously—viz., on one side of the object or on an object placed further back, instead of a degradation through a red-orange to a violet, I found that perhaps a green of a certain lightness or darkness would stay put as it were better than the next color the spectrum dictated, for I had discovered that if one takes a square-inch swatch of all the different colors and their admixtures and places them on a gray, middle tone, background, each seems to advance or retreat in relation to its fellows.³⁰

Actually, Macdonald-Wright made this last discovery regarding color, i.e., that they "advanced or retreated" in relation to the adjoining color, by way of Chevreul. Indeed, Wright studied Chevreul closely, as evidenced by the numerous notes and comparisons made in his Paris journal that are taken straight from noted chemist and color theorist Michel Eugene Chevreul (1786-1889), as recorded in his book, *De la Loi du Contraste Simultané des Couleurs (The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colors)*, first published in 1839. The discovery, or "law," that Macdonald-Wright adopted was Chevreul's now famous law of simultaneous contrast, which is something quite different than warm colors advancing and cool colors receding. The law of simultaneous contrast states that the appearance of a color is affected by its adjacent color: "In the case where the eye sees at the same time two contiguous colours, they will appear as dissimilar as possible, both in their optical composition and in the height of their tone."³¹ According to Chevreul, any given color

would influence its adjacent color in the direction of that color's complementary. Once learned, Wright blended his knowledge of simultaneous contrast with his other color researches, and it became a technical fixture of how he painted. Russell, too, was very much aware of the law of simultaneous contrast, as were so many painters in Paris at that time. Here then, is the most significant influence the theories of Chevreul had on Synchronism.

While reading Chevreul, Wright came upon Leonardo da Vinci's *Trattato della pittura*, which had a determining influence on how his painting would differ from Russell's. Leonardo's discussion of *sfumato* and color convinced Macdonald-Wright that a violet shadow in the middle-distance would not be the same as a violet in the far-distance. One violet would have to be modified so as to signal its further recession, that is, one violet would have to be both cooler and more subdued in tonality in order to appear further back in the picture plane. Russell, by contrast, started out by making all advancing objects yellow, regardless of what place they might occupy in the composition, and, likewise, made all shadows dark violet, and interpreted the spaces in between with other spectral colors, and even this system he never followed mechanically.

The researches in color and form done by Macdonald-Wright and Russell during their earliest collaboration were demanding in technical understanding and execution. However, once understood, assigning different colors to varying spatial extensions perhaps seemed facile. Synchronism might have dead-ended in its infancy had not Morgan Russell taken Macdonald-Wright to the color classes taught by the Canadian Percyval Tudor-Hart (1873-1954). There, Wright and Russell embraced the possibilities of synesthesia, i. e., that stimulation in one

sensory mode (in sight, sound, smell, taste or touch) is capable of arousing sensation in a different sensory mode. Tudor-Hart believed and taught that color had equivalents in the world of music and the world of emotions. Beyond that, Synchronism adopted classical principals in composition and sought to align itself formally with the benchmark artistic achievements of the Western world. What began as a limited investigation of the possibilities of color defining form became a much more ambitious program.

TUDOR-HART AND COLOR

Historically, the search for an analogy between color and music is an ancient one. Ptolemy, the Alexandrian scientist of the second century BC, attempted to make such an analogy.³² Indeed, the history of color/sound relationships is far too complex to detail here. However, a brief summary of key figures and their ideas will serve as a necessary backdrop to the Synchronists' notion of color and sound.

In 1666, Newton experimented with prisms and postulated that white light was not modified to produce other colors, but that white light was actually composed of constituent parts which were the colors themselves³³ (fig. 10). The Aristotelian tradition, in which color was believed to be an actual property of surfaces, was effectively challenged for the first time. In his *Opticks* of 1704, Newton established seven primary colors that made up white light: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Newton assumed that there was a relationship between the musical scale and the color spectrum, and he modified his identification of colors on the spectrum to fit the musical scale. For example, he identified

indigo as a color falling between blue and violet. He could have recognized yellow-orange between yellow and orange, etc. However, he limited the spectrum to seven colors to equal the seven notes of the western musical scale, excluding sharps and flats.

To Newton, as one followed the spectrum from end to end, it seemed as if the red dimension were beginning to repeat itself. To express this relationship, Newton wrapped the color on one end of the spectrum around to meet the other end, and the color wheel was born (fig. 11). This device for demonstrating color relationships would have tremendous consequences for artists.

Though Newton's discoveries were as convincing as they were radical, not everyone accepted them. A significant opponent was the Jesuit priest, Louis Bertrand Castel (1688-1757), who published *L'Optique des couleurs* in 1740. Castel believed that color and music were derived from the same physical source, and hence operated on the same aesthetic principals. Blue was the equivalent of a C note on the musical scale; yellow was an E, and red was a G. Castel built a music/light machine, which he called the "Ocular Clavichord" and which was applauded by Diderot (though condemned in England by Hogarth).

Early in the nineteenth century, the German artist Runge studied Newton (as well as Castel), made his own color wheel and published it in 1810 (becoming one among the many that had been created by that time), and attempted to devise color "chords." Runge was only partially scientific, and believed, like Castel, in a spiritual force that united and transcended matter. His fellow German, Goethe, published *Zur Farbenlehre* in 1810 also. Unlike Runge, Goethe was firmly anti-Newtonian, opting for a personalized version of Aristotelian color theory.

While his theories lacked the underpinning of then-current physics, Goethe nonetheless made numerous useful and influential observations on color as one sees it. He also believed color to have emotional equivalents; yellow, for example, equaled serenity. Goethe was studied by Turner, whose painting, *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory)—The Morning after the Deluge*,³⁴ was an exposition of the theories contained in *Zur Farbenlehre*.³⁵ In that image, red color swirls around a large, yellow, circular shape. The eminent British critic, John Ruskin (1819-1900), once asked the artist for an explanation of that painting's subject, and was told, "Red, yellow and blue."³⁶ Turner was making reference, of course, to the three primary colors in painting. Years later, Morgan Russell would title a painting, *Synchromy in Blue-Violet*, and indicate that the subject was the color, blue-violet.

When Macdonald-Wright first admired Turner's paintings in London in 1910, it is doubtful that he had any idea of Turner's connection to Goethe and color theory. It is interesting to note, however, that Turner's work manifest itself to Macdonald-Wright in 1910 as being the most advanced to date in terms of color, and his influence was substantial enough to be listed as a source of Synchromism. If, in fact, Macdonald-Wright saw Turner's *Light and Colour* specifically, that painting could have been an early influence on the Synchromists' compositional use of swirling discs in space.

Percyval Tudor-Hart, with whom Wright and Russell studied, was well-acquainted with the studies on color that had preceded him, and which had been readily available to art students in Paris for some time.³⁷ These studies included the work done by Hermann von Helmholtz, Ogden Rood and Chevreul. None of these three scientists looked for the

color/sound analogy that Tudor-Hart believed he had found while conducting experiments in this field during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Tudor-Hart summarized the conclusions of his early and on-going experimentation in two 1918 articles.³⁸ In the first of these two articles, the dates 1897 and 1900 are given as the years in which the research for the article was conducted. Since the second article builds on and is an extension of the first, it may be safely assumed that the theories developed in those early years, and which appeared in print in 1918, were the ones taught to Wright and Russell. Future correspondence between Wright and Russell dating from the 1920s clearly supports such an assumption.

When Tudor-Hart began investigating the relationship between color and sound, there was no scientific evidence to support the belief that the two phenomenon operated on the same physical basis. (Indeed, future advances in physics would confirm that they do not.) However, Tudor-Hart was not convinced that then-modern physics had demonstrated what the physical basis of color really was and, further, that "in both cases [that of color and sound] our knowledge of their mode of perception, and the exact relation between subjective reaction and objective stimulus, is as yet largely a matter of conjecture."³⁹ This belief allowed Tudor-Hart free reign in developing his idea that color and sound were perceived in *psychologically equivalent terms*, and therefore a sound/color analogy was valid. He felt that critics of such an analogy had simply not tested it and experienced it themselves.

Tudor-Hart began with the spectrum itself, and a detailed analysis and description of the spectral band of colors. Part of this process involved the confirmation of the researches of Hemholtz.⁴⁰ He experimented with

complementaries, after-image, the mixing of colored pigment versus colored light (that is, subtractive versus additive color mixing), and other color phenomenon, including variations on Maxwell's discs.⁴¹ Using all of the data he compiled first-hand, Tudor-Hart then argued that sound, and thus music, operated on the same principles, if not the same physical basis.

For Tudor-Hart, the world of noise was the equivalent of the world of sunlight. Within those two worlds, sound was the equivalent of color. Extrapolating forward, pitch in music equaled luminosity in color, tone equalled hue, and intensity in music ("designating strength or weakness of sounds") equalled saturation or purity of color. To this he added the belief that the lower notes of the scale, A flat, A, B flat, and B conveyed the emotions of "melancholy and sadness," and so did blues and violets, those colors which for Tudor-Hart equalled darkness. D sharp, E, and F conveyed an "emotion of brightness and cheerfulness," and so did yellow-orange, yellow and yellow-green, those colors which for Tudor-Hart equalled light. And, just as the chromatic scale in music give a "running rhythm," so, too, did the colors of the spectrum.

Not only were Russell and Wright students of Tudor-Hart, they served, according to Wright, as his "lab assistants" in preparing his complex experiments. Their familiarity with his theories would have been intimate. Issues of the most esoteric aspects of color (and therefore issues which would have appealed greatly to Wright) were addressed: in what tonal range does a given color appear most saturated, how does one accurately gage the luminosity of a color at a raised octave? Tudor-Hart provided answers to these questions. But most intriguing of all to his ambitious American lab assistants, and the most applicable to their own

pursuits in creating form with color, was Tudor-Hart's version of the color keyboard.

Tudor-Hart postulated that just as octaves in music occur due to regularly increased vibrations, an analogous phenomenon occurs with color:

This is of prime importance in the general analogy between sound and colour. In sound the octaves rise in pitch from bass to treble, in a geometrical progression by a power of two, i.e., each octave has double the number of vibrations of the preceding one. We may express the analogy thus. As sound rises in pitch, a note and its successive octaves appear to the senses as equal intervals. The vibrations of these intervals increase in a geometrical progression. Similarly as light increases from darkness the 'notes' and their luminosity octaves appear to the senses as equal intervals; and these intervals are constructed by increments of luminosity in a geometrical progression.⁴²

Again, Tudor-Hart expressed his belief that color and sound were perceived in the same way, writing that luminosity octaves "appear to the sense as equal intervals." What they actually may be in the determinations of physics was not as important as how they appeared to be, and thus how we think of them (i.e., colors) and how we use them. Tudor-Hart used the spectrum as the basis of his color wheels (as most color theorists naturally did), and as the basis of his color keyboard. The three primaries, their complements, and the colors in between them (the "sharps" and "flats") conveniently established a scale of twelve colors (fig. 12), a number analogous to the twelve-tone scale (seven notes with five sharps and flats) of Western music. Tudor-Hart made the fortuitous, if

not altogether scientifically sound, discovery that "If now the colours be arranged within the octave, in their order of saturation, their sequence will be in the order of the spectrum, if we consider red-violet as joining up with red. Beginning with the lowest colour perceptible they follow in this order: blue-violet, violet, red-violet, red, red-orange, orange, yellow-orange, yellow, yellow-green, green, blue-green, blue and blue-violet completing the octave."⁴³

Morgan Russell and Macdonald-Wright both adopted the use of color scales. Although, Russell quit painting in scales altogether by 1915-16, Wright painted in color scales dutifully until 1919, and he used them as the basis of his own 1924 treatise on color.

COLOR SCALES

For Tudor-Hart, and for his students, Wright and Russell, individual colors, just like individual musical notes, could form the basis of a scale. Yellow could form the basis of a scale just as easily as blue-violet. The important factor in creating the scales was that the *intervals between the colors be kept consistent* from whatever point of departure one chose. Tudor-Hart summarized this phenomenon: "It will be found that the intervals between the colours are pleasant to the eye in exactly the same degree as the sounds are to the ear [and] that each harmonic is in consonance with its fundamental colour, just as in sound each harmonic is in consonance with its tone (or generating sound)."⁴⁴ Tudor-Hart himself created what he felt to be an exact correspondence between all the notes of a keyboard and colors which matched the changes in octaves using a complex system of mathematical ratios. So complex was Tudor-

Hart's system that using it to create a painting would have required hundreds of separate calculations. It was possible, however, following Tudor-Hart's idea of the importance of intervals, to use the color wheel alone with twelve colors (kept analogous to the Western twelve note range between octaves in music) and create scales. This was the path taken by Wright and Russell.

Wright's claims as to the uniqueness of the Synchronist painting method were reported as early as 1913 in Los Angeles: "Synchronism is an attempt to make of painting an emotional art, such as music; and all of its canvases are worked out in color harmonies, to which its progenitor [referring here to Wright] applies the musical term of 'orchestration.'"⁴⁵ Again in 1919, Wright affirmed that he, Russell and Tudor-Hart had devised a method of painting with color that was completely analogous to creating music on a keyboard:

These color harmonies, limited in number with Cézanne, but of singular justness of vibration, we three [Russell, Wright, and Tudor-Hart] made precise in studying the solar spectrum, and it is now as easy for a painter to strike a perfect chord in any color scheme on his palette as for a pianist to do the same thing on the piano. Such a discovery I believe to be of inestimable value to artists, not because it permits them to put down pretty color combinations, but because the organization of the color scheme serves to bring to a greater homogeneity every element in his work. Beside this it gives him a color center about which the development of his color scheme must be a definite equilibration. The use of these scales also gives him a more precise method of expression which I think, will do away with the stupid idea of "inspiration"

that artists have been talking for years. This, however, is a small and unimportant part of my artistic credo. The basis of all art is form, and if color were not capable of expressing form, it would be only fit for confetti-makers.⁴⁶

Finally, Wright's *Treatise on Color* of 1924 detailed this method which he referred to above, the one devised in company with Russell and Tudor-Hart. The articulation of how color scales are created and how they work was refined by Wright in the years leading up to 1924, after prolonged work with the system. The system, however, when compared with Tudor-Hart's writings and, most importantly, with the early paintings themselves, was unquestionably the same one. The *Treatise* is therefore a most invaluable guide in recreating how the first Synchronies were done. For purposes of clarity, a brief summary follows.

Using the color wheel, with its colors based on the spectrum itself (fig. 13), one chooses a "tonic" color, which will be the basis of that scale. If painting in a major (as opposed to minor) scale, the intervals used in Western music (whole step, whole step, half-step, whole step, whole step, whole step, half-step, see fig. 14) are the basis of selecting the other colors that will comprise the scale: from the tonic color and moving to the right, skip one color and choose the next, skip another color and choose the next, take the next color, skip another color and choose the next one, repeat twice, then take the next one. So, if one began with red as the tonic color, the scale would be as follows: red, orange, yellow, yellow-green, blue-green, blue-violet and red-violet (fig. 15). These colors comprise the scale of red. A color chord would be made with the first, fourth and fifth color of that scale (red, yellow and blue-green), just as a musical chord is made with the first, third and fifth notes of a given musical scale. Wright

referred to color chords as "triads," just as musicians did, and still do, refer to musical chords (fig. 16).

Excited as they were by the discovery of color scales, Wright and Russell did not abandon their interest in creating form with color. Instead, color scales were integrated with the problem of painting with advancing and receding colors. Simply put, in any given painting where warm colors advanced and cool colors receded, those colors could also be part of the same scale. To this increasingly complex system, Wright and Russell added their continued interest in classical rhythm and form as expressed by the Greeks and especially as found in the figurative work by Michelangelo. Synchronism became a method that required juggling color scales, the spatial extension of colors on canvas, classical composition, and the emotional meaning of color. Such a method could integrate correctly all the phenomena of nature, both matter and its perception, since now color could be used like music. The "rightness" of color harmonies built like musical harmonies was explained by Wright in his *Treatise*:

This is the character of the scale-manifestation: an interdependence of divergent elements bound together by some esoteric relational means. Just why there are twelve notes instead of more or less, in our sound-spectrum, if I may use the term, than there are in Oriental scales, is a problem for esthetics to solve, but that there are twelve is the fact we must start with. Why, from these twelve, seven are chosen, I also believe to be inexplicable by science, but this seemingly mysterious and arbitrary choice of number we must accept as an accomplished fact.⁴⁷

In the same *Treatise*, Wright maintained that he was not a scientist, and that the analogy between music and color existed because "our own emotional reactions to them tell us that there exists a positive parallel."⁴⁸ This was Wright the aesthete speaking, the one who believed throughout his entire life that the great mysteries of the world would be forever beyond the grasp of any technology or rational system of thought.

THE EARLY SYNCHROMIES

The genesis of synchromism lay in Russell and Wright's desire to create form using color alone. To this was added the possibility of painting in color scales. Their primary subject matter was either the figure or still life, subjects which lent themselves to rigorous formal analysis. Further, both artist's were not immune to the rapid innovations occurring around them in Paris. The most common comparison of their work has been with the intersecting color planes used by Robert Delaunay and the fractured geometry of the cubists. With that in mind, it is essential to describe another crucial influence Tudor-Hart's teaching had on Wright and Russell. When discussing intervals of color, Tudor-Hart wrote:

Before investigating the analogy of sound and colour intervals it is necessary to emphasise [sic] the fact that the psychological equivalent of the simultaneous perception of two or more sounds, is the simultaneous perception of two or more juxtaposed colours. Consequently the analogue of harmony in sound must be sought in juxtaposed colours. Melody in colour will therefore result from the *espacement* of colours, their isolation by

intervening neutral tint, and also from the order in which colours lie on the field of vision.⁴⁹

In short, colors from a given color scale could not be blended to form a chord or a melody, they had to be set down next to each other in order to function like a musical chord. The obvious reason for this is that when any two or more colors are mixed, they cease to be that color. The colors of a chord must all be present for that chord to exist, just as the notes of a musical chord must (a G chord, for example, cannot be formed with E flat, nor can the chord of red be formed with green). Nothing in this rationale points to a dependency on the *simultanisme* of Delaunay, but rather alludes to the simple phenomenon of notes struck all at once or colors seen all at once. This dictum of Tudor-Hart's must be understood as a primary reason the Synchronists painted with juxtaposed patches of color.

Technically, the earliest synchronies painted would have been Russell and Wright's similar attempts at controlling advancing and receding shapes with color, without the added complication of color scales. This was the first phase of synchronism. However, since the color/sound analogy became central to the Synchronist objective (as the very name of the movement implies), what might be called the intermediate phase of synchronism began when scales were implemented. Paintings of this second phase will be considered here, with attention given to aspects of the more limited program of the first.

The earliest extant intermediate Synchronist painting by Macdonald-Wright is his *Portrait of Jean Dracopoli*, done in 1912 (fig. 17). A small oil, measuring 16 1/4 x 13 1/8 inches, this portrait of the artist's good friend nonetheless demonstrates the fundamental concerns of the

Synchromist method up to that time. Most obvious is the use of color to establish those planes which advance in space, and those which recede. The forehead of Dracopoli, the tip of the nose, the forwardmost points of the cheekbone, chin and eyebrows are all established with yellow. Yellow, as previously discussed, was the color equated with light, a warm color advancing toward the eye. The shadow areas of Dracopoli's neck, the background and beneath the eyebrows where the human eye is setback from the forehead, are done in blue-violet, the color of deepest shadows. Wright applied pigment here vigorously and allowed edges of his colors to meet and blur into the next, much like colors do on the actual spectrum. In later synchromies, Wright's fluid and facile application of pigment actually mimics the vibrations of the spectrum. This was in contrast to Russell's approach of a generally more hard-edged separation of color areas.

Wright used a color scale in conjunction with positioning colors in space based on their distance from the eye. Dracopoli is painted in the scale of (or, "key" of) orange. Starting with orange as the tonic, or first color note of this scale, and moving in intervals equivalent to a major musical scale, the orange scale is as follows: orange, yellow, green, blue-green, blue-violet, red-violet, and red-orange. So, while all of these colors theoretically harmonized just like a musical scale, each color also had to advance or recede in space according to its relative warmth or coolness. For example, on the left cheek of Dracopoli (from the viewer's standpoint), we see that the orange on the tip of the cheekbone functions as the highlight (yellow is the highlight on the opposite cheekbone, where the face is receiving more direct light), and directly beneath it the shift is made to red-orange, which is a move away from us in space.

As per Tudor-Hart's guideline that colors be juxtaposed in order to be experienced as chords, Wright laid out his patches sequentially. Any "melody" in the painting is sought, again following Tudor-Hart, by the *espacement* of the colors. As the eye flows over them, color melody results. In *Dracopoli*, a dominant "S" curve rhythm in reverse is established beginning on the forehead, curving down across the right eye [from viewer], and looping around the chin and down toward the lower right of the canvas. This basic rhythm, ultimately derived from the study of contrapposto, appeared in numerous Synchronist works. It was called the "hollow and the bump" by Morgan Russell, who first suggested its power to Wright.⁵⁰ Its significance will be taken up again farther on.

The color in *Dracopoli* also was meant to evoke a certain emotional mood.⁵¹ Though Tudor-Hart did not record the emotional value of orange as he did with blues and violets, yellow and yellow-green, Macdonald-Wright himself detailed the emotional meaning of colors in his *Treatise*: "Orange can be either loud or soft as a scale. It gives us the sensation of febrile gaiety, and quickness, or of soft, solid dignity. It is either mercurial or magistral....If we paint a portrait in orange it must be of great dignity; its background must be rich and sonorous; its expression must be kindly, intelligent and frank, but never sentimental nor smirking."⁵² Wright still owned the *Dracopoli* portrait at the time of this writing. Indeed, it seems as if this statement regarding the scale of orange is a fond recollection of his friend.

Morgan Russell's *Synchronist Nude* of approximately the same time as the *Dracopoli*, that is, circa 1911-12, reveals the difference in temperament and approach between him and Wright (fig. 18). While superficially similar, Russell did not use advancing and receding colors

with the same accuracy as did Wright. Indeed, Wright noted (see pp. 12-13) that Russell did not paint "mechanically" in this mode, often making intuitive changes he felt necessary for the composition. In *Synchromist Nude*, the outermost ridge of the nose is painted green, even though, according to Russell's own acknowledgement that yellow describes objects closest to the eye, this part of the body should be yellow. Russell's flexibility with color usage prefigured his early departure from the stringent methodology of synchromism, whereas Wright's tenacious adaptation of color scales mirrored his own obsessive search for an all-encompassing order. Still, it was Russell, an artist as devoted to the search for new and alternative ways of expression as any in Paris at that time, who painted the most formidable example of Synchromism's intermediate phase, his *Synchromy in Blue-Violet* of 1913.

Four different versions of the *Synchromy in Blue-Violet* have been recorded.⁵³ As the largest version was extensively repainted in 1971, the smaller version formerly in the collection of Lydia Winston Malbin will be discussed here (fig. 19).⁵⁴ In this synchromy, Russell summarized his objectives with the new method much like Wright did in *Dracopoli*, but without the figural reference.

Russell dedicated the large *Synchromy in Blue-Violet* to his famous New York patroness, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, calling it a work at "the heart of my development."⁵⁵ He prepared for her a short booklet intended to explain the meaning of the work. It would have required a treatise to explain color scales, although Russell did manage to promote to her the novelty of the Synchromist method and the musical analogy:

Never in painting has color been composed in the same sense—This is what I mean by all I say in the catalogue [for the 1913

Bernheim-Jeune exhibit, which featured this painting]—I have always felt the need of imposing on color the same violent twists and spirals that Rubens, Michelangelo etc. imposed on form....It is only by a sense of continuity or curve in color that one can produce an effect as emotional as that of music on us...⁵⁶

The "principal rhythm" illustrated in this booklet for Mrs. Whitney (fig. 20) was the basis for the painting's composition, which he further described as "only a composition of color & light, the form generated being but a simple order of projections and hollows."⁵⁷ Of the two simple opposing lines themselves, he wrote to her: "It is perhaps a very primitive and elementary thing, as line it is classic and old..."⁵⁸ Russell's simple "principal rhythm" was based on his study of Greek sculpture and Michelangelo's sculpture and expresses the relationship of mass observed in contrapposto. In hundreds of sketches, both Russell and Wright studied how the shift of weight in a figure resulted in a basic contrast; tension and relaxation, support and dispersal, a thrust forward and one away. Nowhere was this physical fact more evident than in Michelangelo's sculpture, especially his *Dying Slave* which Russell and Wright both copied over and over. Both artists attempted to distill this rhythm which served as a visual metaphor for perfect balance and harmony of fundamental opposites. The Greeks achieved it, Michelangelo achieved it, and the Synchronists believed this contrapposto rhythm to be as basic to nature as musical harmony or color harmony. To integrate it into the Synchronist method, which was attempting to merge the common essences of sound and color, was the logical next step in Russell's drive to achieve an overall synthesis of basic harmonic components. Wright would later execute some of his most

effective synchronies using this "principal rhythm" (the projection and hollow, or the "hollow and the bump" as Russell and then Wright called it) in a figurative mode.

Russell filled out this principal rhythm, the two simple opposing lines, in broad patches of unmixed color, following Tudor-Hart's rule of juxtaposition. For his scale, he chose blue-violet, which is not without a great deal of meaning.⁵⁹ The scale of blue-violet is as follows: blue-violet, red-violet, red-orange, orange, yellow, green, and blue. According to Tudor-Hart, of the twelve essential colors of the spectrum, yellow is the most luminous, and blue-violet possesses the lowest luminosity. Therefore, yellow has the closest relationship to white light of all the colors, and blue-violet is the deepest possible shadow with color. By choosing the key of blue-violet, Russell tried to create the greatest possible contrast, that is, areas of yellow advancing and areas of blue-violet retreating. This high contrast would be in harmony with the contrast inherent in the principle rhythm (itself a dynamic of opposites) which formed the organizational basis of the composition. In a single image, the harmony of color, its emotional and psychological meaning, and the balance of form (in a very classical sense) would be accomplished. Finally, of this painting, Russell wrote to Whitney:

The bursting of the central spectrum in my picture on one's consciousness has surely a vague analogy with what must have happened if one can imagine the first visual organ as belonging to a conscious being. If modern painting is to express anything greater than a few apples or portraits it can only be something of this sort.⁶⁰

Russell and Wright, responding to the vanguard milieu in which they worked as well as to their individual aspirations, sought an art that

would express universal form, universal rhythm, and universal sensations, an art capable of arresting one's consciousness on the level of pure sensation. It is not surprising that their manifestos of 1913 were so brash, when in fact they felt they were onto the discovery of just such a form of expression.

ADVANCED SYNCHROMISM

Advanced synchronism is an arbitrary but perhaps useful categorization of those paintings in which the entirety of synchronist theory was consciously applied, that is, where optical properties of color established relative distances, where color itself was used as the basis of form, where a principal (universal) rhythm used as the basis of the composition, and where an overall formal and psychological unity among these elements was attempted. Advanced synchronism is represented by Morgan Russell's seminal work, *Synchromy in Orange: To Form* of 1914, and by the synchronomies completed by Macdonald-Wright in Paris and New York between 1914-1918. In this last phase, the divergent approaches of the two men are most obvious. Russell abandoned synchronism in 1916. In that year, he told Andrew Dasburg, "I'm through with Synchronism."⁶¹ By contrast, Wright painted his most intellectually and spiritually engaging images during this period in a manner, in Wright's words, "...not too differentiated from the 1912-13 production...".⁶²

Russell's *Synchromy in Orange: To Form* (fig. 21) was, like *Synchromy in Blue-Violet*, based on the dynamic contrapposto of a Michelangelesque figure. The fundamental opposition, the basic physical tension, in Russell's words, the "hollow and the bump," is expressed over

and over again in this painting by opposing sets of curves. This basic visual equation may be stated as (). Russell himself most likely derived this understanding of form from Rodin, who wrote, "Sculpture is quite simply the art of depression and protuberance. There is no getting away from that."⁶³ Russell visited Rodin often, discussed art with him, and shared with that French master an enthusiasm for Michelangelo. What began for Russell as figural studies in the essentials of classical, universal rhythm, that is, of *contrapposto*, culminated in the emphatic assertion of space itself, which was, as a *sculpteur manqué*, still Russell's primary concern. Of *Synchromy in Orange*, Russell wrote:

The composition must be conceived as an order of volume and space—of projection and hollow—this without any doubt whatsoever is the foundation of all painting, the skeleton in which the rest grows and develops for light means volume and space [and] color also means volume and space but once this part [is] thoroughly conceived it should generate its light and dark and consequently its color organization.⁶⁴

As in the earliest *Synchromies*, Russell used the advancing and receding properties of color to establish those areas of the composition which were projections, and which were hollows. Tudor-Hart's notion of *espacement* is in evidence here, with the colors carefully made distinct from, though juxtaposed with, other colors. His use of the scale of orange (orange, yellow, green, blue-green, blue-violet, red-violet, and red-orange) is fairly regular, though as Macdonald-Wright noted, Russell deviated from the scale when his intuition compelled him. One can see in this work very non-spectral shades of light rose-madder and near-black.

Basic rhythm in space is the true subject of *Synchromy in Orange*. Indeed, this painting is one of the clearest exemplars of what Russell and Wright stated in their 1914 Carroll Galleries exhibition catalogue, i. e., that they "conceive space itself as having a distinct plastic significance which is expressed by color."⁶⁵ "Plastic significance" meant for Russell and Wright that space was as much a three-dimensional entity, capable of being modeled, as much as apples, geraniums or any other physical phenomena. In *Synchromy in Orange*, the viewer moves in and out of space, following the rhythms established, while everywhere this movement and space is determined by color. Also, as the two artists stated in that same Carroll catalogue, they wished their paintings of this period to give "the illusion that the canvas develops like music, in time." *Synchromy in Orange* attempts that very sensation. To realize the full desired and intended experience, a viewer could not experience the work simultaneously, but rather had to move along with the *espacement* of color and along with the pushing and pulling contrast of curves. This experience necessarily had to occur over a period of time, much the same as listening to a sequence of musical notes.

The Synchromist objective, that of creating pure sensation that is at once physical and emotional, individual yet universal, and in which color is the generating phenomena, was admirably sought after by Russell in *Synchromy in Orange*. In light of such a seemingly encouraging achievement, it is puzzling that Russell so soon after abandoned the Synchromist program. It could well be that he himself did not see his own progress, let alone his own achievement. This, coupled with the hardships of World War I and the continued struggle for financial survival, perhaps contributed to Russell's decision to pursue different

kinds of expression. Whatever the reasons for Russell's imminent departure from Synchronism after 1914 (the reasons with Russell surely would have been complex), his artistic realignment occurred precisely during the years when Macdonald-Wright became aesthetically entrenched in Synchronism.

In 1914, Macdonald-Wright painted two significant Synchronist works in Paris after his return to that city with his brother, Willard. *Abstraction on Spectrum (Organization No. 5)* (fig. 22) and *Conception Synchronomy* (fig. 23) are both related to Russell's *Synchronomy in Orange* in that both images are compositionally built on opposing curved bands of spectral color, that is, on the basic expression of contrapposto. Likewise, in each of these Wright paintings the subject matter is rhythm, movement and emotional sensation. Both of these paintings, like Russell's *Synchronomy in Orange*, are perhaps better examples of the kind of art described in the 1914 Carroll Galleries manifesto than most of the paintings that were actually in that show, almost as if the ability of Wright and Russell were finally catching up to their high-minded rhetoric: colors advance toward the viewer, and recede into space as per their inherent quality to do so (making of space a "plastic entity"), they are harmonized around "one generative color" (or, the "tonic" color), and seem to develop "in time." While the relative success or failure, in aesthetic terms, of these 1914 paintings can only be subjectively evaluated, at the very minimum Wright and Russell were producing images in that year which may be demonstrably linked to their written claims. Again from the Carroll catalogue, the artists wrote:

An art whose ambition it is to be pure should express itself only with means inherent in this art.

Painting being the art of color, any quality of a picture not expressed by color is not painting.

In thus creating the subjective emotions of depth and rhythm we achieve the dreams of painters who talk of drawing the spectator into the center of the picture, but instead of his being drawn there by intellectual processes he is enveloped in the picture by *tactile sensations*.

We limit ourselves to the expressions of plastic emotions; for in painting it is ridiculous to search for the fourth dimension and philosophic ideas, or musical abstractions.⁶⁶

Wright's *Abstraction on Spectrum* and *Conception Synchrony* and Russell's *Synchrony in Orange* all successfully avoid any kind of illustrative sensibility. In desiring an art that was "pure," they also eschewed increasingly popular themes of overt modernity, such as the city or the machine. Again, this was due to Wright and Russell's desire not to reject the past, but rather to incorporate timeless rhythms into a more specifically color-oriented art, which they believed germane to painting and painting only.

The mention of the fourth dimension indicates that the artists were aware of this intellectually attractive but aesthetically problematic idea. They could have easily become aware of the topic from attending lectures by the philosopher, Henri Bergson (1859-1941), who was an incredibly popular speaker in Paris during this period and who lectured on problems in the perception of time and space.⁶⁷ Just as easily, the topic could have been argued second-hand in the cafés, or picked up from articles in contemporary journals. In any case, both Wright and Russell insisted at this time that painting was an art of color, and that mathematical or

philosophical theories were best pursued in the arena of logical debate. Painting could evoke emotional and spiritual experiences that were beyond logic or verbal definition, and this was its reason for being.

The desire on the part of Macdonald-Wright and Russell to so unconventionally express aspects of reality, of experiences emotional, psychological and spiritual, placed them fully in the context of the vanguard in the years before World War I. Their use of abstraction was particularly advanced for Americans, but it was even more their desire to create, in their words, a "pure" art, one unclouded by politics, biased histories, personal circumstance or momentary concerns which supports their claim to have attempted a universal art. Their impulse toward the universal was shared by the likes of Kandinsky and Mondrian, their intensity of color by the Orphists and Fauves, and their ambition to create new modes of experience was an essential component of what we now regard as the modern sensibility.

After his brief time in London and his return to New York in 1915, Wright painted continually and with confidence in the Synchronist method:

On of my most productive periods was the three years I spent in New York, a period relatively free from technical or 'approach' problems. I painted in the momentum of the 1912-13 years and most of the work I did was the human figure. I posed for many myself, and the girls I knew posed for me....These works done before late 1918 when I returned to California were not too differentiated from the 1912-13 production.⁶⁸

No longer absorbed by experimental concerns, Macdonald-Wright painted numerous Synchronies, all exhibiting his concern with spatial

extension, rhythm, light and the overall harmony afforded in part by the use of color scales. During this period, he often included the color key of a particular painting in that painting's title, such as *Synchromy in Purple*, or *Synchromy in Blue-Green*, etc. The use of the human figure as Wright's primary subject matter is understandable in light of the artist's self-professed axiom of the period: "We are incapable of imagining a form that is not the result of some contact of our senses with nature. Or at least the forms that issue from this contact are infinitely more expressive and varied than those born of the inventive labor of the intellect."⁶⁹ Still, though figurative, it is important to note that these were solitary nudes, not dated by clothes, a particular environment, or specific identity. Such inclusions would have detracted from Macdonald-Wright's goal of prioritizing light and color moving in space. Always he felt that nature itself was a superior point of departure for a composition than brain-spun configurations.

The secrets of nature, of course, remained secrets, only suggesting themselves through the harmony and the emotional meanings that were experienced as self-evident. A typical example of advanced synchromism from this period is Wright's *Synchromy in Purple* (fig. 24) of 1917. The colors in the painting are spectral, but their inherent saturation (that is, the purity with which they would appear in the spectrum) has been raised. In short, the colors have been tinted, leaving each with less purity in the process of adding white. This process, of tinting spectral colors, dated back for Wright to experiments with Tudor-Hart in attempting to move colors up an octave. What Wright called "purple" in conventional terms is red-violet with its inherent saturation raised. Indeed, Wright often painted in raised scales. The scale of "purple," then, contains red-violet, red-orange,

yellow-orange, yellow, green, blue and violet, all with raised saturations. The colors of this scale are everywhere apparent in the painting. The major color chord is red-violet, yellow-orange and green. This chord, significantly, appears on the face and very near the center of the painting on the figure's genitalia. As color is the "generating medium" of painting, this chord and its emotional meaning are the basis of the harmony in this particular work.

In *Synchromy in Purple*, Wright took full advantage of *espacement*, allowing segments of color to vibrate into one another by way of flickering, painterly strokes that, in effect, simulate the transition of colors on an actual spectrum. Areas which we might call "voids," areas of nothing but a creamy white surface, are used to both slow and quicken the movement of colors back and forth, much as a "rest" does in a piece of music. A close and deliberate study of the color in the painting (a process for which there is no substitute, since this is how the colors were arrived at originally) shows that what at first appears to be a kind of brown is actually a neutralized yellow-orange, and the almost black color above and below the penis and testicles is a neutralized red-violet. Wright is almost ("almost" used here in admission that not every painting of that three-year period has been subjected to detailed analysis) always consistent in his use of scales from 1915-18.

The emotional meaning of the scale of red-violet is recorded in Wright's *Treatise on Color*. Red-violet is portentous, it is the calm before the storm, whereas violet is the storm itself. Strength and action are foretold by red-violet. The use of this scale, in combination with the subject, a nude male, make the source of *Synchromy in Purple* obvious: Michelangelo's *Adam* from the Sistine Chapel. Just as God is about to

invest the conspicuously flaccid Adam with the power of life, so Wright's figure with equally diminutive sex organs awaits arousal. The legs of Wright's figure are boldly spread to reveal the penis, the body relaxed and the head slightly inclined as if just awakening, or perhaps just beginning to move, or as in direct emulation of Michelangelo. Of course, all these possibilities may be present and correct at the same time.

Wright would have reveled in the creation theme as it related to his own role as a creator. So, too, would his awareness of the vitality and importance of sexuality in nature find an appropriate metaphor in the awakening man. The whole idea of the portentous, of that which awaits form, is appropriate to both artist and viewer and the realm of experience. Wright delighted in painting such esoterica. Such intricate pursuits, the kind which baffled young Thomas Hart Benton and others who came into contact with Wright, also baffled his public. Wright was an aesthete and a modernist at the expense of wider recognition, a fact which he, like so many artists of his time, could only lament.

MACDONALD-WRIGHT AND HIS MODERNIST PEERS

Numerous historians and critics of modern art have relegated Synchronism to the status of bastard stepchild to Orphism, the name given by Guillaume Apollinaire to the divers abstractions by Robert Delaunay, Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia and Fernand Léger. Barbara Rose, for example, called Synchronism "crackpot eclecticism."⁷⁰ Virginia Spate, author of the impressive *Orphism: The Evolution of Non-figurative Painting in Paris, 1910-1914*, dismissed Synchronism therein as merely spreading the "decorative aspects" of Orphism, though she noted

the Synchronists' 1913 show at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery as "...curiously, the single most important exhibition containing non-figurative art in Paris before the war, for Delaunay exhibited his non-figurative works only in Germany."⁷¹ Spate summarizes the most popular and on-going assumption regarding Synchronism: "It is difficult to believe that their work was independent of Orphism, since it is particularly close to the circular forms of Kupka and Delaunay, whose ideas they shared on the equivalence between paint-colour and natural light, as well as consequent belief that abstract colour relationships were sufficient subject for a painter."⁷² It is this summation, then, that requires the most direct response.

Paris during the years 1910-1914 was the scene of continuous artistic innovation. New and old ideas clashed in cafés, studios and in the journals. To make even a partial list of ideas/impulses extant in the Paris of that day is enlightening: the immense legacy of Cézanne, the advances of Picasso and Braque, Symbolism, Aestheticism, Matisse and Fauvism, synesthesia, astrology, the Vedas, Bergson, anarchy, universality, the city, the machine, electricity, multiple color theories, Primitivism, theosophy, and relativity. These were but some of the topics being discussed, interpreted and re-interpreted along with a multiplicity of past ideas. Indeed, the idea of there being an equivalency between natural light and color was well-known to the Impressionists decades before the advent of the Orphists. The Synchronists, no strangers to Impressionism, easily could have come to understand light as color from them (and Turner), which is most likely since that phenomenon is more evident and literally expressed in Impressionist works than early modern works. In a milieu as crowded with artists and ideas as was Paris in those years, it is often

difficult to establish who came up with what first, though this is often the preoccupation of scholars. Unfortunately, what is often overlooked is the importance of common sources, Impressionism being a prime example regarding color and light.

According to Macdonald-Wright, though he knew Delaunay, the two never visited each other's studios. According to Spate, Delaunay exhibited his non-figurative work only in Germany in the years before the war. Based on the available evidence, it is not unreasonable to assume that Wright did not see any of Delaunay's non-figurative work before the war. Wright did see Delaunay's *Ville de Paris*, and was impressed by it, though the visual references to the city in that painting were seen by Wright as illustrative, and condemned as such in the Bernheim-Jeune manifesto. A primary, well-known and readily available source for colored, circular imagery that could have inspired both Delaunay and Macdonald-Wright (as well as others) was the color wheel itself.

The idea of a color wheel serving as the point of departure for Delaunay's colored discs appears nowhere in the art historical literature on that artist, though such a comparison has been made elsewhere.⁷³ With a color wheel illustrated next to a *Disc* by Delaunay, the relationship seems rather obvious. Which is not at all to say Delaunay's expression was that simplistic, as it certainly was not, but this comparison points out a common source and one that was definitely well-known to Synchronists and Orphists alike.

Another source for Delaunay's images of colored circles might have been the stained glassed windows of the interiors of cathedrals. Again, such a comparison has never been made in the art historical literature on Delaunay, yet he painted the interior of cathedrals and the image of light, a

primary interest of his, passing through multi-faceted areas of brilliant color could not have been visually unknown to him.

Beyond those comparisons, a circle is the shape of the sun, the source of light, and is anti-gravitational—it floats in space. Using a circle to express both light and aspects of space is ancient. To attribute the primacy of its use to any one artist is both indefensible and counterproductive.

Delaunay never pursued the color/music analogy to the same extent as the Synchronists. Delaunay, like the Synchronists, had studied color theory and had read the work of Ogden Rood. Rood rejected the idea that color and music functioned in any similar way, and wrote that "...any theory of color base on our musical experience must rest on fancy rather than fact."⁷⁴ Delaunay scholar Sherry Buckberrough credits the writings of Rood for turning Delaunay away from exploring sound/color analogies. Rood was a color theorist necessarily ignored by Wright and Russell (even though Rood felt intervals between colors were a crucial factor in how colors were perceived, this idea was shared by Tudor-Hart and then the Synchronists in very different ways).

The use of color scales is perhaps the major factor in terms of method that separates the Synchronists from Delaunay and the other so-called Orphists. Wright and Russell pursued the possibility that the hidden and mysterious power that unifies musical harmonies was the same or similar to the one that unifies color. Like Delaunay, and so many of the vanguard artists of the period, Wright and Russell were fully prepared to explore alternative ways of seeing. The use of color scales, from the point of view of the Synchronists, was a step closer to the essence of what creates harmony and balance, and thus the possibility of a

new method of painting. In retrospect, it would be all too easy to ridicule such a romantic notion. But, they were romantics and shared in the wild enthusiasms of the age. To estimate their activity as mere copying of another vanguard artist is to miss an interesting and eccentric chapter of early modernism in Paris.

Likewise, the influence Stanton Macdonald-Wright had on early American modernists during his New York years has been underestimated and undervalued in art historical scholarship. Though outside the scope of the present study, two particularly relevant examples will serve to underscore this point.

That Thomas Hart Benton was a close friend of Stanton's and a student of Synchronism for a brief time is routinely documented in studies of Benton's art. What is less clearly appreciated is the lasting effect of Stanton's thinking on Benton, even when the latter's painting ceased to show any visible debt to his teacher. Benton's Michelangelesque figures that writhe in rhythmic patterns in his paintings throughout his career have yet to be equated with the dynamic Michelangelesque figures Wright produced in New York, some of which Benton posed for.⁷⁵ However, more important than the obvious formal qualities Benton's paintings derived from Wright is the philosophical attitude about form that Benton retained. Benton absorbed the idea of the "hollow and the bump" directly from Wright, replete with its implications for unity, balance and classical controposto. In the 1930s, while teaching at the Art Students' League in New York, Benton used that very phrase with his students. Indeed, he spoke to them in a symbolic mode about the "hollow and the bump" that echoed Wright. One of Benton's students of the 1930s recalled that "The 'hollow and the bump' had a symbolic significance like 'yin and yang.' It

expressed for us the polarity from negative, recessive, softness to positive, solid, projecting forcefulness."⁷⁶

Benton's equation of the "hollow and the bump" with the *yin* and the *yang* was surely prompted by his continued communication with Wright into the 1920s. Wright, as will be documented in the next chapter, included Benton in Southern California exhibitions in the 1920s. Though they were in regular communication, it has yet to be documented to what extent Wright shared his developing views on Orientalism, the concept of the void, and the overall balance of elements in a painting. Wright shared these views in detail with Morgan Russell, and with his own students at the Los Angeles Art Students' League—certainly he would have passed them to Benton with whom he had shared the "hollow and the bump" in 1915. How much of Wright's esoteric philosophizing reached Benton pupils such as Jackson Pollock? Indeed, when Pollock was himself an art student at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles in 1928, how could he have been unaware of Macdonald-Wright, who was the outstanding modernist in a very small art community? If he managed to remain unaware of Wright in 1928, it is difficult to imagine that he was still unaware of him when Pollock returned to Los Angeles in 1931 after discovering the "hollow and the bump" with Benton in New York. The ideological lineage of the "hollow and the bump" from Wright to Benton to Pollock, and the intriguing possibility of a direct influence from Wright to Pollock in Los Angeles, invites serious scrutiny.⁷⁷

Just as insufficient attention has been given to Wright's influence on Benton and subsequently on a significant painter like Pollock, no attention whatsoever has been given to the influence Wright had on Georgia O'Keeffe. A decidedly important early modernist, O'Keeffe was

reading books by Willard Huntington Wright in 1916, including *The Creative Will*, a work which summarizes a good many of the ideas Willard arrived at in tandem with Stanton. Of *The Creative Will*, O'Keeffe wrote: "...been reading Wright's "Creative Will"—Have you got it? If you haven't I want to give it to you—It has been great to me—that's why I want to give it to you...He [Willard Wright] gets me so excited that sometimes I think I must be crazy. Have been reading Clive Bell again too. He seems so stupid next to Wright..."⁷⁸

In March of 1917, Macdonald-Wright had his first American one-person show at Alfred Stieglitz' 291 Gallery, just prior to Georgia O'Keeffe's first one-person show the following month, which proved to be the last exhibit at 291. That O'Keeffe was moved by Stanton's work is made plain in a letter to Anita Pollitzer in September 1917: "He [Stieglitz] has a new [Stanton Macdonald] Wright and I saw another one—both Synchronist things that are wonderful. Theory plus feeling—They are really great."⁷⁹

O'Keeffe's preoccupation with a color/music analogy subsequently manifest itself strongly in the late teens in such paintings as *Blue and Green Music* of 1919 (fig. 25), a title which recalls Stanton's *Synchromy in Blue-Green* which was included in his 1917 show at 291. Regarding this phase of O'Keeffe's development, the influence of Kandinsky and his book, *Spiritual Harmony in Art*, has been cited.⁸⁰ Though Synchronism had at its theoretical core a color/music analogy, no connections between O'Keeffe's art of the late teens and Macdonald-Wright have been made.⁸¹

SYNCHROMISM AND ORIENTAL CORRESPONDENCES

In the literature on Macdonald-Wright, the idea is often put forward that his interest in Oriental art and philosophy began only after his return to California in 1918. However, numerous autobiographical statements made by Macdonald-Wright prove his acquaintance with Far Eastern art began at the same time he was moving deeply into modernism, that is, circa 1910-12: "I had been put into that [the study of Oriental Art] by [Henri] Focillon with whom I studied at the Sorbonne...." and "I had studied Zen since before I left Paris, as a matter of fact, and had kept it up more or less [ever since]."⁸² In his Paris Journal, Macdonald-Wright made the following telling entry, circa 1912:

In the rebirth and ultimate life of a painter there are 10,000 reincarnations as in Buddhism. Each separate Avatar is a theory. With each theory forgotten we strip ourselves naked before our God, Nature, and are ready to enter among the saved.⁸³

The reference to Buddhism and to theories as "Avatars" is not chance, but rather reflects the influence of the French art historian, Henri Focillon (1881-1943).⁸⁴ A celebrated teacher who became the chair of art history at the Sorbonne in 1924, Focillon published his first book on Oriental art in 1914. Focillon studied a wide range of periods, including Medieval to 20th century art. His cross-cultural interests exposed Wright to comparison between the approaches of East and West.

What is difficult to ascertain is to what extent Wright's youthful investigations of Oriental thought affected the development of Synchronism. Synchronism, as practised by Wright during his early Paris years, never adopted visual motifs or themes that looked specifically

Oriental. Yet, Macdonald-Wright's insatiable intellect would not have permitted him to merely flirt with Orientalism. Far Eastern philosophy and expression eventually became Wright's passion, and it is reasonable to assume that during his first Paris experience, the ideas he discovered regarding the Orient not only fascinated him and led him to life-long study, but also were consistent, from his point of view, with the mystical and intuitive processes that he brought to bear on his own modernist painting.

Focillon introduced Wright to Chinese painting. Since the intimidating wealth of material regarding Chinese painting cannot be addressed here, certain generalizations will have to suffice. According to George Rowley's 1974 study, *Principles of Chinese Painting*, two indigenous approaches to life intermingled to shape the Chinese perspective: Taoism and Confucianism.⁸⁵ Both of these philosophical modes sought "inner reality" by way of the fusion of opposites. In characterizing the Chinese painter, Rowley wrote: "The artist must be neither classic nor romantic, he should be both; his painting must be neither naturalistic nor idealistic, it must be both; his style must be neither traditional nor original, it must be both."⁸⁶

The idea of fusing the achievements of the past with the innovations of the present was very much a central goal of the Synchronists. From Wright's Paris Journal, circa 1912, we read the following: "All new art forms grow out of the old. We can no more cut ourselves entirely off from the accumulated tradition of art than we can have children without heads. Art is just as much an evolution as a plant."⁸⁷ Basic to Synchronism was the attempt to harmonize both color and form in space, based on a universal, classical rhythm.

Again according to Rowley, for the Chinese artist the world of spirit and the world of matter are not separate, but are one. Western dualisms are irrelevant, the mysteries of the Universe are permeated by one power, one way, one impulse—the Tao. Chinese painters did not seek the Absolute by ignoring the world, but rather sought "communion with all things": "No line of separation was made between the life of nature and the experience of man. They both belonged to the elemental being of the universe."⁸⁸

In his "Individual Introduction" for the 1913 Bernheim-Jeune catalogue, Macdonald-Wright stated: "We are incapable of imagining a form that is not the result of some contact of our senses with nature. Or at least the forms that issue from this contact are infinitely more expressive and varied than those born of the inventive labor of the intellect. So far as form is concerned, one must maintain a relationship with nature."⁸⁹ For Wright, the will of the artist was not greater than Nature.

Further, the idea that one power permeated all of nature would have supported the notion that even though music and color manifest themselves differently to the senses, intrinsically they were the same. Therefore, attempting to paint in color scales in an equivalent manner to musical scales would have found a precedent, however superficially understood, in Taoism.

In Taoism, spirit and matter are one, yet all things are in flux. The Tao resides in the resolution of opposites, in the *yin* and the *yang* (fig. 26), and yet the meaning of all things is in the non-existent, that is, in the void. This last concept is one of the most difficult aspects of Tao. Yet, it is crucial. The emptiness in between and around things imparts meaning to them, inasmuch as matter and spirit reside in an ultimate unity. This idea

was restated by Macdonald-Wright over and over again in the early 1920s with such authority that it is difficult to imagine that he had not encountered it years before, that is, via Focillon. The idea that meaning is in the void, in the empty spaces, would have confirmed for Wright that the intervals (the empty spaces) between musical notes imparted to them a sense of harmony and rhythm, and why this was so could not be determined scientifically. Wright adopted painting in color scales in the intermediate phase of Synchronism, and believed that as long as the intervals between colors was kept as in music, then a natural harmony would result. This result would not be the same as music, but rather analogous to music and wholly suited to the medium of paint.

After Wright's return to California, his documented references to Oriental philosophers and painters are legion. Their influence on his art became both obvious and overwhelming. An early affinity for the complex and mysterious teaching of the Orient, and their subsequent subtle influence on Synchronist painting, should not be discounted.

¹Hermann Hesse, *Reflections*, trans. Suhrkamp Verlag (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1971), 129.

²Richard Ellman, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 288.

³Quoted in Faber Birren, *Color: A Survey in Words and Pictures, from Ancient Mysticism to Modern Science* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, Inc., 1963), 124.

⁴The Morgan Russell Archives are now in the permanent collection of The Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, New Jersey. Gift of Henry M. Reed.

⁵SMW to Morgan Russell, undated letter, roll 1266, AAA. Restricted. Used by permission of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁶*York Herald*, 10 October 1884, quoted in Ellman, *Wilde*, 247.

⁷SMW, *Paris Journal*, unpaginated.

⁸Ellman, *Wilde*, 238.

⁹SMW, Paris Journal, quoted in *Serenade*, unpaginated.

¹⁰SMW, Paris Journal, unpaginated.

¹¹*Serenade*, unpaginated.

¹²*Serenade*, unpaginated.

¹³The function of Vautrin, among others, was to "propound a view of life which is of deep significance to Lucien." See Donald Adamson, *Balzac: Illusions perdues* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1981), 51.

¹⁴ Adamson, 11.

¹⁵Adamson, 18.

¹⁶*Serenade*, unpaginated.

¹⁷Jan Stussy papers, roll 3976, frames 695-699, AAA.

¹⁸A brief definition of essential color terms is provided here. (Both Macdonald-Wright and Russell used the following terms in the same sense that they are defined here, however, the careful reader is alerted to the fact that past color theorists such as Goethe and Castel used different terms, and sometimes the same term with a different meaning. For explanations in of those differences, the reader is referred to Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).) A *complementary* color is a hue which complements another in that they form a neutral gray when mixed together, but present a sharp contrast when juxtaposed. A *hue* is that property of a color which gives it its name—red, green, violet, etc. Blue and associated hues are *cool colors*, and appear to recede from the eye. Red and associated hues are *warm colors*, and appear to advance toward the eye. *Achromatic* color is perceived as devoid of hue. *Primary colors*, in pigment, are the three basic hues—red, yellow and blue—from which, theoretically, all other colors can be mixed. *Value* is that property of a color by which it is distinguished as light or dark (that is, if one sees a black and white photograph of a colored image, one sees only the values of those colors; in black and white, the color blue-violet appears darker than yellow). Colors may be raised in value by mixing with white to make a *tint*, or lowered in value by mixing with black to make a *shade*. *Saturation* is that property of a color by which its vividness is distinguished, it refers to the amount of purity of that hue; as a color tends toward gray, it is "lower in saturation."

¹⁹*Serenade*, unpaginated.

²⁰SMW, Paris Journal, unpaginated.

²¹*Serenade*, unpaginated.

²²"In 1908 I bought four Cézanne watercolors and lived with them. I know Cézanne." SMW, letter to Mrs. Phillips, 26 July 1973. Typescript copy author's file from copy in possession of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

²³SMW, "Roots of Synchronism," Stussy papers, AAA.

²⁴Antony Anderson, "Of Art and Artists," *The Los Angeles Sunday Sunday Times*, 3 August 1919. Located in roll LA 5, frames 120-21, AAA .

²⁵SMW, "Roots."

²⁶*Serenade*, 24-a.

²⁷Faber Birren, *Color Perception in Art* (West Chester, Pennsylvania: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1986), 31.

²⁸"You know that in an atmosphere of equal density the remotest objects seen through it, as mountains, in consequence of the great quantity of atmosphere between your eye and them—appear blue and almost of the same hue as the atmosphere itself when the sun is in the East. Hence you must make the nearest building above the wall of its real colour, but the more distant ones make less defined and bluer. Those you wish should look farthest away you must make proportionately bluer; thus if one is to be five times as distant, make it five times bluer." Leonardo da Vinci, quoted in Jean Paul Richter, ed., *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, Compiled and Edited from the Original Manuscripts, Vol 1* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 159.

²⁹*Serenade*, unpaginated.

³⁰*Serenade*, 37-38.

³¹M. E. Chevreul, with a an introduction and explanatory notes by Faber Birren, *The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colors and Their Application to the Arts* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1967), first published as *De la Loi du Contraste Simultane des Couleurs* (Paris: Chez Pitois-Levrault et Cie., 1839), 61.

³²See "Color and Music" in Denis Arnold, ed., *The New Oxford Companion to Music*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 424.

³³For a detailed and thorough history of science and color, see Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

³⁴J.M.W. Turner, *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory: The Morning After the Deluge, Moses Writing the Book of Genesis)*, exhibited 1843, oil on canvas, octagonal, 30 1/2 in. The Tate Gallery, London.

³⁵Kemp, 303.

³⁶Kemp, 303.

³⁷"By the time Seurat began his researches in the 1880s, the amount of optical advice potentially available from science had increased to a point at which we could well excuse the painter if he did not know where to begin." Kemp, 312.

³⁸Percyval Tudor-Hart, "A New View of Color," *The Cambridge Magazine* 7, no. 20 (23 February 1918): 452-456, and "The Analogy of Sound and Color," *The Cambridge Magazine* 7, no. 21 (2 March 1918): 480-486. On Tudor-Hart, see Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, *Percyval Tudor-Hart (1873-1954): Portrait of an Artist* (London: P. R. MacMillan Limited, 1961).

³⁹Tudor-Hart, "Analogy": 480.

⁴⁰Tudor-Hart, "A New View": 452.

⁴¹*Additive colors* are colors made by lights (the additive primaries are red, blue and green) which, when mixed, become lighter in value. *Subtractive color mixing* refers to the mixing of pigments, which result in darkened mixtures (the subtractive primaries are red, yellow and blue). On Maxwell's discs, see Kemp, 313-314: "Maxwell studied optical colour mixtures using revolving disks which fitted together in such a way that the proportions of the colours could be systematically varied."

⁴²Tudor-Hart, "Analogy": 481.

⁴³Tudor-Hart, "Analogy": 483.

⁴⁴Tudor-Hart, "Analogy": 486.

⁴⁵Antony Anderson, "Art and Artists," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 November 1913: 6.

⁴⁶Antony Anderson, "Of Art and Artists," *The Los Angeles Sunday Times*, 3 August 1919.

⁴⁷SMW, *Treatise*, 17.

⁴⁸SMW, *Treatise*, 15.

⁴⁹Tudor-Hart, "Analogy": 485. Also see SMW letter to MR: "I believe that the important thing in T. H. [Tudor-Hart] is not any of his colors but lies in the spatial divisions of his color intervals." SMW papers, roll 1266, frame 34, AAA. Restricted. Used by permission of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁵⁰"...the body in movement creates the (), which you taught me..." SMW to MR, undated letter in SMW papers, roll 1266, frame 40. Restricted. Used by permission of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁵¹The idea that colors have an intrinsic emotional equivalent was certainly not a new idea, but rather another romantic, mystical belief incorporated by the Synchronists. The idea that music, like color, has inherent emotional equivalents has also been repeatedly argued. For the argument that major keys in music signify happiness, and minor keys sadness, see Deryck Cooke, *The Language of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

⁵²SMW, *Treatise*, 26.

⁵³Kushner, *Russell*, 72.

⁵⁴The large version of Russell's *Synchromy in Blue-Violet* was recovered by SMW, who subsequently repainted it in the process of attempting to restore it. Russell's large canvas

was buried under a house, along with approximately seventeen other paintings, for nearly forty years following 1931, when he left them with a friend until such a time as they could be sent to France. This story is related by SMW in detail in the Jan Stussy papers, roll 3976, frames 698-699, AAA.

⁵⁵Russell to Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney (Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney), 2 December 1913. Russell Archives, Montclair Museum.

⁵⁶Morgan Russell, *Harmonic Analysis of the Big Synchronie in Blue-Violacé*, 1913, watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper, four sheets, each 4 15/16 x 6 1/8 in., Whitney Museum of American Art. Acc. 81.2a—d.

⁵⁷Russell, *Harmonic Analysis*.

⁵⁸Russell, *Harmonic Analysis*.

⁵⁹In her discussion of *Synchromy in Blue-Violet*, Marilyn Kushner refers to the "anchor points" as being simply "blue," even though Russell himself identifies them as blue-violet and bases the title of his painting on this color. On the color wheel, as in nature, blue is not blue-violet. Color is all-important to the Synchromist project, and it is necessary to make distinctions which might seem trifling to a layman, but which were critical to the Synchromists. The scale of blue, that is, with all seven colors, would be substantially different from the scale of blue-violet. Its emotional and psychological meaning would be different, as would the position it would occupy in space: blue-violet being the deepest shadow possible.

⁶⁰Russell to Mrs. Whitney, 2 December 1913.

⁶¹Quoted in Levin, *Synchromism*, 31.

⁶²*Serenade*, unpaginated.

⁶³Quoted in Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves, *Artists on Art from the XIV to the XX Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 325.

⁶⁴Russell Archives, Montclair. Notebook No. 17.

⁶⁵SMW and MR, "Introduction," *Exhibition of Synchromist Paintings by Morgan Russell and S. Macdonald-Wright*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Carroll Galleries, 2-16 March, 1914).

⁶⁶SMW and MR, "Introduction," Carroll Galleries exhibition catalogue.

⁶⁷A number of Bergson's ideas would have appealed to Wright and Russell. The notion that one could commune directly with reality through intuition and not analysis would have supported their use of scientifically ungrounded color scales. For Bergson, see Leszek Kolakowski, *Bergson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁶⁸*Serenade*, unpaginated.

⁶⁹SMW, "Individual Introduction," *Les Synchromistes*.

⁷⁰Barbara Rose, "Synchronism: A Tale of Two Gertrudes," in *Autocritique: Essays on Art and Anti-Art, 1963-1987* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), 15. One of the most abrupt dismissals Macdonald-Wright ever read in his own lifetime came in a review of a survey of modern art exhibition held at the Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C.: "But the case of Stanton Macdonald-Wright was something else again, one of those bitter little footnotes to the history of art that serve as a reminder that experimentation and progress are not necessarily the same thing." "Art," *Time* 81, no. 19 (10 May, 1963): 71.

⁷¹Virginia Spate, *Orphism: The Evolution of Non-figurative painting in Paris, 1910-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 51.

⁷²Spate, *Orphism*, 51.

⁷³Paul C. Vitz, "Visual Science and Modernist Art: Historical Parallels," in Dennis F. Fisher, and Calvin R. Nodine, eds., *Perception and Pictorial Representation* (New York: Praeger, 1979), 146.

⁷⁴Ogden H. Rood, *Modern Chromatics, Student Text-book of Color with Applications to Art and Industry*, preface, introduction and commentary by Faber Birren (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1973), 245.

⁷⁵Benton scholar Henry Adams actually credits Benton with teaching figure drawing to Wright, as opposed to the other way around: "He [Benton] instructed Macdonald-Wright in figure drawing, thus providing the basis for Macdonald-Wright's finest group of paintings, the Synchronist figure paintings of 1917-18" See Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: Drawing from Life* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), 20-21.

⁷⁶Axel Horn, "Jackson Pollock: The Hollow and the Bump," *Carleton Miscellany* 7, no. 3 (Summer 1966): 81.

⁷⁷In the most detailed biography on Pollock to date, Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith's *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), any possible connection between Macdonald-Wright and Pollock during Pollock's time in Los Angeles is not made, nor is the connection between Benton's teaching to Pollock of the "hollow and the bump" and Wright teaching it first.

⁷⁸Georgia O'Keeffe to Anita Pollitzer, December 1916, quoted in Clive Giboire, ed., *Lovingly, Georgia: The Complete Correspondence of Georgia O'Keeffe & Anita Pollitzer* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1990), 227.

⁷⁹Giboire, *Lovingly, Georgia*, 255-256. That Stanton and Georgia discussed their work together, and that she admired Synchronism, is further suggested in a letter from SMW to Alfred Stieglitz 8 May 1919: "Also let me know how O'Keeffe like the last synchrony & if she wants it..." Alfred Stieglitz Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁸⁰See Gail Levin and Marianne Lorenz, *Theme & Improvization: Kandinsky & the American Avant-Garde: 1912-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 26-27.

⁸¹The most thorough and well-documented study of Georgia O'Keeffe's early development and sources is Sarah Whitaker Peters, *Becoming O'Keeffe: The Early Years* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991). However, Peters also discounts Macdonald-Wright and Synchromism as sources for O'Keeffe.

⁸²Frederick Wight, "Stanton Macdonald-Wright Interviewed," in *Stanton Macdonald-Wright: A Retrospective Exhibition, 1911-1970* (Los Angeles: The UCLA Art Galleries/The Grunwald Graphic Arts Foundation, 1970), 5.

⁸³SMW, Paris Journal, unpaginated.

⁸⁴"Focillon, Henri," in Ian Chilvers and Harold Osborne, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 181.

⁸⁵George Rowley, *Principles of Chinese Painting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 4.

⁸⁶Rowley, 4.

⁸⁷SMW, Paris Journal, unpaginated.

⁸⁸Rowley, 6.

⁸⁹SMW, "Individual Introduction," *Les Synchromistes S. Macdonald-Wright et Morgan Russell* (Paris: Bernheim-Jeune & Cie., 1913).

CHAPTER THREE
STANTON MACDONALD-WRIGHT IN THE 1920S

S. MacDonald-Wright furnished the foundation of whatever education I have.
John Huston, film maker¹

Pure theory is a grown man's toy. It is also an ersatz for experience.
Stanton Macdonald-Wright²

In 1916, several years before he returned to California, Stanton Macdonald-Wright was compared to several of that State's leading painters, including Guy Rose (1867-1925). Rose, a native Californian, had received traditional academic instruction in France in the late 1880s. Like many Americans of his generation, he came under the influence of Impressionism and assimilated his hard-won traditional skills to painting out of doors. Rose's primary subject matter became the light-filled landscape, and, when he returned to California, the oceanscape. Arthur Hunt, reviewing Willard Huntington Wright's *Modern Painting for Out West Magazine*, felt it revealing that the Synchronists had not painted any marine paintings:

It is a significant thing that in the illusive objective of a great body of water the Synchronists have not tried to apply their theory that color is form. I can imagine MacDonald-Wright trying to give us in several different colors and compositional figures a study of

the sea. If any painting needs mass and form and composition it is marine painting. Each hour, each minute of the day produces a different color, both in the water and the surrounding sky. In that much is the form and color simultaneous, but the color does not determine the forms.³

In short, Synchronist theory, such as Hunt understood it to function, was inherently flawed, and was hardly the final step in painting that Willard had declared it to be. Guy Rose, by comparison, was "modern in every respect." According to Hunt, it was Rose more than either of the Wright brothers who had learned the lessons of Cézanne regarding form and light: "It [a painting entitled the *Old Bridge* by Rose] is probably most typical of Southern California and modern art in that it has brilliant light, rhythm, balance, and expresses an emotion." Hunt forcefully rejected Willard's book while at the same time defending the local aesthetic: "Mr. Wright's *Modern Painting* is of no avail if we cannot apply his principles to the work of Southern California painters."⁴

Hunt's attitude reflected the pervasive conservatism of the California critic, artist and public of 1916. Not unlike the vast majority of Americans who preferred the sensually pleasing surfaces of the Impressionist mode, Southern Californians were hostile to the "isms" emanating from Europe and finding an audience (albeit small) in New York. For the most progressive of Los Angeles painters, the word "modernism" itself was associated with an Ash Can school sensibility. Founded in 1916, the Los Angeles Modern Art Society included as members Meta Cressey, Helena Dunlap, Henrietta Shore, Ben Cressey, Edgar Kellar and Karl Yens. They promised at the time to bring modern art to California—in the form of paintings by Robert Henri and George

Bellows. Even local critic Arthur Vernon realized the temerity of such "modernism," but was realistic enough about local resistance to call the promise "a good start."⁵ However, by April of 1918, Vernon was still lamenting the total absence of modernism from shows sponsored by the California Art Club (the largest and most powerful art organization in the region), and warned that the organization will "suffer for it" and become like the National Academy in New York City.⁶ When Stanton Macdonald-Wright returned to Los Angeles in the fall of 1918, it was to a city all-too-familiar from his youth, a city warm and beautiful but where the painters were "sot in their ways."⁷

When Macdonald-Wright left New York City, he felt he was "ready for other scenes," and one might rightfully wonder if he consciously chose a return to Southern California specifically because it promised a slower cultural environment without the competitive pressures and expectations of Manhattan. He often recalled in later years that his move back to California initiated a "retirement" from the exhibition field, and a period of experimentation in his artwork free from the gallery world and a fickle public. However, in 1919, Macdonald-Wright was anything but a retiree from the art world, and Los Angeles was just then entering a boom period that disqualified it as a retirement community. To the contrary, almost immediately upon his return to California Stanton undertook a wide variety of projects designed to stimulate, illuminate and rearrange the Southland's art community, and to establish himself within that fast-growing city as a guiding force. These projects included publishing on art and aesthetic theory, lecturing, teaching, founding a new and more vital modern art society, renewed experimentation with film and kinetic art,

exhibiting personally and organizing exhibitions calculated to inspire public confidence in the new art movements.

While Macdonald-Wright's contributions during the 1920s were many, it will be suggested here that his success in altering the West Coast artistic milieu in tangible ways was limited. His theories were esoteric and his audience ill-equipped to follow into deep philosophical speculation. His ambitions were often outside the realm of financial and/or technological feasibility. His own easel painting during the next two decades often fell far short of the exhilarating rhetoric of which he was capable. Indeed, a great deal of the influence Macdonald-Wright did have came exactly that way—that is, through his charismatic and defiant personality. Into the quiet and polite art world of Los Angeles in 1919, Macdonald-Wright injected a contempt for authority and anything resembling a smug self-righteousness. For many younger painters, he offered an alternative to conventions of any kind. Stanton Macdonald-Wright continually challenged both his students and his public to look beyond societal pretensions and to find a deeper meaning than mere prettiness in the work of art.

RELOCATION

During the roughly ten years of Macdonald-Wright's absence, the city of Los Angeles had changed, but those changes were minimal in comparison to the growth that would occur in the 1920s. At the beginning of the decade, the city's population was 576,673, and by 1930 it was 1,470,516. In his colorful account of the rise of Los Angeles, historian

Kevin Starr summarized the elements that made the city into a metropolis:

Water made imperial Los Angeles possible; but it was real-estate development and a phantasmagoria of attendant activities—buying, subdividing, building, selling, and finance—which within the decade of the 1920s propelled greater Los Angeles past the million mark, making it the fifth largest city in the United States. An oil boom fueled this emergent economy, together with a tourist industry energized by Hollywood. The port of Los Angeles, meanwhile, wrestled from a resistant topography in the years before the war, emerged from a condition of underdevelopment and became, so local boosters claimed, the second busiest deep-water port in the United States. Surprisingly, the financing of Los Angeles's exfoliating real-estate, construction, oil, port, manufacturing, entertainment, and aviation industries remained largely in local hands, and so Los Angeles emerged as a banking center as well. When it was over, when the stock market crashed in October 1929, an important new American city had been materialized....⁸

When Macdonald-Wright left Los Angeles for Paris in 1909, Hollywood Boulevard was still lined with orange trees. Upon his return in late 1918, the downtown traffic arteries of the city were being planned exclusively for the automobile (Indeed, by the mid-1920s, with over 400,000 cars in the city, traffic had become a way of life and traffic jams a common occurrence). The surge of building and industrial expansion that took place in the 1920s physically altered the City of Angels that Stanton had known as a boy growing up in the Arcadia Hotel on the Santa Monica

coast. Throughout the decade, city planners, entrepreneurs, boosters and various other visionaries promoted Los Angeles as a city where the perennial American search for the better life could still be found. The resulting internal migration was nothing less than astonishing. However, whether or not the dominant social ethos of Southern California changed substantially is another matter: Los Angeles remained throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s a predominantly white (in 1926, out of a population of 1.3 million, there were only 45,000 Hispanics, 33,000 blacks, and 30,000 Asians), Anglo-Saxon Protestant community. A strict, conventional moral code was the norm (not unlike elsewhere in America, there was a plethora of local ordinances governing behavior from beach wear to public embracing), and Biblical fundamentalism was common. The communal desire for prosperity and material gain, however, was everywhere apparent, while the average Angeleno was indifferent to or completely unaware of the high-minded cultural ambitions that drove Macdonald-Wright. An optimist in 1920 might have surveyed the growth in Southern California and called it progress and modernity, while a more jaded observer might have labeled it reckless acquisition and consumption on a mass scale. Macdonald-Wright himself vacillated during this decade between a romantic desire to instigate an aesthetic enlightenment to parallel the economic boom around him, and a grim awareness that no audience existed for his intricately conceived artistic ambitions. Regarding his relocation, Stanton wrote to Alfred Stieglitz that "I am like a man quarantined and sequestered from the world out here in this christ bitten (I use this term literally, as the virus of militant moralism seems to have become violent) country and any word I receive from the real people of America comes as drink to the thirsty."⁹

When Stanton arrived in Los Angeles in the fall of 1918, he was penniless. His first wife, Ida, was then in the city, and the two saw each other for the last time when negotiating a long-overdue divorce. With no financial resources, Stanton was fortunately taken in by his mother who was also helping to support Willard's first wife, Katherine, and their young daughter, Beverly. Macdonald-Wright once described himself as being "at loose ends" in late 1918.¹⁰ A crucial development of that time provided the needed stability for Stanton to regain personal and creative momentum: in 1919, he successfully triumphed over opium addiction.

Both Stanton and Willard had been smoking opium for years; Stanton since 1914 in New York while Willard had certainly preceded him, as it was he who introduced the drug to his younger brother. Willard's abuse of narcotics was among the factors that contributed to the downward spiral of his career in New York during the War years. In 1917, facing insurmountable debts, fatigued and practically friendless (a condition not aided by his aggressive pro-German sentiment), Willard returned to Southern California. The debilitating effects of his habit were evident to his mother and to his wife Katherine, despite the fact they had not co-habitated since 1912. Willard made an attempt at working, but by April of 1918, with his nerves completely frayed, he was admitted to the Sierra Madre sanitarium.¹¹ Upon his release from the hospital later that summer, the state of Willard and Katherine's marriage deteriorated further. In the fall, the two moved to San Francisco and made an attempt at reconciliation, and Willard was hired by *The San Francisco Bulletin* to do a weekly column. Neither the attempt at reconciliation nor the job lasted long, and Willard's continuing abuse was among the causes of his frustration.

Stanton had returned home after Willard had already left for San Francisco. The brothers, always keenly aware of each other and their common ambitions (as well as differences), shared the idea that the West Coast could be educated about modern art. Despite his marital and physical problems, Willard was up North both writing and lecturing on modern art and artists. He wrote in February of 1919: "The West, with its broad tolerance and freedom from precedent and tradition, is the logical place for the development of new ideas, and the time will come when the younger painters will find and project the beauty of modern art."¹² Meanwhile, Stanton was contemplating his own campaign for modernism in the South. Though the two would again join forces as they had in organizing the Forum Exhibition in 1916, a critical difference between the brothers revealed itself when Willard returned to Los Angeles in 1919. Willard, for all his past rhetoric about the superior man, could not control his drug use. Stanton, capable of extreme pragmatism, saw that this self-destructive path was a serious obstacle to his future plans, indeed, to any future:

In 1919 my brother came to Los Angeles, and it was at this time that I began to realize that in my partnership with opium I was a loser. I envisaged my life as a long and dangerous search for the drug and the suffering that not having it entails. I decided to break the habit, to throw away my pipe and its *suey pow* and *yenshi gow*. I proposed self-cure to Willard, and he said he'd try it. I believe any habit not fatal can be cured if one is deeply, surely and absolutely certain that one wishes to cure it. Halfway measures always fail.¹³

Opting for complete rather than gradual withdrawal, Stanton was successful in overcoming his addiction. After weeks of physical pain he

described as "excruciating" and a nervousness "that amounted almost to insanity," he was free from opium. Willard failed. He continued to use opium, tapering off in later years only when constant alcohol use supplanted the need for other drugs.

In addition to overcoming his drug addiction, Macdonald-Wright found a new love in his life, Jeanne Redman. In sharp contrast to the relationships of his past, this one would last (ending only in 1951 with Jeanne's death). As Stanton recalled: "In 1920 or 1921 I found a woman just my age, a music critic, beautifully educated and from an old Georgia-plus-California family....She spoke German as well as French, and was deeply versed in both English and French literature. We found such pleasure in each other's company that as soon as Ida had divorced me we were married."¹⁴

In a stable relationship for the first time in his life, free from a drug addiction that sapped his energy, and living in place that he himself felt to be geographically the most beautiful in the world, it is not surprising that Macdonald-Wright, possessed of a renewed vigor, undertook a wide variety of artistic projects. The most important of these from the early 1920s will now be successively considered, though it must be understood that the artist worked on most of these simultaneously.

MACDONALD-WRIGHT PAINTINGS, 1919-1920

Macdonald-Wright always retained an enthusiasm for expounding his views in print, the most formidable early example being the 1913 *Forum* article, "From Impressionism to Synchronism," that was solicited

and signed by his brother, Willard. During his first year back in Los Angeles, he selected an essay topic that symbolized modernity and futurity, the airplane, and used the subject of aviation to explain why technology and art were actually inseparable pursuits. In his article, "Influence of Aviation on Art: The Accentuation of Individuality," 1919, Macdonald-Wright's emphasis on the unity of all disparate things (evidence of his continued and developing interest in Oriental thought), and his prioritization of nature are central themes:

To speak of the possible relationship of aviation and art, two activities seemingly at variance with each other, may at first appear chimerical. But when we come to consider the counteracting interdependence of all physical and metaphysical things, which, like reflected lights, are ever playing back and forth, we must realize that all thoughts of the human mind, of which flying machines and pictures are merely the concrete manifestations, have an eternally reciprocal dynamic influence.¹⁵

The technology of aviation, Wright argued, could lead to the valuable realignment of individual perception, and, consequently, individual psychological and philosophical postures. Once immersed in the broader view of nature that aviation could provide, the artist's personality would be, in Wright's words, "submerged." The value in this would be inestimable, from his point of view, since it was personality which caused artists to be vain and pretentious, as opposed to genuinely creative. Personality actually suppresses artistic liberty and creates schools of followers, which, for Wright, were simply "*soi-disant* actors" and "mountebanks." By contrast, the individual who is truly self-reliant (an attitude aviation could stimulate), will see his dependence on the whole:

Strangely enough, as man becomes more individual, he loses all vanity and the pretence of petty conceits. He becomes conscious of his dependence as well as his unconscious influence on the things about him. His attitudes toward life changes radically, for the new vision opens the doors to a new life of thought and experiment. In other words, he has achieved the philosophical mind, and he applies it to the little things of every day import as to the larger problems of existence. Such a mental outlook is the only possible one for expression, for expression is merely the restatement of the rhythmic order from which we spring and to which we return.¹⁶

It was nature for Macdonald-Wright, as he had stated in early Synchronist manifestoes, that was the source of art and the end of art, as nature was our source and destination as a species. Macdonald-Wright made it clear in this article that the new subject matter to be gained from aviation, such as new views of mountain ranges or the tops of houses, was of no importance, "for in subject matter there is no originality." He recognized the merits of art work with aviation themes done by his own former student, Thomas Hart Benton, and of his former French rival, Robert Delaunay (whom he referred to as "a young Frenchman of great talent"), but that this work still fell far short of the potential abstractions aviation could foster. Mastery of the air, and the perspective it could render of the earth in space, could make clear the essential contrast of the "hollow and bump" that was central to Synchronist organization and which continued to be a focus of Macdonald-Wright's aesthetic reasoning. Apprehension of this basic duality that forms a unity was, for Macdonald-Wright, a goal of the philosophical mind. And art was, "as ever, the way

to all new thought."¹⁷ He summarized his arguments in a somewhat dramatic tone:

Science, mechanics and art go hand in hand, and it can never be otherwise, for they are all like children of the brain, a result of our communion with, and understanding of nature's way. The lessons gleaned from one have given added life and reality to the others and the artist mind, which is the Prometheus mind, will not, cannot, let, such a flame of inspiration and possible achievement burn unheeded.¹⁸

The artist, then, was a "messenger of the gods," one whose social responsibility it was to enlighten others to nature's ways. Once Macdonald-Wright's elevated viewpoint is recognized, along with his intellectual elitism (if not arrogance), one may more readily understand his disdain for what he felt to be artistic commonalities and trivialities. Such an awareness also goes far in helping to explain the social distance between Macdonald-Wright and so many of his peers in Southern California.

The influence of aviation on Macdonald-Wright's own painting was demonstrated in *Aeroplane Synchrony in Yellow-Orange*¹⁹ of 1920 (fig. 27). As Wright was still painting in scales during the early twenties, it is interesting to look ahead to what he wrote of the emotional meaning in the scale of yellow-orange in his 1924 *Treatise on Color*:

Yellow-Orange has also a braggart tendency but at bottom it is weak and sickly. It is like the last pretences dying in a pompous soul. On this account it has a quasi-sad note, like an old man who feels senility to be not far off.²⁰

Painted almost contemporaneously with the "Influence of Aviation" article, a text extolling the virtues of manned flight, it is most curious that the artist would choose a scale that is "weak and sickly" to express the power of aviation. However, interpretations based on the meanings of color scales as defined by Macdonald-Wright must always be flexible. As he wrote in the very same *Treatise*: "Do not rest satisfied with the spectrums given in this book nor hold to these as final and complete color-scales."²¹ Wright himself never used scales slavishly, and he warned his students to be on guard for just such an aesthetic trap. As discussed in the previous chapter, however, color-scales suggested to the artist a sense of universal order that pervaded not only color and music in analogous ways, but the whole of nature. The application of scales to specific subject matter, in this case a fragmented plane in flight above rooftops and landscape (the very subject matter Macdonald-Wright insisted did not matter), was the result of deliberate selection. Therefore, an interpretation of its use is warranted, knowing such an interpretation is subject to countless modifications.

The idea that the scale of yellow-orange is "like the last pretences dying in a pompous soul" has an obvious relationship to the idea in Macdonald-Wright's aviation essay that the individual personality, and with it all vestiges of pretence, must be overcome before meaningful art can be created: "To experience nature's dynamic rhythms we must as nearly as possible subjugate our ego. We must try to realize that our essential composition is the same as those forces [of nature]. We must forget the specific in contemplation of the general."²² Yellow-orange is a braggart, but the bravado is false and "quasi-sad," for this pretense to power is about to dissolve like a formerly agile mind confronted with

senility. In a like sense, the power of aviation points to the submergence of personality, and with it, personal ego (bravado). Yellow-orange suggests a change, or an appearance contrary to fact (braggertly, but in reality weak). Aviation, a metaphor for Macdonald-Wright regarding an expanded consciousness, also suggests a change—from ignorance to awareness. If we realize that Macdonald-Wright's very brief description of the emotional meanings of color in his *Treatise* was by no means meant to be all-inclusive, then we may assume his use of the scale in this case could have been intended to correspond to the altering of consciousness that could occur through a discovery of the broader world upon which one is dependant (a discovery facilitated by aviation).

A disturbing aspect of *Aeroplane Synchronomy* is that, while the artist declared the subject to be of no importance, the viewer cannot help but identify the ostensible subjects, i.e., the rooftops and the airplane. While Macdonald-Wright intended deeper meaning, and felt communication would be achieved by the universal qualities inherent to color and scales and their use in defining form, that very communication is compromised by illustrative associations. Just as the abstract qualities in Delaunay's *Homage to Bleriot* are circumscribed in part by the narrative of an event, that of plane in flight, so, too, are Macdonald-Wright's. The "cosmic consciousness" Wright referred to in his aviation article is not readily apparent in the rather obvious description of known things (rooftops, planes). Nature's forces are not as clearly revealed as are these well-known man-made objects. Wright certainly would have countered (as he often did in private correspondence) that the subtleties of his work were lost on insensitive and ordinary people. While that may be true of most art in general, *Aeroplane Synchronomy's* intended deeper content is masked

in the type of conventional representation that insured the bulk of his audience would not reach beyond it. In short, *Aeroplane Synchrony* is an early example of how Macdonald-Wright's painting often fell short of his eloquent philosophical discourse.

What allowed Macdonald-Wright to proceed undaunted was his deep, romantic belief that he was right about the preeminence of nature, the universality of form, color and their meaning, and that the creation of anything less was charlatanism. What appeared to some contemporary critics and many later ones as a retreat into a type of decorative realism was routinely rejected by Macdonald-Wright. He wrote for the benefit of his students in his *Treatise*:

Never make the mistake, however, of trying to paint from memory or from pure invention. This last always results in a thin and unconvincing picture, for the reason that man's mind can never imagine the infinite number of significant relationships to be found in the simplest subject. Without these relationships before him, suggesting ever new and rich combinations of color he makes a vapidly logical, and hence dead, design.²³

For Wright, *Aeroplane Synchrony* may very well have been a significant set of relationships, and may have suggested all the philosophical possibilities he outlined in the "Influence of Aviation on Art." The fractured surface of the painting, dissolving forms into the scale of yellow-orange with the smooth facility of stroke that so characterized Macdonald-Wright's brush, signals (as did the early synchronies) the tension between solidity and formlessness, and yet succeeds as a unified composition. Arguably, one may very well sense the interdependence of object and non-object, and be led to a recognition, or perhaps re-

affirmation, of the idea of unity. Of course, Macdonald-Wright, like many other early modernists, refused to ever evaluate the worth of his painting or the validity of his intentions based on the limited perception of the general public.

Two other paintings from the same period that also feature aerial views of rooftops and mountains are *Cañon Synchrony*²⁴, circa 1919, and *California Landscape*²⁵, also circa 1919. Both of these images are extensions of Macdonald-Wright's interconnected ideas as presented in the "Influences" article and, like *Aeroplane Synchrony*, were painted in the momentum of the late New York period Synchronies. All three of these paintings evidence a shift away from the dominant subject matter of Wright's New York years, the figure, but it is the two landscapes more than *Aeroplane Synchrony* that suggest the consolidation in the artist's mind of certain guiding principles. *Cañon Synchrony* (fig. 28) and *California Landscape* (fig. 29) are both defined by vertical compositions with no dominant, central point of focus. Both make ample use of the empty passages that connect color sequences (the *espacement* discussed in the previous chapter). This verticality and use of voids, in combination with the aerial perspective, mimics the work of Chinese landscape painting.

The idea of harmony that so intrigued Macdonald-Wright from his earliest student days, the idea that the classical rhythms of the Greeks and Michelangelo had a place in modern painting, that color, form, movement and solidity all could be compositionally unified, was increasingly confirmed and expanded upon by Oriental thought, especially the idea of Tao. Macdonald-Wright realized fully one could not simply set out to illustrate Tao; it resided in the tension between opposites, in the

yin and the yang. The Tao is tied to Earth as well as Heaven, there must be nature as well as nothingness. In the tradition of Chinese landscape painting, forms dissolve into voids and reappear in a cycle of ceaseless becoming. The use of voids in Chinese landscape painting had a remarkably similar function to the use of *espacement* in the Synchronist aesthetic; both imparted meaning to the whole. But, as Macdonald-Wright increasingly felt, the work of his youth was academic and logical compared to the more deeply mysterious and spiritually broader Chinese tradition. *Cañon Synchrony* and *California Landscape*, in their frank imitation of Chinese prototypes combined with late Synchronist technique, were the products of Macdonald-Wright's continued immersion in and fascination with Chinese philosophy. His adoption of landscape as subject matter in 1919 had less to do with his move to California than his growing commitment to understanding Eastern thought.

Even Macdonald-Wright's use of scales would have been confirmed by early texts on Chinese art. The best-known of these, and one certainly known to Wright by 1919, was the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*.²⁶ On the issue of painting, the *Manual* says: "To be without method is deplorable, but to depend entirely on method is worse. You must learn first to observe the rules faithfully; afterwards, modify them according to your intelligence and capacity."²⁷ Color scales were for Macdonald-Wright a method, but one he increasingly was less dependent upon, until he instructed his own students in his *Treatise on Color* of 1924 to do exactly what the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual* advised; learn this method, then go on to express yourself. The *Manual* also listed twelve

things to avoid in painting, one of which was number twelve itself: "color applied without method."

As to the psychological meanings of color, Macdonald-Wright would have found the following passage from the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual* most interesting:

Ah! considering the vastness of the heavens and the earth, looking around at people and things, reading polished essays, listening to brave utterances, all these go together and make a whole and colorful world. How can color be said to apply only to painting?²⁸

Perhaps Macdonald-Wright's clearest assimilation of Oriental influence to his own work in 1919 was his matching pair of paintings, *American Synchrony No. 1, Green*²⁹ and *American Synchrony No. 2, Yellow-orange minor* (location unknown)³⁰. The first *Synchrony* (fig. 30) is a male nude, the second a female (for which a study exists, see fig. 31). Each figure is depicted in a strong rhythmic pose that echoes the basic hollow and bump, i. e., balance of opposites, strategy. Seen together, one figure moves opposite the other, very much in the visual formula (), repeating again the hollow and bump and further unifying the composition (in this instance, while both figures are conveyed in heroic, Michelangelesque terms, the male figure seems more definitely based on the figure of Christ from Rubens *Raising of the Cross*, (fig. 32). The pair of figures, nude and free from any other extraneous compositional elements, form the basic male/female (or, yin/yang) paradigm, the fundamental equation of nature.

The color scales used in these two paintings are open to varying interpretations, though again we may return to Macdonald-Wright's own

summaries of color meanings for a point of departure. *American Synchrony No. 1*, the male nude, is in the key of green: "Green is the normal color. It is weak, lackadaisical and seems to have arrived at a point where it halts contentedly, a disciple of non-action, of calm, of quiet."³¹ The female nude was painted in the key of yellow-orange minor.³² Yellow-orange (the same key used for *Aeroplane Synchrony*) is, as previously noted, is also a weak scale: "Yellow-orange, while being rich, is at bottom weak....It is gracious and suave and has an evanescent quality peculiar to itself."³³ The meaning of this key altered to the minor mode most assuredly was different for Wright, but he does not indicate specifically the personal meaning of this minor scale. However, he did write that color combinations, including the combination of color scales, altered meanings yet again. In his *Treatise*, Wright noted that: "The most brilliant combination possible to use is orange and green."³⁴ The two color scales then, each weak when isolated, could become strong and vital when juxtaposed. In other words, the characteristic weakness of green is cancelled by the presence of orange, and becomes brilliant. In the two *American Synchronys*, the predominantly green male and yellow-orange female become more than the sum of their parts when united. In short, the mutual deficiencies of male and female complete each other when unified. Using the figures from the Western classical tradition, Macdonald-Wright re-stated the yin/yang.

Believing in the vitality of his work in 1919, and possessed of an eagerness to proselytize for his aesthetic, it was not long before Macdonald-Wright both found and created venues to promote it.

THE ART STUDENTS LEAGUE OF LOS ANGELES

In September of 1919, a review appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor* of the annual California Art Club exhibition in which Edward Vysekal (1890-1939) was noted as the only artist with modern tendencies.³⁵ By the very next year, such a review would have been difficult to defend. Also in September of 1919, the following notice appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*:

Stanton Macdonald-Wright, one of the discoverers of the new idea in art called synchronism, and himself a brilliant painter of portraits and figures, has come from New York to Los Angeles with the intention of starting an art school. Mr. Wright is a brother to Willard Huntington Wright, the novelist and critic. In the projected school, Mr. Wright will insist upon a close study of anatomy; he will demand intelligent drawing, and he will teach the methods of the modern man, so that those whose penchant is independence may choose what best fits them. He will also give weekly lectures to the pupils of the school.³⁶

As it happened, Stanton did not need to start his own school, as his alma mater, the Art Students League of Los Angeles, was turned over to him. Though the exact circumstances are not clear, it could well be that the League was languishing for lack of interest and in need of fresh direction. Or, it may have simply been in a state of transition, as its most recent director, Rex Slinkard, died in 1918, leaving no heir apparent. Since the position was vacant, Stanton may have actively pursued directorship of the League. In any event, Macdonald-Wright recalled that he was

allowed to run it as he pleased and that: "I did, paid my debts, bought a stripped-down Ford and began to teach. The returns were meager, but as they were supplemented by Jeanne's salary, we managed to live comfortably in her flat in town."³⁷

Once installed at the League, located then in a room above the old Lyceum Theater between 2nd and 3rd Street on Spring Street, Macdonald-Wright became, in Arthur Millier's words, "Master of the temple of art, and he was just that..."³⁸ Always forceful, charismatic and energetic, Wright led the Art Students League throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. Here, he emphasized "intelligent drawing," i. e., a mastery of the figure based on the Greek and Renaissance prototypes he so admired (but which he could not himself tolerate to be taught in traditional French academies). There was no drawing of plaster casts, but rather only work from live models. Drawings were not laboriously finished over days or weeks, as Wright taught students to look for the essential rhythms of the body in addition to basic anatomical correctness (fig. 33) At the League (which he referred to in correspondence as "his school"), he could expound on his theories of the basic purposes of art, ideas which he put down in his *Treatise* especially for his students:

The meaning of the masters is simple and frank and is to the effect that the principles, or unalterable natural laws, which are nature, be studied; viz. balance, contrast, action and re-action and the unification in multiplicity, etc., not the superficial aspects of nature. No graphic talent can equal the colored photograph for accuracy, but in a camera which takes such pictures, there is no sense of order or balance; no creative intelligence which takes a chaos existing before its lens and makes of the relationships found

there, plus a directing intellect, a new cosmos of new matter, wholly different from the other, and having imprinted upon it an individual character. This is the artist's work; not the machine's, and if this is not done, no work of art is made.³⁹

In addition to the League, Wright found teaching opportunities at the Chouinard School of Art, which was founded in 1921 by Nelbert M. Chouinard. It was really the League, though, that was Wright's own. The curriculum, the pace of instruction, the entire ambience of the school, was established by Macdonald-Wright. Wright himself had never attended the Art Students League of New York, and made no pretence that his school was anything at all like its more famous predecessor. Students of all persuasions made their way to Spring Street, from the occasional Sunday painter (who quickly dropped out upon discovering the gravity of intent among the group) to more serious students such as Nick Brigante (1895-1991), James Redmond (1900-1944), Al King (dates unavailable) and Mabel Alvarez (1891-1985).

It was this last student, Alvarez, who recorded a number of lectures Macdonald-Wright gave to the League in 1924-1925.⁴⁰ In these lectures, the Oriental ideas that Wright was trying to incorporate into his own art and thinking were offered up to the students with an erudition that must have been out of the intellectual reach of most of his students. Be that as it may, these lectures confirm and demonstrate Wright's submergence in Eastern philosophy and aesthetics. One of the first things students were told was that imitation by itself did not make art: "Imitation thus approximates but one world—that of objectivity, and if we consider the work of art to be the entire expression of the man, it must be an equally balanced manifestation of man's existence in this dual world."⁴¹ He talked

about the idea of the "unique gesture" by which an artist conveyed all the qualities inherent to his art with one movement, that is, the polarities of hot and cold, light and shade, hollow and bump, etc. In all the great periods of art, he told them, in Greece, Italy and China, "we find the arts being produced with this idea uppermost in the minds of the artist."⁴² Macdonald-Wright even broached the difficult concept of the "void" with his students of the 1920s: "This relationship of thing or action to the observer, is the starting point of a work of art. The event itself is of no possible importance further than being the spark which ignites. Here again is a demonstration of Lao Tzu's 'Empty Spaces.' Nothing exists between the thing and the result which follows, and yet every particle of its importance to the artist lies in this vortex of nothingness."⁴³

Macdonald-Wright challenged his students to think and create on the highest levels. Whatever the limitations of certain students may have been, Wright always proceeded as if there were none. The influence he exerted on students in this regard, as a forceful personality who opened up new realms of thinking, is difficult to document. However, some students did recall the effect Wright had on their lives. The film-maker John Huston, for example, attended the Los Angeles Art Students League in 1923 as a young man of seventeen, thinking that painting might be his vocation. He later credited Macdonald-Wright as providing "the foundation of whatever education I have."⁴⁴ Wright introduced the young man to Cézanne, the Renaissance, the Greeks, the Orient and French literature among other topics. Huston recalled that: "Although I had been exposed to music, opera and ballet, he introduced me to Scriabin, Alban Berg, and other experimentalists."⁴⁵ Huston went on to great

success in the film medium, a medium Macdonald-Wright would struggle with himself throughout the 1920s.

Effective as a writer, teacher, and painter, Macdonald-Wright also had formidable organizational skills to use in the promotion of modernism in general and of his own art specifically. In 1919, in tandem with all his other art activities, he began to plan what was arguably the first show of modern art in Los Angeles.

THE EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS BY AMERICAN MODERNISTS

In San Francisco in 1919, Willard Huntington Wright was writing art reviews and social commentary for the San Francisco *Bulletin*. One of the more popular of the latter variety was "Los Angeles: City of Dreadful Night," a follow-up harangue to the author's 1913, "Los Angeles: Home of the Chemically Pure." The first article had caused quite a stir and drawn a great deal of attention to Willard, who enjoyed spotlighting what he considered to be the dim-witted and prudish behavior of Angelenos. "Dreadful Night" was essentially an up-date that indicated nothing much had changed in the Southland. Still, in his first art review for the *Bulletin*, "Exhibit Shows New Pulse: California Artists to the Fore," Willard began a series of arguments designed to win over the public to the idea of modernism:

One feels that there is something of vital and aspiring nature stirring beneath the work [of Henrietta Shore, Joseph Raphael, William H. Clapp, E. Charlton Fortune, and Maynard Dixon] among other [Californians]. There is evident a discontent with the older

forms and methods—an intellectual protest against scholastic conventions and conceptions—a sincere and earnest reaching out toward a new ideal in aesthetic expression. One sees here curious transformations and strange amalgamations—Sargent evolving into Matisse, Whistler fading out into Signac, Bouguereau metamorphosing into Picasso. But who would not prefer such healthy indications of progress and aspiration to the smug and self-satisfied decadence of academic conventionality?⁴⁶

Indeed, Willard's willingness to advance the causes of modern art were expressed to Alfred Stieglitz in a 1918 letter: "...when I get sufficient strength, I am going to endeavor to educate this part of the country...to the idea of modern painting."⁴⁷ In San Francisco, Willard undertook a lecture series on modern art entitled, "What is Art, and Why?" In typical fashion for the cock-sure Huntington Wright, these lectures were billed as "the most important on their subject ever given in America." Though the lectures were well-attended and Willard was invited to speak to the San Francisco Art Association, the results of his efforts, both his newspaper column and his lectures, seemed nil. Huntington Wright's biographer noted the dilemma: "Once again, Willard's optimism about the cultural climate of the day ran aground of some undeniable facts: the Stieglitz-circle painters he believed in mattered less to San Franciscans than the realists, Impressionists, or area talents they were more accustomed to, and in any case art was everyone's lowest priority....The presence of men he [Willard] respected, like the art dealer [Erwin] Furman or J. Nilson Laurvik, the city's museum director, didn't seem to make much difference. People simply didn't care about paintings the way that they did

about their cars and homes, and no one's social standing was raised by purchasing a great work of modern art."⁴⁸

In poor health due to his penchant for over-working himself in bursts, and due to on-going substance abuse, with his marriage perennially unstable, and with no coterie of like-minded moderns around him as there were in New York, Willard decided to return to Los Angeles. One of the most brilliant moderns he knew, his brother, was there.

Like Willard, Stanton had the idea of replicating the 1916 Forum Exhibition in Southern California. Such an exhibition would not only highlight artists the brothers felt to be among the best in the world, but it would confirm Stanton's place in that group. Not long after he had returned home, Macdonald-Wright had made the acquaintance of Frank Daggett, the director of the Museum of History, Science and Art located in Exposition Park. Not centrally located, hardly suited for the exhibition of paintings modern or otherwise (the dinosaur bones discovered at the La Brea tar pits were the primary focus of the museum), and with an advisory board not particularly sympathetic to modernism,⁴⁹ Exposition Park was nonetheless the most appropriate venue for such a show among the very limited choices then in Los Angeles. Macdonald-Wright, using his formidable verbal skills and citing his equally formidable exhibition record, talked Daggett into sponsoring the show, scheduled for February of 1920. This was no easy feat, as a controversy was then underway within the ranks of the powerful California Art Club as to whether the Modern Art Society (formed 1916, see beginning of this chapter) could show at Exposition Park at all as a group.⁵⁰

Macdonald-Wright did most of the organizational work from there, with Willard offering support.⁵¹ Stanton turned to his erstwhile New

York dealer, Alfred Stieglitz, as a single source for all the artists needed to mount the exhibition. He wrote to Stieglitz that "I believe there will be some sales because, as I have said, the women here are more alive than their sisters of the 'great metropolis' [New York],"⁵² an obvious sales pitch for the show. In the same letter, Wright declared that he was willing to "work and talk and lecture and write like the devil to make a go of it."⁵³ Though Stieglitz had no reason to assume his stable of moderns would fair well in California, he had no compelling reason to deny the enthusiasms of an artist he had recently promoted in New York. Shipment of examples of all the artists who were in the Forum show was arranged, plus five more: Charles Demuth, Joseph Stella, Preston Dickinson, Konrad Kramer and William Yarrow. Wright requested the work of Georgia O'Keeffe, though she declined to participate.⁵⁴ Macdonald-Wright felt that no other local painter's work merited inclusion in the show, and so local representation was limited to himself.⁵⁵ And, it was Macdonald-Wright who provided the foreword to the exhibition's catalogue, which read in part:

The enjoyment of modern painting has been curtailed by just this ill-considered and too quick judgement. Unfamiliarity with the new ideals can be blamed for this, just as the public's unfamiliarity with seemingly radical idea and not the public's insensitivity is responsible for every crucifixion and exile recorded by history. But today knowledge travels fast, and the idea, once engendered, speeds by electricity and steam, where once it trudged on foot, and finds fertile ground in the brains of thousand who, with one voice, proclaim its virility. Thus modern painting is not the isolated effort

of a few men but another story added to the always growing edifice of art....

We modern artists are just what our name implies; we are alive with you today—we are not animated corpses—we speak your language, the language of the hum and stir of moving things, of energy and intensity, of the aspirations of the twentieth century. More than any movement since the sixteenth century, we venerate the masters of the past; we study them over, and aspire to their stupendous achievements—we understand them, but we are of a different age and we know that petty imitation and the rattling of their bones for a cheap authority is a sacrilege beneath our sincerity.⁵⁶

Stanton reiterated a deeply held conviction in noting the link between the moderns and the masters of the past. Not simply a ploy to establish credibility in the minds of a reticent public, his pitch for modernism as a natural evolution in society was something he believed wholly. Whether or not "the better people" of Los Angeles were prepared to follow his line of evolutionary thinking was another matter. While the show did not cause anything like the reaction caused by the Armory Show in 1913, it similarly baffled the public that did see it and engendered several mocking reviews in the press. Typical of the negative reaction was "Futuristic Art Shocks L.A.—Paint Daubs Spoil Canvas—Masterpieces Go to Cellar":

In the main art gallery at Exposition Park loud peals of laughter resound where once stalked silence and reverence.

The gallery is thronged with curiosity seekers instead of the long lines of art lovers who once crowded its portals....Some call it bolshevistic.⁵⁷

A more thoughtful critic was Antony Anderson of the *Los Angeles Times*. Anderson, a personal acquaintance of both Stanton and Willard, admitted in his review of the show that he had until very recently found modern art (specifically, Cubism and Futurism) horrifying, but was in the process of trying to be more sympathetic to modernism in general.⁵⁸ His review did not seek to provide insight (on the contrary, he admitted his ignorance of much of what he saw), but did attempt to legitimize the work based on his own aesthetic standard, one which revolved around a conception of conventional, classical beauty. Demuth's watercolors were notable for their "crispness of execution," while George Of's flowers were "lovely." Macdonald-Wright's portrait of Morgan Russell (not listed in final printed catalogue), was criticized by Anderson as not being "clean in color": "The synchronists slump badly, now and again, when they descend from the abstract to the concrete—their concrete is so much in color and texture like that of our main-traveled roads." Not surprisingly, however, Macdonald-Wright was praised by Anderson in a tone that bordered on civic boosterism:

By far the most interesting pictures in the collection are those painted by Stanton Macdonald-Wright, his "American Synchrony No. 1, Green," his "American Synchrony No. 2, Yellow-orange Minor," his "Fantasy after Bach, Blue-Green," with several still life studies of great charm....There is classic grandeur in his color-studies of the figure, they remind one of Michael Angelo's colossals....I do not understand Mr. Macdonald-Wright's

sychromatic studies, but they pique my curiosity. They hold me in thrall, they even delight me—and I shall go back to them again and again before they are taken away from Exposition Park.⁵⁹

In terms of sales, the show was disappointing.⁶⁰ Though the exhibit generated some favorable press and strong attendance (even if the majority of these were "curiosity seekers"), its commercial failure was discouraging to the Wright brothers. Stanton, keenly realistic about the business end of art, would not be easily defeated, however, and would over the next two years attempt to reorganize the local moderns and exhibit modern tendencies again on a large scale.⁶¹ He did, however, blame Stieglitz for not sending better examples of modernism, and wrote frankly to his friend and former dealer that blame for the failure of the show lie with the artists:

God what canvases. I am heart broken, I simply cannot go ahead with buoyant enthusiasm and claim genius for these pictures. I am living here, they are not, and aside from making a monkey of myself I would jeopardize any chance I now have to make a living, and this for men who don't give a tinker's damn and don't see beyond 47th St...."⁶²

Go ahead Stanton did, though, without showing the public anything but enthusiasm for the show. He lectured to large crowds at Exposition Park and toured women's clubs promoting the exhibit. Willard, meanwhile, took out his frustrations with the public and the critics immediately in the local press:

And this new expression, whatever its present defects and shortcomings, will endure, for it is too closely related to life to be alienated by cheap humor or discouraged by ridicule. The day will

come when the pictures in this exhibition will not seem bizarre and incomprehensible; and I believe that if these persons who are sincerely interested in painting will strive conscientiously to find their way into the new territory, instead of scoffing and refusing to follow the artist in his complicated efforts, they will in time arrive at a comprehension of the new work.

Modern painting is not a fad; it is not a transient aspect of art. The false prophets have been predicting its death for years, just as they predicted the demise of all great art movements during their lifetime. But the work goes on, new life is constantly being infused into it; and the corpse has yet to be laid.⁶³

For all of its merit, Willard's diatribe could be easily dismissed by a community that only recently endured his scorn in "Los Angeles: City of Dreadful Night." Many of his readers knew him as an angry and arrogant self-appointed aristocrat, not to be taken seriously in the realm of common-sense.

All of Stanton's efforts may have seemed to him at the time to have been wasted on an ignorant and irretrievably adolescent community. Yet, as disappointing as the show was financially⁶⁴ and in its critical reception, he did see value in forging ahead and trying again and again to make the modernist point of view both known and more appreciated to the general public of Southern California. His "Exhibition of American Modernists" at Exposition Park represented an alternative, one of the first and certainly one of the most significant, to the dominant aesthetic and established mode of expression as represented by the California Art Club. Although small, modernism had made an inroad and would remain a permanent fixture on the local scene.

THE KINETIC LIGHT MACHINE AND EXPERIMENTAL FILM

In 1922, Alfred Stieglitz decided to devote an entire number of the magazine, *Manuscripts*, to the following question: "Can a photograph have the significance of art?"⁶⁵ Thirty-one artists and/or critics were invited to submit their opinions, among them Stanton Macdonald-Wright. The invitation sent by Stieglitz read in part: "Would you like to say something on the subject? We are under the impression you have given it some thought." Not only had Macdonald-Wright given the medium of photography "some thought," he was involved enough at the time with the medium of film to sign his contribution, "Stanton Macdonald-Wright, Painter and Color Motion Picturist, Los Angeles."⁶⁶ Indeed, in the early 1920s, Macdonald-Wright was, in the midst of numerous other projects, actively pursuing an interest he and Morgan Russell had shared for some time; that of making colors move.

An early and essential aspect of the Synchromist aesthetic was dynamic rhythm, the fusion of opposites recorded in passages of color that would reveal themselves "in time" like the progression of notes in music. A logical next-step in the development of a sound/color analogy was to make color change sequentially over time, and the medium of film could make this happen. Macdonald-Wright wrote to Stieglitz privately that "painting had had its say" and was through; the future of painting was, in his opinion, kinetic. In the early 1920s, while collaborating on the Exposition Park show of modernism and after, Willard and Stanton discussed this very topic. The result was Willard's last serious work of art criticism, *The Future of Painting*.⁶⁷

The story of Macdonald-Wright's experimentation in film throughout the 1920s and 1930s was, however, one of frustration and defeat. His grandiose ambitions for the union of color, film and sound were beyond his technological and financial means, and even when he finally perfected a "light machine," its esoteric function attracted no investors. It has been suggested that because Macdonald-Wright was living in Los Angeles where film was a principal industry, he was "therefore inspired by the work being done around him" and, further, that "he could afford to make the machine."⁶⁸ To the contrary, Macdonald-Wright despised the work being done in Hollywood, never associated with the film industry there in any way, and the costs associated with producing a kinetic light machine put him heavily into debt. Nonetheless, he remained faithful to his idea of color and the possibilities of kinetic art. In 1959, Macdonald-Wright built a color machine which survives, the Synchronome Kineidoscope.

Some idea of Macdonald-Wright's attitude toward the Hollywood film industry in the early 1920s is revealed in the 1922 article he wrote for Stieglitz:

As painting intensified expression of sculpture (the sculptural impulse having dominated all painting as it was originally conceived), so literature will be reborn to a greater avatar and a more concentrated expression when it uses the moving picture as a medium.

The stupidity of the photo-drama as it is produced today should not blind us to its possibilities as an art any more than when gazing at magazine covers we should deny Rubens. As bad as these plays are from the standpoint of literature, some of them are

beautiful as photography; as ridiculously directed as most seem to be, we can definitely perceive in many instances the art impulse of the photographer. The medium is stronger than that which utilizes it. It is outrunning the ignorance of those who employ it.⁶⁹

In 1918, the year Macdonald-Wright returned to Los Angeles, the movie *Tarzan* was made (based on the book by Edgar Rice Burroughs, who became a resident of Southern California and whose ranch ultimately became the city of Tarzana) and grossed over six million dollars. Movies like *Tarzan* were immeasurably distant from the aesthetic goals Macdonald-Wright had in mind (however symbolic one might find the content of *Tarzan*). Essentially, Wright wanted to bring to film the same impulses he brought to his painting; pure movement, color, form and rhythm that were universal in nature and compositionally unified. He wrote in 1922 that aesthetic emotion, quite apart from being useless as William James described it, was "the most useful of all emotions for it is the means to the end of that which is an end in itself—philosophical thought."⁷⁰ Historically, there were precedents for the type of light machine Wright envisioned, including Father Louis-Bertrand Castel's color organ of 1734 and Alexander Wallace Remington's of 1895 (Wright may have been aware of the latter⁷¹). The most immediate and notable precedent was the performance in color and music, *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire, Opus 60*, which was presented in New York on 20 March, 1915.⁷² Macdonald-Wright had returned to New York from London the previous month, and could have seen the actual performance. At the very least, he was well aware of Scriabin, and discussed his work with others in Los Angeles in the early 1920s.⁷³

Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) was a Russian composer whose first works were influenced by the earlier romantic composers, Chopin and Wagner. Scriabin became deeply involved with Symbolist poetry, the German philosophers Schopenhauer, Kant, Hegel, and Fichte, was a member of the Society of Free Aesthetics in Moscow, and eventually turned toward mysticism and Theosophy. *Prometheus* was an important culmination of historical attempts to fuse color and music. Though it had been performed prior to its New York debut, those performances lacked the color component that Scriabin wrote to accompany the music. A color organ was built especially for the New York performance of the symphony by the Edison Testing Laboratories, a machine called the "Chromola."

Critical reaction to *Prometheus* was generally negative, with detractors pointing out that there was no sense of a relationship between the music played and the colors projected onto the eight by ten foot gauze strips that faced the auditorium at Carnegie Hall. However disappointing *Prometheus* may have been to its 1915 audience, it still must be understood as an important event for those interested in synaesthesia. As music professor James Baker has pointed out:

The concert received a tremendous amount of notice worldwide, and stimulated a great deal of serious thinking on how to go about creating an art of mobile color. If Scriabin's arbitrary sound-color relations failed to persuade, the performance nevertheless convinced many that color music is feasible, if only it were based on the scientific study of color and its psychological effects as well as the development of a sophisticated technology for projecting colors and forms. *Prometheus* stood as a model of how to shape an artwork around a spiritual concept, and its premise that

the art of light could be based on the laws of music would certainly have made and impact on artist striving for nonobjective painting.⁷⁴

Inspired by the Carnegie Hall performance of *Prometheus*, the architect and Theosophist Claude Bragdon staged a light show entitled, "Cathedral Without Walls" in Central Park in 1916. Though it is not known whether or not Macdonald-Wright attended this performance, it is difficult to imagine that he was not aware of it. Bragdon went on to found the Society of Prometheus with a studio/headquarters on Long Island where color/music technology was researched. It was there that the Danish-born Thomas Wilfred built his Clavilux light machine in 1921, a development Wright could have been aware of from the media attention it received.⁷⁵

Beginning in 1919, Macdonald-Wright began researching film-making. He became associated with Walter Wright (no relation) who had past experience as a Hollywood cameraman. Macdonald-Wright admitted having none of the knowledge necessary to carry out the task.⁷⁶ Despite the fact color film had not yet been developed, it was Stanton's plan to proceed by creating individual color images which would be filmed in with a simple stop-motion technology. Not unlike the relationship between his article on aviation and the painting *Aeroplane Synchrony*, the artist chose a somewhat narrative subject, that of an erupting volcano, as the basis for a sequence of over five-thousand pastels (though not five-thousand separate pastels; changes were made to a given image, filmed, then changed again, etc.). However, this subject afforded him great flexibility and opportunity for color forms in what was an experimental project:

For each frame I used three exposures, one through a green, one blue-violet, and one red-orange, and when projected these exposures were thrown out through the same colored filters. Being a flat plane, there was no parallax and the film was, while clumsily animated and sometimes jumpy in movement, beautiful. It gave me an idea of what could be done and this was my object. Now, I thought, for some real animation of non-objective forms! I put all the negatives in the Blum Laboratories, a repository for many of the Hollywood productions films, and in six months the whole place blew up. Nothing was saved but the memory of a great noise and the remembered experience of being able to do what I wanted.⁷⁷

However primitive the results of this initial foray into color film-making, it inspired Macdonald-Wright to continue on with research and experimentation into a color projector that did not require the messy and time-consuming process of creating each image first in some other media (e. g., pastel or paint). This project absorbed the artist's time off and on over the next two decades, and, as noted, was resumed in the late 1950s. He exchanged letters with Morgan Russell on the subject throughout the 1920s. Russell, still living in France, designed a small light machine sometime in the early part of that decade (fig. 34). A constant theme with Stanton, as it was with Willard, was that art was in a process of constant evolution as much as anything else in the world, and, while the essential universals remained the same (emotions, states of mind, physical sensations), the symbolic forms necessarily changed. In a description of what his ideal film machine could project, Macdonald-Wright prefigured visual representations that were decades away in the future:

...you would have a screen twenty feet square bathed in an ever-changing color stream, like an aquarium whose waters changed with their ever movement—all moving into new formations of salubrious harmonies, fluent, vibrating with pure liquid color every second of time bringing a new picture to the onlooker, a new scheme of color, new sculptural arrangement and a feeling that they were plunged into a world of ambient light whose waves travelled in color-zones, called forth by music's changes.⁷⁸

Limited by funds and balancing his film activity with other projects, Macdonald-Wright made slow progress on a kinetic light machine which would accomplish the above. Eventually, he was able to write to Morgan Russell that he had perfected a light machine. It may have been this machine that Wright used in theatrical production of 1927 with the Santa Monica Theater Guild. However, with no one to sell it to, and without money to sustain lab rentals, materials, and other related production costs, no subsequent developments were made. In the aftermath of the Great Depression, and over many years in which the artist's fortunes took often unfortunate turns, Wright's interest in a kinetic light machine were subordinated to other pursuits.

EXHIBITIONS AND PAINTINGS OF THE MID-1920S

The next significant exhibition of modernism in Los Angeles after the 1920 Exposition Park show was "The First Exhibition of the Group of Independent Artists of Los Angeles."⁷⁹ Held in 1923, the majority of exhibitors were Angelenos. Prior to the exhibition, held in the Taos

Building on West First Street, a poster (featuring a design by an unsigned artist) was distributed declaring the aims of the new group:

To all workers in the Graphic Arts who rebel against the rule of thumb in Art! The Group of Independents of Los Angeles has been organized to bring together experimental and creative artists, and, by holding frequent exhibitions of their work, afford opportunity to the public to follow the progress made in the field of artistic research....

The Group maintains that artistic manifestations, such as cubism, dynamism, and expressionism are sincere intellectual efforts to obtain a clear aesthetic vision.

The fact that any departure from the academic ideal has been deliberately kept in the back ground through the conservative and retrogressive spirit of local exhibition juries makes the formation of a group of this nature imperative....

With the presentation of these exhibitions held under the auspices of the group, the public will at last have an opportunity to comprehend the new form, and an incentive will thus be provided for a more fluent expression on the part of the artist.⁸⁰

This declaration on behalf of modernism clearly expressed the more radical posture of the Group of Independents in relation to the organizations that had preceded them, such as the 1916 Modern Art Society or the Group of Eight.⁸¹ Though not an officer for the Group, at its center was Stanton Macdonald-Wright, who authored the forward for the exhibition catalogue. In it, Wright argued persuasively, if not stridently, for open-mindedness, fairness in judgement and for the validity of modern art. To imitate the past was anachronistic: "The modern artist

striving to express his own age (whether good or bad makes little difference), who is a creature of his age and hence a victim of its basenesses or splendor, cannot be expected to project himself with any degree of sureness five hundred years back and drag forth by the aid of necromantic stupidity the corpse of an art inspired and nourished by a period environment, a greater art, if you will, but a corpse nonetheless....Let our work affect you as it will, but at least let your final opinion not be the result of a preconceived antagonism."⁸²

Exhibiting along with Macdonald-Wright (who only showed two small works) were Boris Deutsch, Edouard Vysekal, Ben Berlin, Nick Brigante, Peter Kraznow, and Val Costello, among others. Thomas Hart Benton was represented in the show with one painting; *Aeroplanes*, suggesting that Macdonald-Wright was still exerting an immediate influence over Benton. Brigante and Costello were students of Wright's at the Art Students League, while still others were regular visitors there. As he would do throughout the decade, Wright saw to it that Morgan Russell was represented, though there were only two of his paintings in the show. Interestingly, the works of Rex Slinkard (1887-1918) were hung posthumously in recognition of his early efforts for the cause of modernism in Southern California.

The critical response to this show was an improvement upon the lashing taken by the Exposition Park show of Stieglitz painters, but it is also difficult to know in the absence of most of the one hundred and seventy-two paintings then hanging how vanguard the exhibition really was. Local critic George Hyde wrote of the show that "Each work has a special appeal as to sincerity of purpose and even connoisseurs who decry the modern movement will find much to whet their artistic palette at this

exhibition."⁸³ Macdonald-Wright's landscape entry, *Santa Monica Canyon* (fig. 35), was painted with an aerial perspective, like the earlier *Cañon Synchrony* and *California Landscape*. Sharing the same high-keyed palette and vibrant compositional rhythms of those paintings, *Santa Monica Canyon* was understood by Hyde as a "delightful conception of impressionistic art."⁸⁴ Whether or not this type of well-intentioned but short-sighted criticism represented progress on the local scene to Wright and the Group of Independents is doubtful, though at minimum a relaxation of critical hostility signaled the awareness that modernism and traditional art had to begin learn to coexist on the West Coast.

In the following year, Macdonald-Wright privately published his *Treatise on Color* that has been discussed at length in this study. It should be noted here, though, that it was printed in an edition of only sixty copies, and sold exclusively to Wright's students. Each one of the copies was accompanied by hand-painted color wheels and templates designed to locate color scales, and each was placed in a hand-made slip-case. (So rare had the *Treatise* become by 1967 that Macdonald-Wright had to borrow one back from a student for the text to be reprinted in the Smithsonian catalogue on Wright from that year.⁸⁵) Printed in such a small edition, with limited distribution, and in view of its esoteric content, it must be concluded that the initial influence of this text on the local art community was likewise small and limited to a select group interested in modernism. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the very presence of such a treatise and its availability was one more contribution made by Wright, along with his own paintings, manifestos and exhibition projects, that provided unconventional ideas and opportunities to other artists around him.

Wright himself intended the work to be a primer for students who had no experience at all with color, and later wrote Russell (c. 1929-30) that "there are many parts of the treatise that don't bear examination by mature artists. Don't forget that it was written for students."⁸⁶ Despite this retrospective disclaimer, he did have the *Treatise* examined at the time by a very mature artist and fellow-teacher, Robert Henri. Wright's purpose was to get from Henri a usable quote to promote his book, and Henri provided the following:

My opinion of your book is that *it is the simplest, the most informing, and the best book I have ever read on the use of color* [emphasis is Henri's]. I have underscored the foregoing lines thinking that you might prefer to quote them....I hope that any additions you may make (in your letter you suggest that there may be some) will be only what is vitally necessary in stating more clearly what you have to say, if that is possible. To me, as it stands, it is a masterly work.⁸⁷

Once the sixty copies of the *Treatise* were distributed, Macdonald-Wright did not reprint it (the Smithsonian's 1967 reprint is the only one). The original copies required a great deal of work on the part of the artist to manufacture, and there may have been very little market for them beyond that original sixty. In addition, it was characteristic of Wright to enjoy the precious quality of such enterprises. The limited edition of the book, its handsome production values and its elite audience combined to make the book something of an Aesthetic experience, the kind Oscar Wilde might have approved of. Yet another reason the artist chose not to reprint the *Treatise* was that at the very time of its publication, he was moving away from the strict use of color scales, and was beginning to paint in an

intuitive manner based more on his increasingly Eastern preoccupations until, by the later 1920s, he abandoned them altogether.

A most interesting probability regarding Wright's *Treatise* is that it was owned by the eccentric art teacher at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles in the 1920s, Frederick Schwankovsky. Schwankovsky was a devotee of the color/music analogy, and was a practicing Theosophist. For his students, he made a booklet on color theory which contained, like Macdonald-Wright's, a color wheel. More like Scriabin than Wright, Schwankovsky assigned each color a specific musical tone, but very much like Wright assigned colors an emotional content. Schwankovsky could have derived all or most of his color ideas from the theosophical text, *Thought Forms*, and from Kandinsky without the benefit of Wright's book. However, the similarities between Wright's *Treatise* and Schwankovsky's booklet (and the smallness of the Los Angeles art community at the time) are too similar not to consider the possibility that the latter's work was influenced by the former's.

In 1928-1930, Jackson Pollock was a student of Schwankovsky's at Manual Arts High. Schwankovsky introduced the young artist to a variety of unconventional techniques with media, including dripping paint. He also introduced Pollock to his color theory, and to the theosophical ideas of art as a medium than can lead to truth (he even took Pollock to Ojai to meet the spiritualist, Krishnamurti). The question that arises is, with his introduction to and interest in the unconventional, did Pollock meet Macdonald-Wright at this time, and did he know the *Treatise*? Did Pollock ever draw at the Los Angeles Art Students League? Unfortunately, no documentation exists at this time to confirm such events. However, there are even more Macdonald-Wright/Pollock

correspondences to suggest that Pollock was aware of the older artist. When he went to New York in 1930 and enrolled at the Art Student's League, Pollock studied with Thomas Hart Benton. Of all the artists then teaching in New York, Benton is the one Wright would have recommended to any young student. At the League, Benton espoused Wright's theory of the hollow and the bump, and fellow Pollock student Axel Horn recalled that "The 'hollow and the bump' had a symbolic significance like 'yin and yang.' It expressed for us the polarity from negative, recessive, softness to positive, solid, projecting forcefulness."⁸⁸ If Pollock was not aware of Wright directly from his student years in Los Angeles, he became aware of him second-hand through Benton's dissemination of Macdonald-Wright's East/West philosophical fusions.

Typical of Macdonald-Wright's easel paintings in the mid-1920s dealing with the figure are *Muse Synchrony* (fig. 36), *Nature Synchrony* (fig. 37), *Arcady Synchrony* (fig. 38), and *Yin Synchrony No. 2* (fig. 39). Typical of his landscape painting is *Chinese Valley Synchrony* (fig. 40). In all of these, the objective forms of either the human body or the landscape are emphasized in clear drawing and forceful modeling. These same forms are linked to amorphous backgrounds of shifting tonalities that interpenetrate the main subject, as if the figures or the landscape were emerging from, or back into, the non-objectivity of the surrounding space. More simply put, objectivity and non-objectivity are blended and balanced. The artist's expanding belief in the necessity of joining opposites (and in the primacy of nature) was given a visual formula in these paintings.

Many of the paintings of this period, *Muse Synchrony* for example, demonstrate Wright's on-going interest in the writhing, Michelangesque pose. The anatomical structure of the Muse is

particularly full and muscular, recalling the Sibyls of the Sistine Chapel. Others, such as *Yin Synchrony*, more fully reveal his desire to fuse East and West. "Yin" is the feminine principle of the yin and yang, and is frankly illustrated here as a woman in a passive, reclining pose. The landscape surrounding her is a liquid morass of shifting color; to the left, the head of a tiger emerges and leers toward the sleeping body. In Chinese symbolism, among other things the tiger is the Lord of Beasts, and is associated with the yang, or masculine principle.⁸⁹ Macdonald-Wright knew from his reading of a basic classic of Confucianism, the *I Ching* (*Book of Changes*, a book revered by Taoists as well), that it was the successive movement of yin and yang that constitutes the Tao.⁹⁰ Here, then, is a rather obvious confluence of male and female symbols, painted in a technique which itself was intended to not so obviously suggest polarities (objective/non-objective).

When compared with the abstract subtleties of Chinese calligraphy, where the very touch of the brush reveals whether or not the artist possessed *ch'i yun*, or spirit resonance, that elusive quality that suggests the mystery and power of the Tao, the composition of Macdonald-Wright's *Yin Synchrony* seems blatantly illustrative and superficial. It is at this very critical juncture, when the art of Macdonald-Wright regularly adopts Oriental themes, that we must realize Macdonald-Wright knew he could not *be* Chinese. That is to say, he was fully aware of his Western cultural conditioning, and it was a fusion of the two cultures he sought in his own work. From his point of view, the objective forms in *Yin Synchrony* were indebted to the Western tradition of representation (the modification of that tradition stemmed from his own role as a modernist), and the content was indebted to Taoist thought.

An important example of this idea of fusion painted in 1924-1925 was *Vision Synchrony* (fig. 41). In the upper left are three figures intended to represent, from left to right, Confucious, Jesus, and the Buddha; in the center of the composition, the head of a tiger and the head of a snake emerge; at the right, a nude standing male looks across the central void of the canvas, over the tiger and snake, back toward the three men, while a nude woman sits in front of him, her body and face serene, her eyes closed. A chasm of light and glimpses of an imaginary landscape separate the man and woman from the historical figures. One is tempted to interpret the nude couple on the right as the Biblical Adam and Eve, separated from enlightenment (Confucious, Buddha, and Jesus) by the snake, emblem of the fall from grace and subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden. To such an interpretation would have to be added the figure of the tiger, whose claws lie on the back of the snake, a symbol of the yang, of creative power, perhaps overwhelming the snake, certainly holding it in check. And, beyond the central compositional chasm, itself representing the gulf which separates sin from redemption, or ignorance from enlightenment, are the figures which represent enlightenment itself. The entire picture is a meditation on the principles (and dualities) of sin/salvation, dark/light, life/death, ignorance and vision. Like the *Yin Synchrony* previously discussed, *Vision Synchrony* avails itself of rather obvious symbols and compositional staging to put across its philosophical content.

Macdonald-Wright exhibited *Vision* in the "First Pan-American Exhibition of Oil Paintings" held at the Los Angeles Museum in Exposition Park in November of 1925 (according to Mabel Alvarez, there

were over 8,000 people at the opening⁹¹). Of the reception to his painting, the artist wrote the following:

The picture of the *Vision* (Pan-American) is the most unpopular picture I have done in many years. There are very few people who do not think it my worst effort. To me it is my best, and whereas I can see room for vast improvement *partout*, I believe the composition to be my most "important." I feel I have at last assimilated a certain amount of the combined feeling of East and West—in other words I feel it to be a basis for a genuine American product, perhaps the first to be done over here....In my contact with things Chinese, I have had my vision extended—I have felt a kinship of a sort that I can say truthfully "I recognize myself in their outlook."⁹²

Wright's assessment of the painting as a "truly American product" stemmed from his conviction that it was not the re-hashing of old European formulas, nor the duplication of anything Chinese. American, in this sense, represented the meeting ground of the East and West, as opposed to an extension of Europe. (Wright was never interested in cultural chauvinism; to him, patriotism was an "imbecility.")

Though he was no doubt reacting to adverse criticism at the time, Macdonald-Wright's defense of *Vision Synchrony* as his best work is more than disturbing hyperbole; it prefigured his deepening involvement with the visual narration of various philosophical concepts, beliefs, myths and fusions of the same. The early Synchronist Macdonald-Wright, who sought universal form, rhythm and color, shifted into the depiction of more specific cultural icons and archetypes that by necessity carried with them specific cultural meanings. He began to emphasize the power of

myth and of archetype as ways to greater philosophic thought (always for Wright an end in itself), and this emphasis took on increasingly narrative terms. Fundamental rhythms and impulses in his paintings, especially the concept of balance, now had to accommodate academic descriptions of people and stories. No matter how philosophically complex his intentions were, and no matter how fluid and colorful his surface textures were painted, in the mid-1920s the art of Stanton Macdonald-Wright became circumscribed by a literary fixation that would characterize his work for nearly thirty more years.

In 1925, one thing that had not changed about Macdonald-Wright was his indefatigable penchant for organizing exhibitions. In conjunction with a number of local artists who had long shown tendencies toward, or at least sympathy with, modernism, Wright helped to re-organize the Group of Independents that had exhibited together into the "Modern Art Workers." As with the Group of Independents, Wright held no official office, but it was he who wrote the Worker's manifesto.⁹³ This particular "manifesto" took the form of an open letter to the Los Angeles Times, in which Wright was decidedly less acerbic than he had been past manifestoes, forewords and artist's statements:

The Modern Art Workers was formed in answer to what we felt was a need in Los Angeles. First of all, it is against nothing. Our desire is to provide exhibitions wherein artists who do not exhibit in the regular official shows will have an unprejudiced showing. We believe, furthermore, that it is necessary to exhibit all types of sincere work for the approval of the art-interested public, without regard for the personal predilections of like-minded juries....

We all have infinite faith in the future of Los Angeles, both as a great metropolis and as the greatest art center of the world, and our primary desire is to form a group in which any sincere artist coming here will feel, no matter what his affiliations, a genuine and intelligent congeniality....

We feel the time is ripe to get a more cosmopolitan atmosphere into the art life here, build up some real vitalizing competition, and tear down a few "taboos."⁹⁴

The first exhibition of the Modern Art Workers opened on October 5, 1925, and continued into November at the Hollywood Library (the same month in which the Pan-American show opened at Exposition Park). Macdonald-Wright spoke at the opening, and was asked why a key could not be given to the meaning of modern pictures: "Mr. Wright repeated that it is 'sensitivity' in the individual that is the key."⁹⁵

Among the paintings he exhibited was *Arcady Synchrony*, which was critically well-received. Indeed, as Wright's work delved into ever-greater objectivity in combination with spectral suites of color, critical reaction remained positive, if not complimentary in the extreme. Local criterion for the success or failure of art work continued to be, for the most part, a sense of traditional academic structure in drawing and color. While Wright definitely deviated from the traditional, there was quite enough of the academic in his work of the mid-1920s to assuage even the more conservative tastes. In the "Sixth Exhibition of Painters and Sculptors of Southern California" held at Exposition Park in April, 1925, Wright's *Yin Synchrony* led one anti-modernist critic to observe that "...such haunting things as Macdonald-Wright's *Yin Synchrony* reconciles some beholders to the thought that there may be both beauty and emotion in this

modernistic chaos. It is a curious and fascinating canvas that Wright has hung."⁹⁶ In yet another Exposition Park show of 1925 featuring the work of moderns,⁹⁷ Macdonald-Wright again attracted the most favorable press: "Stanton Wright's *Nature Synchrony*, which may be called the keynote of the exhibition, may not be a picture in the usual and accepted sense—in sober truth, it is not, according to the gospel of the Victorians—but it is a thing of great and haunting beauty, and it is art."⁹⁸ (With its focus on a male, female and infant figure, and with a pyramidal composition reminiscent of Raphael, Morgan Russell compared *Nature Synchrony* to images of the Holy Family, i.e., the Biblical Jesus, Mary and Joseph.⁹⁹) Macdonald-Wright was swaying more and more members of the local art community toward the acceptance of unconventional art forms, but with work decidedly less radical in appearance than his work of 1918-1922, let alone his *Synchronies* from pre-War Paris.

SYNCHROMIST THEATER AND LATE PAINTINGS OF THE 1920S

In the mid-1920s, Macdonald-Wright's growing absorption in things Oriental led him to independently study the Chinese language. More and more of his time was spent in Chinatown, where he became particularly enamored of traditional Chinese theater. Both Stanton and his brother, Willard, had been theater-goers from an early age when their mother used to take them to Broadway in New York. For Macdonald-Wright, however, Chinese theater was a very different experience, one where abstractions mingled colorfully with conventionally understood symbols, and yet where "the whole experience was insubstantial, like a game of

butterflies..."¹⁰⁰ With typical zealously, Wright procured every book he could on the subject and studied its history and structure thoroughly. He met a number of the local actors, sketched costumes, and eventually painted a number of scenes directly out of plays he watched.

In 1927, Macdonald-Wright became director of the Santa Monica Theater Guild. As he was making some money directing the Art Students League, lecturing, and selling an occasional painting (and since his wife, Jeanne, was working), he was in a position to devote considerable time to community theater if he so desired. The job also paid one hundred dollars a month. Wright's by-then considerable status as an organizer, possessed of both verbal and written skills, his reputation as a highly creative person, and his own interest in theater combined to make him an obvious candidate for the directorship.

Initially, Macdonald-Wright directed contemporary plays by O'Neill and Coward, as well as reviving an old play of Oscar Wilde's. After the very first season, however, Wright took advantage of the situation to experiment with his own ideas for the stage, ideas that were heavily influenced by the Chinese theater in which he had become immersed. He wrote four plays; "The Infidelity of Madame Lun," "Beyond," "The Tiger's Tail," and "The Wild Goose." He also directed them, designed the sets, and sometimes played small roles. Like his paintings, Wright's plays were replete with Western conventions, but everywhere tinged with a flavor and attitude that stemmed from contact with the East.

Director's notes, a list of props, and the script for "The Infidelity of Madame Lun" survive.¹⁰¹ As in Chinese Theater, stage decoration was minimal. For example, the first act took place in a "wooded scene." To create this atmosphere, Wright suggested that a chair be placed stage right

with a neat placard suspended from it which simply read, "wooded scene." Yet, his lighting directions were given with utmost care:

But there should be a color atmosphere of *sous-bois* over the whole scene. This is blue, a rich ultra-marine blue, intensified by orange sunspots which fall upon the clothing of the actors as they walk about. On a plain back-drop, preferably silver, but not necessarily so, there should be a light not seen on land nor sea; made by two flood lights throwing their beams upwards, and toward each other; one of blue-green, and one of purple. If the electrical equipment permits, a magnificent sunset effect may supplant the two floods....¹⁰²

Likewise, Macdonald-Wright took care in the description of the character's costumes. He brought in a Chinese actress for the title role, and even instructed the amateur troupe of the Santa Monica Theater Guild in basic symbolic hand-gestures of Chinese theater. The play itself was a satire on the foibles of human nature not without a good deal of humor. The lines are marked by Wright's self-termed "exaggerated and flowery verbiage": "*Woman*: Curb, I beg you, the iridescent flow of your admitted eloquence. I came her to expedite the drying of the earth! *Sage*: Ah, peerless moon-face, the smooth exterior of your scintillating personality is only equalled by the priceless frankness of your unconventionality."¹⁰³

Macdonald-Wright called his work with the Guild, "Synchronist Theater." In 1927, he told the *Christian Science Monitor* that his early experiments in Synchronism played a large part in his theater work, as it was color that established abstract equivalents.¹⁰⁴ His emphasis on the abstract, as well as his use of a color organ (no doubt a device that grew out

of his work in color film and the development of a kinetic light machine) were described:

For example of this, in one scene of his play, "Beyond," the action of the play takes place in nowhere, at no time, therefore to have other than a purely abstract setting would not only be incongruous but ridiculous. The mood induced by the use of these synchromistic setting is definite, and together with the use of Wright's color organ, which can throw any or all the colors of the spectrum upon any spot he wishes, evoke an illusion and atmosphere of a fresh sort....

[Macdonald-Wright] believes that the one way for the theater to move is toward the philosophical spectacle, putting theatrical production in the form of satire; to transform the beauty of an idea that you receive intellectually into a visual idea giving you beauty. To this end Wright has embodied much that has been used in Chinese theater, his reason for so doing is that comparatively few people know about the interpretive forms of the Chinese theater and therefore won't expect what they have seen before—in other words they are liberated from all preconceived ideas as to how a theatrical performance should be given.¹⁰⁵

The theater, for as small as the Santa Monica Guild was, provided Macdonald-Wright with yet another venue to suggest the idea he wrote about in his 1919 aviation article; that philosophical thought was an end in itself. Such thought could lead to an awareness of the limitations of pure logic, of the mystery inherent in nature, and of the unity of things material and spiritual. Wright remained remarkably consistent in his attachment to this ideal throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

In 1927, Macdonald-Wright's activities in the theater and his determination to learn the Chinese language did not prevent him from indulging his penchant for organizing exhibitions. This time, as opposed to the American Modernists show of 1920, the Group of Independents of 1923 or the Modern Art Workers of 1925, Wright planned a show for just him and Morgan Russell, entitled simply, "Synchronism."¹⁰⁶

The two artists had maintained a lively correspondence ever since Wright had moved to California, and a theme to which they always returned was Morgan's relocation to California (which never happened, though he visited in 1931), and the possibility of working together again (specifically, on a light machine). Another primary topic was the dire financial situation the two artists were always in. Macdonald-Wright acted as an agent for Russell's paintings in California, putting them into all the shows he could and handling sales negotiations whenever the occasion arose. Stanton was forever apologizing for the paltry amounts of money he sent to Morgan in France—usually increments of five or ten dollars, sometimes twenty. All payments were few and far between. A show of Synchronism in 1927 would accomplish a number of things; it would provide a venue for Wright's latest paintings, it would confirm his role as the region's preeminent modernist, and it could possibly generate some income for Morgan. (Of the sixteen pieces Wright exhibited in this show, only six were even for sale, and of these one was a self-portrait.)

"Synchronism" was held at the Los Angeles Museum in Exposition Park in February, 1927. In physical appearance, it was far different than the Synchronism of the 1913 Paris exhibition. On view was Wright's *Nature Synchrony, Prometheus* (a narrative of the ancient myth), *Water* and *Earth* (part of a series of four allegories on the elements), three different

scenes taken from Chinese theater, a *Self Portrait*, two landscapes, four still lifes and two figures (including *Muse*). Of the twenty-two works Russell sent from France, eight were either bathers or nudes, and at least seven were still lifes. The fact that both painters had returned to more representational work, yet desired to exhibit under the rubric of "synchronism" is telling. Both Wright and Russell retained an attitude toward harmony and balance of form and color in their 1920s production, which, they felt, was consistent with their early work in abstraction and finally non-objectivity. Retention of the movement's name was not some pathetic attempt to recapture either a past glory or to capitalize on whatever notoriety they could attach to their role as early moderns (Wright was realistic about how much Angelenos did not know): both painters genuinely felt the term still applied to their individual aesthetic.

For Macdonald-Wright, whose primary concern as a Synchronist in 1913 had been the balancing of light and dark, warm and cold, movement and unity, a primary concern had become the balancing of Occidental and Oriental traditions: "Art, according to Mr. Wright, is now [1927] in the process of a spiritual awakening, and from the inoculation of the Oriental influence with the Occidental ideal new forms will arise."¹⁰⁷ Believing fully that such a fusion was both possible and necessary, Wright blatantly laid Synchronist color over naturalistic renderings, which were in turn related thematically to the Orient. However, Wright felt himself to be using line in a wholly different way in these paintings. In an undated letter to Morgan Russell (circa late 1920s), he explained his understanding of the Chinese use of line:

In the Chinese, I now see that movement is not a *souci* [worry] with them, that is actual movement of masses, meat or

human movement; they are interested not in objectivity but in their medium which is line and which only moves as the artist moves it. I mean by this that line being not material, only functions by reason of how the artist uses it, and not by any effort or principle of its own. It exists as an abstraction and to organize it into a unity with itself, keeping it pure, one cannot force it into a manifestation of a principle of which it knows nothing (we cannot make it a slave of a divergent idea/principle but must let it have a life of its own, motivated by itself and answerable to itself alone)...[In a Chinese figure] the line is the thing that is ordered, the figure is made by the line and not the line by the figure. In this I find the great difference between the East and the West. In the Orient, the primary thing is the line, the objective figure is a result. In the West, the line results from the movement principle of the figure itself.¹⁰⁸

Macdonald-Wright's own use of line became increasingly prominent through the 1920s. Lines were used as a focal point for rhythmic interplay in a given image; they defined the subject, and retained, from the artist's point of view, "a life of their own." Not surprisingly, Wright's intent with line was lost on most contemporary and future viewers, a loss due in great measure to the perceived decorative quality of his lines (especially when seen in combination with the glowing patchwork of Synchronist color around them). Indeed, the Oriental subjects painted by Wright appeared to some viewers then (and to many now) as obvious and illustrative, the scenes from the Chinese theater being the best examples (fig. 42). The deeper mysteries of *ch'i*, which Wright sought in brushstrokes derived from Chinese calligraphy, collided head-on in his paintings with a Western realism weighted down

with materiality. In *The Sword Dance*, the actor/performer depicted is culturally specific, described with well-worn Western representational methods. Her context is known (the theater), and the description of this context seems to stem from an objective detachment far more so than from a spiritual kinship. The illustrative quality of his work was noted in a review of the 'Synchronism' show when the show travelled North to San Francisco: "It [Macdonald-Wright's painting] is surprisingly story telling for what is called 'modern art.'"¹⁰⁹

Macdonald-Wright believed that the addition of Synchronist color and fragmentation to both Oriental subjects and Western draftsmanship was far from a decorative enterprise, but rather a stylistic updating of each mode simultaneously. If the inherent meanings in his use of line were not understood or appreciated, he would be the last to be surprised. Wright believed adamantly that just as technology and art needed to fuse in projects such as kinetic light machines, so, too, did the illusory division between East and West need to be overcome. The critical dilemma in his paintings of the 1920s is whether or not the overt blending of traditionally Western formal qualities and vestiges of Synchronism with quasi-Oriental subject matter and a partial adaptation of Eastern line satisfied this objective. For Wright, firm in his conviction that art was a stimulus to philosophic thought, such a blending was justified if the result were to increase an awareness of the inter-connectedness of nature and culture, art and thought, East and West, and of all other polarities.

In the last years of the decade, Macdonald-Wright produced a series of works in this vein. *Self Portrait* of 1928¹¹⁰ features the juxtaposition of the artist himself as Western man, while directly behind him is the depiction of an Oriental man, perhaps meant to represent the artist's

second self, i. e., his own dual nature. *Fisherman* (fig. 43) of that same year features an Oriental figure deep in thought, surrounded by a landscape of alternating masses of land and void, vertically composed and with no sense of an absolute perspective. Typical of his still life production were *Water Lilly Still Life No. 3*,¹¹¹ and *Synchromy Still Life (Japanese Fruit)*,¹¹² *Karu Yaki Still Life*,¹¹³ and *Dragon Tail Still Life Synchromy* (fig. 44), all featuring a formal simplicity marked by the inclusion of recognizable Oriental motifs.

In 1929, Macdonald-Wright painted a pair of figures, *Dawn* (fig. 45) and *Night* (fig. 46), that conceptually bears comparison with the pair of figures he painted at the beginning of the decade, *American Synchromy No. 1* and *American Synchromy No. 2*. Very much like the earlier pair of paintings, it was the artist's intention to create a yin/yang analogy via the juxtapositions of opposites with *Dawn* and *Night*. In the 1929 paintings, however, one sees clearly how the overlay of Synchromist color and fracturing of the picture plane ceased to be a primary pictorial concern. In the later paintings, the early prismatic arcs and rays of color have been replaced with clear, linear definition on the figures. These figures, as in the *American* pair, are still vignettted against simplified backgrounds of color, but in *Dawn* and *Night* there is the inclusion of a horizon line, a visual reference to the earth and connected to the symbolism of the female form as earth. Most significantly, *Dawn* and *Night* were not painted in color scales. Macdonald-Wright wrote to Morgan Russell at the end of the decade that he no longer painted in color scales, and that "I count for the rightness of my color motives on my absorption in the subject and I find it works."¹¹⁴

Macdonald-Wright's involvement with Eastern thinking, especially Taoism, had led him to believe that the idea of painting in color scales at all was simply too linear, too logical, too bound to materiality. He continued to advise students to learn color scales, so that they could understand the intricacies of color mixing and get a feeling for the emotional and psychological power of color. For the mature artist, though, especially the one who would go beyond the conventions of Western thought, an emotional and spiritual identification with the subject replaced the scales system which had promised to automatically evoke certain states of mind if used correctly. At the end of the 1920s, Macdonald-Wright's eclectic philosophical interests far outweighed any lingering need to either be or appear to be on the cutting edge of vanguard painting.

MACDONALD-WRIGHT AT THE END OF THE 1920S

In 1955, when he was sixty-five years old, Macdonald-Wright wrote an article in which he casually surveyed the development of art in Los Angeles. In a bit of hyperbole reminiscent of his Paris years, Wright noted that the 1920 exhibition of modernism at Exposition Park (which, surprisingly, he did *not* take credit for in this article) was the turning point in California art history, that it had, in fact, caused "as much consternation in Los Angeles and vicinity as did the Armory Show in New York in 1913."¹¹⁵ While the comparison with the Armory Show was just so much colorful exaggeration, Wright's characterization of the results of the 1920 American Modernists exhibition merit consideration:

In spite of the polemics of the status quo group [i. e., the California Art Club], this exhibition awakened the enthusiasms of the younger men, and interest in the current European movements became a definite undertone of the times, either pro or con. Criticism was rather conciliatory, and the art schools opened their psychic windows to the newer and fresher drafts coming from Paris. The changeover, no more than a loud rumble before [the exhibit] became a definite item of news and curiosity.¹¹⁶

Indeed, reviews of modernist exhibitions did become a regular feature of the Los Angeles press after that 1920 show, and the public and the local art community were forced to react to their presence, either "pro or con." Unquestionably, this was the decade when modernist painting established itself as a permanent and visible fixture in the Southland. However, also as Wright noted, modernist painting was as much an item of "curiosity" as it was "news." Evaluated against the backdrop of the dominant artistic interest in Southern California in regional American Impressionism, the progress made by Macdonald-Wright and the various members of the modern art groups for acceptance and tolerance, let alone understanding and appreciation, was minimal. The "conciliatory criticism" mentioned by Wright in 1955 was just that, conciliatory, but hardly critical. The work of the moderns was routinely judged by standards set and understood in relation to the outstanding painters of the California Art Club, such as William Wendt and Guy Rose; a combination of academic correctness in drawing, naturalism in color, and soothing garden scenes or commanding landscapes for subject matter formed the basis of fine art for those Angelenos who thought about it. While this might be said of any region of America in the 1920s, it was definitely true

of Los Angeles where the California Art Club not only represented popular taste, but where it so successfully dominated all aspects of art activity. Plainly stated, for every article in the local papers that dealt with an aspect of modernist painting, there were literally hundreds that dealt with the activities and achievements of the members of the California Art Club. The sale of a modernist painting was a rare event while work by the "status quo" painters, to use Wright's terminology, were highly marketable. In terms of quantity, the number of traditional or Impressionist-influenced painters in the Southland was overwhelming, whereas there were but a handful of modernists who defined themselves as such. It is in this overall context in which the growth and influence of modernist painting in Southern California must be evaluated. By any fair standard, the growth of modernism was small, and its influence limited to a small circle of adherents. When artist Lorser Feitelson arrived in Los Angeles in 1927, he wrote:

Talk about a desert—this was not only physically bare but artistically as well and in the hands of guys who were making money selling potboilers and running around in Pierce Arrows....No one ever heard of modern art. If you even talked about Van Gogh you were a very dangerous guy. So I felt very much alone.¹¹⁷

Similarly, Galka Scheyer (1889-1945), a German-born friend of and dealer for the Blue Four (Lionel Feininger, Alexei Jawlensky, Wassily Kandinsky, and Paul Klee), had tried to promote these artists in the Southland since a 1926 showing of their work at Exposition Park. In 1931, she moved to Hollywood (renting the Chase House designed by R.M. Schindler), where she displayed more than three hundred works by the

Blue Four. She was at liberty to display them because she could not sell them.¹¹⁸

To identify the limits of the modern movement in Los Angeles during its infancy is not to deny either its vitality or viability. Macdonald-Wright played a crucial role during the 1920s in sustaining that vitality with his talent for organizing shows, promoting vanguard painting in manifestos, articles and lectures, and inspiring his fellow painters to claim their rightful status as artists in the community.

Significantly, though, Macdonald-Wright spawned no school of followers. While artists around him found Wright personally powerful and charismatic and felt fortunate in having such an articulate spokesman for modern art, none painted like him.¹¹⁹ Whereas his students experimented with color scales, none made it a part of their mature artistic expression. None followed his lead in trying to fuse elements of the Orient and Occident, and none seemed to assimilate his idea that the function of art was to inspire and expand philosophical thought. That there was no "school of Wright" in 1920s Los Angeles (in terms of imitation), is attributable to two factors. First, Macdonald-Wright severely discouraged copyists, and encouraged the development of individuality. Secondly, Wright's own aesthetic ambitions, the welding of two seemingly opposite world philosophies, was perhaps simply too intimidating for most students and a project best left for Wright alone.

As a modernist himself, Macdonald-Wright did not look for overt symbols of modernity in the 1920s. That is to say, he avoided the theme of the metropolis that so interested Louis Lozowick, or subjects such as the Brooklyn Bridge, which Joseph Stella called "the shrine containing all the efforts of the new civilization, AMERICA."¹²⁰ Further, never throughout

the 1920s was Macdonald-Wright interested in creating an art that was characteristically "American." He felt his work in fusing the East and West to be perhaps the most American product of its time precisely because it was a hybridization, not of America and Europe (America having evolved from the latter), but of two philosophical points of view. Modernity became for Wright in the 1920s not a function of subject matter (few American painters had equalled his level of abstraction before the war), nor of political affiliation or simple symbology (a plane, a machine, a skyscraper). Modernism, for Wright, was a predisposition and desire to advance philosophically. Thus, the past was always an important resource as a repository of intellectual and spiritual achievement, but the present could not be a slave to the past. In his manifestoes and lectures of the decade, a recurring theme was that of evolution: as technology increased, so too must our general awareness of the world. If society was to flourish and unify, it had to collectively recognize the need to be as spiritually deep as it was industrially adept. Art, its creation and subsequent appreciation, was, for Wright, a primary means toward that end.

¹John Huston, *An Open Book* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 28.

²SMW, quoted in *Stanton Macdonald-Wright: A Retrospective Exhibition, 1911-1970* (Los Angeles: The UCLA Art Galleries, 1970), unpaginated.

³Edwin Arthur Hunt, "The Wright Criterion," *Out West Magazine* 43, no. 4 (April 1916): 161.

⁴Hunt, "Criterion": 161.

⁵Arthur G. Vernon, "Modern Art in California," *Graphic* (1 February 1917). Copy in Alvarez Papers, AAA.

⁶Arthur G. Vernon, "Modern Art in California," *Graphic* (20 April 1918). Copy in Alvarez Papers, AAA.

⁷SMW, *Serenade*, unpaginated.

⁸Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 68-69.

⁹SMW to Alfred Stieglitz, 20 November 1918. Alfred Stieglitz Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹⁰*Serenade*, unpaginated.

¹¹For a detailed account of Willard's personal and domestic struggles, including his bout with drugs, see Loughery, *Van Dine*.

¹²Willard Huntington Wright, "Innovators Will Find West Good Field for All Sound Modernism," clipping from the *San Francisco Bulletin* (22 February 1919), in the Willard Huntington Wright Scrapbooks, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University Archives.

¹³*Serenade*, unpaginated.

¹⁴*Serenade*, unpaginated. At the time of this writing, no documentation is available to confirm the exact date of this marriage. However, Stanton's third wife, Jean Sutton, reported the marriage as having occurred in 1922.

¹⁵Stanton Macdonald-Wright, "Influence of Aviation on Art: The Accentuation of Individuality," *Ace: The Aviation Magazine of the West* 1, no. 2 (September 1919): 11-12.

¹⁶SMW, "Influence of Aviation": 12.

¹⁷SMW, "Influence of Aviation": 11.

¹⁸SMW, "Influence of Aviation": 12.

¹⁹SMW, *Aeroplane Synchrony in Yellow-Orange*, 1920, oil on canvas, 24 1/4 x 24 in. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949. Acc. 49.70.52. Accession records at the Metropolitan indicate that Macdonald-Wright himself had reported the painting had been done in 1920 in Los Angeles. The painting is discussed and illustrated in George Heard Hamilton, "The Alfred Stieglitz Collection," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 3 (1970): 384.

²⁰SMW, *Treatise on Color*, 20.

²¹SMW, *Treatise*, 33.

²²SMW, "Influence of Aviation": 12.

²³SMW, *Treatise*, 33.

²⁴SMW, *Cañon Synchrony*, 1919-1920, oil on canvas, 25 x 25 in., Collection of the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

²⁵SMW, *California Landscape*, ca. 1919, oil on canvas, 30 x 22 1/8 in., Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio. Gift of Ferdinand Howald.

²⁶Mai-Mai Sze, *The Tao of Painting: A Study of the Ritual Disposition of Chinese Painting, with a translation of the Chieh Tzu Yuan Hua Chuan or Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting, 1679-1701*, Volume Two: The Chieh tzu Yuan Hua Chuan. Bolligen Series XLIX. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956. Macdonald-Wright, an avid bibliophile, would have been undaunted in acquiring the 1887-88 Shanghai edition, the one most widely used up until recent times. He may have known of its existence since his early contact with Focillon. Also, the Manual was translated into French in 1918 by Raphael Petrucci as the *Kiai-Tseu-Yuan Houa Tchouan, Les Enseignements de lat Peinture du Jardin Grand comme un Grain de Moutarde: Encyclopédie de la Peinture Chinoise* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1918). The following citations are from the 1956 Princeton edition.

²⁷*Mustard Seed*, 17

²⁸*Mustard Seed*, 34

²⁹SMW, *American Synchrony No. 1, Green*, 1919, oil on canvas, 34 1/4 x 23 in., Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection.

³⁰Though unlocated, a photograph of the painting exists in the Estate of the Artist, Chowning Gallery files. In addition, a preparatory sketch for each painting survives, private collection.

³¹SMW, *Treatise*, 19.

³²See entry no. 63 in the catalogue, *Exhibition of Paintings by American Modernists* held at the Museum of History, Science and Art in Exposition Park, Los Angeles, February 1-29, 1920: *American Synchrony No. 2 (Yellow-orange minor)*.

³³SMW, *Treatise*, 26.

³⁴SMW, *Treatise*, 24.

³⁵"Current Tendencies at Los Angeles," clipping from the *Christian Science Monitor* in the Mabel Alvarez papers (unfilmed), AAA.

³⁶Antony Anderson, "Art and Artists," *The Los Angeles Times* (21 September 1919).

³⁷*Serenade*, unpaginated.

³⁸Arthur Millier, "Now There's Only a Parking Lot," clipping from the *Los Angeles Times* in the Macdonald-Wright Papers, LA 5, frame 47, AAA.

³⁹SMW, *Treatise*, 28.

⁴⁰SMW, "Lectures to the Art Students' League of Los Angeles," recorded and transcribed by Mabel Alvarez, Museum of Modern Art Library. Hereafter referred to as "ASL Lectures." Xerox copy from the original in possession of the author, courtesy of Pauline Khuri-Majoli.

⁴¹SMW, "ASL Lectures": 1.

⁴²SMW, "ASL Lectures": 2.

⁴³SMW, "ASL Lectures": 30-31.

⁴⁴John Huston, quoted in Lawrence Grobel, *The Hustons* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), 105.

⁴⁵Huston, quoted in Grobel, *The Hustons*, 105.

⁴⁶Willard Huntington Wright, "Exhibit Shows New Impulse: California Artists to the Fore," *San Francisco Bulletin* (25 January 1919), clipping in the Willard Huntington Wright Scrapbooks, Princeton.

⁴⁷WHW to Alfred Stieglitz, quoted in Loughery, *Van Dine*, 146.

⁴⁸Loughery, *Van Dine*, 147.

⁴⁹The three advisory board members were William Wendt, one of Southern California's premier Impressionist painters; William Preston Harrison, a prominent collector of the Ash Can School, and Mrs. Randall Hutchinson, a moderate to conservative patron of the museum.

⁵⁰"Modernist Exhibits are Given Sanction," *Los Angeles Express* (27 June 1919), in the Museum Scrapbooks for 1913-1923, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Exposition Park. The California Art Club felt that it had always given "due consideration and space to the work of the artists of the newer school," felt that Modernists should show only under the auspices of their organization, which, of course, put the Moderns at the mercy of a jury appointed by officers of the California Art Club.

⁵¹Loughery agrees with this assessment of Willard playing a "supporting role" in the show's organization. See *Van Dine*, 149.

⁵²SMW to Alfred Stieglitz, 12 October 1919, Alfred Stieglitz Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library.

⁵³SMW wrote a long and convincing article on the legitimacy of modern art and America's leading role in its development which appeared soon after writing to Stieglitz of his [SMW's] promotional intentions: SMW, "Americanism in Art and Letters," *Los Angeles Times* 23 November 1919.

⁵⁴SMW to Stieglitz, 12 October 1919. "I naturally want O'Keeffe to be represented..." Stieglitz Archive, Beinecke Library.

⁵⁵Originally, Macdonald-Wright included fourteen of his own paintings in this show. Indeed, the original catalogue printed for the exhibition listed them all; copies of this unedited catalogue are to be found in the Scrapbook of Exhibitions for 1913 to 1923 at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Exposition Park, and in the Library of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The actual catalogue that visitors received at the opening is to be found in the Mabel Alvarez Papers (unfilmed), AAA. In the revised version, only five paintings are listed for Macdonald-Wright. One might assume there were objections to the emphasis the organizer/curator put on his own work, however,

Antony Anderson's review, "Our American Modernists," *Los Angeles Times* (13 February 1920), mentions the Wright's as hanging which were not listed in the final catalogue. So, all fourteen paintings were hung. Possibly, Wright did not want his East Coast counterparts to know that he used the show to such personal advantage.

⁵⁶SMW, "Foreword" in "Exhibition of American Paintings" catalogue.

⁵⁷"Futuristic Art Shocks L.A.—Paint Daubs Spoil Canvas—Masterpieces Go to Cellar," *Los Angeles Record* (19 February 1920), clipping from the Museum Scrapbooks for 1913-1923, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Exposition Park. See also "Modern Art Exhibition Varied," *Los Angeles Express* (12 February 1920), Scrapbooks: "...decidedly freaky..."

⁵⁸Antony Anderson, "Our American Modernists," *Los Angeles Times* (13 February 1920), clipping in the Museum Scrapbooks for 1913-1923, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Exposition Park.

⁵⁹Anderson, "Our American Modernists."

⁶⁰Only one painting sold, this being an oil by William Zorach. See footnote no. 64.

⁶¹Stanton exhibited again that very year: "Synchronistic [sic] School to Hold an Exhibition," *Los Angeles Times* (22 August 1920): 18. Little is known of this particular exhibit, though the article cited here indicates that William Yarrow, Thomas Hart Benton, Preston Dickinson and Macdonald-Wright were the main artists featured.

⁶²SMW to Stieglitz, 3 February 1920. Stieglitz Archive, Beinecke Library.

⁶³WHW, "Art and Aunt Maria," *The Los Angeles Times*, clipping, Museum Scrapbooks for 1913-1923.

⁶⁴Out of the entire exhibition, there was only one sale: "You [Stieglitz] will get a check for \$175 minus (I suppose) 10% gallery fee for the Mountain Path of Zorach. This is the sales total! Why anyone should pick out the worst canvas of a bad show is beyond me, but there you are!" SMW to Stieglitz, 8 March 1920. Stieglitz Archive.

⁶⁵"Can a Photograph Have the Significance of Art?" Thirty-one statements in *Manuscripts* 4 (February 1922).

⁶⁶SMW, "Photography and the New Literature," in *Manuscripts*: 7.

⁶⁷Willard Huntington Wright, *The Future of Painting* (New York: Huebsch, 1923).

⁶⁸Kushner: *Russell*, 109.

⁶⁹SMW, "Photography and the New Literature": 7. SMW offered his thanks to Stieglitz for a copy of *Manuscripts*, then wrote to Stieglitz, sharing his opinion on some of the other articles that appeared therein: "My dear Stieglitz: I got the MSS. you so kindly and forgivingly sent me and it really took me back to N. Y. among the squabbles of the little fellow again. I had almost forgotten the rancor and pettiness of the "art world" antagonisms, the playing to the gallery, the near-epigrammatic conversations and the

superficial literary efforts for posterity, but that magazine shows them up astoundingly...Mr. Pennell surely must be an ass as well as a swine. Marin's logic is a bore and founded on temporary mental eclipse, superinduced to please you. Benton's article was good in parts. Mine was rotten. If Ornstein would substitute the word "music" for "photography" he would state an obvious truth as true as his present statement. De Zayas is amusing, but old, discouraged, effete and "caricaturiste." Of all the articles, Sherwood Anderson's is alone enjoyable. It is by far the best done, the most truthful and penetrating."

⁷⁰SMW, "Photography and the New Literature": 7.

⁷¹Levin suggests that Russell knew of Remington's work, and therefore Russell could have made it known to Wright. See Levin: *Synchromism*, 44.

⁷²See James M. Baker, "Prometheus in America: The Significance of the World Premier of Scriabin's *Poem of Fire* as Color-Music, New York, 20 March, 1915," in Kermit S. Champa, et. al., *Over Here! Modernism, the First Exile, 1914-1919* (Providence, Rhode Island: David Winton Bell Gallery, Brown University, 1989), 90-111.

⁷³See Grobel, *The Hustons*, 105.

⁷⁴Baker, "Prometheus": 106.

⁷⁵On Wilfred, see Stark Young, "The Color Organ," *Theatre Arts Magazine* 6, no. 1 (January 1922): 20-32. Wilfred's objective was to build a light machine that functioned like an organ, but his interests were not in synesthesia as he firmly believed there was no direct relationship between color and sound. Another light machine developed at this same time was built by Mary Hallock Greenewalt. See "Applying 'Spectral Colors' to Music a New Fine Art," *Current Opinion* 71, no. 1 (July 1921): 66-67, and Mary Hallock Greenewalt, "Decorating with Light and Color," *Art & Decoration* 15 (June 1921): 104-105.

⁷⁶*Serenade*, unpaginated: "I had no equipment and knowledge of how to go about the job, but with bull-like persistence I was going to do it anyway."

⁷⁷*Serenade*, unpaginated.

⁷⁸SMW to Morgan Russell, 1922, quoted in *Serenade*, unpaginated.

⁷⁹Full text of the catalogue reprinted in John Alan Walker, ed., *Accounts of Early California Art: A Reprint Anthology* (Big Pine, California: Privately Printed by John Alan Walker, 1988).

⁸⁰Walker, *Accounts*: unpaginated.

⁸¹Founded in 1921 for exhibition purposes, the Group of Eight included E. R. Shrader, J. H. Rich, Clarence Hinkle, Edouard Vysekak, Henri de Kruif, Donna Schuster, Mabel Alvarez, and Luvena Vysekak. See Moure: *Dictionary*: B-10.

⁸²Walker, *Accounts*: unpaginated.

⁸³George Rodier Hyde, "Color Riots at L. A. Exhibit of 'Modernists'" (1923) reprinted in Walker, *Accounts*: unpaginated.

⁸⁴Hyde, "Color Riots."

⁸⁵Pauline Majoli, interview with Will South, 1992. The student Wright borrowed the *Treatise* from was Mabel Alvarez.

⁸⁶SMW, letter to Russell, c. 1930-31. Macdonald-Wright papers, Roll 1266, frame 174, AAA. Restricted. Used by permission of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁸⁷Robert Henri to SMW, 1 May 1924, letter in the collection of Mrs. Stanton Macdonald-Wright. Xerox copy from the original in possession of the author, courtesy Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁸⁸Axel Horn, "Jackson Pollock: The Hollow and the Bump," *Carleton Miscellany* 7, no. 3 (Summer 1966): 81.

⁸⁹C.A.S. Williams, *Outlines of Chinese Symbolism & Art Motives* (New York: Dover Publications, 1976), 398.

⁹⁰For a definition and discussion of ideas regarding yin and yang in the *I Ching*, see Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 266-269.

⁹¹Mabel Alvarez, 1925 diary, unfiled, AAA.

⁹²SMW to Russell, 1925, letter quoted in *Serenade*, unpaginated.

⁹³SMW, "An Open Letter From a Modernist," letter printed in the *Los Angeles Times* (4 October 1925): 35. In this letter, Wright noted that George Stojana was president, Mabel Alvarez vice-president, and Eduoard Vysekal, treasurer.

⁹⁴SMW, "Open Letter."

⁹⁵"Hollywood Has First Modern Art Exhibit: Public Shows Appreciation of Creations," newsclipping, (6 October 1925), LA 5, frame 274, AAA. Also see Marjorie Ross, "Modern Artists Score in Exhibit," *The Hollywood Citizen* (6 October 1925).

⁹⁶Caroline Walker, "Art Exhibition Reveals New Painters," clipping in LA 5, reel 224, AAA.

⁹⁷The exact date of this show is missing from the Los Angeles County Museum Library's list of early exhibitions.

⁹⁸"Modernists Show, Los Angeles Museum," 1925 clipping, LA 5, frame 227, AAA.

⁹⁹Russell to SMW, 1925, quoted in *Serenade*, unpaginated. "I think your picture of a family worthy of going beside any holy family I know of. It's most *ravissante* in all respects, quite a classic achievement." SMW had sent Russell photographs of the painting for his evaluation.

¹⁰⁰*Serenade*, unpaginated.

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- 101 Provided to the author by Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.
- 102 SMW, director's notes for "The Infidelity of Madame Lun."
- 103 SMW, from the script of "The Infidelity of Madame Lun": 2.
- 104 "Synchronist Theater at Santa Monica," clipping from the *Christian Science Monitor* (1927) in files of the Chowning Gallery, San Francisco.
- 105 "Synchronist Theater at Santa Monica."
- 106 *Synchronism*, exhibition catalogue, (Los Angeles: Exposition Park, February 1927).
- 107 Claudia Colonna, "The Art of Stanton Macdonald-Wright," (June 1927), clipping in LA 5, frame 222, AAA.
- 108 SMW to Morgan Russell, roll 1266, frames 40-41, AAA. Restricted. Used by permission of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.
- 109 Gene Hailey, "The Work of Wright and Russell," *The Argus* (1 June 1927): 6.
- 110 Illustrated in roll LA 5, frame 261, AAA.
- 111 Illustrated in roll LA 5, frame 264, AAA.
- 112 Illustrated in roll LA 5, frame 269, AAA.
- 113 Illustrated in roll LA 5, frame 293, AAA.
- 114 SMW to Morgan Russell, roll 1266, frame 175, AAA. Restricted. Used with the permission of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.
- 115 SMW, "Los Angeles," *Art News* (October 1955), clipping in roll LA 5, frame 46, AAA.
- 116 SMW, "Los Angeles."
- 117 Arthur Secunda, "Feitelson, Gerchik, Schifrin," *Artforum* 1, no. 2 (July 1962): 22.
- 118 "This collection would be fabulously valuable in today's terms, but for Scheyer it meant that she had been unable to market a significant inventory." Henry T. Hopkins, "The Blackbird and the Blue Four," *Antiques & Fine Art* 8, no. 4 (May-June 1991): 57.
- 119 Periodically, Southern California modernists did paintings wholly indebted to Wright, but these were few, and not produced on a regular basis. A prime example is Edouard Vysekal's *The Herwigs*, 1928, oil on canvas, 54 3/8 x 39 1/4 in., Collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The surface of the painting is formally an adaptation of Wright's work of the 1920s in both application of paint and palette. Indeed, Vysekal had been experimenting with Wright's color theory since the early 1920s when he did paintings (now lost) such as *Arrangement: Scale of Orange*. For a discussion and reproduction of *The Herwigs*, see Ilene Susan Fort and Michael Quick, *American Art: The Los Angeles County*

Museum of Art Collection (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 318-319. A painter whose work does seem to have been strongly indebted to Macdonald-Wright and Synchronist theory was the Northern Californian Chinese-American, Yun Gee (1906-1963). Outside of the parameters of this study per se, Gee is the only Californian painter after Wright to have been identified by critics as a Synchronist (see Diane Cochrane, "Yun Gee: Forgotten Synchronist Painter," *American Artist* 38 (January 1974): 46-51). Gee was still in San Francisco in June 1927 when Wright and Russell's Synchronism exhibit travelled to that city. It is hard to imagine that Gee would have missed this exhibition, as he was immersed in the study of art at that time, and left for Paris on 19 June 1927 for further study. Gee would have also been able to see Wright's 1932 exhibit at An American Place. Despite this, Gee's primary biographer, Joyce Brodsky, does not explore the influence of Wright on Gee: "I cannot find any evidence of direct contact between Gee and the leading Synchronist painters. Ironically, Stanton Macdonald-Wright was in California at that time, but John Ferren said (in a 1968 Schoelkopf catalogue, p. 4) that he was painting 'sexy orientalia.'" See Joyce Brodsky, *The Paintings of Yun Gee* (The University of Connecticut, Storrs: The William Benton Museum of Art, 1979), 69, fn. 40. As Brodsky has pointed out, Gee was greatly influenced by California modernist Otis Oldfield (1890-1969), who had been in Paris studying at the very time of Futurist and Synchronist exhibitions. Oldfield's early Paris experience begs the question as to what extent he himself was influenced by Synchronism, how much of that influence he passed to Gee, and to what extent the both of them were influenced by Wright's work in California of the 1920s. In 1927, the year of Wright and Russell's San Francisco show, both Oldfield and Gee painted decidedly Synchronist-influenced canvases: see Yun Gee, *Chinatown*, 1927, oil on paperboard, 11 x 16 in., Collection of the Oakland Museum (this was one of Gee's first modern paintings—he burned all his pre-1926 production) and Otis Oldfield, *Telegraph Hill*, 1927, oil on canvas, 40 x 33 1/4 in., the Delman Collection.

¹²⁰*Transition* 16-17 (June 1929): unpaginated, in the Joseph Stella File, Whitney Museum of American Art Library.

CHAPTER FOUR

MACDONALD-WRIGHT IN THE DEPRESSION ERA

And S. MacDonald-Wright, altogether the most brilliant young man I had ever met. He could do anything, that fellow, and do it with the ease of a master. He never had to learn; he was born mature, and the variety of his gifts was embarrassing to every one but himself. His smaller abstractions remain, both in color and composition, superior to the best that Picasso can put together. He spoke French perfectly; he could out-think and out-talk anyone on any subject; and he dressed like an English lord.

Thomas Craven, 1934¹

Early in 1929, UCLA professor Annita Delano wrote to her friend in Paris, Sonia Delaunay, and updated her on the activities of their mutual acquaintance, Stanton Macdonald-Wright: "He said to tell you he was hiding away in a cave in Santa Monica by the sea. However, I will tell you he is painting some splendid things, very different from the former paintings. They are more simplified. He is still interested profoundly in Oriental art."²

Just as he had not "retired" from the art world when he returned to California in 1918, Macdonald-Wright was far from "hiding away in a cave" in 1929. In fact, he was as occupied with painting, writing, teaching and planning exhibitions as he had been at the outset of the decade. In

February of that year, local critic and arts enthusiast Merle Armitage observed:

Many people do not like Wright, many are afraid of him. He is sometimes likeable, sometimes not. But he is a formidable man. And it is a barometer of our slothfulness, our mental and aesthetic sluggishness, our stupidity and our fear of anything first class, that we have not discovered Wright, that we have followed a horde of false gods, to nowhere. But Wright would be the last one to care. He is enjoying himself hugely, and preparing for his New York exhibitions.³

Macdonald-Wright had, in fact, decided to introduce his latest Orient-inspired work in the city he still claimed to thoroughly despise, New York. However defective that city still was in Wright's opinion, it had a broader base for the appreciation of art than Los Angeles at that time. Wright was in search of a larger audience where some might understand the curious synthesis which he believed was occurring in his painting.

Despite looking farther afield for exhibition possibilities, Wright was, in Armitage's words, "enjoying himself hugely." By 1929, he was a well-known cultural celebrity in the Southland. Though not much better off financially than he had been in 1920, Wright was still directing the Art Students' League, was selling an occasional painting, and was confident enough of future prospects that he continued to encourage Morgan Russell to visit and possibly relocate in Los Angeles. On 5 October 1929, a large breakfast/reception for about eighty-five people was held in Macdonald-Wright's honor in San Pedro.⁴ The purpose of the reception was the general promotion of the fine arts in that small Los Angeles port town, where an associate of Wright's, Charles Rider, was attempting to

start a gallery and art school. That Wright himself, his personality and notoriety, could be used for such promotional ends was a measure of his regional stature. At the end of that very same month, stock prices collapsed on the New York Stock Exchange, altering Macdonald-Wright's optimistic projections for the next decade and changing the course of the Nation.

The Great Depression in California effectively and immediately ended boom times in Los Angeles.⁵ Though Hollywood survived and sometimes thrived in the 1930s,⁶ due in no small measure to the escapist entertainment it provided for Americans, real estate and building, manufacturing and retail, farming and agriculture all spiraled downward. Like the rest of the country, unemployment skyrocketed. The usual financial struggles faced by visual artists were significantly compounded by the Depression; commissions dwindled, collectors curtailed speculation, galleries folded. Macdonald-Wright, fully aware of the suddenly increased difficulties in pursuing his various cultural projects, not to mention in simply selling a painting now and then, nonetheless began the decade, like he had the 1920s: writing, painting, and exhibiting simultaneously.

MACDONALD-WRIGHT IN THE EARLY 1930S

Painted in 1930, Macdonald-Wright's *Yin Synchrony No. 3* (fig. 47) is perhaps the artist's most successful attempt at the fusion of Oriental and Occidental elements. Within a horizontal format, a nude female figure lies upon a rippling, red cloth which, like the figure itself, is mostly clear and linear against the highly colored background, yet which dissolves into

clouds of amorphous color. Compositionally, solid form is paired with evanescent voids. Behind the nude, a winding road, which repeats the undulations of the body and the rhythmic lines of the cloth, recedes into an unknown distance of mountains and colored haze. The nearness of the figure is balanced with the distance of the landscape. The flesh of the nude is painted in muted, lustrous flesh tones, while the surrounding landscape and cloth are brightly colored. Everywhere in the design and execution of the image, Wright has consciously sought to both include and balance opposites. Clarity and ambiguity of form coexist. Muted and saturated tonalities are juxtaposed. And, all compositional elements are based on and designed around the simple and fluid rhythm of the sleeping figure that holds two calla lilies in one hand, while the other hand lies open and empty.

At the same time that Wright intellectualized a pervasive balance of formal elements in a manner he felt to be consistently Oriental, he based the nude female figure on Michelangelo's *Adam* from the *Creation* sequence in the Sistine Chapel. Wright could hardly have chosen a figurative source more representative of the classical tradition within the larger history of Western art, and his choice was quite deliberate. Again, it was his ambition to unify the essential formal and conceptual attributes of Eastern and Western visual art, attributes which, Wright believed, represented the same basic realities from two divergent philosophical approaches. In the classical tradition, best represented by Michelangelo, the abstract principles of opposition, balance and unity are manifest via the objective work. In the Orient, Wright believed (see quote, pp. 162-63), this process was wholly the reverse: objective forms resulted from the use of line as first and foremost an abstract principle which could by itself

reveal *ch'i* (spirit). Each tradition, Eastern and Western, nonetheless carried within it fundamental aspects of the art of its opposing culture.

For the Western world, the figure of Adam represents Divine Creation. He is matter organized into man. In the Orient, Yin, the female principle, *is* matter, *is* the Earth itself. It is this principle from which birth and growth, i.e., creation, derive. The organizing principle, the Yang, or male half, gives shape to Yin, but is not its equivalent, nor less its substitute. In *Yin Synchrony*, the female figure, partially fading into the landscape and at peace with it, is an obvious allegory of the Oriental principle. Yet, in her derivation from a specific Western figurative tradition, the male principle, indeed, the first male, is implied. The elegance, stillness and grace of the *Yin* figure in its harmonious landscape evokes the order and balance sought by the Western academic, classical tradition, from Greek pediment figures to Poussin. For Wright, it was a belief in order, a fundamental order, and the expression of that order, that was common to both halves of the world, East and West.

Deftly painted, sensuous and esoteric, Wright's *Yin Synchrony* is also independent of any concrete narrative like his earlier *Sword Dance*, or the series of paintings he was about to undertake on Ancient Heroes. Very much unlike the Social Realist and American Scene painting that was soon to dominate American artistic production, Wright's *Yin* is not centered on time, place or event. The artist himself felt a strong personal satisfaction with the painting when he recalled it as "the most purely beautiful nude I have ever painted."⁷

In an unpublished article of 1930, entitled, *Observations: Modernist Art and the American Field*, Macdonald-Wright argued for the importance of the symbolic nature of subject matter in painting. The text,

replete with harsh dismissals of other early moderns and of theories Wright felt could be "easily refuted," is one marked by a familiar stridency in style that only mars an otherwise serious and thoughtful aesthetic:

In looking back over the years, beginning with this century and ending with the war, we feel as though a febrile nightmare has had us for a companion. In looking back over the years from 1918 to now, we feel that cretinism has grasped the thousands of talents which are still occupied with those early problems we imposed upon ourselves. The problems have all been solved! We can disintegrate objectivity with a minimum of effort, in angles, *a la* Léger, or by means of half-stated forms and obnoxious color *a la* Kandinsky. We can extend impressionism over large and facet-like areas in the manner of Delaunay or produce the titillation of light on haystacks as Monet loved to do. After all, *qu'importe tout cela?* None of it has the remotest relation with the creative élan. In the magistral works of Giotto and the Ku K'ai Chih, the delicate and lyrical beauty of a Piero della Francesca or a Persian miniature, we ask for no problem-solutions. We are content to feel a great faith, a great tradition, an intensely creative philosophical impulse of the human psyche. Such petty considerations as local color, straight or curved lines, whether the light falls naturalistically seem too inconsequential for words. When man is subjectively exhausted, he turns his eyes outward. This is the whole criticism of not only modern art, but the explanation of the scientific age as well.⁸

According to Wright, it was America, precisely because it was the most intensely scientific and mechanical country in the world, that had become "exhausted" before the rest of the world. The greatest need was to

"find our souls," a process itself underlying all past and present creativity: "All art is an expression of this searching and finding." While modernist art movements had served to turn attention back to the old masters, modern artists themselves had lost sight of the need for a subject matter that was more than an end in itself. For Wright, the formal construction of an image was the "ordered material body" of art, but not the whole of art by any means. The non-material and spiritual aspect of art manifests itself through the material body, and it was subject matter that could provide the necessary link between the artist's picture and "man's world of subjective experience and aspiration":

We can no longer paint—no matter in what style—a *Girl With a Parrot* or *Lady With a Goldfish*. We demand in a canvas some thought which acts as a dynamo on our own thoughts and stimulates them into rich interlacing patterns of our beliefs, feelings and experiences. Every man of real talent with whom I am acquainted has found a subject matter to inspire him, and in every case it is a subject matter that has a deeper meaning than the mere surface representation would indicate. This, at least, is as it should be.

With the early Renaissance, Christianity was the subject; in Persia, China and India it was the legends of the heroes, secular or religious. Art has always dealt with man's faith, i.e., with the inner man.⁹

At the outset of the 1930s, Wright believed that it was America, more than Europe, that would develop a subject matter that would be ordered and carry an idea for those who would see it. Again, he predicted this because it was America that was then coming to realize the futility of

believing the machine could provide for its spiritual needs. The astute viewer would have wisely to distinguish among the legions of artistic fakers and poseurs to find the genuine thinker. Finally, to facilitate the soul searching of society, artists had to combine genuine craftsmanship with clarity of thought, and "we [society] should digest and emulate the ancient Chinese unwritten law, that of making the artist first a scholar and a man, and then an artist." Here, Wright was clearly referring to himself and the kind of artist he firmly believed himself to be.

Wright's *Observations* of 1930 recapitulate his emphasis on the duality of painting, specifically on the materially well-crafted image, not devoid of subject, that could manifest the spiritual. This text also provides a basis for understanding why Wright so thoroughly rejected the American Scene and Social Realist schools of painting that were to dominate American art in the 1930s. For Wright, views of American farmland or cities or descriptions of workers and factories, however sincerely painted, were limited in aspiration. That is to say, a "search for soul" could not be conducted via images of nationalistic sentiment or interest in the superficial details of political unrest. Subject matter had to now take its cue from tradition, from the Renaissance, Chinese and Persian art, and become nothing short of heroic or profoundly symbolic. It was with this idea in mind that Wright undertook a major project of 1930 to 1931, indeed, a project he would never finish: a series of large-scale paintings of Ancient Heroes.

In the summer of 1930, Macdonald-Wright began what was intended to be a series of eighteen paintings inspired by great historical figures.¹⁰ The number of works in this series was later modified to twelve, but only three are known to have been completed: *Zardusht and His*

Fravashi (fig. 48), *Lao Tzu and Yin Hi* (fig. 49), and *Siddhartha and Nanda* (fig. 50). The latter two canvases depict the Chinese sage and the future Buddha using the same combination of crystalline form combined with vaporous background elements that Wright used in *Yin Synchrony*. Yet, both paintings lack the more satisfying synthesis found in the *Yin* due to the artist's strong narrative emphasis. Lao Tzu (the second figure in this painting, Yin Hi, or Yin Hsi, was the disciple to whom Lao Tzu recited the *Tao Te Ching*) and Siddhartha, spiritual mentors for Macdonald-Wright, are so materially represented as to potentially negate the philosophical abstractions represented by both. The symmetrical and calm seated pose of Lao Tzu and the overt gesture of blessing given by Siddhartha are equally illustrative; Wright cast each into a visual stereotype rather than the archetype he so desired. Deeply obsessed with ideas of oneness and universal truths, Wright's saturation in Oriental thought nonetheless resulted here in perfunctory representations. So important was subject matter to Wright at this juncture that his zeal for the heroic caused him to focus only on the depiction of these historic figures themselves, and not any concept of the heroic. Just how much Wright identified with these great prophet/scholars is evidenced by the third of these paintings, *Zardusht and his Fravashi*.

Zardusht is Zoroaster (alternately called Zarathustra), the sixth-century Persian who founded the small but influential religion of Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster, a social critic and reformer, preached a theological dualism as an aspect of his cosmology, i.e., that the world was split between the force of good and the force of evil. For Zoroaster, god (Ahura Mazda) was all-powerful and just, and would help man in the struggle against evil, but god held all men responsible for their own acts.

It was the responsibility of man to participate in the struggle, and man would ultimately be judged by his acts. That Macdonald-Wright identified with the idea of individual responsibility and participation, and with Zoroaster's own attempt to lead a life of perfection by thought, word and deed, is suggested by the fact that Wright used himself as the model for Zoroaster, and for the Fravashi.¹¹ In the mythology of Persia, the Fravashis were among the good genii believed to inhabit all nature. Their special designation was as guardian angels and were a part of the soul. Macdonald-Wright created, in effect, a portrait of the artist as prophet and seer, as one who saw further and was only persecuted for it, and who would ultimately be martyred (Zoroaster, according to legend, was assassinated by a Turanian). The only comfort and protection for the prophet (the artist) is his Fravashi (also the artist).

At the risk of overstating the significance of this double self-portrait, the painting functions as an accurate autobiographical statement: Wright believed himself to be something of a prophet, as one gifted with greater vision and possessed of a greater truth, and as one fated to be understood only by his shadow-half, that is, his Fravashi.

Ever since his student years, Macdonald-Wright nurtured a disdain for any art he felt merely posed as such, and for any aspirations that were less than the most intellectually challenging. In 1930, at the age of forty, his former brash self-confidence was metamorphosing into a narrow intolerance. Genuinely moved by the humility of a Siddhartha and by the idea of simple truths, Wright increasingly failed to identify with simple truths around him, let alone with humility. Throughout the decade and beyond, Wright rarely admitted that any good painting was being done anywhere in the world, yet still sought acclaim from the same public that

routinely hailed false prophets. Extremely critical of the desires of others, he disowned the desire within himself. Recognition of this aspect of Wright's personality is necessary to understanding his brand of social and political absolutism throughout the decade.

In January of 1931, Wright's old friend and co-founder of Synchronism, Morgan Russell, was at last able to come to California from France. Whether or not Russell himself thought of the trip to Los Angeles as an attempt at relocation is not certain, though it is certain that Wright had long anticipated a visit from Russell. He wrote in 1930: "Yesterday was my 40th birthday and more and more I feel the need of escaping human beings in the aggregate and settling down among maybe three or four friends, among whom, you, *mon vieux*, head the list *et comment...*"¹² In that same letter, Wright also lamented the current economic catastrophe, citing it as unlike any hard times they had ever experienced before. Once in California, Wright and Russell, perhaps invigorated by what was certainly a raucous reunion, undertook an ambitious schedule of exhibitions in addition to teaching and lecturing schedules.

The first of Russell and Wright's joint California exhibitions took place in November of 1931 at the Legion of Honor in San Francisco. Though no catalogue exists for this show, it is reasonable to assume that a great many, if not all, of the paintings displayed were the same ones shown just two months later in Los Angeles in January of 1932, for which a catalogue does exist. While Russell showed a mix of Synchronisms, landscapes, bathers and still life, virtually all of Wright's paintings at the Legion of Honor were linked together by his new Orientalizing style and subject matter.

It was in San Francisco that Wright received the first of a number of unsympathetic reviews to his new work: "Brilliant color and meticulous execution, to say nothing of second-hand Orientalism, do not necessarily make for great painting and fine technical skill, or at least so we have always been led to believe, may be a means to, but is scarcely in itself the ultimate end of art."¹³ This unknown critic reacted against the perceived illustrative character of the three paintings in the ancient heroes series, writing further that "it is in an illustrated book that they really belong."

Alternately, Wright received positive response in the press: "These are sound paintings, beautifully drawn in beautiful and harmonious colors. They tickle the emotions, they delight the eye, they are unique."¹⁴ Of special note to this critic were the nudes in the exhibition, *Dawn, Night*, and the *Yin Synchrony*. For Wright, however, admiration of his skill in drawing was not sufficient to offset disappointment that none of the critics reviewing his new work seemed to recognize his formal and conceptual attempts at the unification of Eastern and Western art and philosophy.

Wright and Russell's joint exhibition opened in Los Angeles on 4 January 1932 at the New Stendahl Art Galleries. Local reception in the press was uniformly positive, although, as in San Francisco, regional criticism was light on insight and largely confined to free-form (i.e., noncontextualized, ahistorical and criterionless) opinion. For example, local writer Rob Wagner observed the following on the Stendahl show:

Well, Macdonald-Wright has evidently decided to lay low on theory and get out and paint pictures, for he is exhibiting as gorgeous a bunch of canvases at Stendahl's as ever came to town. The draughtsmanship is marvelous, the color rich and luminous, and the compositions rhythmic and beautiful. Even though one

did not know the symbolic meaning of the subject matter, the pictures would ravish the eye, just as a great symphony, although one knows nothing of the composer's intellectual message, will still ravish the ear.¹⁵

With like hyperbole, Los Angeles *Times* critic Arthur Millier hailed Wright and Russell as "two of the most important living American artists."¹⁶ In glowing terms, Millier praised the two artists, their past accomplishments, and their new work. Millier was also the first critic, perhaps primed via conversations with Wright himself, to comment on Wright's aesthetic synthesis: "Wright seems to be working almost out of time. He seems neither modern nor ancient. He is trying a new thing. East and West have been fused often before and perhaps it is happening anew here." Still, Millier failed to discuss in specific ways what that fusion might mean to a viewer, let alone in the context of regional or American art.

Anticipating the need to explain his new direction, and never one content to allow the press to be the sole arbiter of his work, Wright planned a series of lectures to accompany the Stendahl show. Wright delivered two talks: "Art Forms" and "Art Evolution," and Russell spoke on "Ancient and Modern Art" and "Latin versus Nordic Races in the Plastic Arts."¹⁷ While no written record of these lectures has surfaced, the topic of evolution in the arts was an idea Wright, with the help of brother Willard, had been promoting since the advent of Synchronism and one he had emphasized throughout the 1920s. The idea that art represented a continual struggle toward a higher state of awareness explained not only modern art, but, for Wright, his latest move toward synthesizing East and West.

The show at Stendahl's moved yet again, this time to the Los Angeles Museum of Art at Exposition Park, where it opened in February. In a statement prepared for the Exposition Park show (written in the third person), Wright emphasized the importance he attached to his blending of East and West: "Being interested in genuine art expression, he naturally wished to reside where European trends were only a distant echo and the academic tendencies of Italian classicism were mixed with a new impetus coming from the Orient. He feels that in 1928 he really struck his stride and began to produce his mature work."¹⁸ Wright again lectured, and again laudatory (and again mostly shallow) commentary appeared in local papers.¹⁹ Wright felt the general significance of his work was not understood, and, until it was, it could have no real influence, nor could he receive any meaningful recognition. Since 1929, when he was fully immersed in his new work, Wright had planned (as he told Merle Armitage) to exhibit in New York and he now planned in earnest to take his and Russell's Exposition Park show there. Certainly, increased exposure always increased the chances for sales (nothing sold in either San Francisco or Los Angeles), but it was more the possibility that he could receive some intelligent critical notice that motivated Wright at this juncture. And, the logical place for him to exhibit in New York was with Alfred Stieglitz, who had a new gallery called "An American Place," and with whom Wright had maintained a steady correspondence throughout the 1920s.

At the same time that Stanton began making preparations with Stieglitz for an exhibition, serious disruptions were taking place in his personal life. At the age of forty-two he was going through, in his words, "menopause," or "the possession that fixes itself on sensitive men around

the age of forty or forty-two."²⁰ In popular terminology of the late twentieth century, this phenomenon, real or imagined, would be called a "mid-life crisis." A number of factors no doubt influenced the feelings of restlessness and urgency which gripped Wright in 1932: he had yet to gain the stature he felt he deserved in American art, he and Morgan jointly were unable to move forward with the light machine project which had so inspired both of them through the 1920s, and time was running out for those and all other projects. Wright's artistic frustrations were further complicated by an undiagnosed and chronic gastro-intestinal problem that often made him sick enough to predict his own death. Most emotionally upsetting to the artist was a divorce from his wife, Jeanne.²¹ The divorce stemmed, at least in part, from what is today considered the prototypical symptom of the male mid-life crisis—an extramarital affair. Wright's affair was with a young actress (eighteen years his junior) named Riza Royce.

Macdonald-Wright met Royce sometime in the late 1920s, when Royce was still the wife of Hollywood producer Josef von Sternberg (1894-1969), who knew Stanton and had purchased one of his still-lives.²² In the year von Sternberg made his best-known film with Marlene Dietrich, *The Blue Angel* (1930), Royce divorced him, and escalated her affair with Wright. The relationship with Royce was sufficiently serious and prolonged to induce Wright to move and live with Royce in New York.²³ Looking back on this period of his life, Wright knew he was in the throes of destructive behavior, noting that he "winked at myself as one who stands aside and sees another making a fool of himself."²⁴

Having decided to move to New York to live with Riza, Macdonald-Wright held his last night of teaching at the Art Students

League on 3 May 1932. As student Mabel Alvarez recorded it at the time, "Everyone, including men, were affected."²⁵ Morgan Russell was still in Los Angeles, though he remained only until August. His sojourn in Southern California and his reunion with Stanton, though resulting in ample exhibition opportunity, did not persuade him to permanently relocate. The severity of the Depression in California was such that Russell was no better off financially than he had been in France.

Once in New York with Royce, Stanton's personal demons did not abate. He found the city as repulsive as he had years earlier. As his relationship with Royce continually deteriorated, Stanton focused attention on a book project that he had started in Los Angeles. The result was the unpublished manuscript, entitled *A Basis of Culture*.²⁶ Completion of the book offered no solace to his troubled mind, nor did socializing with old New York acquaintances. He painted little and without the inspiration he had felt in California. However, despite all the personal problems affecting him, Wright had successfully arranged for a show with Stieglitz at An American Place. The show opened on 3 October 1932.

The brochure for Macdonald-Wright's American Place exhibition lists thirteen works, the same thirteen shown at Stendahl's the previous January, less one still-life.²⁷ The following is the complete statement Stanton wrote for that show:

An American Culture, like every historical culture must have the acculturative traits of the cultures it has contacted. Differences in cultures are produced by the patterns the qualitative racial temperament assembles. Every culture conceives reality as bipartite—as phenomena and noumena. To me, reality exists

within—hence my lack of interest in the topical. Art is both a method of expressing the fundamental desiderata of all mankind and of avoiding the immediacies of transient "idle excitements." Subject matter is valuable only as a symbol of the content—the content is the author—and the author can only express one thing—himself. In these works the "esthetic apperception," so necessary to the construction of the modernist intellectualism has given first place to direct absorption in subject matter. Finding myself divested of theories in a theoretical era, it is with a certain tentative humility that I submit the works to the public.²⁸

In this short statement, Wright concisely identified both his core beliefs of the time and the justification for his subject matter. Wright, consciously drawing on a variety of philosophical traditions (and, as will be discussed, psychological theories), defined reality as being perceived in two ways simultaneously, through things seen and felt (phenomena) and through knowledge arrived at only through the mind (noumena, a Kantian term). In short, any experience of life is based on the duality of material and immaterial. The mixture of both phenomena and noumena occurs only in the mind, thus "reality exists within." An "American Culture," merely a subset of reality, possesses the traits of cultures it has contacted, including, but not limited to, aspects of the Orient. The experience of other cultures and types of knowledge through noumena is part of the artist's reality, and, along with nature, is symbolized in the subject matter. Wright truly believed his work no longer to be "theoretical," but rather the outward manifestation of his own inner life and spiritual aspirations.

Finally, art functions to express the "desiderata [needs and wants] of all mankind," and is the method by which one may avoid "idle excitements." This observation was all too autobiographical: Wright wished at the time to find his way back to the creative life he had somehow suddenly abdicated, and to rid himself of his then-current "idle excitements" which included New York City and Riza Royce. Art, he believed, would save him.

Macdonald-Wright's emotional and spiritual malaise while in New York could not possibly have been assuaged by the critical reception to his American Place exhibition, though it is entirely possible the unsatisfactory reviews may have served as a catalyst for his return to California. One critic, citing Wright's claim that "reality exists within," asked his readership: "Now, really, don't you think that's going some?"²⁹ This same critic felt the Ancient Heroes series to be devoid of emotional content:

The amount of energy that has been spent upon these canvases is formidable, and it is a pity that the returns from it are so meager. Mr. Wright's colors are assembled intellectually and are therefore not color at all, and his Chinese saints and heroes put together patiently during months of labor are so separated from the emotions that they cannot arouse them in spectators.³⁰

Another otherwise positive notice by Edward Alden Jewell in the *New York Times*, one praising Wright's remarkable color and composition, nonetheless was marred (for Wright) by reporting that "subject matter here is manifestly not the important thing, even could the subject be explained. As decorative documents, the paintings are often

startlingly effective."³¹ Jewell also found Wright's gallery notes baffling and useless.

Unfortunately, the most favorable notice Wright's show received was printed in the *Chicago Post*, where the paintings were not available for viewing. Still, Rose Mary Fisk's observations serve as evidence that critical reaction was not unanimously negative, and that the expression of an East/West synthesis (as opposed to "Oriental influence") was sensed by at least one person (and, therefore perhaps more):

The paintings are an amazing mingling of daring, highly accomplished color and raffine line, of immersion in Oriental philosophy and reaction to the California landscape, of flat masses of boldly juxtaposed singing color and suave, finished drawing of flowers, bits of Chinese porcelain, and, eyebrows....Throughout, even in the more straightforward portrait of S.M.W., in the still life with red apples and red pomegranates against a red table, the baffling mingling of Oriental detail, modernist color and an almost pre-Raphaelite sweetness of line persists.³²

Interestingly, Fisk was also the only critic to remark that Wright, as part of the earlier Stieglitz group at 291, was an artist who "helped to introduce modern ideals to the American consciousness," an historical anecdote either forgotten by the New York writers, or worse, simply ignored.

There is no documentary evidence to suggest that this exhibition was given serious consideration by other artists at the time. There is no evidence of any sales from the show. Abstaining from social realism, American Scene painting, or abstraction, Wright's 1932 debut of his new style was more than an anomaly on the New York scene—it was an

anomaly within the context of American painting of the decade. Any hope that Wright had entertained of finding both a sympathetic and understanding audience on the East Coast for his work was effectively quelled. Indeed, if it were not for the continued broadmindedness of Alfred Stieglitz, Wright may not have had a show at all in New York in 1932, a fact not lost on the artist. Later, in 1938, Stanton summarized his respect and admiration for Stieglitz in a personal letter to the dealer:

.....never forget, dear old Stieglitz, that I have never ceased feeling that you were, are and will be directly and indirectly responsible for what element of success and encouragement that the younger men of the century have received. I shall always hold you in both esteem and affection and it fills me with warmth toward you and what you have stood for, merely to write it to you.³³

Stanton recalled his brief New York sojourn as "a period of insanity." He left Riza in New York, and the extraordinarily comfortable accommodations she provided, sometime shortly after the close of the American Place exhibition. He was back in Santa Monica in January of 1933, and reunited with his ex-wife, Jeanne, whom he re-married the following summer. In January, Wright was, ironically, heading back to New York for a brief trip to negotiate the publication (which never occurred) of the text he wrote while living with Riza, *A Basis of Culture*. He then spoke to the press at length about the book and the state of the art world, taking the opportunity to reaffirm his devotion to higher ideals in art (the artist, he said, writes for posterity "not only his individual reactions to life, but the consuming faith and the ever living aspirations of his race and era"), and, not surprisingly, to dismiss European art and rebuke the function of art critics:

Europe is psychically bankrupt. America is the only country in which exists the hope for the development of a new and significant art. From a maelstrom of commercialism unparalleled in the history of mankind, Hollywood may conceivably emerge as the Byzantium of a new culture, the center of a new art, which in its ultimate expression may resemble, but not imitate, something of the motif and hand of the Orient. Art criticism, regardless of the sincerity of the intent, is at best but a relatively futile gesture—an effort necessarily aborted by the inherent inability of one person to assume, in their entirety, the ideals of another.³⁴

Wright's anger with critics, not uncommon in artists, was, as it had been in the 1920s and in the teens, symptomatic of his ongoing and larger frustration at not being recognized as a leading creative spirit. His periodic diatribes against European art and those Americans who would imitate it were part of the same frustration. Yet, Macdonald-Wright's exasperation with the art world at large cannot be understood as simply the result of an overly demanding ego or a superiority complex. All of Stanton's writing, personal and otherwise, all of his lectures and the bulk of his artwork (so he felt), were linked by a genuine desire to unify himself with the fundamental order he believed permeated all things. Art that aspired to anything less was not art. In the same article quoted above, Wright talked about the role of the artist:

Believing himself [the artist] to be practicing his trade, exercising his taste or reveling in that which was his dearest pleasure, he was singing of the forgotten lands of his inter-mixed bloods a song whose rhythm and melody were part of his very fiber; not a spontaneous song, but one built up in the secret chambers of

his mind for thousands of years and to which his patrons have written the words.³⁵

Stating further that all religions were necessarily linked to art, Wright described religion as unconscious strivings to solve man's oldest problem and, while he did not define "man's oldest problem" in this article, one might assume it to be the answer to the purpose and meaning of existence. Wright's observations here reveal in a general way a knowledge of the psychological theory of archetypes and the role of symbols and ritual in revealing those archetypes. A passionate devotee of psychology who read voraciously in the field at this time, Wright had found something of an intellectual ally in Carl Jung (1875-1961) at this time. Jungian notions of the existence of archetypes as being actually part of the mind itself (in Wright's words, "built up in the secret chambers of his mind for thousands of years") and of the mediating function of symbols between the conscious and unconscious were known to Wright and assimilated with his already extant dualist view of reality.

THE INFLUENCE OF JUNGIAN PSYCHOLOGY

In the summer of 1954, Macdonald-Wright taught a class which, in his words, "consisted of lectures on world-wide iconography based on Jung's archetypes."³⁶ His broad knowledge of archetypes at that time was predicated upon an interest in Jungian psychology dating back over two decades.

Included among Jung's works in English available to Wright prior to 1933 are *Collected Papers on Analytical Psychology*, 1916; *Psychology of*

the Unconscious, 1916; *Psychological Types*, 1923; and *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, 1928. The significance of Jungian psychology for Wright is such that a much larger and independent study is required, though mention must be made here of the more critical correspondences.

First and foremost is the theory of the archetype, an idea necessarily linked to Jung's theory of the collective unconscious. For Jung, archetypes were patterns of psychic perception common to all human beings. This idea had great appeal to Wright, who had long believed that in the realm of fundamental rhythms and colors, their meaning was universal. Though an archetype is not to be confused with a common image, being distinct from the actual symbols and images themselves, the idea that human beings shared individual and collective psychic experience is consistent with the aesthetic premises upon which Synchronism had been based and upon which Wright had been building since 1913.

Defining the archetype in *Psychological Types*, Jung wrote that "the archetype would be—to borrow from Kant—the noumenon of the image which intuition perceives, and, in perceiving, creates."³⁷ Compare this language with Wright's brief introductory statement to his American Place exhibit: "Every culture conceives reality as bipartite—as phenomena and noumena." The use of the word "noumena" here could be seen as coincidental and unrelated to Jung, except that in Wright's statement he also uses the term "apperception," a term used by Wright precisely as specifically defined in Jung's *Psychological Types*: "Apperception is a psychic process by which a new content is articulated to similar already-existing contents in such a way as to be understood, apprehended, or clear."³⁸

Further, Wright wrote of his art as symbols; for him, symbols expressed a content, which was the author himself, i.e., his inner reality. Jung, of course, wrote at length of symbols and their connection with religions, art and mythological heroes (the very subject matter of the Ancient Heroes series). Regarding the individual who created symbols, he wrote: "The living symbol cannot come to birth in an inert or poorly-developed mind, for such a man will rest content with the already existing symbols offered by established tradition. Only the passionate yearning of a highly developed mind, for whom the dictated symbol no longer contains the highest reconciliation in one expression, can create a new symbol." Macdonald-Wright believed himself to be possessed of just such a mind.

Another of Jung's unique contribution to psychology was his identification of the anima/animus as an archetype. The unconscious feminine aspect of the male personality he called the "anima," and the unconscious male aspect of the female personality he called the "animus." Thus, in every male is an element of female, and vice-versa. This duality, or what might be termed bi-sexuality, of each individual personality has a definite yin/yang connotation. Indeed, it was Jung himself who discussed the equation of anima/animus with the yin/yang in a work undoubtedly known to Wright, the 1931 translation of the Chinese classic, *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*.³⁹

The Secret of the Golden Flower (or, the *T'ai I Chin Hua Tsung Chih*) is a collection of Taoist wisdom attributed to Kuan Yin-hsi (the very figure Wright included in his Ancient Heroes series),⁴⁰ for whom, according to legend, Lao Tzu wrote down the *Tao Te Ching*. In the text, explained and translated by Richard Wilhelm, the terms for the psychic polarities deriving from yin and yang are actually translated as anima and

animus. As Wilhelm explained, "*animus (hun)* is the light, *yang-soul*, while *anima (p'o)* is the dark, *yin-soul*."⁴¹ In an extensive commentary included in this book, Jung expressed his approval for these translations.

Indeed, the aim of Jung's commentary on the *Secret of the Golden Flower* was, in his words, an "effort to build a bridge of psychological understanding between East and West....Therefore it seemed above all important to me to emphasize the agreement between the psychic conditions and the symbolism of East and West, because, by means of these analogies, there is opened a way to the inner chambers of the Eastern mind."⁴² Jung described how Eastern wisdom has been for so long misunderstood by the West and dismissed as faith or superstition, and yet "the wisdom of the East is based on practical knowledge coming from the flower of Chinese intelligence, which we have not the slightest justification for undervaluing."⁴³ The Western emphasis on science had obscured our ability to see other ways of comprehending.

However, Jung maintained that scientific method was the "main support of the European mind," and must not be undermined in the attempt to understand the East. If understood as a tool rather than an end in itself, scientific method could help bridge the gap between East and West, and support the struggle toward a higher state of consciousness that was really common to both cultures. In this quest for greater understanding, Jung made it clear that the Chinese are far ahead of the West, but that simple imitation of Chinese traditions will not work for the Western man:

It is not for us to imitate what is organically foreign, or worse still, to send out missionaries to foreign peoples; it is our task to build up our own Western culture, which sickens with a thousand

ills. This has to be done on the spot, and into the work must be drawn the real European as he is in his western commonplaceness, with his marriage problems, his neuroses, his social and political illusions, and his whole philosophical disorientation.

We should do well to confess at once, that, fundamentally speaking, we do not understand the utter unworldliness of a text like this [*The Secret...*], indeed, that we do not want to understand it. Have we, perhaps, an inkling that a mental attitude which can direct the glance inward to that extent owes its detachment from the world to the fact that those men have so completely fulfilled the instinctive demands of their natures that little or nothing prevents them from perceiving the invisible essence of the world?⁴⁴

Though the West had largely missed the practical significance of works like the *I Ching* and would benefit immensely from its applications, this learning process had to be undertaken from the West: "Only by standing firmly on our own soil can we assimilate the spirit of the East."⁴⁵ Disowning one culture for another was not an answer. This attitude, arrived at independently and from his own experience, was central to Macdonald-Wright's point of view. Jung provided a psychological analysis, replete with praise for the Orient and its philosophies, that justified and seconded most of Wright's artistic and personal ambitions.

Wright's awareness of Jungian psychology is evidenced not only in his gallery statements and remarks to the press, but also in his personal letters and his diaries. In 1933, Jung published his important work (available then in English), *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, a title which echoed Wright's 1930 assessment that we needed to "find our souls." Therein, Jung surveys dream analysis, his theory of types, the stages of life,

archaic man and takes an entire chapter to describe the "modern spiritual problem." In that chapter, the complexities of Jung's thought (dangerously generalized in this text) were brought to bear on the problem of modern man's psychic distress, and he concluded that modern man, as opposed to previous generations, is aware of the reality of the psychic life: "Psychic life always [in previous cultures] found expression in a metaphysical system of some sort. But the conscious, modern man, despite his strenuous and dogged efforts to do so, can no longer refrain from acknowledging the might of psychic forces....which cannot, for the present at least, be fitted in with our rational world-order." Jung continued:

The revolution in our conscious outlook, brought about by the catastrophic results of the World War, shows itself in our inner life by the shattering of our faith in ourselves and our own worth. We used to regard foreigners—the other side—as political and moral reprobates; but the modern man is forced to recognize that he is politically and morally just like anyone else. Whereas I formerly believed it to be my bounden duty to call other persons to order, I now admit that I need calling to order myself.⁴⁶

Early in 1934, Stanton wrote to Morgan Russell, strongly echoing Jung and the themes of *Modern Man in Search of Soul*, including materialism, pessimism and the need for inner equilibrium:

My real desire is not for art or for a social life, but for peace within, and all these monetary and social battles are in a cause in which I don't believe. Art ceases to have an importance to me that moment it ceases to bring me peace or satisfaction. I cannot consider it as a means to bring me money as this is the least of my

troubles and has never brought me surcease from worries and desires. More and more I wish to get away from the false person in me I have built up all my life and try to evoke from out the clouds of my illusion the real soul with which I was born. But there seems to be no chance of my ever doing this, I am chained more and more to the wheel of a hideous momentum that bears me deeper and deeper into the mocking night of a more stupid existence.⁴⁷

Familiar with Jungian concepts, and motivated by his own life-long interest in myth, the mind and spirituality, Wright shortly undertook the single largest artistic project of his life, a mural designed to illuminate the two streams of consciousness in man (one unconscious and imaginative, the other conscious and mechanical) and the future of their unification.

THE SANTA MONICA LIBRARY MURALS

In 1932, the Depression proved itself to be a deepening problem, despite President Herbert Hoover's hope that it was a temporary one. It was clear that relief in the form of private charities was insufficient to address the increasingly desperate unemployment situation nationwide. Newly-elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed the crisis with a wide range of programs designed to put the country back to work. Created with the aid of his "Brain Trust" of advisors, these programs constituted Roosevelt's New Deal, and became known as the "alphabet soup" of government agencies. Among the agencies created were the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA), and the Civil Works Administration (CWA). The FERA, established in May of 1933 at a time

when some fourteen million Americans (about one fourth of the work force) were out of work, was authorized to give immediate grants to states for relief projects.

President Roosevelt was sympathetic to petitions made on behalf of the needs of artists, and in December of 1933 a six-month program called the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), financed under the CWA, was established.⁴⁸ Organized into sixteen regional divisions, each manned by museum administrators and volunteers, PWAP was directed nationally by Edward Bruce. One of the program's objectives was to employ artists to decorate nonfederal public buildings and parks. It was under the auspices of the PWAP that Stanton Macdonald-Wright painted his Santa Monica Library Murals.

Merle Armitage, local art impresario and friend of Macdonald-Wright, was appointed regional director for the PWAP in Southern California. Within one month of its establishment, one hundred and six artists were put to work for PWAP in the region extending from San Diego north to San Louis Obispo. It was Stanton's own idea to execute murals for the Santa Monica Public Library, and he may have proposed it directly to Armitage. Whatever administrative route the mural proposal initially took, the idea was advanced before an open meeting at the Santa Monica city hall on January 24, 1934.⁴⁹

At this meeting, Mayor William H. Carter and Merle Armitage as well as numerous interested citizens registered overwhelming support for the mural project. Among the advocates were muralist Hugo Ballin (who would also work on PWAP) and art patron Joseph Lippman. In what was described as "a burst of spontaneous enthusiasm generated by the prospect of obtaining a mural of outstanding importance for this city,"⁵⁰ \$968.50

was raised that afternoon to defray the costs of materials needed for the project. Wright himself addressed the meeting, taking the opportunity to explain that the purpose of his proposed mural was "not to show Fulton's first trip up the Hudson, or to create a picture gallery in which future residents of Santa Monica may recognize their ancestors, but to create a work that will have a meaning for people from every country of the globe."⁵¹ He then described to them his subject matter, which was nothing less than the intellectual and spiritual development of humankind. Significantly, he also volunteered to work for free in order to allow support personnel to be funded by PWAP.

The murals, conceived by Wright in his typically ambitious fashion, would be designed to depict the two streams of development in the history of our species; one technological, emphasizing achievements in science and engineering, and the other imaginative, focusing on religion, art and literature. These two aspects of human aspiration would merge, Wright explained, in the medium of the motion picture: "In its essentials, the artist pointed out, the motion picture couples the highest development of the imagination with the great technical progress which the race has made to achieve a new form of expression."⁵²

In its conception, and, indeed, in the manner in which Wright discussed the project then and later, the library murals echoed Jungian ideas. Most of these ideas, it must be stressed, were comparable with Jungian theory and not necessarily derivative. The intellectually supportive role played by Jung, however, is important to understanding Wright's intentions. Technological/imaginative duality as the mural theme, for example, recalls one of Jung's conclusions in his commentary for the *Secret of the Golden Flower*: "Western consciousness is by no

means consciousness in general, but rather a historically conditioned, and geographically limited, factor, representative of only one part of humanity. The widening of our own consciousness ought not to proceed at the expense of other kinds of consciousness...just as the East cannot do without our technique, science and industry."⁵³

The very physical structure of the mural, with technology opposed to imagination on separate walls, can be understood as a dialogue between the rational conscious and the spiritual unconscious (as we shall see, Wright himself discussed the mural in terms similar to this). The merging of these two strains of psychic activity at the end of the mural can likewise be understood as the attainment of a higher, and healthier, state of awareness that is necessarily more complete and whole than either strain by itself. Psychic wholeness is the desired mental state in Jungian psychology, attainable only through a dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious. When Macdonald-Wright sent an open letter of appreciation to Mayor Carter thanking him for the support of the city, he wrote: "Perhaps we have unknowingly become the children of a new era; perhaps the hand of some rhythmical destiny has moved us all to envision a wider psychic realm..."⁵⁴

That Macdonald-Wright was deeply and directly, as well as independently, involved in the study of psychology is best evidenced by the fact that he wrote two wide-ranging essays on the subject of consciousness in 1934, at the very time he was working on the library murals: "The Mechanism of Consciousness and the Ideal" and "Art and the Topical," both unpublished.⁵⁵ These essays reveal that Macdonald-Wright was by no means a Jungian *per se*, and that he had certain definite ideas contrary to those of the well-known psychologist. It is nonetheless

profitable to see Jungian ideas as one aspect, and a very important one, of the vigorous intellectual eclecticism characteristic of Macdonald-Wright, and which the artist used to conceive the library murals.

The subject matter of the murals is described by Macdonald-Wright in a catalogue printed to both commemorate and explain the project:

The subject matter may be described as depicting the two streams of human development: one technical, the other imaginative. They coalesce and fuse in what perhaps holds the greatest potentialities for art expression invented by man—the medium of the moving picture. Those who have been in a moving picture stage and laboratory during the filming of a picture know what a great role the inventions along the lines of precision machinery, chemistry, and electricity, play in the process.⁵⁶

Wright planned the mural so that when one entered the library through the main entrance, the first images seen (directly across from the entrance) comprised the *Prologue*, which depicted the ancient impulses toward both technology and imagination. The *Prologue*, as originally installed in the Library, established movement in two opposing directions: to the left, primitive man was shown inventing the wheel (in Wright's words, "the first epoch making invention of mankind"), while other primitives were shown attempting to subdue a great sea monster symbolizing the forces of Nature (fig. 51). This scene established movement through the mural sections describing technological achievement. To the right, a scene of another group of prehistoric people depicted a primitive artist carving a reindeer horn, while another figure cowered before images of monsters in the sky, symbolizing belief in deities (fig. 52). This scene established movement through mural sections

describing the creative and imaginative history of mankind. Above both of these scenes at the start of the mural proper was a lunette (designed to fit existing architecture, as was the entire mural) depicting the meeting of ships at sea and caravans on land, intended to symbolize the wide dissemination of knowledge. Here, Wright included Mongol, Chinese, Persian, and Egyptian figures.

Moving left away from the *Prologue*, in the direction of technological development, Wright depicted ancient philosophers in whom the Western intellectual tradition is grounded: Aristotle, Socrates, Alexander and Zeno (the stoic). Not only did these figures represent the pure intellect that formed the basis for abstract mathematics, but they also represented "Occidental man's necessity of giving himself *rational* answers to *irrational* questions."⁵⁷ Continuing on, the subject of the next panel was the Roman aqueduct at Nimes, France, as an example of the progress and magnificent feats of technological thinking.

In subsequent panels, Wright depicted some of the great men of science (and, in his catalogue, pointed out their achievement); Roger Bacon, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, William Herschel, Michael Faraday and Clerk Maxwell. Also represented are a modern city, a coal miner, a steel worker, a modern motor, an airplane, and two huge heroic figures representing the positive and negative currents of electricity.

Moving toward the right, away from the *Prologue*, away from the prehistoric artist carving, two ancient Oriental deities appeared; the eagle god of the Assyrians and Siva the Creator and Destroyer. Noting that because "most of our imaginative design and our faiths have come to us from the East," Wright positioned Confucius, the Buddha and Lao Tzu next after the gods. Again, Wright identified in the mural catalogue the

contributions of the historical figures represented. Of Lao Tzu, he wrote that his book the *Tao Te Ching*, "remains one of the profoundest works of the human mind."

Continuing to the right, Wright depicted a panel of legends, including the Fox Spirit, the Chinese Dragon ("...whose varied attributes are too manifold for so short a description..."), Europa and the Bull, Pegasus, the nymph and Satyr, and ghost fires rising from a steaming ravine. In the next panel was the Royal Mosque at Isfahan, followed by a pastoral scene with the figure of Boccaccio. The next panel featured Michelangelo carving his Slave, and also represented the great poet, Dante, descending the stairs of an Italian villa. Behind the figure of Dante were represented two contemporary citizens, Mr. Harry H. Gorham and Mr. Robert P. Jones, nephews of Senator Jones, the founder of Santa Monica.⁵⁸

Following after Dante came the composers Bach, Beethoven and Wagner. The next panel depicted a fantasy of the Rhine operas of Wagner, complete with Rhine maidens. Macdonald-Wright's father, Archibald Wright, was represented on the next panel as both a young man of nineteen and as a painter at an easel (the entire mural was dedicated both to Archibald Wright and the City of Santa Monica). On another slim panel appeared a figure of a dancer on stage, followed by a panel of famous musical virtuosos including Karl Muck, then conductor of the Boston Symphony.

Both sides of the mural came together at the entrance to the Library in a large panel depicting the shooting of a motion picture (fig. 53). Actress Gloria Stuart, a native of Santa Monica, was the central portrait. Above the arch over the front door, two final figures served to represent the dual

impulses of the imaginative and the technological: Edgar Allen Poe, and Dr. Lee H. De Forest, inventor of the audion amplifier and a pioneer in talking motion pictures, whose studio was then in Hollywood. Wright provided the essential meaning of this odd coupling at the mural's end: "The artist in bringing these two men together has attempted to indicate the technical necessity felt by the imaginative artist and the imagination necessary to the profound technician." Nowhere, Wright felt, could the complementary talents of artist and technician (who contain within themselves aspects of their opposite) be more effectively joined than in the medium of film.

Macdonald-Wright labored on the library murals for eighteen months without compensation. When it was done, he had painted over one hundred sixty figures, including forty-six portraits, and had covered approximately two thousand square feet. Wright painted the entire mural himself, though he did have two technical assistants funded by the PWAP. These assistants helped cut, dowel and prepare the white pine sections that form the support for the variously-sized mural panels. Wright was fully aware that the Library wouldn't last forever, and made certain his mural at least stood a chance of preservation.⁵⁹ In these murals, the artist summarized his attitude toward technology, tradition, religion, and especially his own eclectic philosophy. In the process, he also managed to include a number of references (some veiled) to a number of other issues, both personal and aesthetic, some of which will be considered here.

The basic premise of the mural is that neither art nor technology could or should contain the whole of human experience. Even once unified, art and technology could not reveal fundamental mysteries of the universe. However, the unification of the dual impulses of man would

more closely mirror the forces of nature. The results of this unification would be greater harmony and greater awareness on the part of individuals and societies. Implicit in the creation of the mural was the idea that society in general (and Santa Monica in particular) could benefit from knowing the sources of its belief; its gods and great thinkers of the past, heroes and scientists alike. As an advocate of expanded awareness, of pluralism and of the potential for beneficial change through alternative ways of thinking (and therefore, acting), Macdonald-Wright pre-figured holistic religious and political movements of the 1980s and 1990s by several generations.

Wright's attitude toward technology was essentially what it had been in 1919 when he wrote *The Influence of Aviation on Art*, that is, machines could benefit humanity by showing graphically the interrelatedness of things (indeed, in a nod backward to his article and his own *Aeroplane Synchrony* of 1920, a plane appears in this mural). The great figures of science he represented as heroes, as individuals who went beyond the conventional wisdom of their times. It would be futile to assume, however, that science could know the ultimate mysteries. This is made clear in the *Prologue* panel of the mural, where two prehistoric men attack a Makara, symbolizing the blind forces of Nature. In Vedic mythology, a Makara is a sea monster ridden by Varuna, a god of universal power. It is Varuna, along with the god Mitra, that maintains universal order. Their power is magical and absolute. For man to attempt to control the Makara, as they do here, is futile. One figure shoots at the Makara with a bow and arrow, while another throws a noose.⁶⁰

At the same time Wright commented here on the limitations of science, as well as its courage and determination, he subtly critiqued the

most popular form of painting then current—the American Scene. The likeness of the prehistoric man throwing the lariat was that of Thomas Hart Benton.⁶¹ Wright's intentions here are multiple. He is complementing Benton's personal heroism (acknowledgement of Benton's fight for a kind of art he believed in), and yet Wright equates Benton's pursuit with science—noble and useful, but inherently limited. The problems with topical art were considered at length by Wright in his 1934 unpublished article, "Art and the Topical":

It will some day become evident to the Topicalists that not subject matter, which is only a symbol when not a fake, but *content* is the expressive, the psychically significant element for consideration. This content can never be anything but contemporaneous; the fact that many men feed themselves on what one might call the past does not mean that they are not of the present day. All the motivations they receive from past arts are transliterated in the process of admiration into contemporaneous considerations, and this could never happen unless the stable quality of past art encompassed in its universality the ideals of the present day. These ideals are what might be called "psychic practicality" and have little to do with the ephemeral slogans of one or two generations.⁶²

Wright reiterated at length in this essay what he had written in one paragraph for his American Place exhibit in 1932—subject matter only symbolized a content, a content which could only express one thing, the author. If the author were an American, his work, if truly art and not a "fake," would betray his/her Americanness. Another author, if Chinese or African or Persian, would necessarily reflect something of that cultural

"temperament." In another essay of circa 1930, Wright argued that "racial temperaments" were an "accomplished fact."⁶³ Varying racial temperaments accounted for the differences between Chinese and Persian art, which, in turn, are so different from Renaissance art, and so on.

The existence of temperament, for Wright, was far from the most important aspect of either a culture or a work of art. Common to *all* temperaments is the fundamental "order-principle," the recognition by humanity of eternal recurrence and of the interdependence of all things around him/her. For Wright, ethics and morality were but efforts to achieve a similar fundamental harmony. Indeed, his own library mural was an effort to express the "order-principle." As for the American Scene painters, most failed, in Wright's opinion, to see or feel beyond their subject matter to find a content. Wright did admit that topical creations could have content, and that topicalism had succeeded often in the past (citing Zola, for example) to both document contemporary life and suggest something of the universal, but he gave no examples of who in America in the 1930s might have been capable of such a synthesis in painting.

Among numerous other personal references is the inclusion of Michelangelo carving his *Slave* (fig. 54). The work of Michelangelo, and the *Slave* specifically, were critical to the development of Synchronism—Wright and Russell both did painted versions of it. Michelangelo's influence was, in fact, alive and well in the library murals themselves, especially in such figures as the heroic allegories of positive and negative energy (fig. 55).

Wright depicted the figure of Edgar Allen Poe (a Wright favorite since childhood) as modern in all respects—wearing modern clothes and represented in a modern interior. On the wall behind Poe is a painting in

the style of Morgan Russell.⁶⁴ The implication is that Poe and Russell were of like mind and equal modernity, if not kindred spirits.

On the most personal level, Stanton's inclusion of a portrait of Archibald Wright in the mural served to acknowledge his father's role as early mentor to his son. Archie Wright is depicted as an artist at the age of nineteen, the very age Stanton was when he began his artistic career in Paris. The meanings here, again, are multiple. First of all, Stanton identified deeply with his father. Further, Stanton felt a tremendous debt to his father for starting his career. He also felt a tremendous guilt that his father never saw Stanton the mature adult, as opposed to the delinquent he had been as a youth. The dedication of the library murals (written in Chinese) to Archibald Wright appears on the back of the canvas at which Archie is shown painting.

Local reception to the library murals was entirely positive in the press. In fact, work on the individual sections received coverage as they were completed.⁶⁵ Wright received the familiar accolades of "Modern Master"⁶⁶ and "Renowned Artist,"⁶⁷ and the murals themselves were an object of genuine interest, curiosity and appreciation. When the murals were finally dedicated on 26 August 1934, a large crowd filled the Santa Monica Library to listen to the artist interpret them.⁶⁸ Merle Armitage presented the murals to the city on behalf of the PWAP, and Mayor Carter formally accepted them for the city of Santa Monica.

Nationally, the dedication of the murals received ample coverage. Both *Art Digest*⁶⁹ and *The Christian Science Monitor*⁷⁰ (drawing heavily on Arthur Millier's reporting) printed extensive descriptions of the murals, noting that they were the largest murals to be done under the PWAP. *Time* magazine did likewise, adding that the Santa Monica Public

Library was now home to "the gaudiest main reading room on the Pacific Coast."⁷¹

Though the unknown critic writing for *Time* did not provide any other kind of formal analysis, let alone discussion of content, the superlative "gaudiest" must have not only irked Wright, it must have crossed the minds of numerous visitors to the Library who were either unfamiliar with or simply repelled by Wright's palette. At least one visitor, Mabel Alvarez, herself a Wright student, recorded her surprise and secret dismay over the murals: "Went with Irene to see Wright murals in Santa Monica Library. Like some of it very much & some not at all. Hardly believed he would do certain illustrationy sorts of things."⁷²

Alvarez repeated secretly what some critics in San Francisco and New York had already printed about Macdonald-Wright's narrative manner. Indeed, the perception of Wright's work as "story-telling" (a perception bolstered by the artist's use of bright, fantastic colors reminiscent of so many picture books, or worse—magazine covers) was perhaps much more pervasive in Southern California than Los Angeles and Santa Monica news articles suggested. For those who could not fathom Wright's all-critical "content," the murals, and the easel work dating from the late 1920s, were merely large fantasy images to be liked or disliked, but nothing more. Visual ideas of "psychic necessity" were, despite Wright's eloquent orations on the subject, beyond the reach of a community not only mired in economic Depression, but one far more inclined (of those who were inclined at all) to the pleasing delicacies of regional Impressionism. As for Wright's emphasis on myths and heroes, these were easier to understand as exotic decorations, and at any rate could never compare to the comforting rhetoric of traditional Western religions.

Though he was no doubt fully aware of the limited influence the library murals might initially have, there was also no doubt in Wright's mind that he had created a great mural. In a letter to Morgan Russell, Wright described both the extent of his labors and his assessment of the mural's quality:

I am sending this letter in the envelope with a folder or brochure of my mural, unveiled August 25th....The work was a job, at the *besogne* every morning, work all day till dark and many, many days after dark and at night. The fact that it's the best mural in the U. S. doesn't satisfy me and I feel that if I had it to do again I'd do better. However, I might do worse, and it was all done under the most hideous pressure from practically every point. For weeks I dragged my legs like a bug that has been stepped on, half-paralyzed thru nervousness, at other times influenza made me fall off the scaffolding and pass out of consciousness. At other times I was driven half mad by conferences with lawyers, and on top of it all there was money to get—taught, lectured when I could and had to study up on many subjects, build a house, Well, Christ I can't even begin to enumerate everything....⁷³

Wright's elevated estimation of his own work was not shared by later historians of American Art. In fact, the Santa Monica Library Murals are not discussed, or even footnoted for that matter (in a field where footnotes often supersede text in quality), in any of the major studies devoted to American mural painting or art of the 1930s. Part of the reason for this is obvious: the library murals would not fit into a study on American Scene painting, nor less into a study of Social Realism or 1930s abstraction. The murals were, like the Ancient Heroes series, an anomaly

within American painting of the period. To dismiss or ignore the library murals because of that distinction, or worse, as mere illustration, is to overlook an attitude and world view that defined Macdonald-Wright's sense of modernity in the 1930s.

The library murals were, in summary, a carefully crafted visual sermon on the wisdom of expanded thinking. They were designed to advocate not only the acceptance of world views other than Western, including ancient, Eastern, and mythological world views, but their assimilation as well. The artist spoke of the need to balance psychic needs for the spiritual and the physical, and he attempted to reflect that need for balance in the dual nature of the mural's narrative. What Wright proposed visually was, in effect, an alternative way of thinking about life, culture and the future. In his advocacy of change and evolution (by always building on but not imitating the past), and in his rejection of conventional social standards as sufficient guides to living fully, Wright was thoroughly modern. His futuristic vision of the fusion of technology and imagination in art was nothing less than prophetic—from computer imaging to virtual reality, it is difficult, and perhaps useless, to distinguish between art and science in late twentieth century art forms.

The Santa Monica Library Murals still appear to many today as odd works of art; the conglomeration of bright, saturated color with Michelangelesque form, sinuous Oriental line and vaporous patches of compositional void all layered on to representations of monsters, cave men, scientists and artists seems eccentric, if not exaggerated and aimless. The murals, though unconventional and challenging, did not have the tremendous influence of the Mexican muralists, inspired few imitators and ignited no identifiable movement. Deeply philosophical and esoteric,

they failed to provide accessible social and political solutions in mural form, for which the Mexicans were noted.

In 1964, the Santa Monica Public Library moved from its location on 5th Street to a new facility on 6th Street. An unsuccessful effort was made by the city to find another location for the murals, and they were donated to the Smithsonian in 1966, where they are now a part of the permanent collection of the National Museum of American Art.⁷⁴

MACDONALD-WRIGHT AT MID-DECADE

In 1934, while Macdonald-Wright was working furiously on his Library murals, critic and art historian Thomas Craven published a lengthy book on the development and current status of contemporary painting, entitled *Modern Art*. Craven, who argued for the international independence and recognition of American art, recalled his old friendship with Wright in glowing terms. Craven also noted, however, why his own interest in Stanton's art ended along with the Synchronist era: "From the French and Italian influences of his youth, he [Wright] has strayed into a world of Chinese philosophies, and in that world we shall leave him, for I have no key to its mysteries."⁷⁵

In this honest but curt statement, Craven reiterated the problems that other critics had found with Wright's work, especially in the artist's 1932 exhibitions in San Francisco and New York. They simply had no idea of what the artist was trying to communicate, and opaque gallery notes did not help matters. Because a good friend such as Craven could express this kind of abrupt dismissal of Wright's current work, one may assume that it was much easier for critics who had no personal sympathy for Stanton,

and easier still for artists that Stanton had alienated in past years. For the East Coast art community at mid-decade, Stanton Macdonald-Wright was, for those who remembered him, no longer an artistic pioneer, and certainly no longer a force in American art.

As if in direct response to Craven, staunch Macdonald-Wright supporter Arthur Millier wrote a 1934 article surveying Southern California painting, and boosting Macdonald-Wright:

A school of painting which has no parallel elsewhere in America consists of Stanton Macdonald-Wright and his followers....He delved into religions and philosophies and came up holding fast to the art and philosophy of old China. Neither Europe nor the East Coast pleased him any more. He hates New York and lives overlooking the Pacific at Santa Monica. He seeks, in his painting, to blend Western civilization with Oriental culture—an adventure peculiarly appropriate, and perhaps prophetic, for the future of this coast. Michelangelo and the Sung painters are contributing elements to his style, which, while entirely different, recalls Persian painting in its clear line drawing and bright colors. His color grew out of his "Synchromist" period. Wright's best students, such as Albert Henry King and James Redmond, are really disciples. They adopt his style and method and gradually work out their individual styles through that of their master. This school of painting is not at all understood by Eastern critics. They cannot see, underneath the borrowed Chinese elements, the destiny of this region to absorb wisdom from beyond the Pacific. This school has a future.⁷⁶

Millier's comments here were typical of his promotional bias toward Californian artists, and also indicative of a regional resentment toward what was perceived as the elitist ignorance of New York. His statement that "this school has a future" was hardly prophetic. Albert King and James Redmond⁷⁷ were, in fact, deeply influenced by Wright, but neither artist evolved a strong personal vision. Neither King nor Redmond added dimension or individuality to the Macdonald-Wright aesthetic. Each exhibited only minimally, and neither can be said to have stimulated the development of modernism in Southern California beyond the influence Wright exerted alone. At mid-decade, Wright's primary influence on the Southern California scene was, as it had been in the 1920s, by virtue of his personal charisma, unconventionality and aggressive advocacy of intellectually and spiritually challenging art forms. However, whereas throughout the 1920s he had clearly been the central figure in modernist exhibitions and propaganda (both verbal and written), in 1934 Wright's primacy was challenged by the establishment of a cohesive and vibrant Los Angeles art movement.

In that year, Lorser Feitelson (1898-1978), a 1927 immigrant to Los Angeles, and Helen Lundeberg (b. 1908) founded the Post-Surrealist movement. With an interest in metaphysics, modern psychology and European surrealism, Feitelson and Lundeberg inaugurated their movement in November of 1934 at the Centaur Gallery in Hollywood. Joining them were artists Knud Merrild, Etienne Ret, Harold Lehman and San Franciscan Lucian Labaudt. The Post-Surrealists exhibited again in Hollywood in 1935,⁷⁸ at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art that December, and in May of 1936 at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York. The work of Feitelson, Lundeberg and Merrild caught the attention

of Museum of Modern Art curator Alfred Barr, who included all three of them in the 1936 exhibition, "Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism."

Like Wright before him, Lorser Feitelson also advocated modernism in other ways beside his own painting; he opened his own gallery, The Hollywood Gallery of Modern Art, and curated modernist shows, including works by the Cubists and the German Expressionists. An articulate spokesman for the arts, Feitelson (together with Lundeberg) offered an alternative approach to modernism that built on European traditions without explicitly imitating them, or condemning them.⁷⁹ As Jules Langsner explained in the 1935 exhibition catalogue for the Post-Surrealists, their movement, as opposed to Surrealism, affirmed "impeccable esthetic order rather than chaotic confusion, conscious rather than unconscious manipulation of materials, the exploration of the normal functionings of the mind rather than the individual idiosyncracies of the dream."⁸⁰

Unlike Wright's work at mid-decade, the work of the Post-Surrealists *looked* modern to the average gallery-goer. Their images, like those of their European predecessors, involved improbable juxtapositions and highly personal symbols (idiosyncratic or not). Lorser Feitelson's 1934 oil, *Genesis, First Vision* (fig. 56), embraced enigma and ambiguity. Likewise, Lundeberg's 1935 oil, *Double Portrait of the Artist in Time* (fig. 57), dealt with the typically Surrealist issues of time and memory. While these paintings and others within the Los Angeles Post-Surrealism orbit never posed a significant threat to the continued local dominance of conservative landscape and figure painting, such paintings represented the acceptance of the self, dreams, enigma and illusion as appropriate subject matter. Though existing evidence suggests that Wright respected

Feitelson's commitment to modernism and his personal integrity, Post-Surrealism as a movement struck Wright as another instance of imitative subservience to European art. Subject matter that addressed the metaphysical or transcendental in any manner lacking what Wright considered total philosophical resolve was the work of "half-brained symbolists, soul painters and space wanderers."⁸¹ Macdonald-Wright never participated in any of the Post-Surrealist exhibitions.

The Post-Surrealists nonetheless contributed substantially to an atmosphere of experimentation and re-kindled an interest in symbolist painting that had been small, but present, in Los Angeles since the work of Rex Slinkard (1887-1918). In 1935, artist and critic Grace Clements painted her *Reconsideration of Time and Space*, which owed no small debt to de Chirico. Peter Krasnow had returned from a three year period of study in France in 1934, and undertook a series of abstract wood sculptures that evidenced an interest in the smooth, reductive forms of Brancusi. Knud Merrill's cubist-oriented work became increasingly emblematic after 1935, as evidenced in his 1938 *Equilibrium* (fig. 58). And, in addition to the work of these artists, the symbolist visions of the reclusive Agnes Pelton (1881-1961), a desert resident of Cathedral City near Palm Springs, were often exhibited in the Los Angeles area (see *Primal Wing*, 1933, fig. 59). The development of these artists, who formed an important group within the small circle of Los Angeles modernists, was unencumbered by Macdonald-Wright's disdain. Neither did they feel a need to incorporate the Oriental influence that Millier had predicted would characterize art of the Pacific Coast.

In February of 1935, Macdonald-Wright was included in an exhibition organized by the Whitney Museum in New York, entitled,

"Abstract Painting in America." All three of his paintings were synchromist works dated 1917, all loaned by Alfred Stieglitz. Wright's inclusion here proved he was still remembered for his contributions to early modernism, but the exclusion of his new work suggests that, like Craven, the organizers were content to leave Wright and his later work alone. Despite the largely negative reception to his 1932 show at Stieglitz' American Place, Wright determined once again to take his new work before a New York audience. This time, he organized a group show, with himself at the center, and presented the exhibit as evidence of a movement engendered primarily by Wright himself.

"Ten Pacific Coast Painters: Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Group" was held at the Carl Fisher Gallery in March, 1936. As sponsor and leader of the group, Macdonald-Wright's work was shown in a separate room. Other artists included were Conrad Buff, Barse Miller, Phyllis Shields, Charles Davis, Atanas Katchamakoff, Thomas Craig, Don Smith, Vivian Stringfield, Nick Brigante and James Redmond.⁸² For the exhibit, Miller departed from his routine landscape work to contribute two pieces in a more abstract vein. Several of the contributors were students and ardent admirers of Wright, especially Stringfield and Shields. Davis' work, an oil entitled *Brothers*,⁸³ was derived from Wright's sense of compositional balance and linear emphasis. Brigante exhibited a landscape entitled, *Mountain Rocks in Fog and Mist*, a work almost certainly related to the series he worked on from 1935 to 1937, *Nature and Struggling Imperious Man*. This latter series of watercolors by Brigante is heavily, if not completely, indebted to Wright in concept and execution.⁸⁴ It may be assumed that Redmond's work, as it would be throughout the remainder of the decade, was likewise dependent on Wright. Stanton himself

showed a number of drawings, and also reprised his Ancient Heroes series.

The show as a whole may very well have given the impression that Wright hand-picked these artists to demonstrate that East and West were, in fact, blending on the West Coast and that his own influence was central to this process. In retrospect, this seems to have been very much Wright's goal, as none of the moderns associated with Post-Surrealism were included here, let alone any one of the great majority of conservative California traditionalists. The exhibition statement consisted of an excerpt of Arthur Millier's 1934 text which included the observation that "A school of painting which has no parallel elsewhere in America consists of Macdonald-Wright and his followers."

The majority of the reviews were negative. One unidentified critic declared that it was "far-fetched to label their efforts an authentic representation of a definitely American art or, to quote the gallery's statement again, of a 'modern Californian outlook.'" Of Wright, this same critic continued that

Macdonald-Wright expresses himself with something of the manner and technique of the old Chinese print-makers. Definitely he is a master craftsman, an exquisite and sensitive colorist, and a genius at sure effective line. And he has great imagination. But we cannot work up an overwhelming enthusiasm for his work. His series of canvases on Oriental mythology might make splendid and original illustrations.⁸⁵

In the wake of a disappointing East Coast reception to the "10 Pacific Coast Painters," Macdonald-Wright was again confronted with a public that had not only little enthusiasm for his work, but really very little

interest. In 1936, Wright knew his role as an influential American painter had dwindled to almost nothing. Even in Southern California, with the rise of Feitelson, Lundeberg and Merrild, Wright was less and less the dominant figure in modernism he had been. The "10 Pacific Coast Painters" exhibition, clearly designed to force critical recognition of his role as artistic leader and innovator, seems now to have been a somewhat shallow attempt at self-promotion.

Macdonald-Wright's personal correspondence and journal entries of the late 1930s reveal a man increasingly bitter over his critical neglect and antagonistic toward the larger art world. His immersion in Oriental philosophy failed to bring him inner peace, or to allow him to pursue his work undisturbed and unconcerned with the expectations and opinions of others. Beginning in 1935, his organizational, verbal and writing skills, in combination with his lingering reputation in Southern California as a world-class artist, garnered for Wright an administrative post within the Federal Art Project, a position which he used (sometimes forcefully and quite undemocratically) to continue proselytizing for his unique brand of modernism.

MACDONALD-WRIGHT AND THE FEDERAL ART PROJECT

In 1934, the Depression was deepening—more than 1,250,000 Californians (roughly one-fifth of the State's population) were dependent on public relief. As historians of California have noted, politics and government in the State remained "confused, demoralized and ineffectual" throughout the decade.⁸⁶ As Los Angeles looked for

leadership and solutions to the crisis, a number of socially provocative movements were spawned and self-proclaimed Messiahs appeared. While, for example, evangelist Sister Aimee Semple McPherson preached her unique brand of salvation over the radio to a wide listenership, the Utopian Society was founded in 1933 in Los Angeles to work toward a new world based on "technocracy" and the enlightened rule of science. In terms of city government, a good example of the mingling of desperation and errant public policy was the attempt on 4 February 1936 (the year Wright took "Ten Pacific Painters" to New York) by Los Angeles police to forcibly (and illegally) block entry into the city by those seeking employment. Indeed, a large part of the California story during the Depression is one of brutality and violence, and, while not part of this study, should nonetheless be mentioned.

On a national level, the decision was made to continue government support of art and artists. The defunct, yet ostensibly successful, Public Works of Art Project was followed by the Treasury Section of Painting and Sculpture (known as the "Section"), the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP), and the Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP). The Section's mission was to commission high-quality art work via competitions for public buildings, and need was not a criterion for the selection of artists. TRAP, a smaller, sister project of the Section, also decorated public buildings but hired mainly from relief rolls. The FAP, established in October, 1935 under the directorship of Holger Cahill, was the largest art project, including divisions for easel painting, graphics, film, murals, photography, posters and sculpture, among others.

Cahill, along with other key New Dealers, including the President himself, believed a new relationship between the artist and the public

could be forged via the democratic policies of the WPA/FAP. Both Roosevelt and his administration understood the art projects as a means of further defining traditional American values in positive and optimistic images, despite prevailing social realities. It was the popular American Scene movement,⁸⁷ one stressing American life and customs in the city and the country, that was adopted, albeit unofficially, as the pictorial mode most suited to achieving that goal.⁸⁸

Under the WPA/FAP, the country was divided into sixteen administrative regions. California was split into Northern and Southern art projects. To handle its unwieldily size, Southern California was further split into five additional semi-autonomous districts which all reported to the director of the Southern California project, Nelson Partridge, Jr. Stanton Macdonald-Wright was appointed director in 1935 of the Los Angeles district of the Southern California Art Project.

In his role as director of the Los Angeles district, Macdonald-Wright assisted in the initial organization of the Project and its subsequent administration. With his dominating personality and keen intellect, Wright served effectively as district supervisor, and eventually as director, for the Southern California region. Polished and precise as a speaker and a writer, he acted as an enthusiastic promoter for government patronage of the arts. In a 1939 foreword for an exhibition of Project art, Stanton wrote:

The opening of the WPA Art Program marked the cultural "coming of age" of our nation. Heretofore the aesthetic development of our artists was more than a little haphazard; the pervading force of European influence obscured to a great extent the very definite Americanism that lay latent in their talents. To be sure, Americanism had been adumbrated before, but the successive

waves of "movements" and "schools" of art so rapidly succeeding each other from across the seas easily inundated a country still artistically dormant, still only partially aware of its vast homeland potentialities....Confidence in the ability of the Southern California Art Project to finish any work it undertakes, and finish it magnificently, is steadily growing, and such confidence is the measure of the Project's value and its reason for being.⁸⁹

Privately, however, Wright often expressed sincere misgivings about the Project and the standards for artistic excellence, represented by American Scene painting, that it allowed. In his memoirs he recalled the following:

Cahill asked me after all the projects had closed, "Well, Stanton, what do you think of what we did?" I quite truthfully told him that we had set art back a hundred years. I was wrong. We had killed it forever, and in a typically American way. We gave five thousand people the idiotic idea that they were artists and they never went back to the tasks from which they came. Many of them became celebrated and preempted the dying field of serious endeavor. I consider the WPA one of the most deleterious movements in history.⁹⁰

This recollection is typical of Wright's aggressive literary posturing, and should not be used to wholly discount numerous other early and completely positive statements. In fact, Stanton was proud of many Project achievements, especially of those in which he played a significant role, and had hoped, as so many did, that the WPA/FAP would raise the national level of art awareness and appreciation in general.

During his first year on the WPA/FAP, Stanton continued his own easel painting and drawing. A number of these works were shown in the previously discussed 1936 "Ten Pacific Painters" exhibition at the Carl Fischer Gallery in New York. One known drawing from that show is *Rain in the Gaviotta*, an exquisite rendering of landscape in soft, sinuous rhythms.⁹¹ Never one to miss an opportunity, however, Wright saw that the WPA/FAP, by virtue of its manpower and material resources, was capable of large-scale collaborative efforts. He became involved early on in what was to be a uniquely Southern California contribution to the WPA/FAP—the revival of mosaics.

For Macdonald-Wright, a scholar of ancient cultures and ardent student of the Renaissance, the mosaic medium offered a chance to participate in a tradition extending back in time to the murals of Ravenna, and the ancient civilizations of Greece, Rome and Babylon. By November of 1936, Wright had completed the first of a series of mosaics he would design under the auspices of the WPA/FAP, *The Four Elements*.⁹² This mosaic was part of a fountain in the children's courtyard of the Santa Monica Public Library, site of his PWAP mural. Appropriately, *The Four Elements* continued a thematic interest in the imaginative life of the mind and the physical properties of nature which he had explored in the murals inside the library. Wright's familiar serpentine use of line pervades the design, though these lines are expressed in regular, square-shaped pieces of colored stone, or tesserae. It was perhaps this very regularity of shape and application of tesserae that prompted Wright to innovate upon ancient mosaic techniques.

No doubt consciously mimicking one of his Renaissance heroes, Wright set out to reinvent the mosaic medium in much the same way

Leonardo da Vinci had experimented with oils, grounds, and binders. Working in tandem with fellow project artist, Al King, Wright spent the better part of late 1936 and the first half of 1937 experimenting with chemicals and concrete. The result was a new process known as "petrachrome" (a term coined by Wright, and one quite similar in form to "synchrome"), a process which has been cited as a novel contribution to the WPA/FAP by the Southern California Project.⁹³

Basically, petrachrome is based on the ancient technique, *opus sectile*. This latter method involves joining small pieces of different colored stones to form an image. Wright introduced the use of modern materials to *opus sectile*; crushed marble, stone aggregates and oxides. In addition, petrachrome differed from traditional mosaics in that the cut pieces of colored stone were joined in varying patterns according to the shape they defined in order that the sense of an object's texture was conveyed.⁹⁴ Wright and King made great claims as to its durability and permanence, which, as time revealed, it was not.

The petrachrome process was revealed and explained in a color film on the opening day of an exhibition of WPA art at the Stendahl Gallery in the summer of 1937. The film showed the process as it was being applied to the largest single mosaic project undertaken in the country, a mural entitled, *Long Beach Recreations*, designed by Stanton Macdonald-Wright (fig. 60). The design was originally begun by Henry Allen Nord, but the finished product is typical in all respects of Wright's compositional sense. In fact, as Wright was prone to do with his murals, he apparently based the central figure on a person important in his life—in this case, his wife, Jeanne. The fact that the design was begun by someone else, however, explains the mundane subject matter which was anathema to Wright. In

short, he took over an already approved project, and for good reasons: the Long Beach mural was planned on a grand scale, and, once finished, would be a monument to Wright's genius as the inventor of petrachrome as much as it would be a celebration of the Southern California lifestyle. That Wright was proud of the mural at the time of its creation and later is evidenced in a 1969 letter he wrote to the Long Beach Municipal Arts Commission: "It is, I believe, the largest mural of its kind in the world and I was an enthusiastic admirer of it when I had the honor of its unveiling. From an artistic standpoint, I doubt if there exists anywhere a better public decoration, and as you know, such a work must be judged not from the standpoint of an individual painting but from the point of view of its function in a community (so we must also view the colossal stone cutting of the presidents)."⁹⁵

When *Long Beach Recreations* was completed and installed in the Roman arch on the north facade of the Long Beach Municipal Auditorium (now demolished),⁹⁶ it measured thirty-seven feet, nine and seven-eighths inches in height and twenty-two feet, eight inches in width, and required over 466,00 pieces of tile. Its success was hailed on many levels; as an example of the technological progress engendered by the WPA/FAP, as a beautiful work of outdoor decoration that would inspire the local community, and as a work of art that positively interpreted contemporary American life. In hindsight, *Recreations* also serves as an exemplar of all the murals, mosaic and otherwise, completed under the aegis of the Southern California Art Project: it is conservative in concept and design, executed in an idealizing, realistic style, and it is apolitical—thoroughly disengaged from Social Realist painting or abstraction, despite having been designed by California's leading modernist.

The only overtly political mural done under the New Deal art projects in Southern California was *Man Amid His Inventions*, 1935, painted by Leo Katz for the Frank Wiggins Trade School (fig. 61, present location unknown).⁹⁷ Katz had studied mural painting in Mexico, and had worked under Jose Clemente Orozco (1883-1949) when that artist painted his well-known *Prometheus* mural for Pomona College in Claremont, California. Katz was clearly influenced by the idea of art as a tool of social change. His mural depicted a man with outstretched arms walking amid canons and scenes of violence on one side (including a nude woman stabbing a man in the neck), and a motion picture camera and scenes of benevolence on the right. Katz completed the mural under the PWAP just prior to the completion of Macdonald-Wright's Santa Monica Library murals. Katz' mural outraged Southern Californians, and was ordered removed. Artists, including Macdonald-Wright, were mostly silent on the subject.⁹⁸

As previously discussed in this study, Macdonald-Wright had a deep aversion to either Social Realist painting or Regionalism, as neither mode fit into his definition of ultimate purpose of art, which was self-knowledge and the revelation of universal truths. Though he left no record of his opinion on Katz' mural, it is certain Wright was opposed to the politicization of art. As an influential leader in the Southern California Art Project, Wright made no moves to initiate murals with socially relevant themes. Significantly, no one on the Project challenged him, or even seemed to have a desire to do so. As powerful as he was as an administrator and personality, Wright alone could not have controlled so thoroughly the expressive impulses of an entire region. Southern

California artists collectively preferred imaginary and non-threatening images to the relentlessly difficult life of Depression-era America.⁹⁹

Nancy Moure attempts an explanation for the absence of political themes in the Southern California FAP:

Social realism was simply not relevant in a city where benevolent climate and generally benign living conditions had traditionally led artists to represent positive subjects. If the art of the 1930s was indeed an American art springing from environmental conditioning, then by producing positive subject matter Los Angeles New Deal artists were simply being true to their conditioning.¹⁰⁰

Artists in Los Angeles certainly knew of the unrest in their State between employers and labor, especially in agriculture. They knew about the brutality meted out to impoverished immigrants seeking work. In 1938, Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* was a bestseller, though it was banned in Kern County schools and libraries by the Kern County Board of Supervisors due to the protests from the farming community which claimed it was being unfairly portrayed. Southern California artists knew about the graft and corruption in their own city politics (Mayor Frank Shaw was under investigation by a grand jury in 1938, and his accusers were the victims of house and car bombings). None of these issues, among other pressing problems, were addressed by Southern California artists, and their indifference cannot be attributed to the climate and even less to the philosophies of Macdonald-Wright which none of them subscribed to in any demonstrative manner. On the contrary, the majority of the project artists were typical of their community in the sense that they, too, subscribed to a bourgeois set of Mid-Western values and

religious conservatism, yet aspired to dreams of wealth and prosperity offered by Los Angeles. Social ills were best left undiscussed, covered up and ignored. Still other Project artists were grateful to the government for the opportunity to work, and looked forward as much as any other American to an era of renewed prosperity. As historian Steven Gelber summarized: "No matter which federal agency sponsored it, no matter where it was painted, no matter whether it was a mural, easel painting, or print, California's New Deal art reflected the shared values of the artists and the New Deal administration."¹⁰¹

Of the artists in 1930s Los Angeles who delved into easel painting with political overtones, Paul Starrett Sample (1896-1974) serves as an outstanding example but also a curious one for two reasons: Sample did not paint on the WPA/FAP (he served as assistant professor at University of Southern California from 1926-1936), and he was a former Macdonald-Wright student.¹⁰² Sample painted a string of images stemming from his interest in social and economic conditions in the mid-1930s: *Speech at the Brewery*, 1932¹⁰³; *Miner's Resting*, 1935 and *Janitor's Holiday*, 1936. Personally acquainted with Wright's teaching and philosophical positions, Sample was nonetheless unencumbered by them and painted views of the Depression's downside. Sample's artistic independence, as well as Wright's penchant for artistic domination, are both revealed in a Sample journal entry of 5 February, 1927:

This afternoon I listened to a talk on Modern art by Macdonald-Wright at the museum. He was fine. He appears to be extremely brilliant and is a talented speaker. But the peculiar part of it all was his attitude. He had a chip on his shoulder, was aggressively browbeating throughout and bullied his audience. It

was delicious. He has lots to say and says it well. But I still do not appreciate modern art.¹⁰⁴

Though impossible to document, one might well wonder if Wright's decidedly negative view of Regionalism and/or topicalism circumscribed some artists working on the Project, and left those outside of its jurisdiction more inclined to freely explore subjects regularly painted in the national mainstream. A basic problem in studying Southern California Project easel painting is that much of it remains lost, destroyed and/or undocumented. Looking at the few examples reproduced in project exhibition catalogues, the easel work reflects the same conservative and idealizing tendencies common to the mural work.

Macdonald-Wright himself remained aloof from his social and political context, and often aloof from the artists who worked with him and for him. Convinced of the rightness of his own personal vision over any officially sponsored program, he did exert substantial influence over the type of murals that were done, thus resulting in the high number of literary and fantastic themes in the mural painting of Southern California. He never fully believed, however, that the Project as it was organized nation-wide and as it was administered on any local level could ever benefit the cause of "Art" in the long term (hence his comments to Cahill that the Project had killed art forever). His disdain for bureaucracy and for the limited intellect and imagination of the project in general were captured in a 1939 diary entry, one worth quoting at length:

Just now there is much preparation for the World's Fair in San Francisco where the 'project' will be well-represented by all types of work. But here, as wherever there is an extended officialdom (that is, where authority must filter through numerous

officials with their opinions and their reasons and their taboos and static and brittle theories) a really intelligent *modus operandi* is impossible. "Policy" of one kind or another always clutters up an intelligent procedure, and an intelligent opinion, and the results are usually no better than mediocre even when this good. I certainly cannot subscribe to the principle of "two heads being better than one" except when the group is made up of imbeciles. One good head is still best, and a really intelligent head is best when left alone....It is not an edifying pastime to glance through the publications printed by Washington and see the reproductions of the so-called "New Horizons" [a reference to the WPA/FAP show held in 1936 at the Museum of Modern Art] of our art. It would be more depressing if these actually were our "new horizons." The work presented is not representative of our possibilities as the majority are those of non-artists, students, faddists, and incompetents who pass, in the topical-minded juries that judge them as ample or great, [and who judge] masters of simplicity as masters of 'social-implication' and masters of god-knows-what. They represent the criterionless taste of the world today and their counterparts are found in music and literature as well as art. Working in such an environment, for me, is playing a role and I am much more interested in the crafts of mosaic and opus sectile, terrazzo and glazed brick than I am in the actual depictions. The reversion to the hand-cutting of stone is an excellent thing for the artist and on this craft side of our activities my real interest is aroused.¹⁰⁵

And, play a role he did—sincerely interested in certain projects and individual artists, always interested in what he considered true art, but never a believer in bureaucracy, government or the rule of the many no matter what he may have committed to print. At times his interests overlapped with those of the WPA/FAP, though, most often, they simply did not.

A JAPANESE INTERLUDE

Throughout the 1930s, some of the chronic problems Macdonald-Wright was plagued with in the 1920s continued to haunt him. Physically, a severe gastro-intestinal problem periodically confined him to bed and reduced him to skeletal proportions. Psychically, an overwhelming desire to visit the Orient nagged at him. Despite the former problem, Wright finally managed in 1937 to schedule a three month visit to Japan.¹⁰⁶ Exactly how this trip was financed remains a mystery at the time of this writing, but it is not improbable that Wright used the WPA/FAP in some creative way to be granted both time away and some funds to study art that might in some way be used to benefit the Art Project upon his return to America. More probable, however, is that he simply saved money from his salary to make the trip. The artist left without his wife and was in Japan for May, June and July of 1937 (in his absence, progress on the *Long Beach Recreation* mosaic was overseen by the capable Albert King).

In his memoirs, Wright provides a colorful account of his sea-voyage across the Pacific, replete with a drunken captain and the possibility of his own burial at sea due to his inability to eat, and then a

visit to a geisha house in Yokohama upon arrival in Japan (this despite his weakened-unto-death condition). His own account of his first encounter with Japan is recounted with a romantic and heartfelt fervor as typical of Wright's recollections as his tirades:

We made port about five p.m. just in time to see the first gold sunset. The sky was a light burnt orange with brick-red horizon shading to blue-green at the apex and Fuji-san sat in all its mysterious pride with brilliant orange snow and violet shadows detached from the earth by a band of light blue and it seemed to me truly the mountain of the gods. Around its summit flew a tiny plane. I began to feel better at once and the geisha house filled me with enthusiasm. I understood a minimum of what was said or sung but I could make myself understood limitedly. Here was antiquity. The girls were beautifully clad in colorful silk kimonos playing the samisen and koto and reciting poetry from the Manyo shu and even some haiku. Their songs were sad minor melodies probably old when Columbus discovered America.¹⁰⁷

The net effect of this three-month trip was that it served to confirm in Macdonald-Wright all his assumptions regarding the refinements of Oriental culture. If his Orientalizing sentiments before the trip suffered from any twinges of uncertainty, they were effectively removed after his stay in Japan. However, in a diary entry recorded not long after the trip, Wright confessed to an earlier unwarranted condescension toward Japan in favor of China:

I had always felt a sort of superior disdain, a condescending patronage for Japan; for when I thought of Japan it was from the standpoint that China and I were one, and *we* could very well view

the Japanese from a cultural height. So I expected nothing and I found a people who have a rare and delicate taste, an innate refinement in living, a beautiful order in the more important things of life and an exquisite outlook on things artistic. I hid my eyes, one might say, before the modernizations of Japan...¹⁰⁸

RETURN TO AND TERMINATION OF THE PROJECT

Wright returned to America with much, in his words, to "digest" from his time spent so far away from the concerns of the Social Realists or American Scene painters. Resuming work on the Project was not a priority, but the realities of financial need required him to do so. It was at this time that he was asked to replace Thrysis Field as director of the Southern California Project, which meant he was paid a little more than twice what the average artist earned. The increase in pay no doubt ameliorated Wright's return to the States, as did a fortuitous discovery of what was causing his intestinal troubles accompanied by effective treatment.

Healthier financially and physically than he had been in years, Wright administered the Project with a heavy hand and his well-honed sense of political savvy, a sense developed more out of perceived need to outwit the enemy than to advance within political ranks. He continued to design and oversee the installation of large-scale mosaics and petrachromes (the two were understood as different mediums, and Wright even created a petrachrome unit distinct from the mosaic unit already in existence). By September of 1937, he completed the seven foot

two inch mosaic, *Products of Nature and Inventions of Man*, for the Hooper Avenue Elementary School. In theme and design, this mosaic both echoed the Santa Monica Library Murals and also reflected Wright's continued and freshly-confirmed insistence on delving into more philosophically symbolic images. In November, Wright's mosaic design entitled, *Early California*, was completed at the Thomas Edison School. In early 1938, Wright was working on two large mosaic mural designs simultaneously: *Landing of the Vikings* for Santa Monica High School and the *Evolution of Writing* for the Southgate Public Library, and in January the Long Beach *Recreations* mural was dedicated in a two-day ceremony.

Macdonald-Wright continued designing murals through 1938 with a seemingly endless supply of energy. He designed a one-thousand-square-foot curtain for the Santa Monica High School Auditorium, and completed a mosaic fountain for a private patron in Bel Air. He also undertook the planning of a gallery space devoted to the Southern California Project, for which he designed the decorative walls. At this same time, Wright worked in the medium of lithography, producing several credible prints (including one of angry and apparently revolutionary Mexicans, the closest thing Wright ever did to a Social Realist work in his entire career).¹⁰⁹ Inspiration to work in this medium was due to the presence in Los Angeles of the master printer, Lynton Kistler, who provided technical direction for Wright's lithographs.¹¹⁰ Of this highly productive period, Wright noted at the time: "All in all during the active time I have worked on the FAP I have not been idle as these works and innovation have been supplementary to running the office

work of the whole Southern California area—Now the price of good work seems to be more work and no more pay!"¹¹¹

In 1939, a series of ten murals located in the Los Angeles County Hall of Records Board of Supervisors' Hearing Room were dedicated.¹¹² Among the artists involved were former Post-Surrealists Lorser Feitelson and Helen Lundeberg, as well as artists whose work was closely directed by Macdonald-Wright. The ten murals (now destroyed, along with the building) serve as good examples of the conservative and coldly illustrative character of most California murals executed under the project. All ten murals depict historical subject matter, from the *Granting of the Magna Charta* by Buckley MacGurrin to Feitelson's *Czar Issues Russian American Charter, 1799* and Helen Lundeberg's *Jedehiah Smith Near San Gabriel, 1826*. All ten share a stiff, if not clumsy, compositional torpor and astonishing lack of spatial imagination. Though Lundeberg and Feitelson still worked at more modern work privately, they had no trouble suppressing modernist inclination for their work on the project.

Several of the murals clearly reveal that Macdonald-Wright had a hand in design. Charles Hulbert Davis' *Landing of Cabrillo, 1542* is a reconfiguration of schemes found in Wright's Santa Monica Library murals, especially the vaporous landscape background, as is his *Drake's Landing in California, 1579*. Buckley MacGurrin's murals, such as *De Neve Founds Los Angeles*, as anatomically unconvincing as anything done on the Project, are confused pastiches of literary sources, though his brush, like Davis', shows some guidance by Wright.

Macdonald-Wright strongly influenced a number of other murals not only in style, but in choice of subject matter as well. Don Totten (1903-1967), a former Wright student, painted *Brunhilde and the Sacred Flame*

for the Grant Elementary School. The mythic and fantastic subject matter is indebted to Wright, as is the linear, rhythmic style. Jimmy Redmond's mural, *History of Science*, for Manual Arts School is pure Wright in figural conception, use of Orientalizing motifs, palette, and smooth brushwork. Redmond, of course, was a close pupil of Stanton's (a good many Southern California Project artists had been Wright students, though not all imitated him as slavishly). Nancy Moure sees direct Wright influence even in the work of Lorser Feitelson, in that painter's mural entitled *Henrick Hudson* for the Hooper Avenue School.¹¹³ This image features muscular, Michelangesque figures and sinuous linear patterns that do seem to stem directly from Wright.

Macdonald-Wright rounded out the year 1939 lecturing, writing, designing and, not surprisingly, curating. He developed two ambitious shows for the Project gallery in April entitled, "Classical Form" and "The Evolution of Gothic Form." These exhibitions were designed to enlighten the viewer as to the numerous sources of so-called contemporary art. In conception and intent, the shows were pure Wright—since his Synchronist days he acknowledged and paid homage to past art and culture. His role as project director allowed him to indulge his didactic, if not pedantic, interests with classical art. In October, he contributed a short, but sincere and supportive article to the *California Arts & Architecture* magazine's special issue on Chinese Art.¹¹⁴ Therein, he paid high compliments to Southern California's Chinese artists. Interestingly, Macdonald-Wright's entry into the 1939 World's Fair was a simple, elegantly composed still-life in the manner of his late 1920s work.¹¹⁵

Emotionally, the benchmark event of 1939 for Stanton was the death of his brother, Willard Huntington Wright. Since childhood, the

two had been fierce competitors and important mutual influences. They had collaborated on the promotion of modern art in America via books and exhibitions, and had shared dreams of shaping and dominating the American intellectual and artistic landscape. However, their careers diverged in a way that perhaps neither of them could have imagined as children: Stanton held fast to his aesthetic idealism, while Willard abdicated his former aesthetic purism for success as a murder mystery novelist and Hollywood script writer. In later years, Stanton would maintain that he played a role in Willard's untimely death; as a symbol of Willard's conscience, Stanton indirectly contributed to his brother's need to self-destruct:

My brother was a bitter man; he found life intolerable *after* he had enriched himself. His bitterness was the result of his selling what he considered his real genius for poetry for what he finally discovered was valueless—money. He took to a gentlemanly drink, nothing but Cognac, a pony of which his butler set beside him every half hour. On my infrequent visits to New York I would remonstrate with him, and I even went so far as to probe his doctors for a prognosis—and it was bad. They both thought that Bright's disease would get him, but Willard was stubborn and wanted to die and increased his dose. He told me he had found the pleasantest way to commit suicide, but as you know something even easier finally got him! I stopped visiting him and if you have read his novel, *The Man of Promise*, you will remember the symbol of his conscience, Seminoff. That character was I, and although he had a strange affection for me, the sight of me aroused him often to violence, and often to tears. How many times have I listened for

hours as he expounded his "philosophy" of complete futility, always ending by sneering at me because I considered man's attempts at transcendence valuable. I thought he'd be better off *not* seeing me. His death, that I considered a self-destruction, was a blow to me, a younger brother, both of us reared according to European traditions....He was pitiably human!¹¹⁶

By 1940, enthusiasm for the New Deal and its various projects was waning as war loomed in Europe and Roosevelt turned his attention to foreign policy issues. Actually, the WPA/FAP had been on the decline since 1938, when key New Deal idealist Harry Hopkins resigned and Congressional hostility toward the project steadily increased as arts advocates tried to make the WPA/FAP a permanent government fixture. Opponents of the Project levied charges against it that ranged from un-American activities to waste and inefficiency. The relief bill for fiscal year 1940 required that states absorb twenty-five percent of the cost of local WPA/FAP projects, lay off all workers who had been with the WPA/FAP over eighteen months, and required a new loyalty oath in an attempt to quell "subversives." The ranks of the art project shrank instantly. As the national defense effort steadily intensified, the future of the WPA/FAP was clearly in jeopardy.

In 1940, Wright remained busy directing the Southern California Project, and, true to form, took on additional projects that interested him. He started work on two black and white stop-action films in that year; one on Occidental composition,¹¹⁷ and one on Oriental composition. Both were finished in 1941. Financial backing for the Sychrome Corporation, which he had continued to work on intermittently since the 1920s, withered completely in the late 1930s. Frustrated at his long-term inability

to create a light machine, Wright nonetheless picked up the pace with his own easel painting in 1940-41 with the object of staging another one-man show in 1942.

Macdonald-Wright's formidable energy level, his high expectations (from himself and from those who worked for him), and his organizational acumen no doubt all contributed to the generally high-level of productivity on the Southern California Project, even as it neared its end. After an official visit to Los Angeles from 29 August to 3 September of 1941, National FAP director Holger Cahill made the following report:

The Southern California Art Project devotes its major activities to an art production program and has developed a remarkably well-organized and efficiently functioning project set-up for that purpose. On the basis of production, the Southern California Art Project not only leads the other projects on the Pacific Coast, but also all other WPA projects. It has produced more creative work in proportion to employment than any other state art project, and it has maintained standards of quality in this production equal to those of any other art project in the country.¹¹⁸

By the end of 1941, America was at war, and Cahill's praise of the Southern California Art Project was just so much more well-intentioned propaganda aimed at persuading the Congress to extend the WPA/FAP. Wright, like many other artists surviving on the Project, fully expected the worse: "We're at war as everyone foresaw, I am getting ready for an exhibition at Stendahl's in April, [and] I'm teaching again at the Art Center school (for how long?). The project is definitely and slowly folding up....Money is very scarce and I fear for the time the project shall close."¹¹⁹

In preparation for the imminent demise of the Project, Macdonald-Wright looked further afield for employment opportunities, which were severely limited. Supporting himself as an artist was as unrealistic as it had been in 1913—Wright's exhibition at Stendahl's in May of 1942 yielded not one sale. In July of that year, the WPA's Federal Art Project became a part of the War Services Program, an interim step toward its certain closure. At the end of the year, in November, Wright was offered a teaching position at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), and accepted, though not without some misgivings:

Yesterday [4 December 1942] it was announced in the papers that FDR had finally taken the axe to all WPA, to take effect from Feb. 1st to June 30th, 1943. It was a blow to me—in a way—and for many reasons. At my age and in my profession a living is impossible to make unless I teach or lecture or do something aside my art and it is not pleasant to get snatches of visions of complete poverty. And yet I have faith in my ultimate destiny and I realize that probably the happiest life I can lead is that of painting. But I have so many obligations—debts, expenses, etc., as well as so many impossible desires and longings that require solvency of a sort....I trust in my usual trust which has never failed me.¹²⁰

New Dealers had failed to convince either the government or the public of the value of continuing the art projects, and the harsh realities of war effectively suspended the entire issue. The Projects ended, recalling Elliot's words, with a whimper, and not a bang. Macdonald-Wright, at the age of fifty-three, escaped conscription for the second time in his life and, though his new vocation was "as foreign to me as the WPA,"¹²¹ emerged in the 1940s as a professor of art and art history at an established

university. He would continue to influence students, write essays, books and reviews, and exhibit on a regular basis, but Stanton Macdonald-Wright's central role in the dynamics of Southern California art was over.

¹Thomas Craven, *Modern Art* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934), 251.

²Annita Delano to Sonia Delaunay, 11 March 1929, The Annita Delano Papers, roll 2999, frames 238-240, AAA.

³Merle Armitage, "Meet Macdonald-Wright, Painter," *Los Angeles Record*, clipping in roll LA 5, frame 236, AAA.

⁴"85 Present at Breakfast-Reception Given for Stanton Macdonald-Wright," *San Pedro News Pilot* (5 October 1929), in roll LA 5, frame 294, AAA.

⁵For the early years of the Depression in Los Angeles, see William H. Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast, 1929-1933* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).

⁶For Hollywood economics during the 1930s, see Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

⁷*Serenade*, unpaginated.

⁸SMW, *Observations: Modernist Art and the American Field*, 1930. Unpublished, copy provided courtesy of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁹SMW, *Observations*.

¹⁰Arthur Millier, "Our Artists in Person," *Los Angeles Times* (27 July 1930): 14.

¹¹Macdonald-Wright's careful rendering of his own features is evidence enough that this is a self-portrait. However, for additional confirmation, see "Synchronist," *Time* (2 September 1935): "In this painting Artist Macdonald Wright used his own face as a model for that of Zarathustra (Zardusht) and of Fravashi, Zarathustra's nobler shadow."

¹²SMW to MR, roll 1266, frame 209, AAA. Restricted. Used by permission of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

¹³Clipping from the *San Francisco Argonaut* (13 November 1931), in roll LA 5, frame 262, AAA.

¹⁴Clipping from the *Oakland Tribune* (15 November 1931), in roll LA 5, frame 262, AAA.

¹⁵Rob Wagner, "Cultists and Great Art," *Script* (16 January 1931): 15.

¹⁶Arthur Millier, "Wright and Russell Give Season's Major Exhibit," *Los Angeles Times* (10 January 1932).

¹⁷See *Exhibition by S. Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell*, exhibition catalogue, in roll LA 5, frames 133-34, AAA.

¹⁸[SMW and Morgan Russell], "Work by S. Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell" in *February Exhibits* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum, February, 1932): 1.

¹⁹See Alma May Cook, "Personality in Exhibits of 2 Artists," *Los Angeles Herald Express* (6 February 1932). "His [SMW's] color was always pure in its brilliancy, and from this he has gone forward to the brilliant masterpieces of color which he is showing in this exhibition..." See also H. Raymond Henry, "S. Macdonald-Wright Oils Attract Interest At Museum Exhibit," *Hollywood Citizen* (13 February 1932). "Some public-spirited citizen should present an oriental reading room by Macdonald Wright, to a public library, for here we find the ideal decorator for this kind of room."

²⁰SMW, "Letter to a Dead Mistress," quoted in *Serenade*, unpaginated.

²¹At the time of this writing, no exact date is available for this divorce, though it is reasonable to assume, since the two were together throughout the 1920s, a date of 1930-31.

²²*Lang Yao*, 1929, illustrated in roll LA5, frame 270, AAA.

²³In a later biography, it was reported (the information must have come from Royce herself) that Royce was actually married to SMW, though they never were: "Born: 1908, Lancaster, Pa. Died: Oct. 20, 1980, Hollywood, Calif. (heart attack). Screen, stage, television actress, radio and television writer. Divorced from director Josef von Sternberg (dec. 1969), and later married to painter Stanton Macdonald-Wright." Evelyn Mack Truitt, *Who Was Who On Screen* (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1983), 632. Among Royce's film credits were *A Star is Born*, 1937, *Good Neighbor Sam*, 1964 and *Myra Breckinridge*, 1970.

²⁴SMW, "Dead Mistress."

²⁵Mabel Alvarez diary for 1932, unfiled, AAA.

²⁶SMW, *A Basis of Culture*, unpublished. The original typescript copy of this manuscript, with hand-written corrections by Macdonald-Wright, is in the possession of Dr. J. Andrew Hutchinson of Lorton, Virginia. In a study of nearly four hundred pages, Macdonald-Wright surveys Byzantine, Hellenic, Etrurian, Roman, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Persian, Indian, Renaissance, Chinese, and Assyrian art.

²⁷This absent still-life was a work entitled, *Lang Yao Still-life*, listed in the Stendahl catalogue as from the collection of Joseph Von Sternberg. See footnote number 21.

²⁸SMW, statement in "S. Macdonald-Wright Exhibition" brochure at an American Place, October 3—29, 1932. Roll LA 5, frames 303-304, AAA.

²⁹Exhibition review clipping from unidentified New York paper (October 1932), in roll LA5, frame 272, AAA.

³⁰Clipping, (October 1932).

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- ³¹Edward Alden Jewell, "Wright's Tentative Humility," clipping from the *New York Times* (8 October 1932), in roll LA5, frame 292, AAA.
- ³²Rose Mary Fisk, "Americans Hung in Pairs for Tendency Study," *Chicago Post* (11 October 1932). Clipping in roll LA5, frame 292, AAA.
- ³³SMW to Alfred Stieglitz, 7 March 1938, Stieglitz Archive.
- ³⁴Wilbur C. Riley, "Glimpse of Future's Art?" *Hollywood Citizen* (January 1933). Clipping in LA5, frame 293, AAA.
- ³⁵"Glimpse of Future's Art?"
- ³⁶SMW, diary entry for 4 December 1955, recorded in *Serenade*, unpaginated.
- ³⁷C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, Inc., 1926), 508.
- ³⁸Jung, *Psychological Types*, 524.
- ³⁹Richard Wilhelm, translator, *The Secret of The Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1931). With a commentary by C. G. Jung.
- ⁴⁰One might wonder if it was not *The Secret of the Golden Flower* text which inspired Wright to include Yin Hi in his portrait of Lao Tzu.
- ⁴¹Wilhelm, *Secret*, 16.
- ⁴²Jung, *Secret*, 136.
- ⁴³Jung, *Secret*, 78.
- ⁴⁴Jung, *Secret*, 80.
- ⁴⁵Jung, *Secret*, 128.
- ⁴⁶C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of Soul*, first published 1933, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 203.
- ⁴⁷SMW to Morgan Russell, roll 1266, frame 159, AAA. Restricted. Used by permission of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.
- ⁴⁸The literature on the role of the arts during the Depression is vast. A most useful introduction is Richard D. McKinzie, *The New Deal for Artists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973). On Section murals specifically, see Karal Ann Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post-Office Murals in the Great Depression* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) and Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984).

⁴⁹"Library Mural Work to Begin in Week's Time," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook* (25 January 1934).

⁵⁰"Library Mural Work to Begin."

⁵¹"Library Mural Work to Begin."

⁵²"Library Mural Work to Begin."

⁵³Jung, *Secret*, 137.

⁵⁴"Wright Lauds Cooperation," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook* (14 February 1934).

⁵⁵Both essays made available to the author courtesy of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright. Used by permission.

⁵⁶SMW, *Santa Monica Library Murals* (Los Angeles: Angelus Press, 1935), unpaginated.

⁵⁷SMW, *Murals*, unpaginated.

⁵⁸Macdonald-Wright did not explain the inclusion of these two individuals, but one may speculate that their representation was for political reasons.

⁵⁹SMW, letter to Morgan Russell, 1934. Roll 1266, AAA. Restricted. Used by permission of Jean Macdonald-Wright. "*Eh bien*, as the Library building will not last forever, or even close to forever, I decided to do the mural so that it could be removed and placed elsewhere when the time comes to tear down the building and so am doing it on wood." The murals are now in the permanent collection of the National Museum of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution.

⁶⁰Wright's in-depth knowledge of mythology comes into play here: in Indian mythology, the noose and the bow and arrow have additional meaning. The noose is a symbol of knowledge and of intellect that can make objects known. The bow likewise denotes the mind; it fires five arrows which correspond to the five senses. See Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

⁶¹See Arthur Millier, "Huge Mural Being Installed in Santa Monica's Library," *Los Angeles Times* (18 August 1935). "Clausen poses for Wright and Thomas Benton, rated No. 1 painter of 'The American Scene,' whose likeness appears in the mural as a primitive man apparently trying to rope the neighboring dragon with a lariat."

⁶²SMW, "Art and the Topical," unpublished, 1934. Courtesy of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁶³SMW, "The Structure of Art," unpublished, ca. 1930. Courtesy of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁶⁴See SMW, *Murals*.

⁶⁵See "First Mural Unit Finished," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook* (2 April 1934): "Murals for Library Developing Under Guiding Hand of Wright," clipping in roll LA5, frame 304, AAA: "Second Unit of Library Mural Draws Praise From Art Critics," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook* (24 July 1934); Untitled clipping from *Los Angeles Saturday Night* (18 August 1934) in LA5, frame 304, AAA.

⁶⁶"Murals for Library Developing."

⁶⁷C. S. Warren, "Interesting Personalities....," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook* (7 March 1934).

⁶⁸Wright Tells Murals Story: Large Crowd Entertained At Library Ceremony by Noted Artist," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook* (26 August 1935). "Wright mingled the language of erudition humorously, with everyday talk, as he made the subject matter of the murals easy to understand. From the solemn heights of science and art he dropped once to the word 'lousy,' said by Vicki Baum to be one of Hollywood's two pet words. The other one, 'swell,' he did not use. But several of his auditors said the word described his remarks."

⁶⁹"Wright's Huge Mural, 200 Figures, Is in Place," *The Art Digest* (1 October 1935).

⁷⁰Arthur Millier, "Invention and Imagination," special to *The Christian Science Monitor* (24 August 1935).

⁷¹"Synchronist," *Time* (2 September 1935).

⁷²Alvarez diary, 16 September 1935, in AAA, unfiled.

⁷³SMW, letter to Morgan Russell, 8 September 1935, roll 1266, frame 137, AAA. Restricted. Used by permission of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

⁷⁴Since the murals were removed from Santa Monica and transferred to the National Museum of American Art, there have been several attempts by interested citizens to have them returned to Southern California. For early activity in this regard, see Ken Fanucchi, "Tug of War for Famous Murals," *The Los Angeles Times* (13 June 1974). In the next decade, see Anne Morgenthaler, "SM Murals may return home," *The Santa Monica Evening Outlook* (23 November 1987). The author wishes to thank Mr. Roger Genser, one of the most recent activists attempting to retrieve the murals on behalf of the city of Santa Monica, for sharing his file of correspondence on the issue.

⁷⁵Thomas Craven, *Modern Art* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934): 251.

⁷⁶Arthur Millier, "New Developments in Southern California Painting," *The American Magazine of Art* 27, no. 5 (May 1934): 243-244.

⁷⁷For brief entries on both King and Redmond, see Nancy Moure, *Publications in Southern California Art*, 1, 2 & 3 (Los Angeles: Dustin Publications, 1984).

⁷⁸Joined in this show by Reuben Kadish and Philip Goldstein (later Philip Guston). See Susan Erlich, "Lorser Feitelson," in *Turning the Tide*: 58.

⁷⁹See Lorser Feitelson and Helen Lundeborg, "New Classicism" [the Post-Surrealist Manifesto], 1934, reprinted in *A Birthday Salute to Helen Lundeborg* (Los Angeles: American Art Council of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989): 4. Feitelson and Lundeborg referred to Post-Surrealism as "unprecedented in the history of art."

⁸⁰Jules Langsner, *Post-Surrealists and Other Moderns* (Los Angeles: The Stanley Rose Gallery, 1936): unpaginated.

⁸¹SMW, *Observations*. Indeed, there was by 1934 a plethora of "half-brained symbolists, soul painters and space wanderers" in Southern California. As Cary McWilliams noted in *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, Inc., 1990, rpt. of 1946 edition), "No single aspect of Southern California has attracted more attention than its fabled addiction to cults and cultists." McWilliams surveys the better-known cults of the literally thousands that have located and thrived in California since mid-century, from the arrival of William Money in Los Angeles around 1841, the founder of "The Reformed New Testament Church of the Faith of Jesus Christ," to Theosophy and New Thought to the establishment of the I AM movement in 1934. Of the many metaphysical movements to either arise in or be centered in Southern California, the Theosophical Society remains a vital presence at Ojai, the organization's international headquarters. Theosophy's "new messiah," Krishnamurti (early and influential friend to Joseph Campbell, a leading figure in the present-day study of myth), lectured at Ojai throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, and his teachings continue to be popular today. Regarding Theosophy, Macdonald-Wright once again found an ally in Carl Jung, who wrote: "When faced with the problem of grasping the ideas of the East, the usual mistake of the Western man is like that of the student in Faust. Ill-advised by the devil, he contemptuously turns his back on science, and, getting a whiff of Eastern ecstasies, takes over their yoga practices quite literally, only to become a pitiable imitator. Theosophy is our best example of this mistake." *Secret of the Golden Flower*: 79. In a diary entry dated 25 April 1939, Macdonald-Wright recorded the following: "Krishnamurti, Ouspensky, Baba, Jeffreys, Buchman, Steiner, and Gordieff [sic]...a strange group of men, some proclaiming an unusual divinity, vast spirituality, universal knowledge, and all seemingly charged, as though by drugs, with a need or an overwhelming desire to proselytize. I am left with the taste of struggle and chaos by the account of some, but a distinctly unclean reaction by others, by pity or despite for others due to their sincerity or to their palpably phoney pronouncements."

⁸²"Macdonald-Wright Feature of Show by 10 Pacific Coast Artists," *The Art Digest* (15 March 1936): 34.

⁸³Reproduced in "10 Pacific Coast Painters."

⁸⁴Nick Brigante, *Nature and Struggling Imperious Man*, 1935-1937, watercolor on panels, each 38 x 27 in., Collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of the Artist. In this series of watercolors, Brigante illustrates the struggle of man with nature, a theme of Wright's Santa Monica Library murals. In terms of style, Brigante mimics Chinese Song Dynasty landscape painting by way of Macdonald-Wright. Wright himself later praised the series in a review; see SMW, "Art Stuff," *Script* 27 (21 November 1942): 14.

⁸⁵"California Painters Open Local Exhibit," *New York World Telegram* (14 March 1936), clipping in AAA, roll LA5, frame 313. For a more positive review, see E. C. Sherburne, "Pacific Coast Painters," clipping in LA5, frame 312, AAA. See also two clippings in roll LA5, frame 315, AAA; one from the *New York Sun* (14 March 1936), and one unidentified

review, in which the following observation was made: "...and they all paint so similarly that differentiations between them will have to wait until they have thrown away the palettes they have obtained from Mr. Macdonald-Wright and get new ones of their own. Mr. Macdonald-Wright, himself, might profit by getting a new palette, too..."

⁸⁶Walton Bean and James J. Rawls, *California: An Interpretive History* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1988), 309.

⁸⁷"American Scene Painting" encompasses two distinct subgroups: Regionalists and Social Realists. Both groups painted in realistic styles, shunning the influence of European modernist movements, though the Regionalists emphasized rural American scenes, and the Social Realists painted urban America with an emphasis on critical interpretations of social problems.

⁸⁸Ample evidence exists, in addition to the images themselves, demonstrating a commitment to the ideals of American Scene painting as appropriate to the Art Projects. In 1934, Edward Bruce had declared "the American Scene" as the appropriate subject matter for PWAP. At the termination of PWAP, Edward Rowan, Bruce's assistant, wrote the following to Homer St. Gaudens (then serving as a member of the Fine Arts Commission selected as the representative to PWAP): "In looking over photographs of work sent in from the entire country Mr. Bruce, Mr. Watson, and I feel that it time that every regional Director check up very carefully on the subject matter of each project and see that the request which we made at the beginning of the Public Works of Art Project be carried out a little more faithfully, that is, that the American scene be stressed. We definitely want to achieve this." Quoted in Park and Markowitz, *New Deal For Art*: 26-27.

⁸⁹SMW, "Foreword," in *Southern California Art Project*, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum: Sept. 1-Oct. 8, 1939).

⁹⁰*Serenade*, unpaginated.

⁹¹Reproduced in *Parnassus* (March 1936), clipping in Artist's File, The New York Public Library.

⁹²For a visual, see roll LA 5, frame 567, AAA.

⁹³Nancy Moure, *Painting and Sculpture in Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Los Angeles: The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980): 50-51. "The most important contribution of Southern California artists, however, was in the invention of petrochrome and in the development of a new mosaic technique. In recognition of Southern California's unique climate and its orientation to the outdoors, Stanton Macdonald-Wright did not confine decoration to building interiors, as did most other FAP units across the country, but brought it outside. He found two durable media that could withstand sun and weather: petrachrome and mosaic."

⁹⁴For a detailed discussion of the petrachrome process, including photographs of the work done on the Long Beach mural in progress, see Natt Piper, "The Mosaic Tile Mural for The Long Beach Municipal Auditorium," *Pencil Points* (August 1938): 495-498. The author thanks Mr. Douglas Hinkey of the FHP Hippodrome Gallery in Long Beach for bringing this article to his attention.

⁹⁵SMW, letter to the Long Beach Municipal Arts Commission, written from Florence, Italy and received in Long Beach on 10 December, 1969. Typescript copy in the Long Beach Public Library. The author thanks Mr. Douglas Hinkey of the FHP Hippodrome Gallery in Long Beach for providing a copy of this document.

⁹⁶When the auditorium was razed in 1975, the mural was saved through the efforts of Long Beach preservationists. For conservation work done on the Long Beach mural, see Myrna Saxe, "The Transfer and Conservation of the Long Beach Mosaic," *Bulletin of the Association for Preservation Technology* 16, no. 2 (1984): 26-31. The mural is now installed on the Long Beach Promenade at street level.

⁹⁷Prior to joining the WPA/FAP, Philip Guston (then Goldstein, 1913-1980) had come under the influence of Siqueiros and became a member of the local John Reed Club. Guston started a mural in 1932 of a black man being whipped by the Ku Klux Klan. Guston's panel was destroyed by the Los Angeles Police "Red Squad." Later, while on the rolls of the FAP, Guston painted nothing approaching the political content of his work for the John Reed Club. Northern California, by contrast, was the site of one of the most controversial murals painted in America under PWAP—the infamous Coit Tower murals. Richard McKinzie concisely records the details: "Perhaps the most publicized clash between artists and their new patron occurred over alleged communist propaganda in a new memorial tower to volunteer firemen on San Francisco's Telegraph Hill. About 25 PWAP artists received wall space in stair wells and lobbies of Coit Tower, named for Miss Lillie M. Coit, onetime mascot of the Knickerbocker Volunteer Firemen and donor of \$125,000 for the beautification of San Francisco. A month before the tower's scheduled opening, newspaper editors touring the building discovered a miner in one panel reading the *Western Worker*, a communist weekly. Other irregularities turned up. There were shocking headlines on newspapers and books by Karl Marx, Erskine Caldwell, and other proletarian writers in a library fresco. The *San Francisco Chronicle* was missing from a newsstand in another panel, and a hammer and sickle and motto, "Workers of the World Unite," appeared in one of three panels by the artist Clifford Wight." McKinzie, *New Deal for Artists*: 24. Ultimately, Wight's hammer and sickle image was removed. McKinzie makes the important point, however, that "Clifford Wight and other artists whose work was censored represented the exception to the PWAP's dealings with artists. The large majority who received PWAP checks did not feel compromised by conforming with PWAP's definition of the American scene."

⁹⁸A notable exception was Frederick Schwankovsky, who complained of the Los Angeles Board of Education and their "Pollyanna state of mind." See Frederick Schwankovsky, "A Mural in Search of a Wall," *California Arts & Architecture*, 48, no. 4 (October 1935): 15, 34.

⁹⁹One might well argue that Edward Biberman's 1941 Treasury Section of Fine Arts *Abbott Kinney and His Dream of Venice* mural was evidence of social consciousness, as it depicts Kinney between a beautiful city and the city as it actually was with refineries and pollution. This image is a cautious one, however; it does not condemn Venice in 1941 so much as present a challenge for its future. The interpretation is, at minimum, open to disagreement, whereas the violence and mayhem of Katz' mural was obvious and confrontational. Likewise, some may see Reuben Kadish and Philip Guston's 1937 *Untitled* mural for the Los Angeles Tubercular Sanitorium as falling within the parameters of Social Realism. This writer finds it an interesting dreamlike image indebted to the FAP mural supervisor, Lorser Feitelson, who himself steered clear, on his work for the Project, of the surrealism which he had promoted for so many years.

¹⁰⁰Moure, *Painting and Sculpture*, 47.

¹⁰¹Steven M. Gelber, "Working to Prosperity: California's New Deal Murals," *California History* 58, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 101.

¹⁰²Of his study with Macdonald-Wright in the mid-1920s, Sample recalled: "Macdonald-Wright was another who I think was the first strong influence on me, *intellectually* [italics in original transcript]. He was a great draftsman and great teacher, too. We would meet once a week in his studio down on Spring Street in Los Angeles [the Art Students' League]. And there again, the people that were there were young painters mostly, or teachers, all of whom recognized in Macdonald-Wright an outstanding intellect and one who had an outstanding and substantial philosophy of art and a great knowledge of the history of art. And his teaching was also on an informal basis. He would, some evenings, simply go from—we all sat around the edge of the room on benches and there was a model on the model stand, sometimes a female nude, sometimes a male nude. He would move from one to another of us and sit down and we would make room for him and he would draw. He was a magnificent draftsman. I've saved some of his drawing—beautiful draftsman. And we would just watch him draw. He'd never say anything. He'd just draw and two or three of us would be watching him. Then he'd get up and move on and draw for the next group. Other evenings he would change that procedure and he'd say, "Model, you needn't pose anymore," and he'd get in the middle of the room and he'd begin to talk, maybe about Chinese art, maybe about the Impressionistic movement, and he'd spend the evening talking. We never knew what he was going to do but it was always an exciting evening." Transcript of an oral interview with Paul Sample by Robert Brown, 10 October 1971, Paul Sample Papers, unfiled, AAA.

¹⁰³*Speech at the Brewery*, 1932, oil on canvas, 36 x 40 in., Capricorn Galleries as of 1980. Illustrated in Moure, *Painting and Sculpture*, 58.

¹⁰⁴Paul Sample, journal entry dated 5 February 1927, reprinted in Robert L. McGrath, *Paul Sample: Painter of the American Scene* (Dartmouth: Hood Museum of Art, 1988), 28. Sample is one of the group of artists who assisted Siqueiros in paint the *Meeting in the Street* mural at the Chouinard Art School. The *Meeting in the Street* mural, as McGrath has pointed out, may have have been the inspiration for Sample's *Speech Near the Brewery*, painted in the same year, 1932. Both images deal with an orator haranguing a group of laborers.

¹⁰⁵SMW, diary entry dated 10 February, 1939, reprinted in *Serenade*, unpaginated.

¹⁰⁶See the May cover for the Southern California Art Project Bulletin, in LA 5, frame 1128, AAA which features a pen and ink drawing of Macdonald-Wright on the cover by one Dorothy Jeakins, with the caption: "It's a long jump from Los Angeles to Kyoto, Japan, but S. Macdonald-Wright, until April 1 Supervisor of the 11th District, Federal Art Project, has successfully made it. He plans to be gone three months. While in Japan Mr. Wright will lecture on ethnology at the Imperial University in Tokyo, and then journey south to the Temple at Nara to study the antiquities there. This private 'project' has long been a dream of Mr. Wright's, and the warm wishes of the Project artists—and not a little envy of such a trip—go with him."

¹⁰⁷SMW, *Serenade*, unpaginated.

¹⁰⁸SMW, diary entry of 1939, reprinted in *Serenade*, unpaginated.

¹⁰⁹The title of this lithograph is *Laborers*, listed as no. 41 but not illustrated in David W. Scott, *Stanton Macdonald-Wright*, exhibition catalogue (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Press, 1967), 43. This catalogue notes that *Laborers* was "Wright's only work in the medium of lithography; signed with a Spanish pseudonym, 'Delimpalisada.'" This is not true. Another example of a Macdonald-Wright lithograph is *Clump of Trees Before a House*, 1938, illustrated in Ebria Feinblatt and Bruce Davis, *Los Angeles Prints, 1883-1980* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980), 56.

¹¹⁰On Kistler, see Clinton Adams, *American Lithographers, 1900-1960: The Artists and Their Printers* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1983).

¹¹¹SMW, diary entry date 2 February 1939, reprinted in *Serenade*, unpaginated.

¹¹²For complete descriptions and visuals, see Historical Murals in the Los Angeles County Hall of Records Board of Supervisors' Hearing Room, in LA 1, frames 654-679, AAA. The Hall of Records building, and all the murals that were in it, are now destroyed.

¹¹³Moore, *Painting and Sculpture*, 49.

¹¹⁴SMW, "Chinese Artists in California," *California Arts & Architecture* 56, no. 4 (October 1939): 20-21.

¹¹⁵SMW's entry was entitled *Still Life No. 2*, 1939, oil on mahogany panel, illustrated and listed as no. 318 in *American Art Today: New York World's Fair* (New York: National Art Society and the Blanchard Press, 1939): 124. The author thanks Mr. Elzy J. Bird, former director of the Utah WPA/FAP and himself an exhibitor in the World's Fair, for bringing this catalogue to the author's attention.

¹¹⁶SMW, letter to Dr. Carl Dolmetsch, 26 August 1967, provided to the author by Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

¹¹⁷*Ideals of Occidental Composition*, copy in AAA.

¹¹⁸Holger Cahill, "Field Report," 29 August to 3 September, 1941, roll LA 1, frame 126, AAA.

¹¹⁹SMW, diary entry dated 28 February, 1942, reprinted in *Serenade*, unpaginated.

¹²⁰SMW, diary entry dated 5 December 1942, and reprinted in *Serenade*, unpaginated.

¹²¹*Serenade*, unpaginated.

CHAPTER FIVE
CODA AND CONCLUSION

Stanton Macdonald-Wright is unique in American art: cosmopolitan, profound student of historic culture-forms, his brilliant erudition and his many faceted abilities are without precedent. As artist and personality, he is superb material for a Vollard. Only this celebrated biographer could have done him justice.

Lorser Feitelson¹

Most people, art lovers and just art meddlers, dearly love to quiz painters. They love to put colors into words and lines and forms into phrases and they feel that if they can "say" a picture, that they know art. So sure are they that all art can be transliterated into conversation, they cry betrayal when the artist develops or changes his style or finds new interests.

Stanton Macdonald-Wright, 1945²

MACDONALD-WRIGHT AFTER THE WAR TO 1973

In the thirty-year period extending from the demise of the Federal Art Project in 1943 to his death in 1973 at the age of eighty-three, Stanton Macdonald-Wright remained highly productive in those fields of endeavor which had always interested him: painting, exhibiting, writing and teaching. He painted as prolifically as at any time in his career, the

exhibitions of this period were his largest, he wrote regularly (including his memoirs, which have been so often cited in the present study), and taught formally for over ten years. His painting was the subject of an extraordinary number of retrospective exhibitions for a living artist, though he would continue to feel deprived of the substantive recognition given to a peer such as Georgia O'Keeffe or a former student such as Thomas Hart Benton. Wright even managed to finally build a kinetic light machine, though it was based on his designs of the 1920s and '30s and was hardly representative of post-War technologies. Indeed, from 1943 to 1973, Macdonald-Wright revisited and re-hashed the dominant philosophical and artistic themes that had preoccupied him for the previous thirty-five years, ultimately returning to Synchronism. All the while, he remained adamant regarding his own role as an innovator in the history of American painting, as well as intolerant and derisive of innovations made by others after the war.

Unlike the previous twenty-five years, however, Wright no longer held or sought positions of leadership in the art community. From 1918 to 1943, he had been director of the Art Students League, central organizer of the Modern Art Workers, director of the Santa Monica Theater Guild, and head of the WPA/FAP, as well as a vigorous public speaker. After 1943, his only analogous position was as an instructor at UCLA, and even this position was part-time and short-lived (though he was still very much an influence on those students he taught). Wright traveled extensively, spending as much time away from Southern California as in it. The role of maverick modernist no longer suited him; instead, he aspired to the image of an ancient sage, to become the archetype of the hero he so admired. When in California, he was more often than not sequestered

away in his Pacific Palisades studio; students could seek him out, but he no longer came to them. Participation in things such as art organizations was, for the most part, a thing of the past.

The Southern California art community hummed with activity in the post-War era while Macdonald-Wright became increasingly withdrawn from it, ideologically as well as physically. Abstract Expressionism, a movement Wright loathed,³ inspired a younger generation, as did Pop, Op, and Color Field Painting. For these emerging artists, Wright could not serve as mentor as much as anachronistic detractor. In an era when "California Funk" captured the imagination of both painters and sculptors, Wright's grand ideologies perhaps seemed remote, dated, and irrelevant (a catchword of the 1960s).

In addition, Stanton's own painting suffered from bouts of aesthetic indecision and conceptual weakness. Often after 1943, he painted pictures that are difficult to describe in terms other than illustrative (cartoonish in some cases) and garish. Collectively, these late paintings have contributed to the critical disparagement of an artist whose strident claims included primacy in the historical development of abstraction and a masterful use of color. They have also unfortunately obscured a proper evaluation of the numerous effective works the artist did in his last thirty years, works that occupy a niche in the story of American color abstraction at mid-century.

The combination of Macdonald-Wright's relative absence from the Los Angeles art scene after the War with his own episodes of artistic foundering insured that he was not nearly the pivotal figure he was in the 1920s and 1930s. His reputation survived in retrospectives; exhibitions that unavoidably celebrated past accomplishment more than current

efficacy. Not long after he died, Stanton Macdonald-Wright's crucial role in the dissemination of modernism in Los Angeles was all but forgotten.

TRANSITION FROM THE FEDERAL ART PROJECTS

As the Federal Art Project was incrementally phased out during the first year and a half of World War II, Macdonald-Wright painted continuously at his easel, especially since large-scale murals were no longer feasible. In May of 1942, he showed with long-time friend and collaborator Morgan Russell at the Stendhal Gallery.⁴ Wright contributed fifteen still-life and figure studies, including *American, Self-Portrait; Still-Life with Yellow Ginger*; and *Homage to Pierre Louÿs*.

The first painting depicts a stern and serious Macdonald-Wright, with his right arm propped upon a short stack of books and his left hand holding an apple.⁵ On the table in front of him are a shell and a small Oriental statuette (a seated Buddha?). His "Americanness" is curiously stated at a time when America was engaged in a full-scale war with Japan. A past proponent of American's leadership in the arts, Wright nonetheless always despised nationalism and blind cultural chauvinism (something of which he regularly accused the French). This portrait subtly signals Wright's continued interest in the Orient, and his sense that being an American did not preclude other cultural affinities.

The second painting, *Still-Life with Yellow Ginger* (fig. 62), is typical of the artist's work with this subject matter in the early 1940s.⁶ Solidly composed and painted with bright, evanescent color, *Still-Life with Yellow*

Ginger demonstrates Wright's ongoing concern with formal issues in painting.

The last of these three works, *Homage to Pierre Louÿs* (fig. 63), is a bizarre and erotic canvas.⁷ A sleeping female nude stretches across the foreground, while a second woman sits behind her, fully clothed, calmly reading. Both occupy a fantastic landscape with a view of a distant ocean, and a bouquet of lilies in the foreground. Apples and bananas form an ordered still life in the middle foreground. Obviously non-aligned with anything remotely like American Scene or Social Realist painting, *Homage to Pierre Louÿs* is quintessential Macdonald-Wright in its esoteric and erudite allusions.

Pierre Louÿs (1870-1925) was a French writer of erotic poetry and prose.⁸ He was an intimate of Gide, Debussy, and of Wilde, one of Macdonald-Wright's earliest influences. Louÿs' career flourished from 1890-1901, and in the years before World War I, precisely the years in which Macdonald-Wright was immersed in reading Wilde, Balzac and the Symbolist poets, he was at the height of his popularity in Paris. However, *Homage* is more than a sentimental backward glance at youthful idols for Wright; it is an image born of personal impulses which intersected with the larger Romantic dialogue which always compelled him.

One of Louÿs' first successful literary products was *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, published in 1894.⁹ The book purported to provide translations for the first time of the poetry of a sixth-century prostitute, Bilitis. The story was, of course, entirely a fabrication on the part of Louÿs, and a fabrication with numerous literary ploys and obscure references to antiquity which would have been hugely entertaining to Wright. Fanciful and imaginative, the book recounts Bilitis' early life in Lesbos, her friendship

with Sappho, and finally her years of physical service to Aphrodite. Critics of the time were quick to comment on the book's erotic nature, specifically its lesbian content. Wright's painting not only illustrates the sea, lilacs and flowing hair so often described by Louÿs, but likewise alludes to the forbidden but exotic topic of lesbianism.¹⁰ The possible meanings of his painting would have been lost on his Southern California audience, which, again, would not have concerned Wright—such poetic delicacies and learned fantasies were naturally beyond the reach of the masses.¹¹

Macdonald-Wright himself felt the Stendahl show to be "a dignified and satisfying exhibition," though he was disturbed over not achieving exactly the desired expressions.¹² His dissatisfaction at this time was the beginning of a long period of stylistic vacillation before his return to Synchronism. He was also dissatisfied with the lack of monetary return from the exhibit: "My show at Stendhal's is over—no sales...and the whole thing leaves me with a dull, brown and banal taste. I got quite a number of reviews—some good, some very bad, and some divided. My time is not yet...."¹³

Realizing that making a living selling his art was as impossible as ever, Wright took a job as art critic for the weekly, and racy, Hollywood magazine, *Rob Wagner's Script*.¹⁴ He replaced friend and fellow art project employee Buckley MacGurrin who had been drafted. Aside from providing him with some little extra income, the art column in *Script* allowed Wright to pass sentence in print on local, national and international artists. More importantly, writing the column allowed Stanton to expound on the why and wherefore of art, something he criticized other critics for not doing. In this respect, Wright wasted no time in presenting himself as a writer who would challenge his

readership. In his second column, he reviewed an exhibition of Indian arts and crafts held at Exposition Park, and immediately addressed the issue of what art is and what the issue of primitivism is about:

Art is supposed to be the full measure of the man; his faults of vision, his psychic and even psychotic being; his competence and incompetence, his social conditioning, his sensibilities to form and design, his blind spots, his diet, his loves and hates, his I.Q., and, most important for primitive man, his religious conceptions. Primitive "art" fills this bill. It comes from a psyche with a radius more circumscribed than ours, dominated by ritual and religion, by racial taboos and formalizations, by simple and strong but quantitatively minimal desires. The metaphysical obsession makes him all he is and hopes to be, after the condition of survival is assured. His art thus is hieratic and he himself, as a conformer, is hierodule. He works for his tribe and he does it in a way to please his gods.¹⁵

This type of broad cultural, critical and historical criticism was not standard Southern California fare. Wright challenged his readership to look for what he described as the "intangibles" that make art and subtly invoked Jung at the same time: "Let's stand before these pots and shards, boxes and pipes and blankets trying for once to let them talk to us. Let's shut up and listen. Perhaps they have something to say to us of our pasts, remote and possibly golden, that have left in the limestone of our souls a faint tracery like the fossil form of a fern leaf."¹⁶

Wright's collected columns over the four years he wrote for *Script* serve as a valuable document on Southern California art of the period, but also reveal the critic's mature thought at the end of the 1918-1943 period.

Though he could at times be caustic, his barbs were usually reserved for the internationally famous (Chagall and Rouault were, for example, "outside and beneath the sphere of painting"¹⁷). He was routinely supportive of local art and artists. Though he never agreed with the manifesto of Post-Surrealism, Wright always had high praise for Lorser Feitelson and Helen Lundeberg.¹⁸ He called Henry McFee, an early modernist along with Wright and a transplant to Southern California, "one of the best painters of the country."¹⁹ Other Angelenos to receive flattering, yet sincere, remarks from Wright were Knud Merrild, Mabel Alvarez, Edouard Vysekal, Nick Brigante, as well as the conservative painters William Wendt and John Hubbard Rich. Wright used the column to bolster art associations, to promote enlightened jurying and exhibition policies, and to laud local phenomena such as the very important modern art collection of Walter and Louise Arensberg.

Wright frequently critiqued broader issues of art and meaning. Of art history as a discipline, he wrote: "Do you realize our 'art' histories are only the recording of names and technical experimentations? Pick up an art book such as colleges use, by XYZ called "Art, Here and There, etc." It seems to me a perfect example of that piling up of nauseous data that Balzac claimed was the greatest mark of spiritual sterility."²⁰ His harsh criticism of a purely formal approach to interpretation of objects was based on his unrelenting belief that art was a language of intellectual and spiritual transcendence.

On occasion, Wright made observations that portended future critical problems in art history. The following passage indicates an early awareness of what certain current feminist theoreticians maintain, i. e., that art has long been encoded with a male point of view:

I hope to see, before the Grim Reaper inducts me, a painting by a woman that really is a woman's painting. Man, having usurped the field primarily, has made for painting a male criterion and unfortunately women have fallen for it. A little work on modern psychology or psychoanalysis would make women realize that what they have to say is the *feminine* [emphasis Wright's] word. The pioneer would suffer the usual fate of pioneers but in time women would be free to tell us men off. I for one would welcome the ear-slapping-down process.²¹

When Macdonald-Wright stopped writing for *Script*, it was in order to make more time for painting.²² During his four-year tenure, though, he brought a broad knowledge of international art, a sharp wit and a keen interpretive sensibility to local art criticism.

Just a few months before closing down his office for the WPA/FAP, and while writing for *Script*, Wright negotiated a contract with the University of California at Los Angeles as a lecturer beginning in November of 1942. He did not teach painting and drawing initially, but lectured on Gothic architecture, Oriental, and modern art and aesthetics. Opinionated and brilliant, long-used to fighting ideological battles and loathsome of administrations (including the one he ran for so long for the WPA/FAP), Macdonald-Wright's insertion into the conservative academic milieu of UCLA predictably generated periodic confrontations and various frictions with professional bureaucrats and fellow faculty members.

Yet, from the outset, Macdonald-Wright was a fabulous success with his students. By all accounts, he challenged them to think and work harder while introducing them to a broad range of artistic and

philosophical ideas. In the classroom, he lectured with ease and authority. Without having to affect a pose, Wright appeared as the urbane, knowledgeable internationalist that he was. When his contract for 1943 expired in June of that year, students responded with a signed petition to retain Macdonald-Wright on the faculty.²³ One student who studied with Wright from 1945 to 1951, Pauline Khuri Majoli, recalled that he was extraordinarily encouraging to students, and stressed that they be themselves and not an imitation of another.²⁴

Wright managed his teaching schedule so as to allow for an unprecedented four, sometimes five, uninterrupted days of painting. As a result, he continued to exhibit frequently; October and November of 1943 at Stendahl's;²⁵ in May at the San Francisco Museum of Art;²⁶ in February of 1945 at the Los Angeles Museum in Exposition Park; and the following April at Stendahl's yet again.²⁷

Typical of the works included in the 1945 Stendahl were *Woman with Musical Instruments* and *Still Life with Oxblood Vase* (fig. 64), both oils dating from that year. The rhythmic linear smoothness of Wright's former work gave way here to a rougher quality indebted to the surface effects of synthetic cubism and specifically to the compositional strategies of Georges Braque. Wright uncharacteristically indulged the prosaic subject matter of women and musical instruments, and blatantly succumbed to painting under the influence of a European movement, a weakness in American painters that he so often had decried. Even old friend and critic Arthur Millier could not help but comment on this surprising turn-about in Wright's attitude: "The man who, a few years ago, fulminated against Parisian modernisms has helped himself to most of them for the works in this show. The principal debts are to Picasso and

Braque, with a tincture of Matisse."²⁸ Though Wright continued to paint subject matter derived from Oriental myth and culture, even these works were executed in a Braque-like fashion. Indeed, Wright's admiration for Braque at that time was expressed in a *Script* article: "Braque is fast becoming recognized as the modern example of the full French genius. Here is order, sensibility, a *proper* mastery of materials and an individual expressiveness that can take the most ordinary objects of every day use and by that creative and mysterious process make of them new experiences."²⁹

That Macdonald-Wright was less interested in the analysis of formal structures than his French colleague is evidenced by his large 1945 painting (also in the Stendahl exhibition), *Six Women of Cassis* (fig. 65).³⁰ The seven by thirteen-foot image displays overlapping form, intersecting planes of color, and abstract interplay of line along with a controlled degree of naturalism. The primary intent, however, is the depiction of the six women, all of whom were either married to or had a serious affair with Stanton. Wright's motive was autobiographical, if not self-congratulatory. He included himself in the painting with his easel under his arm, walking out of the scene. Women, he seemed to say, inspired him and fueled his art, but, ultimately, he remained detached (indeed, detached enough to be on his way to finding a seventh).

Six Women of Cassis, in addition to a decidedly callous content, suffers from artistic eclecticism gone awry. Though the palette employed is the high-keyed palette of Wright and not the predominantly gray palette of Braque, the borrowed surface affectations are unconvincing in their lack of formal logic and oppressive in their strident decorative organization. *Six Women* is fully representative of the artistic struggle that deepened for Macdonald-Wright as the 1940s wore on. Ever dissatisfied with his

current work, an emotion common to the compulsive and the brilliant, Wright nonetheless plumbed sources and styles out of synch with his own temperament, a temperament more prone to the exploitation of forceful rhythms with an emphasis on flowing line and conceptually orchestrated color. The formal parameters of Cubism were, in short, alien to the aesthetic sensibilities that had been germane to Macdonald-Wright's work since Synchronism and even before. As he himself wrote in 1946, "[My] Greatest artistic admirations were Michelangelo and Cézanne. Greatest personal influence, Morgan Russell."³¹

While Wright continued to struggle with his expression, he was made the subject of a major retrospective exhibition in 1948: "Thirty Five Years of Creative Painting," held at the Art Center School Gallery of Los Angeles.³² Perhaps the artist was somewhat gratified by the recognition given to him at that time by the notables of the Southern California art scene, despite the fact this could not be construed as national, let alone international, recognition. Wright's longtime colleague in modernist painting, Lorser Feitelson, then director of the Art Center Galleries, wrote the following exhibition notes:

Stanton Macdonald-Wright is unique in American art: cosmopolitan, profound student of historic culture-forms, his brilliant erudition and his many faceted abilities are without precedent. As artist and personality, he is superb material for a Vollard. Only this celebrated biographer could have done him justice. His art does not seek superficial understanding and applause; it stands aloof in an art world plagued by the presumptions of ambitious amateurs, the chit-chat and pedantic foppery of "arty" poseurs. Wright has remained uncompromising

in conserving the integrity of his art personality; as a young man, after an incredible record of achievement, he quit Paris and New York to escape from the intrigues and the cynical business of fabricating "fame" that obsessed most of the efforts of the talented artists in those centers. Internationally recognized, Wright has chosen to return to this area to make his permanent home—this area, where as a boy he received his first art instruction. His art transcends regionalism: as a creator his achievements are universal, in that he has succeeded in giving form to his knowledge of the life-force of all art.³³

Feitelson's laudatory remarks were in addition to many Wright predictably received in the local papers.³⁴ It is hard to imagine, however, that Feitelson's emphasis on Wright's artistic integrity did not give Stanton reason to pause and consider the derivative quality of his most recent work, especially in relation to his earliest.³⁵

He kept up an impressive level of productivity at the easel, and continued to exhibit regularly, including a one-person in 1950 exhibition at the Honolulu Academy of Arts where he taught for the summer. Gradually, Wright began to veer away from Cubist pastiches to still lifes and figurative work that began to show an admixture of by-then long unused Synchronist strategies and more formally academic methods. An example is the 1951 *Self-Portrait with Squash* (fig. 66). Here, though not animated by a central, unified rhythm like the early Synchronies, the familiar planes of spectral color are applied in a manner more akin to Wright's work of 1917 than Braque's of the pre-War era. That is, these planes of color function more as rays of colored light than as collage fragments. The artist's face is fully modeled and partially hidden amid the

colored rays that cut in and out of the still life in the composition's middle ground. It is a sullen face, with a down-turned mouth and blankly staring eyes.

A key to understanding this particular self-portrait is the death in 1951 of Stanton's long-time wife, Jeanne. They had been together (excepting a brief separation in the early 1930s) practically since Wright's relocation to California over thirty years earlier. Despite his legendary status as a lothario, Wright had a deep bond with Jeanne, and was devastated by her death. His thoughts inevitably turned to his own mortality, to lost time and regrets, and to unaccomplished goals. Mabel Alvarez, who was again studying privately with Stanton in 1951, noted this poignant aphorism from a Wright lecture: "Don't try to discover something. Only discover yourself."³⁶ Jeanne's death, in combination with Stanton's long period of artistic sluggishness, contributed to his own reinvigorated search for himself, a search which ultimately led to a return to Synchronism.

Wright's aesthetic shift back to Synchronism was noticed right away by Los Angeles critic Jules Langsner.³⁷ Langsner also commented that the artist was giving up his Oriental motifs, this in reference to *Self-Portrait with Squash* and similar oils of that year. However accurate that observation was in 1951, Wright had certainly not lost interest in the Orient. By June of 1952, Wright managed to secure a summer-long position at the Academy of Arts in Honolulu doing research on their Oriental collection. From Hawaii, he went to Japan in October under the aegis of a Fulbright scholarship to study Chinese and Japanese painting. Stanton remained in Kyoto until March of 1953, when he was forced by ill health to return to the United States. Before leaving Japan, he wrote a

rough draft for an intended book on critical theory, entitled *Beyond Aesthetics*.³⁸ He also painted a large number of Japanese scenes which he called *Nippon no Iro*, the Color of Japan. These included scenes of the Buddha at Nara, Miyako Odori (a theatrical performance), and landscape views. While in Japan, Stanton recalled feeling "an intellectual and emotional 'at-homeness' I have never known elsewhere."³⁹

Just prior to his academic residency at Honolulu in the summer of 1952, Stanton married a former student of his from UCLA, Jean Louise Sutton. The new Mrs. Macdonald-Wright, quiet, shy and withdrawn, supported her husband throughout his artistic readjustment and for the rest of his life. That the ever-opinionated Stanton was entrenched in an artistic and intellectual phase of readjustment back in America is evidenced in part by his statement to the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1953 upon his return to America: "Today I have no philosophy."⁴⁰ Even more telling is the following brief excerpt from a much longer diary entry from 1955: "since about 1948 I was psychically *un homme perdu*—feeling like a man falling—with no hand holds anywhere—lost to desires, to ambition, to attachments—conceiving that all was futile; without faith (while wanting it with every breath) but convinced of human unimportance, desperately bitter at times and at others hopeless, resigned, ill and useless."⁴¹

In November of 1954, Stanton's heart-related health problems prompted him to resign his professorship at UCLA.⁴² 1954 was also the year that Wright returned fully to Synchronist painting. As Jean Wright has noted, "His [Stanton's] return to Synchronism in 1954 meant a return to a strict observance of the color scales. Canvases were given conceptual titles, and the scale they were done in noted on the back, in a sketchbook of

preliminary drawings, or his diary."⁴³ In February of 1955, Wright exhibited both early and current examples of Synchronism at the Rose Fried Gallery in New York.⁴⁴ Wright recalled the show as "on the whole unsuccessful; but it served to invigorate me further and to make me work even harder."⁴⁵ And, work hard he did, painting twenty-one pictures over the next ten months, several of them almost mural size.⁴⁶

Of his return to Synchronism, Stanton gave this succinct, yet poetic, explanation to former student and artist, Charles Hess:

You talk of art, and it is a good subject. The man who will really understand what it is all about hasn't appeared in print—and for good reason. There are too many kinds and there are too many theories that purport to supply its background and meaning, and there are too many subjective sensations for the man who knows his subject (I mean the artist) ever to put into words more than a series of principles, strongly tinged with desires and ideals as well as rationalizations of his own shortcomings—that is, until he has finished with vanity, ambition, and yes, youth...At my age, after thirty-five years wasted on theories and analyses, I found myself confronted by a simple fact—at sixty-three, I looked at my own face as we are advised to do by the Taoists and Zenists, and the answer was obvious, too obvious—I had searched everywhere except in myself—almost like the conception of the *Hound of Heaven* of Francis Thompson. I had a long disciplinary training in France. I had naturally (viz., according to my own nature) conceived of a characteristic type of expression when I was twenty-one, and now I found that that former expression was still characteristic of me, that's all. I am now painting the same kind of pictures I painted at

my earliest period—better I trust—at least they look better to me.

All the intellectualizing of thirty-five years served to lead me about the spiral to my starting point.⁴⁷

Indeed, it was a major contention of Wright's that the primary difference between his early Synchronism and his later Synchronism was a hidden, interior quality that came with personal maturation and growth. The artist would further explain this phenomenon the following year, when he enjoyed the largest retrospective exhibition to date in January of 1956 at the Los Angeles County Museum at Exposition Park, where he had organized the show of American modernism thirty-six years earlier. In the catalogue for that show, the artist was quoted as follows:

It was now that my years of exile from the exhibition field began [in 1918, upon his return to California]. I worked at painting, of course, continuously, but in a sort of psychologic void trying this, trying that, without halt and also without any satisfaction. As I had to earn a living I was an employee for the government; I lectured at several universities on art history and Oriental aesthetic, and I lived in Japan in 1937 and again in 1952-53 for the purpose of studying Chinese calligraphy and the ideas of Zen. At the end of 1953, at the age of 63, having finally freed myself from the weight of former ideas, I felt that I was on the trail of those art qualities relative to me. I mean that I had thrown overboard all my previous preconceptions, and was ready to paint my best works.

At first I saw my new painting with a certain astonishment, for I had made the 'great circle,' coming back after 35 years to an art that was, superficially, not unlike the canvasses of my youth. However, at bottom there was a great difference. I had achieved an

interior realism [emphases Wright's]; what is called *Yugen* by the Japanese. This is a sense of reality which cannot be seen but which is evident by feeling, and I am certain that this hidden reality was what I felt to be lacking in my younger days. This quality can be created neither by intellectual means nor by the will. It is necessary that the artist be 'taken over' by an all encompassing idea. Dante stated '*chia pinge figura si non puo esser lei non la puo porre*;' that is to say that the artist must entirely 'become' that which he paints; he should (from the standpoint of a program) lose himself altogether during the exteriorization of the picture.

Thus my painting is both abstract and not abstract. It is engendered by a subject of ideas which are *concepts*, not *things*. For me these concept-subjects are only a starting point and I do not demand that they be considered either the *raison d'etre* or the nub of my art.⁴⁸

Wright's comments reveal that he was still very much the aesthete he had been as a young man. The idea of being completely "taken over" by a feeling in order to create art sounds similar to Tolstoy's religious fervor in *What is Art?* Quoting Dante, spiritual mentor to Michelangelo, is yet more evidence of Wright's deep romanticism. Finally, Wright's artistic acquiescence to *Yugen*, a mysterious interior realism or presence, was itself an arguably romantic, if not aesthetic, act. To describe his own work as both abstract and not abstract reads as the quintessential Zen statement made by a Western man. Finally, Wright referred to his career as the "great circle" because it began with Synchronism and would apparently end with it. The circle, of course, is a primary symbol of mythology and Jungian psychology. It, more than any other symbol,

signifies wholeness and completeness. The very choice of this metaphor, a very conscious choice on the part of Macdonald-Wright,⁴⁹ indicates his conviction that Synchronism was incomplete in its nascent form in 1913, and now was completed by the spiritual refinement of his years, by *Yugen*. Immediately after the opening of the show, Stanton recorded in his diary: "I did realize the vast superiority of my new work over the old. The early work was materialistic and heavy—the latter work was like a release of a singing spirit from fetters—better drawing and infinitely better color and order."⁵⁰

The exhibition itself was a huge success for Stanton. Richard Brown, then Chief Curator for the Museum, summarized Wright's stature in his introduction for the show's catalogue: "Most of the time since 1920 he [Wright] has lived and worked in Southern California where, as an artist, an intellectual force, as a teacher, and as a leader among his colleagues, his influence has been considerable."⁵¹ The show received glowing reviews from long-time Wright supporters Jules Langsner and Arthur Millier, among others.⁵² Hundreds of Southlanders attended the opening. As Wright recalled, "It didn't rain and there was a large turnout—probably a thousand people and the mob spirit was enthusiastic and laudatory. The hanging of the show was superb and the general effect beyond my expectations..."⁵³

Wright's 1956 Exposition Park retrospective show, like the Rose Fried exhibit in February of 1955 in New York, marked his return to Synchronism in conjunction with showing his early Synchronist work. The show allowed for comparison between the two periods, that is, early and late Synchronism, a comparison rarely made in contemporary scholarship. As already pointed out in this study, the overwhelming

amount of study devoted to Macdonald-Wright to date has concentrated on Synchronism up to 1918. The Synchronies of the 1950s merit re-examination, not just in relation to early modernism but also in relation to the advent of Abstract Expressionism and Color Field painting in America. For example, it is difficult not to see a relationship between these late Synchronies and the work of the self-named Four Abstract Classicists; Lorser Feitelson, John McLaughlin, Frederick Hammersly, and Karl Benjamin, who exhibited together at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1959.⁵⁴ These painters shared a formal vision of a clean, hard-edged geometric abstraction that invites comparison with Wright's. Feitelson, of course, was a long-time associate of Stanton's, but the aesthetic connections between Wright and a painter such as McLaughlin (who was himself intellectually and aesthetically indebted to the Orient) call for further elucidation.

An example of Wright's new Synchronist work from the 1956 show is *Hommage to Debussy* (fig. 67), 1954. Unlike the early Synchronies, *Debussy* displays crisper edges outlining more definitely geometric shapes. The palette employed is softer, the tonalities more muted. Despite the geometric compositional emphasis, a sense of fluid rhythmic movement is established. With a nod to Debussy in the title, Wright's image aspires to the same type of ordered yet lively structure as that musician's work with notes. It was Wright's intention to create an intellectual and emotional evocation; an evocation wholly personal yet at the same time capable of communicating an aesthetic experience to the viewer. Wright believed that an "evocation" resulted when an artist immersed himself completely in an idea, and allowed his inner feelings to dictate to his brush.⁵⁵ Pure emotions, he further believed, were universal

and unchanging in character and thus capable of being transmitted to anyone at anytime. In this regard, the artist's intentions were not at all distant from those of his youth. His work, in formal terms, had become more finished, more polished and more obviously elegant in addition to Wright's belief that these latter pieces contained *Yugen*.

Along with Wright's renewed interest in Synchronism and painting in general came a fresh interest in self-promotion. New oils which had graced his recent retrospective were assembled for shows in cities that served as launching points for Synchronism in the pre-War years; Paris and New York. In Paris, Stanton enlisted the aid of noted critic, painter and author, Michel Seuphor (b. 1901) in recommending an appropriate gallery. In the course of his own art historical research, Seuphor had initially approached Wright for information regarding his role in the development of modernism. The result was a rich correspondence on the subject, and the formation of a dear friendship. On Seuphor's recommendation, Wright debuted his new work at the Galerie Arnaud in June of 1956.

The international reception to the new Synchronist works was a continuation of critical disparagement the artist was so used to receiving outside of the Southland, but which was always hurtful nonetheless. One British writer said of the oils at the Galerie Arnaud that they "...unfortunately lack the vitality of his [Wright's] youth."⁵⁶ French critics echoed that same sentiment: "...during his wild youth he creates his most beautiful canvases...it is only very recently that he has taken up abstract painting again. Alas, it is quite weak compared to the work of his youth."⁵⁷ Another noted that "These [recent] works demonstrate without doubt a new confidence in a conceptual order and idealistic meaning, but a

the same time they betray the difficulty in being [an abstract painter] after having been."⁵⁸ Only Pierre Charbonnier of *Le Monde* wrote a review entirely positive, declaring that Wright's new work revealed a "*métier magistral*."⁵⁹

When Wright took his show to New York in October at the Duveen-Graham Gallery, the reviews were not much better.⁶⁰ Despite his explanation of the role of the Orient in his work, one unconvinced critic noted that "...for some reason the Orient has always spelt disaster to Western Artists."⁶¹ Hilton Kramer took the show to task in more abstruse but still unflattering language: "What one feels in the presence of these paintings is the incongruous attempt to synthesize a visual vocabulary so historically specific with philosophical interests wholly alien to this manner of representation."⁶² At least one positive note came from Howard Devree, who wrote that "...Stanton Macdonald-Wright, who pioneered in abstract use of color in Paris in his youth and now at 66 has come up with new work as vital and brilliant as any in his career."⁶³ Despite Devree's enthusiasm, just as Wright's attempt in 1932 at Stieglitz' American Place had failed to re-establish him as a major American painter, so now had his attempt in 1956 apparently failed.

However, just as he had done in the 1930s and even earlier, Wright pressed on with his painting and with a belief in the importance of his work. Regarding the poor critical response to his Duveen-Graham show, Stanton recorded in his diary that "...it will take more than magazines to stop me."⁶⁴ In 1958, Wright published an article in Paris that was ostensibly a general reflection on art, but which was really a defense of his own recent work and an answer to some of his critics. Writing about the

development of abstraction, Wright noted the liberating influence of African art in the pre-World War I era, and went on to add:

But alas, the specter of the original dilemma was not long in reappearing, and was again accompanied by boredom. Now, however, the visible world was exhausted of unknown, inspirational forms. How to manage? It was thus that the artist associated himself with psychology and the little-known oriental philosophy. Bad partners, these two disciplines only succeeded in giving him free reign with anarchical frenzy, to push it to a disastrous amorphism. Did this constitute a third dilemma? On the contrary, I claim that it was the salvation. The artist has only to trust in the genius of his traditions, to return to structure and to his artistic responsibility.⁶⁵

Also in 1958, Wright received positive critical attention from Seuphor, who, more than any other major critic of the time, devoted serious attention to Synchronism and its relationship to early modernism. Of the new Synchronies, Seuphor wrote: "But what is our surprise at seeing the canvasses that Macdonald-Wright has painted since 1953! These are new synchronies! Simply fresher than the first ones and yet to be aged in history's attic. These new synchronies are perhaps more cosmic than the old ones, more poetic also, but they are plastic above everything else and their spatial exaltation does not contain any literary or figurative allusion. Freshness, youth, the joy of living, such are the qualifying terms which express them."⁶⁶

The last years of the 1950s were nonetheless difficult for Wright not only with critics, but with his dealers as well. He railed about their "imbecilities, discourtesies and incompetence," and vowed to withdraw

from exhibiting, a vow he could not keep. The all-too-familiar frustration he felt with critics, dealers and the public compelled him to angrily write the following in late 1959: "I have had my day (in 1913-1919) and fled from it in isolation in California. I'll have another after I die because this I know—if I know anything—no one has remotely approached me in the handling of color."⁶⁷

Stanton and Jean returned to Japan in 1960 for an extended stay in Kyoto where the Wrights lived in a monastery setting. Stanton painted, and the two enjoyed traveling the countryside, attending lectures when possible, and occasionally collecting Oriental art for their home back in Pacific Palisades. So content were the Wrights in Japan, and so attached to its culture and customs, that they returned almost annually to live for extended periods. The peace Stanton felt while in Japan, however, did little to alleviate nagging feelings of bitterness regarding his own country. In November of 1961, Stanton recorded a typical tirade against America:

We're both getting more and more homesick for Kyoto.

We've been away since June 10—that's five months and a week.

We can generally stick it out here [California] for seven months, but things get continually worse, I mean more stupid, a never-ending affront to all thinking and feeling...This country has repudiated me completely, has lost its greatest artist and gained his undying despite [sic]. It is a beautiful world, and California is a magnificent state and climate, but beyond this appreciation I feel nothing but hatred for every move my countrymen make.⁶⁸

Stanton's resentment toward the American public over the issue of recognition never abated. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the last years of his life were a morass of anger and regret. On the contrary,

his ill feelings about the public face of his career co-existed with a good deal of warm sentiment and satisfaction regarding his own personal life. From hundreds of reminiscences Stanton wrote during his final decade, the following is a typical description and summary of his life:

One should never try to go back, but surely one can treasure memories, one can, for a few moments, live in them and the fact that they are gone forever gives them a mellower, a more golden sheen. I think the words 'never again' in themselves can throw a spell over us for they bring a realization of our impotence [and] our transitoriness in this world where joy is so short and where youth is even shorter. This joyfulness of youth is romance and romance enriches our thoughts and colors all our following years. Yet youth is not the only romance. Whatever enriches us and whatever colors our lives is romance. I know because I have had a full tally of it—then—and now. My whole life has been a romance—partaking of the last days of an artist's life in Paris—living fervently the last days of a grand epoch—poverty-stricken in N.Y. and seeking oblivion in opium—California and a new life, essays in the business world but always as an actor plays a role...Have I not said youth in Paris—age in Kyoto? Well, I have it and who could have more—for I have chosen romance above pleasure, riches, repute and acceptance and I think, in this dewdrop world, I have chosen wisely.⁶⁹

In 1961, Thomas Hart Benton visited Macdonald-Wright at the latter's Pacific Palisades home, and painted Stanton's portrait (fig. 68).⁷⁰ Wright is portrayed at work in front of a Synchronist painting of brilliant color; his face is serious, his eyes intent. Wright appears not unlike an

ancient Chinese sage, wizened and wise. The Synchronist backdrop is an odd reminder that it once was part of all that was new and rebellious, while the image of the painter serves to remind that both artist and image necessarily become aged and pass into history. Both Benton and Wright, each then in his early seventies, reminisced about their very different roles in American art and their mutual survival. The portrait stands as a commemoration of Benton and Wright's long friendship, and also as a very personal testament to individual perseverance and determination.

Ironically, it was beginning in 1961, the moment of Benton's portrait commemorating the pioneering role of his friend, that Macdonald-Wright painted some of his most ineffectual canvases. *Fish*,⁷¹ *Fudo*,⁷² and *L'Age D'Or*⁷³ serve here as examples.

Fish (fig. 69) is a decorative parody of Synchronism as originally conceived. The stylized outline of a fish fills the horizontal format of the canvas, and is intersected by arcs which derive not from any inherent compositional rhythm, but from the implied shapes of fins and gills. These shapes are rendered in brightly colored patches that make no pretense to colored light, a color scale, or what Wright himself had previously created in the name of color harmony. The subject matter, a criterion so important to Wright in previous decades, is wildly uncharacteristic. Whether born of personal frustration or eccentric experimentation, the image falls far short of Macdonald-Wright's demonstrated expressive power.

In 1963, the artist painted *Fudo*, a close-up imaginary portrait of a Fudo-Myoo, a manifestation of the Buddha and one who does His bidding. According to legend, the Fudo-Myoo has a ferocious face, long hair, and carries a sword (Wright also painted a *Flying Fudo*, with a huge sword),

and ties up with rope those enemies of the Buddha. Wright's *Fudo* is an extravagant, overly-exaggerated caricature of a face, complete with twisted mouth and protruding, sharp teeth. Like *Fish*, *Fudo* is intersected by lines and curves that have no structural relationship to a fundamental rhythm, as in the early synchronisms, but spin off the *Fudo*'s chin, ear and eyebrows. The coloration is exotic and bold, but completely lacks the sophistication of the early work or the work from the mid-1950s.

L'Age D'Or (fig. 70), dating from 1966 to 1967, is the most disturbing example because it is the largest, most compositionally chaotic, and the one Wright himself called "the summation of synchronism."⁷⁴ Over three large panels, clusters of figures appear as stylized and inept renditions of Wright's formerly successful variations on Michelangelesque bodies. Some play musical instruments, one is winged, others surge athletically or else lounge in stock classical poses. The color patterns, applied intuitively and, like *Fudo* and *Fish*, in no strict scale, are as harsh and disjunctive as they are emphatically decorative. The ensemble appears as a confused and disorganized pastiche of past Wright paintings, brought together in a seemingly desperate attempt to create a major work.

One is tempted to assume that these inferior late works and others like them served to validate the focus American art scholars have placed on Wright's early contributions to modernism. Again, this focus resulted in the dismissal of his major Synchronist works of the 1950s, as well as Stanton's entire career between the World Wars. Whatever creative demise Macdonald-Wright suffered in the 1960s in no way lessens the substantive achievements of previous decades.

Into the 1960s, Wright continued to exhibit often and in diverse locations, including Rome.⁷⁵ He also continued to be included in numerous group shows and surveys. Among the more important of these were "The Decade of the Armory Show" organized by Lloyd Goodrich and held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in February of 1963; and "Synchronism and Color Principles in American Painting, 1910-1930," organized by William C. Agee and held at the Knoedler Galleries in December of 1965. The latter exhibition not only contributed to renewed interest in the achievements of early American moderns, it also laid the groundwork for the serious study of Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell as it lifted their paintings out of the perennial shadow of Orphism. Before the decade came to a close, Wright was the subject of two more major retrospective exhibitions; in 1967 at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Art (formerly the National Collection of Fine Arts); and in 1970 at the Wight Gallery at UCLA.

In the last years of his life, Stanton continued to paint and to outline new uses for color and technology, which he predicted would make extraordinary advances in the coming decades, almost as if he were envisioning the advent of the personal computer and high-tech graphics. He told artist Jan Stussy that the future of art was the blending of all art forms into one, a vision Wright had held since the 1920s. He wrote hundreds of letters to friends and colleagues, detailing his summary thoughts on art and life. Many of these long and very revealing letters seem to have been written with an eye to the future and to the eventual assessment and re-assessment of his role in American art. He condemned all those fakers and poseurs he had somehow neglected to condemn earlier, and condemned anew those he felt deserving. To the end, Stanton

remained self-promotional, but with a firm belief in the integrity of his own vision. He wrote long, cathartic letters to long-dead mistresses and former wives, and to his father. He wrote diary entries describing his longing for lost emotions and energies and describing his regrets and memories of Virginia, Paris, New York and the zealous ambitions of his youth. It was not uncommon for the artist to contradict something he had written years earlier, or to alter facts, or, strangely enough, to curiously minimize at times his greatest achievements. In tens of thousands of words written in the few years before his death, Stanton exposed his flayed but still-intact emotional, intellectual and spiritual life of eighty-plus years. When he died from a heart attack in 1973 in Pacific Palisades at the age of eighty-three,⁷⁶ it was with a similar belief to the one he held as a young man bound for Paris, albeit tempered by time and experience; history would record Stanton Macdonald-Wright as a great painter.

CONCLUSION

In the relatively young academic field of American art history, the study of regional art is younger still, and, at the time of this writing, is being continually subdivided into areas of special interest. The energy and thought being directed into these areas will no doubt yield both new raw data as well as fresh insights into the recent past. Rigorous investigations of art created outside of the East Coast establishment have already contributed substantially to an awareness of formerly remote traditions, colonies and movements that entwine and embellish the American experience.

Much attention has justly been given to the history of early Southern California art, with its abundance of early *plein-air* painters, art clubs, and exhibitions. Southern California exponents of symbolism, surrealism, and cubism have also been brought up for re-examination and revision in a host of articles, exhibition catalogues, master's theses and dissertations. The current temptation, perhaps unavoidable, has been to overestimate the size and strength, both physically and intellectually, of the emergence of modernism in the Southland.

For all its vitality and productivity, Los Angeles was not a miniature Manhattan, nor less the "Athens of the West" that local promoters of the time deemed it to be. Geographically, Los Angeles sprawls as compared to the density of Manhattan. In 1920s and 1930s Los Angeles, there was a much smaller number of modern artists working in a much larger area when compared to New York, a phenomenon that reduced the day to day contact among those artists as well as limited the exchange between artists and the general public. In addition, modernist activity in painting, though present, was dwarfed by the ever-present emphasis given by a decidedly conservative public to the traditional painters.

And, Los Angeles simply was not the intellectual center of modernism that New York was, in that it had again a smaller population of vanguard writers, critics and connoisseurs. Just as Willard Wright had disparaged culture in Los Angeles in his 1913 article, "Los Angeles, City of Dreadful Night," cultural observers of Los Angeles in the following decades continued to lament the dearth of serious inquiry, modernist or otherwise. As a young scholar traveling in the West, Joseph Campbell visited Los Angeles in 1931 and wrote the following to a friend: "I have a

notion I shall always feel about Southern California as I feel about it now, a glorified real estate development designed for pretty obvious people."⁷⁷

One of the first historians of Los Angeles modernism, Henry Hopkins, points out that in the initial studies of a Southern California avant-garde "we simply fought for the recognition that there *was* something in Los Angeles [in the 1920s and 1930s], that the modern art world didn't start here over night."⁷⁸ Likewise, it is not the intention of this author to further disparage, malign or otherwise insult the formative years of culture in Los Angeles, but rather to fairly describe and assess the conditions under which modernist painting appeared. In short, there were few practitioners and a small audience.

The presence of Stanton Macdonald-Wright in the Southland from 1918 and throughout the 1920s and 1930s was, in fact, of central importance to the very presence of modernist painting; as a painter, teacher, lecturer, curator and forceful personality, Wright contributed to a creative milieu that offered more diverse options, both formal and philosophic, than existed prior to 1918. More than any other single artist of the era, Wright argued for the validity of modernism. In person and in written manifestoes, he explained to a reticent local population that the art of painting aspired to more than copying nature; art could be intellectual and spiritual; as a cultural language, art could connect past, present and future; as a mode of understanding, art may be self-revelatory. Yet, Macdonald-Wright expended his efforts in a region largely unreceptive to his ideas, and his influence was ultimately felt among a select group of progressive artists and an even more select group of citizens. Still, it is this presence of his attitude, a self-confident, aggressive and persuasive attitude, that commands attention in the history of Los Angeles in the 1920s and 1930s.

Macdonald-Wright worked to force modernist issues into a public arena, however immune that public generally was to his ideas of modernism.

While it is impossible to document the many unseen ways in which one artist influences the intellect and spirit of another, Los Angeles between the wars produced no artists who followed directly on the intricate philosophies of Macdonald-Wright. While a few clearly copied Wright's formal style of the '20s and '30s, the esoteric and demanding aesthetic agenda of which Wright sermonized was simply too difficult or intimidating, or both, for other artists to adopt. Wright was widely admired in the Southern California art world, as well as disliked and even feared; his personality was dominating and irrepressible. Force of personality alone, however, does not mold the aesthetic viewpoint or aspirations of another. In the post-World War Two period, Macdonald-Wright students such as Jan Stussy and Gordon Nunes both became credible and interesting artists, as did Pauline Majoli and Charles Hess, but they all developed a distinctly personal voice. Stanton influenced them as a good teacher influences students— by showing them a bigger world of things and ideas. He made them think and feel, and inspired them to produce individual kinds of art.

Macdonald-Wright's artistic integrity sustained himself and impressed others, but his personal aesthetic remained, for the most part, personal. It was his public personality, in combination with but even more than his paintings, that regularly shook and stirred the cultural conventionalities and complacencies of the Southland between 1918 and 1943. His intellect, one that fiercely questioned the past and boldly envisioned the future, served as an outward model for individual creativity and his varied accomplishments as a benchmark for younger

artists. Among the small, yet vital, core of modern artists working in the Southland between the Wars, Stanton Macdonald-Wright provided a link between the heroic years of modern art before the First World War and the visual innovations of our own time.

¹Lorser Feitelson, "Introduction" in *Thirty Five Years of Creative Painting*, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles: Art Center School Gallery, 1948), unpaginated.

²SMW, "Art," *Rob Wagner's Script* (31 March 1945): 18.

³In a lecture at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, circa 1966, SMW decried the current work of Phillip Guston, then also hanging at the SBMA, as "stupid junk" and that anyone who painted like that "ought to be shot." Tape five of five cassettes, Jan Stussy Papers, AAA.

⁴Herman Reuter, "Reviewer Comments on New L. A. Art Exhibitions," *Hollywood Citizen News*, 25 April 1942. Clipping in roll LA 5, frame 316, AAA. "Morgan Russell, his co-exhibitor, is also an expressionist."

⁵Illustrated in roll LA 5, frame 316, AAA.

⁶This painting was formerly in the collection of Mssrs. Walter Nelson-Rees and James Coran of San Francisco. It was destroyed in a devastating fire in Oakland, California on 20 October 1991.

⁷Illustrated in "Macdonald-Wright Exhibits After Ten Years," *Art Digest* 16, no. 15 (1 May 1942): 17.

⁸On Louÿs, see H. P. Clive, *Pierre Louÿs(1870-1925): A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

⁹Pierre Louÿs, *Les Chansons de Bilitis* (Paris: Librairie de l'art indépendant, 1895 [actually December, 1894]).

¹⁰The composition of Wright's *Homage* seems to derive from a number of motifs found in *Les Chansons*, and recalls some verses very specifically, such as this song of Bilitis to the woman, Mnasidice: "She is sleeping in her tumbled hair with her hands mingled behind her neck. Is she dreaming? Her mouth is open. She breathes softly. With a little white swan's down I wipe the sweat on her arms and the fever on her cheeks, but without waking her. Her closed eyelids make two blue flowers. I am going to get up so quietly. I shall go and draw water, milk the cow and beg fire from the neighbours. I want to be curled and clothed when she opens her eyes. O Sleep, remain long betwixt her beautiful curving lashes, and carry the blissful night into a dream of happy omen." From Pierre Louÿs, *The Songs of Bilitis* (New York: Privately Printed for William Godwin, Inc., 1933), 76.

¹¹Wright's *Homage to Pierre Louÿs* is, of course, open to alternative interpretations, and invites speculation on other motivations he may have had in painting it, which may include, but not be limited to, Wright's own interest in voyeurism and lesbianism as an object of male sexual fantasy.

¹²SMW, diary entry dated April 24-June 6, 1942, quoted in *Serenade*, unpaginated.

¹³SMW, diary entry dated April 24-June 6, 1942, quoted in *Serenade*, unpaginated.

¹⁴*Rob Wagner's Script* was started in 1929. Stanton's first review appeared in *Script* 27, no. 631 (20 June 1942): 18, and his last in *Script* 32, no. 726 (30 March 1946): 20.

¹⁵SMW, "Art Stuff," *Script* 27, no. 632 (4 July 1942): 16.

¹⁶SMW, *Script* (4 July 1942).

¹⁷SMW, "Art," *Script* 30, no. 681 (10 June 1944): 28.

¹⁸See SMW, "Art Stuff," *Script* 27, no. 639 (10 October 1942): 18 This is but one review of many in which Wright praised Feitelson and Lundeberg.

¹⁹SMW, "Art Stuff," *Script* 27, no. 640 (24 October 1942): 14.

²⁰SMW, "Art," *Script* 31, no. 714 (6 October 1945): 18.

²¹SMW, *Script* 27, no. 642 (21 November 1942): 14. In fact, SMW often spoke to Alfred Stieglitz of Georgia O'Keeffe as the preeminent example of a woman expressing the feminine perspective, a view Stieglitz himself apparently expressed to Stanton at one time, as evidenced by the following letter from SMW to Stieglitz: "Again I think of her [O'Keeffe] because we came to you together, at the same time, and I think of your saying she is the feminine and I the masculine side of a new art." SMW to Stieglitz, 8 March 1920. Stieglitz Archive. An earlier expression of this same idea came in 1919, shortly after SMW had relocated to California. He wrote to Stieglitz describing plans for a book that he [SMW] intended to write, and requested from Stieglitz a paragraph on the "feminine" in art: "I also wish to have a paragraph on "feminine art," the art expression of the female, showing where the male and female can never touch." SMW to Stieglitz, 16 September 1919. Stieglitz Archive. Apparently, Stanton felt from past conversations with Stieglitz that the dealer felt as he did about the polar nature of masculine and feminine; i. e., that what is inherent and natural to one sphere is not to the other. Later, in 1924, Stanton wrote to Stieglitz that he believed O'Keeffe's work and his own [SMW's] "to be the only completely original work being done here now." SMW to Stieglitz, 15 November 1924. Stieglitz Archive. An interpretive problem with SMW's comments regarding O'Keeffe is that the majority of these were made to Stieglitz, a man Stanton admired and would not wish to directly insult. However, SMW once wrote the following to Morgan Russell, ca. 1920s: "Of course I have never been under the impression that Stieglitz knew anything about art. He has helped me enormously I have a personal regard and affection for him as a man and a friend, but why oh why must these two things get mixed up and why must he consider that he knows something about art? If he did he could never look twice at O'Keeffe's. Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings! My god they are the work of a feeble minded and neurotic, repressed and sensual old maid, no quality, no value. Stieglitz loves her, hence her work is wonderful." SMW to MR, roll 1266, frame 28, AAA. Restricted. Used by permission of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

²²Lorser Feitelson took over for Wright briefly as critic for *Script* in 1946.

²³Petition in personnel file, University of California at Los Angeles. Copy in author's file. Wright's value to the University was confirmed by other subsequent events. In July of 1943, Wright was offered a position with the army recording activities in the South Pacific, prompting Art department chairman Hilpert to urge University President Sproul to retain Wright's services. Letter of 2 July 1943, Personnel file, UCLA. In October of 1944, the University of Southern California (USC), offered Wright a lucrative position, again prompting Hilpert to advise that UCLA should "do what is necessary to keep him." Letter, October 1944, Personnel file, UCLA.

²⁴Pauline Khuri Majoli, interview with the author, 21 February 1992, Los Angeles. The author, in turn, studied painting and drawing with Majoli from 1976 to 1980. During that period, Majoli still had students make color charts in the manner she had been taught by Macdonald-Wright. Periodically, she brought a painting by Mabel Alvarez to class to make a point about the use of color, and in 1979 took a group of students, including the author, to an exhibition of Macdonald-Wright paintings at the Arco Tower in downtown Los Angeles. That she had been influenced in her thinking by Macdonald-Wright was obvious even at that time, though her work was and is remarkably unfettered by his work or theory.

²⁵See exhibition catalogue in roll LA 5, frame 322, AAA.

²⁶See clipping, "S. F. Art Exhibits," in AAA, roll LA 5, frames 154-155, and "L. A. Artist Turns to New Style," *San Francisco Examiner* (14 May 1944).

²⁷See Maude Riley, "Wright Writes," *Art Digest* 19, no. 14 (15 April 1945): 13. See also SMW, Art," *Script* (31 March 1945) for reprint of catalogue essay for this show.

²⁸Arthur Millier, "Modernist Foe Adopts That Style," *Los Angeles Times* (8 April 1945): part III, 4. Millier continued: "Wright's bent has always been decorative. He has hidden his flair under many an 'ismic bushel. He is not a 'deep' artist. But he is one of the most brilliant in the world today."

²⁹SMW, "Art," *Script* 30, no. 681 (10 June 1944): 28.

³⁰Illustrated in Millier, "Modernist Foe." The reader will also recall that the town of Cassis was for a time the French residence of SMW.

³¹SMW, biographical notes provided to the Whitney Museum of American Art for the 1946 exhibition, "Pioneers of Modern Art in America." See folder for that exhibition in Whitney Museum Library.

³²"Thirty Five Years of Creative Painting: An Exhibition of the Work of S. Macdonald-Wright," exhibition announcement in artist's file of the Museum of Modern Art Library, New York City.

³³Lorser Feitelson, "Introduction" in *Thirty Five Years of Creative Painting*.

³⁴For example, see Arthur Millier, "S. Macdonald-Wright," *Art Digest* 23, no. 3 (1 November 1948): 21; Kenneth Ross, "Retrospective display made of Macdonald-Wright's work," *Los Angeles Daily News* (23 October 1948); and [Arthur Millier], "S. Macdonald-Wright's Power, Talent Shown," *Los Angeles Times* (24 October 1948), part IV: 4.

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- ³⁵The reader is referred to chapter two of this dissertation, in which Synchronism is argued to be a development parallel to Orphism, and not derivative of it.
- ³⁶Alvarez papers, unfiled, AAA.
- ³⁷Jules Langsner, "Art News from Los Angeles" *Art News* 50, no. 1 (March 1951): 52.
- ³⁸SMW, *Beyond Aesthetics*, draft copy in the possession of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.
- ³⁹SMW, excerpt from his memoirs, recorded in *Serenade*, unpaginated.
- ⁴⁰SMW, 26 April 1953, from handwritten answers to an artist's questionnaire supplied by the Whitney Museum of American Art. Whitney Museum Library.
- ⁴¹SMW, diary entry for 4 December 1955, recorded in *Serenade*, unpaginated.
- ⁴²SMW, letter to Gibson Danes, 9 November 1954. UCLA Art Department personnel file. Ensho Ashikaga, a Wright student, wrote a poem for Stanton on the occasion of his retirement: "Ume ichi rin, so e te, yuka mashi, fude no ato." [I want to leave, by adding, to the trace of my brush, one plum flower.] Roll LA 5, frames 139-140, AAA.
- ⁴³Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright, in *Serenade*, unpaginated.
- ⁴⁴The exhibit was simply titled, "Stanton Macdonald-Wright," 14 February to 5 March, 1955, at the Rose Fried Gallery, New York City.
- ⁴⁵SMW, diary entry for 15 December, 1955, recorded in *Serenade*, unpaginated.
- ⁴⁶SMW, diary entry, 15 December 1955.
- ⁴⁷SMW, letter to Charles Hess, 12 November 1954, copy courtesy of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.
- ⁴⁸SMW, quoted in Richard F. Brown, "Introduction," in *A Retrospective Showing of the Work of Stanton Macdonald-Wright*, exhibition catalogue, 19 January to 19 February 1956 (Los Angeles: The Los Angeles County Museum, 1956): 9.
- ⁴⁹In the summer of 1954, Wright taught a class which "consisted of lectures on world-wide iconography based on Jung's archetypes..." SMW, diary entry for 4 December 1955, recorded in *Serenade*, unpaginated.
- ⁵⁰SMW, diary entry for 19 January 1956, recorded in *Serenade*, unpaginated.
- ⁵¹Richard F. Brown, "Introduction" in *A Retrospective Showing of the Work of Stanton Macdonald-Wright*, 19 January to 19 February, 1956, exhibition catalogue, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1956).
- ⁵²See Arthur Millier, "Wright Art in Brilliant Show," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 January 1956; Jules Langsner, "Return to Synchronism," *Artnews* 54, no. 9 (January 1956): 18; Naomi Baker, "The Art Circle," clipping in roll LA 5, frame 48, AAA; and Frode Dann, "Dean of

Western Painting Given Retrospective Exhibition," *Pasadena Star-News*, 5 February 1956. See also "West Coast Pioneer," *Time* (5 March 1956): "But after a trip to Japan four years ago, he began working again in the style of his earlier abstractions. Studying Japanese art and Oriental philosophy, he found a strength and 'interior realism' that he felt was the missing element in his Paris paintings. The result, as shown last week, is a richer, more serene art with formal, soaring movements and pure color that suggest visualized orchestral music."

⁵³SMW, diary entry for 19 January 1956, recorded in *Serenade*, unpaginated.

⁵⁴Peter Plagens attributed the source of the Four Abstract Classicists' aesthetic to the California environment: "Hard Edge arose out of Los Angeles's desert air, youthful cleanliness, spatial expanse, architectural tradition...and, most vaguely and most importantly, out of optimism..." See *Sunshine Muse* (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1974): 119-120. In a very similar fashion, Susan Ehrlich later interpreted SMW's early California Synchronies as stemming from the environment: "...Macdonald-Wright's Synchronies stand as ideal paradigms that interpret the region as undefiled Eden. Their dreamy vistas of mountains and valleys, nestled in clouds of tropical color, convey a sense of tranquil well-being, of poised serenity." See *Turning the Tide*: 91. Both of these like-minded viewpoints fail to incorporate the more intellectual concerns of the painters, specifically Wright's and Feitelson's convictions regarding the very topic of classicism.

⁵⁵SMW's definition of "evocation" is recorded in taped interviews with Jan Stussy, circa 1970-1971, Jan Stussy Papers, AAA.

⁵⁶John Gross, "Current and Forthcoming Exhibitions," *Burlington Magazine* 98, no. 639 (June 1956): 214-215.

⁵⁷Louis-Paul Faure, "Les ages de la peinture," clipping (April 1956), from files of the Zara Gallery, San Francisco, California.

⁵⁸"Dans les galeries: Un pionnier américain de l'art abstrait, Macdonald-Wright," *Les Beaux Arts* (28 August 1956). Clipping from files of the Zara Gallery, San Francisco, California.

⁵⁹Pierre Charbonnier, "Non figuratifs," *Le Monde* (27 April 1956): 3.

⁶⁰Wright showed at the Duveen-Graham Gallery in New York City from 16 October to 3 November 1956.

⁶¹Lawrence Campbell, "Reviews and Previews," *Artnews* 55, no. 6 (October 1956): 6-7.

⁶²Hilton Kramer, "Month in Review," *Arts* 31, no. 1 (October 1956): 52-53.

⁶³Howard Devree, "Veteran Moderns: The Art of Andre Lhote—Macdonald-Wright," *The New York Times* (21 October 1956).

⁶⁴SMW, diary entry for 16 November 1956, recorded in *Serenade*, unpaginated.

⁶⁵SMW, *Considerations*, *Art Actuel International* 3 (1958). The original reads as follows: "Mais, hélas, le spectre de l'impasse ne tardait pas à reparaitre et de nouveau l'ennui

l'accompagnait. Mais maintenant le monde visible était épuisé de formes inconnues, inspiratrices. Comment se débrouiller? C'était alors que l'artiste s'alliait avec la psychologie et la philosophie orientale méconnue. Mauvaises compagnes, elles n'ont fait que lui donner libre cours à la frénésie anarchique, à le pousser jusqu'à un amorphisme funeste. Troisième impasse? Au contraire, je prétends que c'était le salut. L'artiste n'a qu'à se fier au génie de ses traditions, à revenir à la structure et à sa responsabilité artistique."

⁶⁶Michel Seuphor, "Synchronies," *L'Oeil* 37 (January 1958): 56-61.

⁶⁷SMW, diary entry for 31 December, 1959, recorded in *Serenade*: unpaginated.

⁶⁸SMW, diary entry for 19 November, 1961, recorded in *Serenade*: unpaginated.

⁶⁹SMW, diary entry for 26 April, 1962, recorded in *Serenade*: unpaginated.

⁷⁰On Benton's visit, see Arthur Millier, "Two American Giants," *Los Angeles* (November 1961): 46-47.

⁷¹SMW, *Fish*, 1961, oil on canvas, 16 x 36 inches, exhibited in *The Art of Stanton Macdonald-Wright*, May-June, 1967 at the National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution (now the National Museum of American Art), no. 79.

⁷²SMW, *Fudo*, 1963, oil on panel, 24 x 20 inches. Private Collection.

⁷³SMW, *L'Age D'Or*, a triptych, 1966-67, oil on panel, each 96 x 48 1/8 inches, exhibited in *The Art of Stanton Macdonald-Wright*, May-June, 1967 at the National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution (now the National Museum of American Art), no. 98.

⁷⁴Quoted in Christie's catalogue of *Important American Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture of the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries*, auction catalogue for sale of 25 May 1989, (New York: Christie's, 1989), 394.

⁷⁵SMW exhibited at the Galleria Schneider in July of 1958. For a review, see Palma Bucarelli, "Macdonald-Wright: un maestro dell'astrattismo americano," *La Sera* [Roma], 30 July 1958, in roll LA 5, frame 97, AAA.

⁷⁶"S. Macdonald-Wright, Noted Artist, Dies at 83," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 August 1973, part III: 15.

⁷⁷Joseph Campbell, quoted in Stephen and Robin Larsen, *A Fire in the Mind: The Life of Joseph Campbell* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1991), 158.

⁷⁸Henry Hopkins, interview with the author, 3 April 1993.

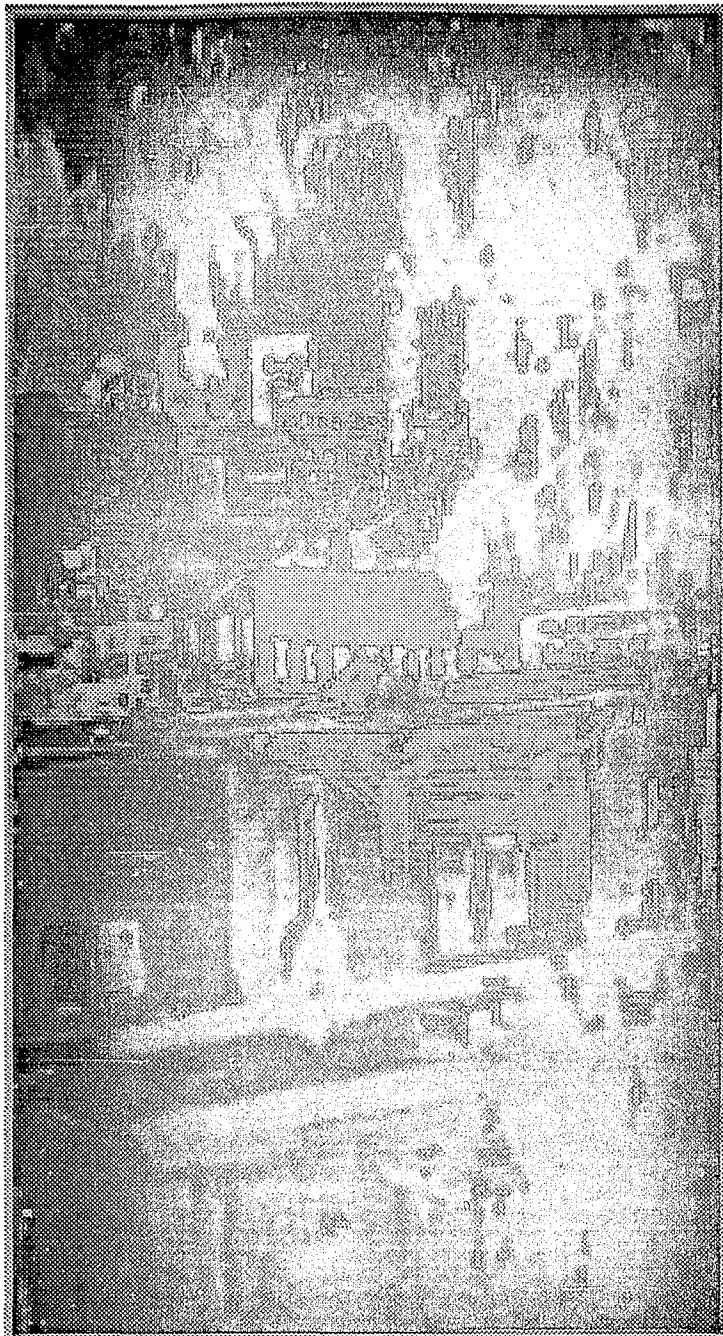


Fig. 1. *[View of Santa Monica]*, 1903, oil on board, 16 x 8 in. Estate of Stanton Macdonald-Wright. Courtesy of the Chowning Gallery, San Francisco, California.



Fig. 2. [*Self-Portrait with Lee Simonson*], ca. 1911, unlocated.
Photo courtesy of the Estate of Stanton Macdonald-Wright.



Fig. 3. Stanton Macdonald-Wright in France, 1912, with one of his pet monkeys. Photo courtesy of Michel Seuphor.

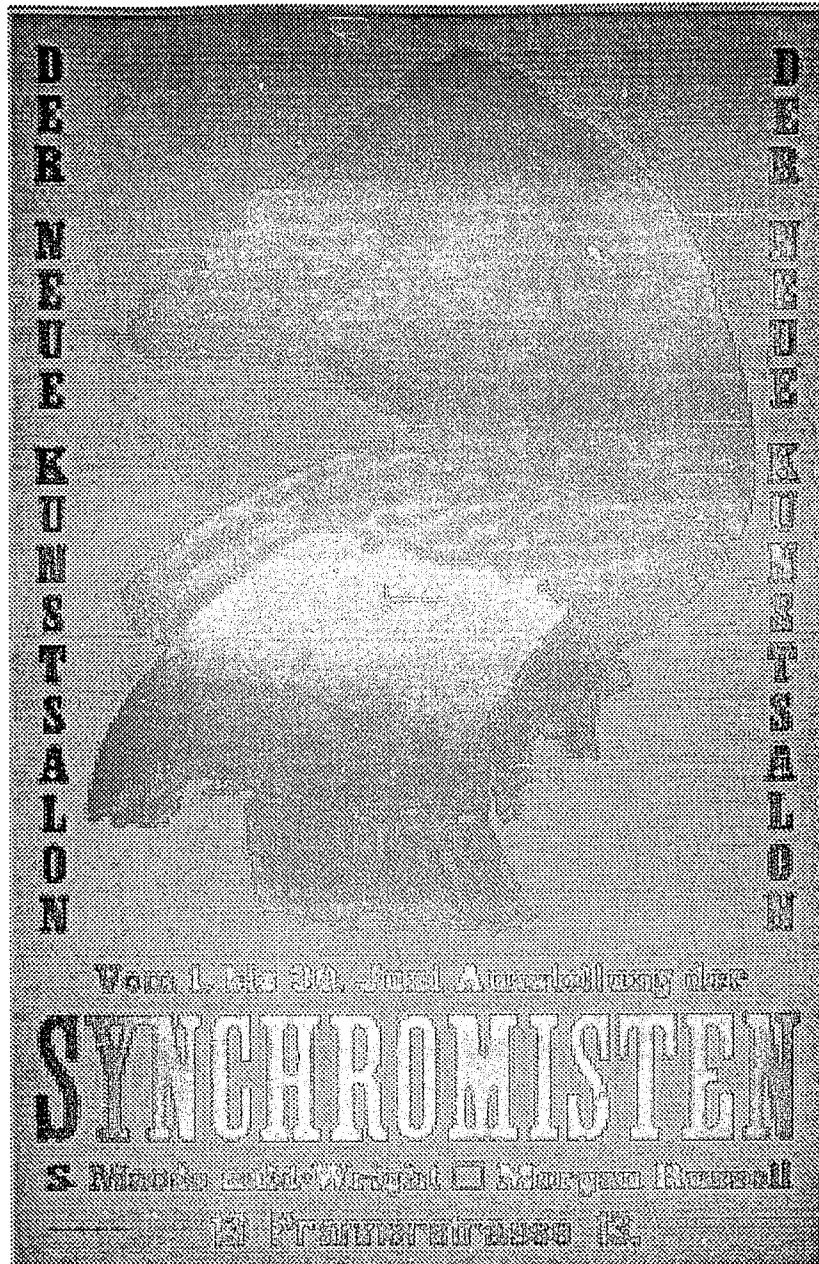


Fig. 4. Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell, *Synchromisten*, June 1913, offset printed poster with color added by hand in gouache, 41 1/2 x 26 1/2 in. The Montclair Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry M. Reed.

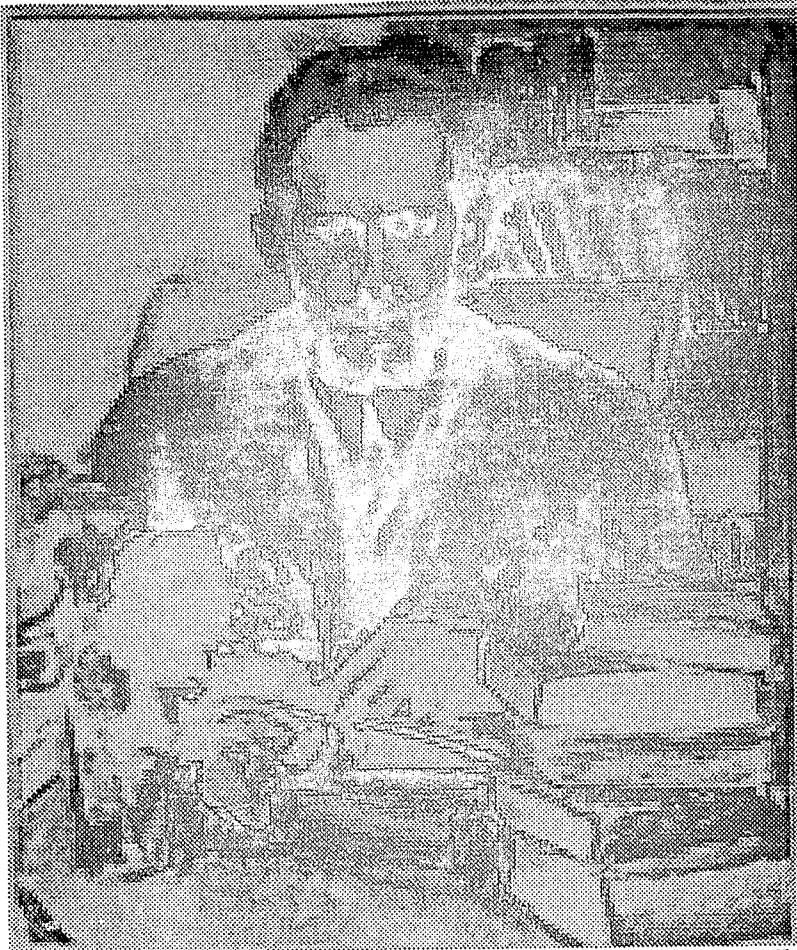


Fig. 5. *Portrait of the Artist's Brother* (S. S. Van Dine), 1914, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in. The National Portrait Gallery.

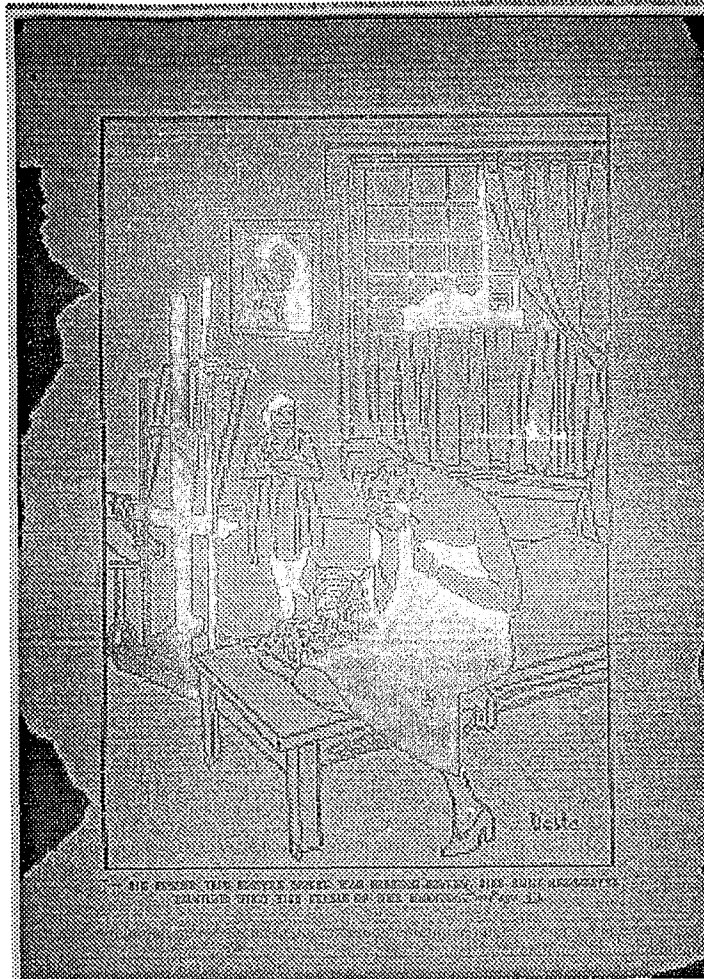


Fig. 6. *He Found the Blonde Model Was Sobbing Softly...*, ca. 1915, pen and ink, dimensions unavailable. Signed with the pseudonym, "D'Este." Reproduction courtesy of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

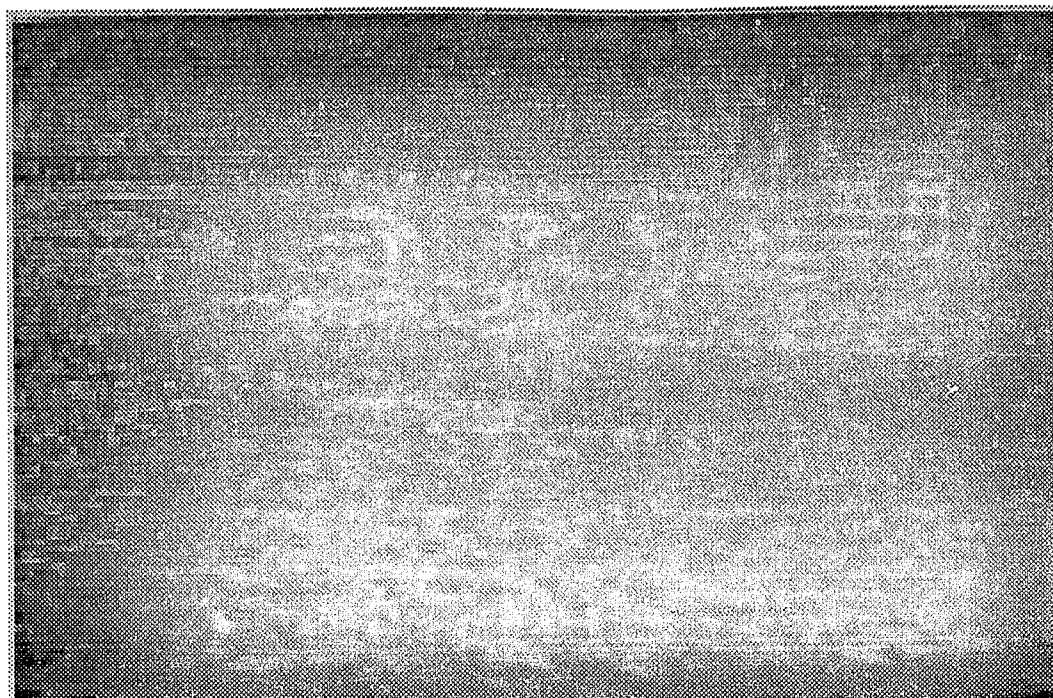


Fig. 7. Morgan Russell, *The Bridge on the Seine*, 1908, oil on canvas, 18 x 27 in. Private Collection.

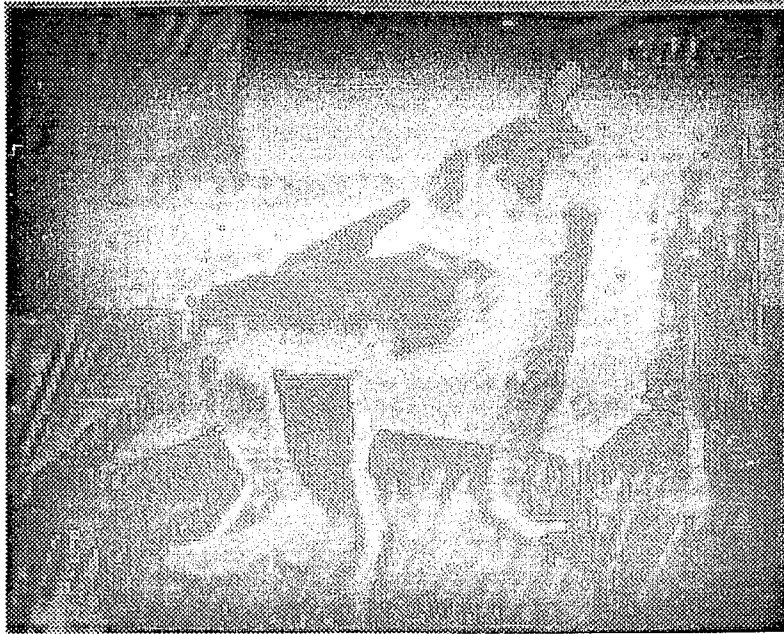


Fig. 8. *[Seated Nude]*, ca. 1909-1910, unlocated. Photograph courtesy of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.



Fig. 9. Morgan Russell, visible amidst his sculpture work in his Paris studio, ca. 1910. Photograph courtesy of the Morgan Russell Archive, The Montclair Art Museum.

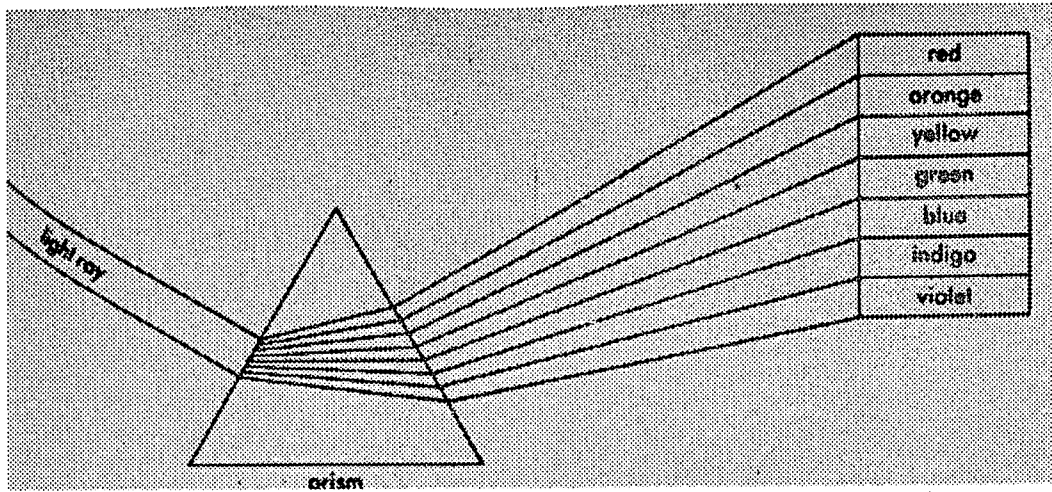


Fig. 10. Diagram of Sir Isaac Newton's experiment of passing white light through a prism to break it up into its constituent parts, which are the colors of the spectrum.

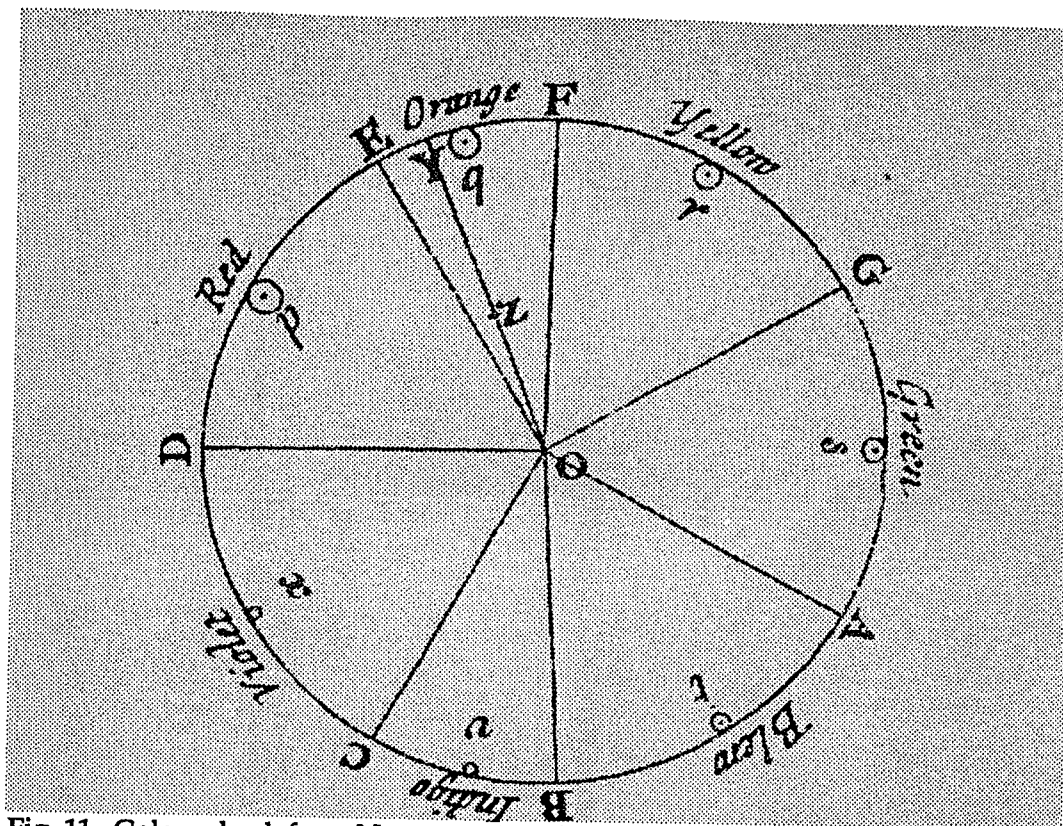


Fig. 11. Color wheel, from Newton's *Opticks*, first printed in London in 1704.

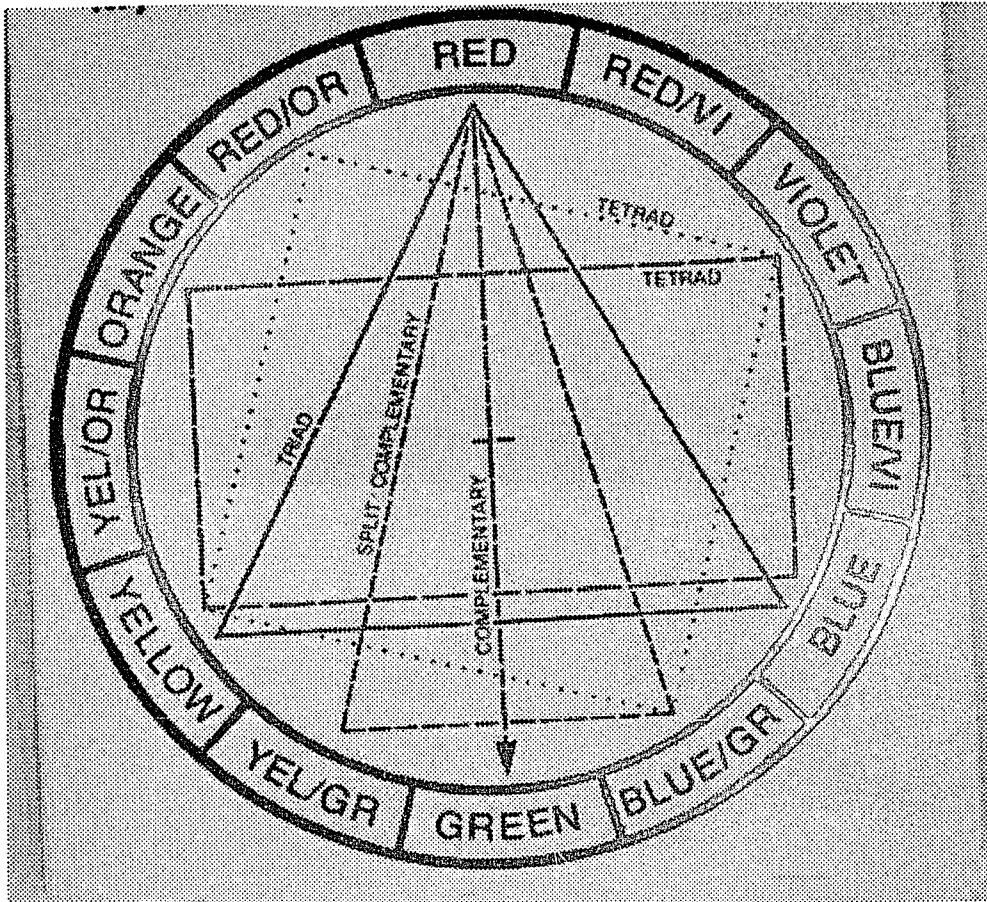


Fig. 12. Diagram of a conventional color wheel of pigment hues, showing relationship of complements.

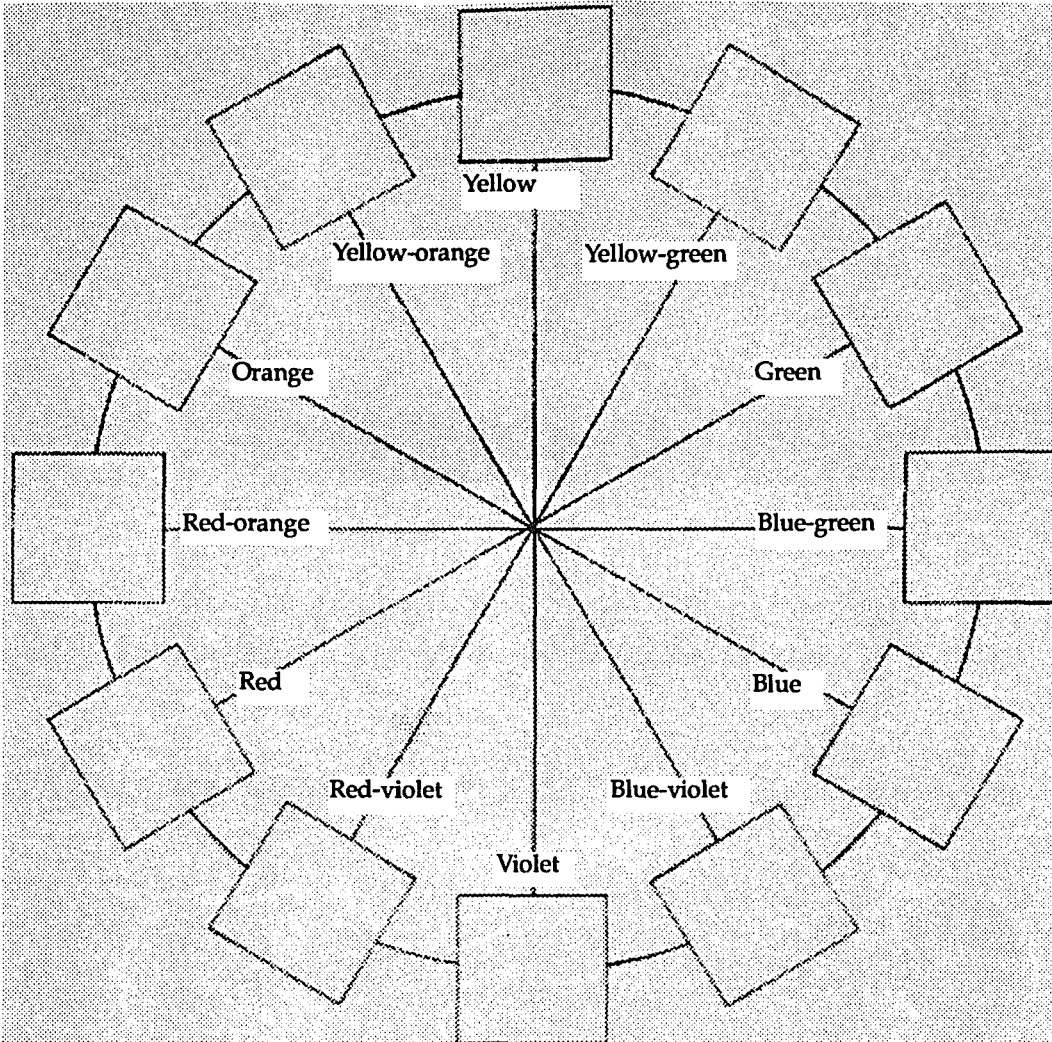


Fig. 13. Color wheel based on the original (shown here slightly smaller than actual size) made by Stanton Macdonald-Wright for inclusion in his 1924 *Treatise on Color*. Each copy of the *Treatise* was fit unbound into a black slipcase which included three handpainted color charts by Wright. These color charts are a record of what Wright believed were the closest equivalents in pigment to spectral color. They also serve as a record of his palette.

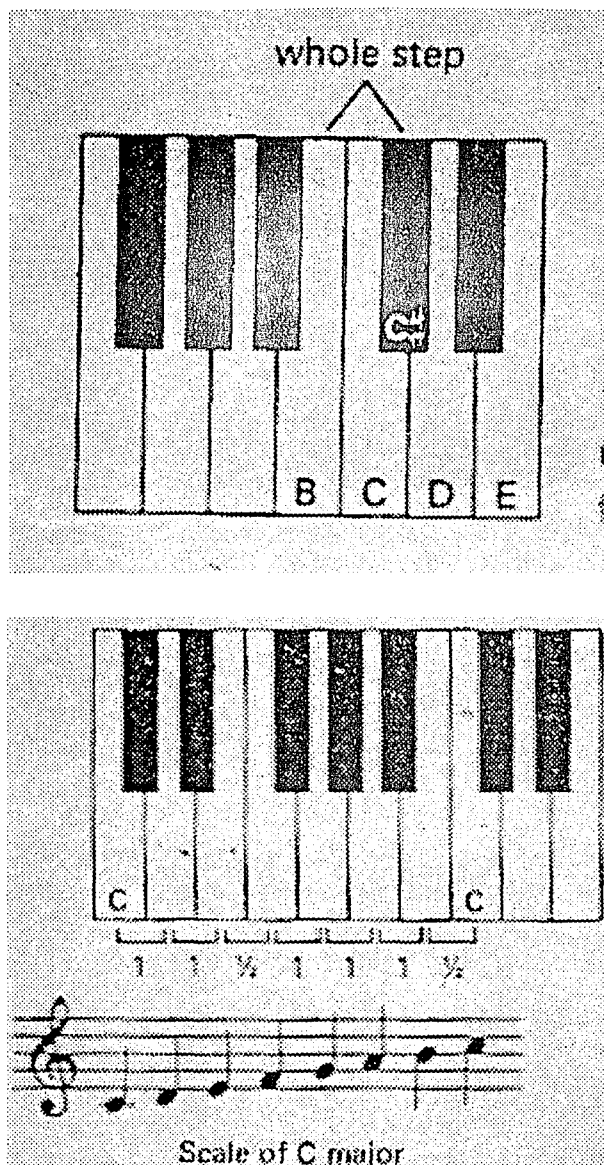


Fig. 14. An octave is defined as an interval which sounds as a unison. On the piano keyboard the octave can be played with the span of a hand. It is within the octave that we space out the patterns or scales on which Western music is based. The octave can be divided into a scale consisting of any number of tones. Seven tones are used in the diatonic scale, which is the basis for much of our traditional Western music. The seven tones are arranged in a specific way: two whole-step intervals; a half-step interval; three whole-step intervals; a half-step interval. With the inclusion of sharps and flats, a twelve-tone scale is established. Macdonald-Wright treated the twelve colors on a color wheel like musical notes, creating scales that had what he felt to be an analogous system of intervals.

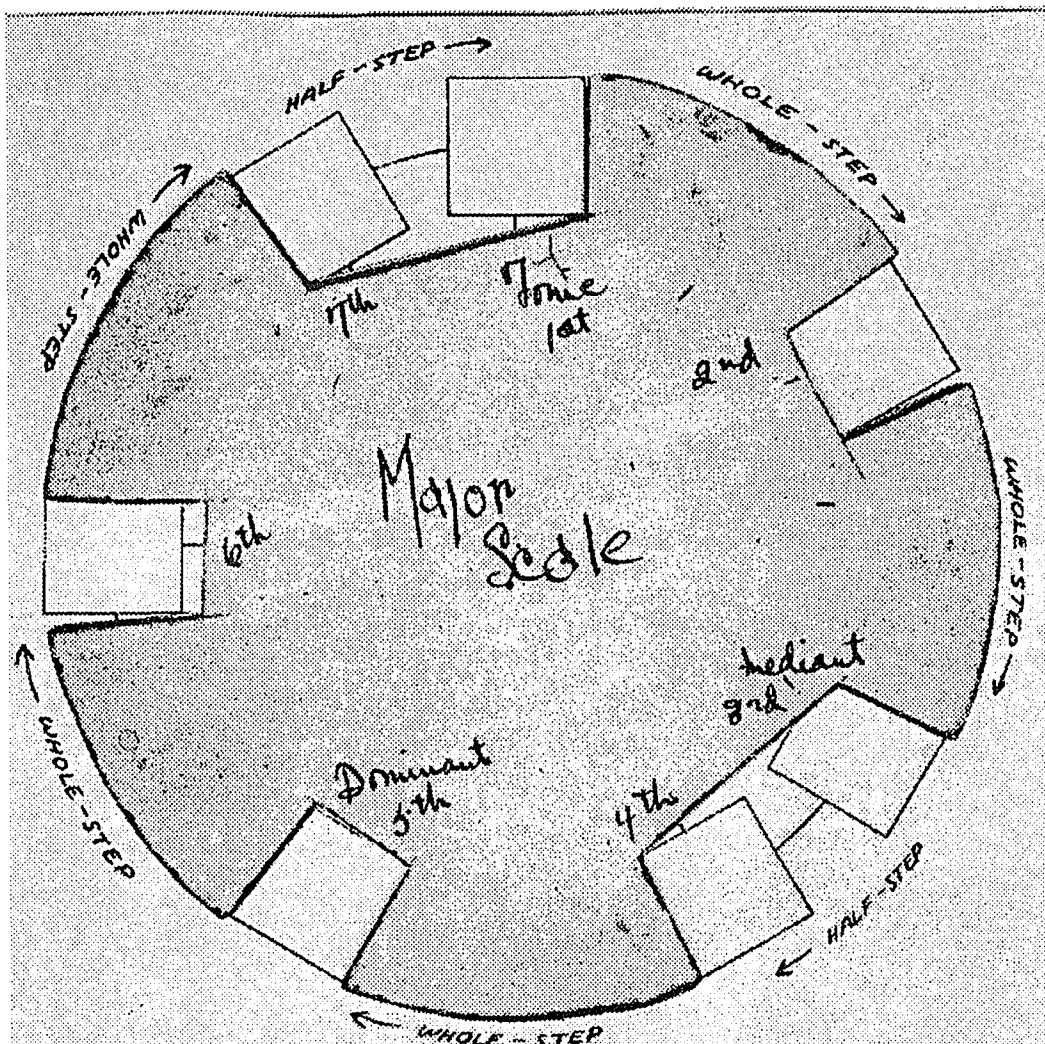


Fig. 15. Along with the two color wheels and the chart of neutralized colors, Macdonald-Wright provided templates to automatically form color scales in the proper intervals. Pictured here is a copy of a template made by Wright, laid over the color wheel. The steps between colors are based on the intervals used to form a major scale in Western music (see fig. 14). Wright also provided a template to form minor scales, and a color wheel of colors with "raised saturation." Wright was careful to note in his *Treatise* that the use of scales should not be understood as absolute, but rather as a point of departure in learning about color properties, both physical and psychological.

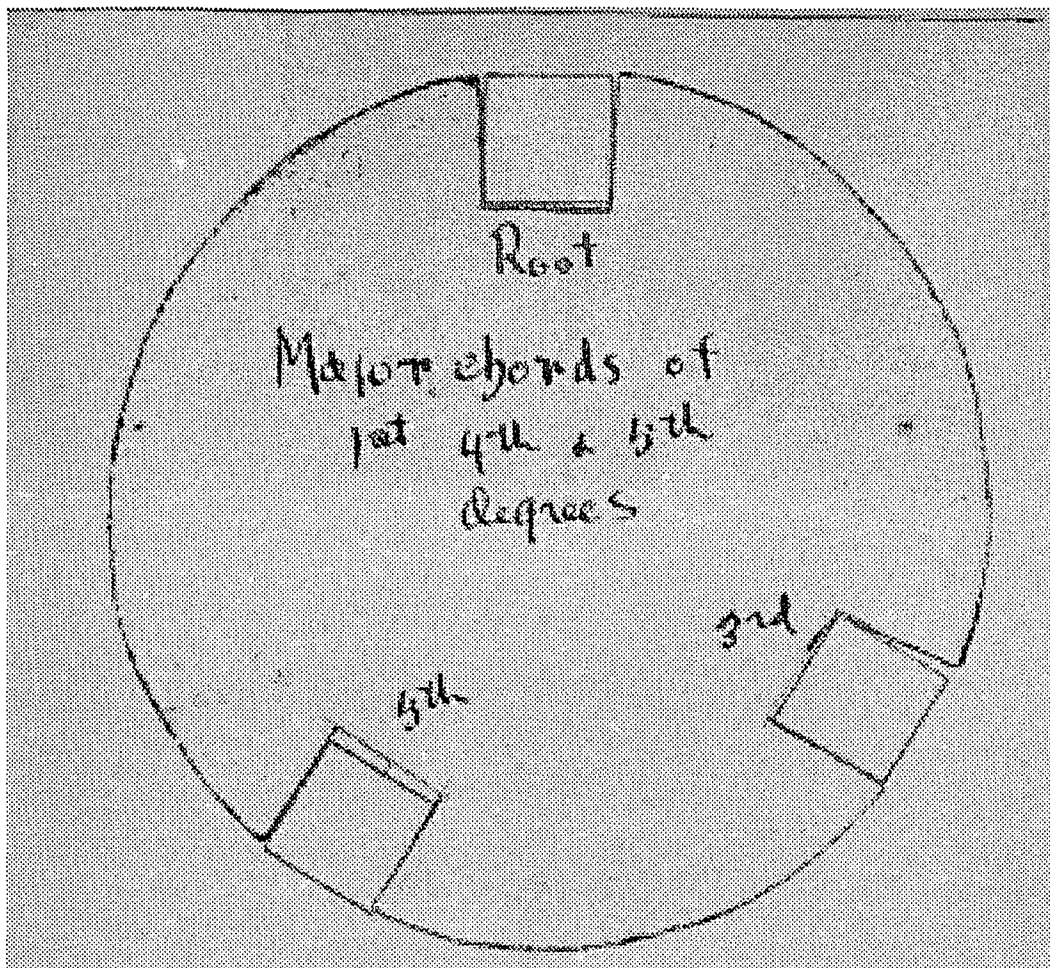


Fig. 16. Macdonald-Wright provided this template to fit over the color wheel and provide the artist with color "chords" or "triads." In keeping with the musical scale analogy, these color chords were built on the first, third and fifth of a given color scale, just as a major chord in music is built on the first, third and fifth notes of any given major scale. Wright's reference on this template to the "1st, 4th and 5th degrees" is to the tonic, dominant and subdominant chords of any scale as they are understood in basic diatonic theory. The tonic chord is built on the first note of the scale; the dominant chord on the fifth note of the scale; and the subdominant on the fourth note of the scale.



Fig. 17. *Portrait of John Dracopoli*, 1912, oil on canvas mounted on board, 16 1/4 x 13 1/8 in.. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Roy R. Neuberger, New York City.



Fig. 18. Morgan Russell, *Synchronist Nude*, ca. 1911, oil on canvas, dimensions unavailable. Collection of Ahmet and Mica Ertegun.

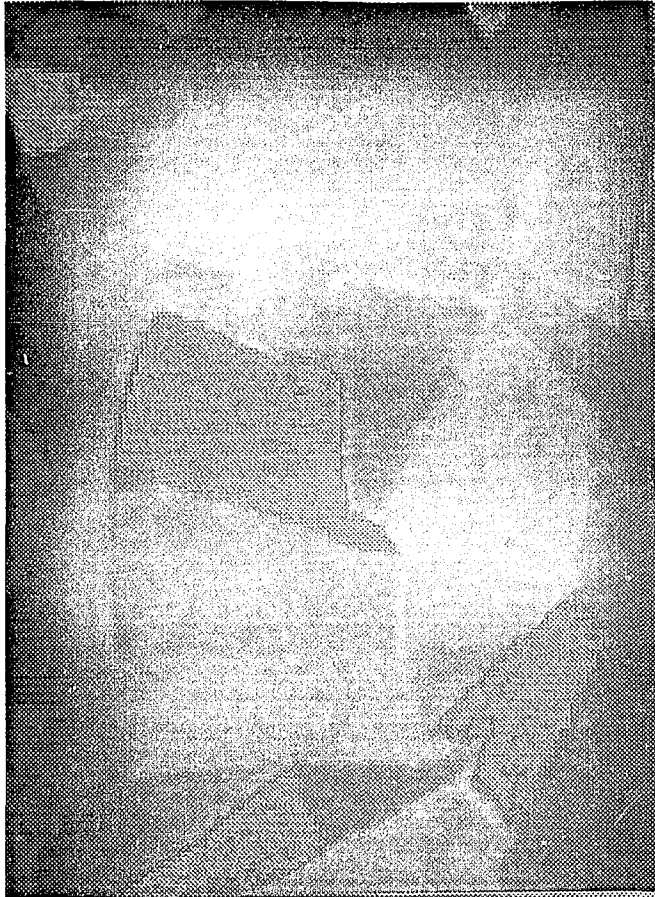


Fig. 19. Morgan Russell, *Synchrony in Blue-Violet*, 1913, oil on canvas mounted on board, 13 x 9 3/8 in. Formerly in the Estate of Lydia Winston Malbin.

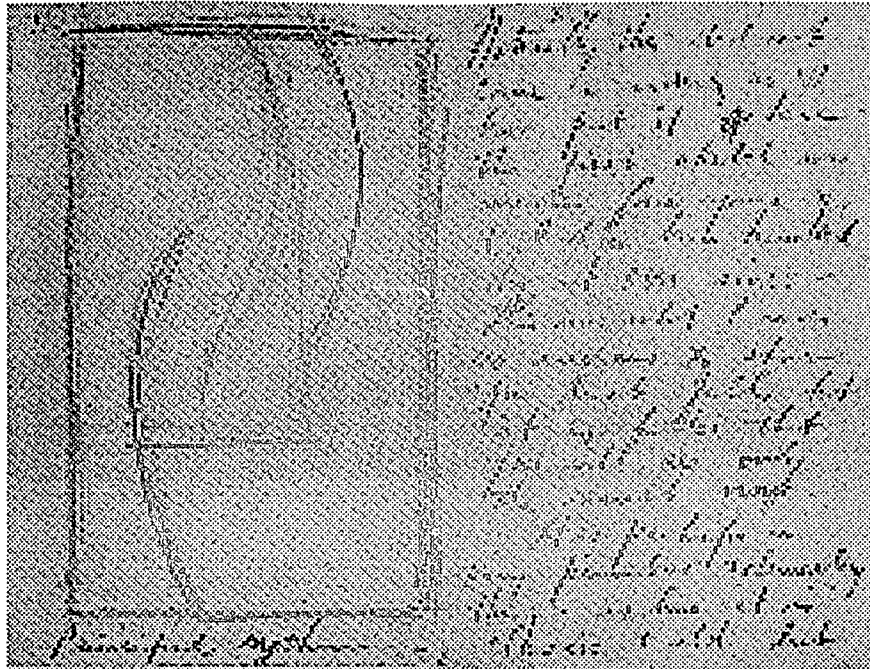


Fig. 20. Morgan Russell, diagram prepared for Mrs. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney illustrating his concept of "principal rhythm."



Fig. 21. Morgan Russell, *Synchromy in Orange: To Form*, 1914, oil on canvas, 135 x 121 1/2 in. Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York, gift of Seymour H. Knox, 1958.



Fig. 22. *Abstraction on Spectrum (Organization No. 5)*, 1914, oil on canvas, 30 1/8 x 24 3/16 in., Des Moines Art Center, Coffin Fine Arts Trust Fund, 1962.



Fig. 23. *Conception Synchrony*, 1914,
oil on canvas mounted on cardboard,
29 3/4 x 11 1/8 in. Formerly Estate of
Lydia Winston Malbin.



Fig. 24. *Synchrony in Purple*, 1917, oil on canvas, 36 x 28 in.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



Fig. 25. Georgia O'Keefe, *Blue and Green Music*, 1919, oil on canvas, 23 x 19 in. The Art Institute of Chicago, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Gift of Georgia O'Keefe, 1969.835.

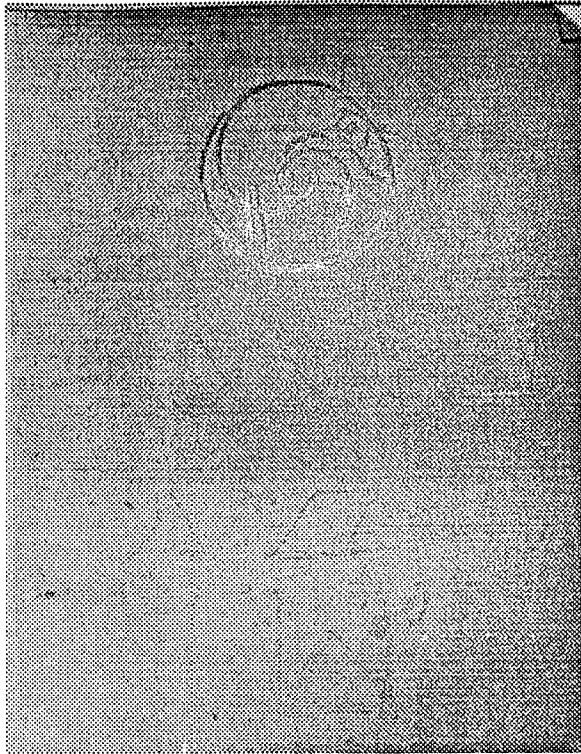


Fig. 26. Morgan Russell, the Chinese symbol for the *Yin* and the *Yang*, n. d., pencil on paper, 12 x 9 in. The Morgan Russell Archives, The Montclair Art Museum.



Fig. 27. *Aeroplane Synchrony in Yellow-Orange*, 1920, oil on canvas, 24 1/2 x 24 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Alfred Stieglitz Collection.

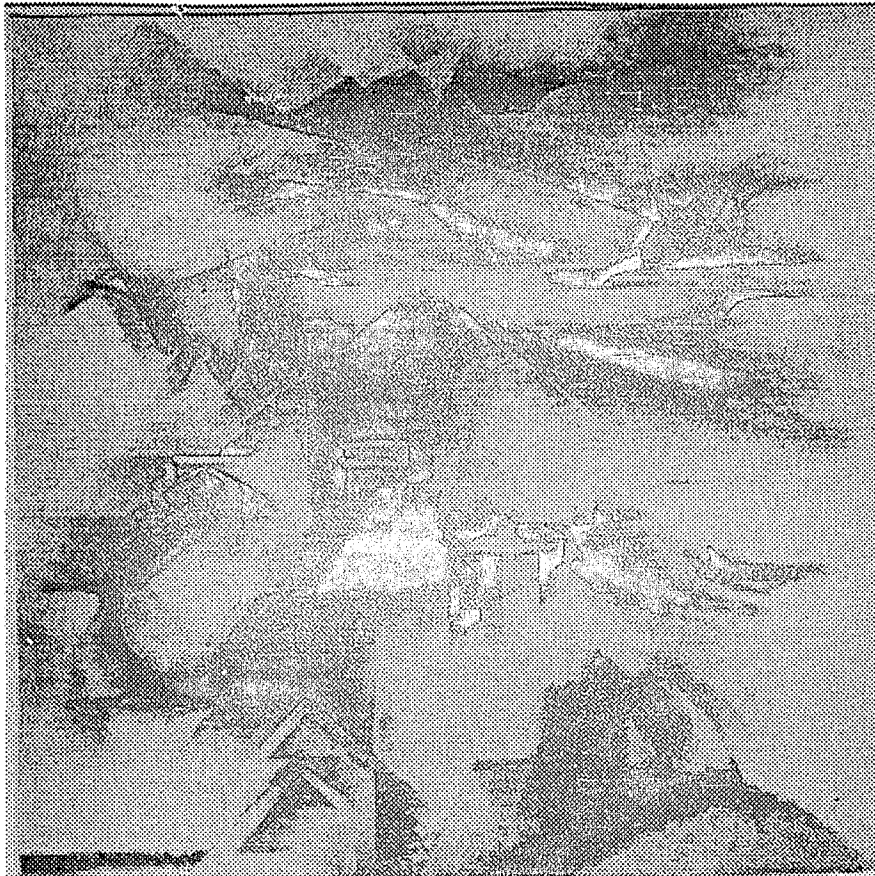


Fig. 28. *Cañon Synchrony (Orange)*, ca. 1919, oil on canvas, 24 1/8 x 24 1/8 in. University Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Gift of Ione and Hudson Walker.



Fig. 29. *California Landscape*, ca. 1919, oil on canvas, 30 x 22 1/8 in. Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio, Gift of Ferdinand Howald.



Fig. 30. *American Synchrony No. 1*, 1919, oil on canvas, 34 1/4 x 23 in. Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, The Ella Gallup and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection.



Fig. 31. *Study for American Synchrony No. 2*, 1919, charcoal, 16 x 11 in. Private Collection.



Fig. 32. Peter Paul Rubens, *A Study for the Figure of Christ*, ca. 1609-1610, black chalk, charcoal, and white chalk on buff paper, 400 x 298 mm. Collection of the Harvard University Museums, Gift of Meta and Paul J. Sachs.



Fig. 33. [*Figure Drawing*], ca. 1920-1930, pencil on paper, figure 10 1/2 in. length (sheet size unavailable). Collection of the University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson.

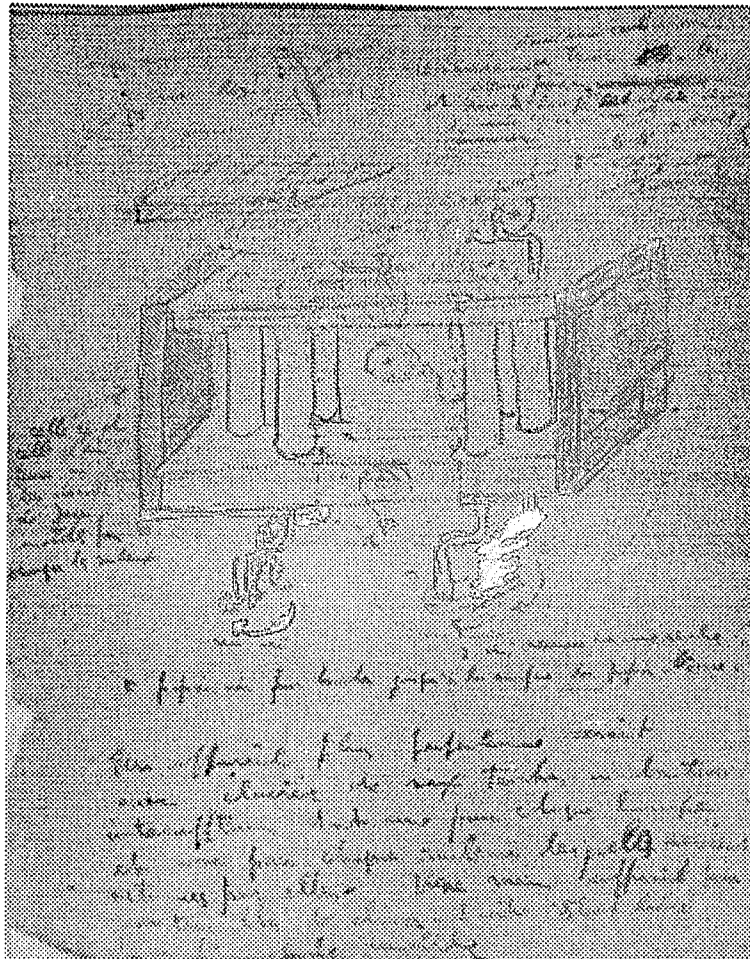


Fig. 34. Morgan Russell, *Study for a Kinetic Light Machine*, n. d., pencil on paper, 8 7/8 x 6 5/8 in. Morgan Russell Archives, The Montclair Art Museum.



Fig. 35. *Santa Monica Canyon*, ca. 1923, oil on canvas, 36 x 28 in.
Photograph courtesy Goldfield Galleries, Ltd., Los Angeles.



Fig. 36. *Muse Synchrony*, 1924, oil on canvas, 36 x 28 in. Private Collection.

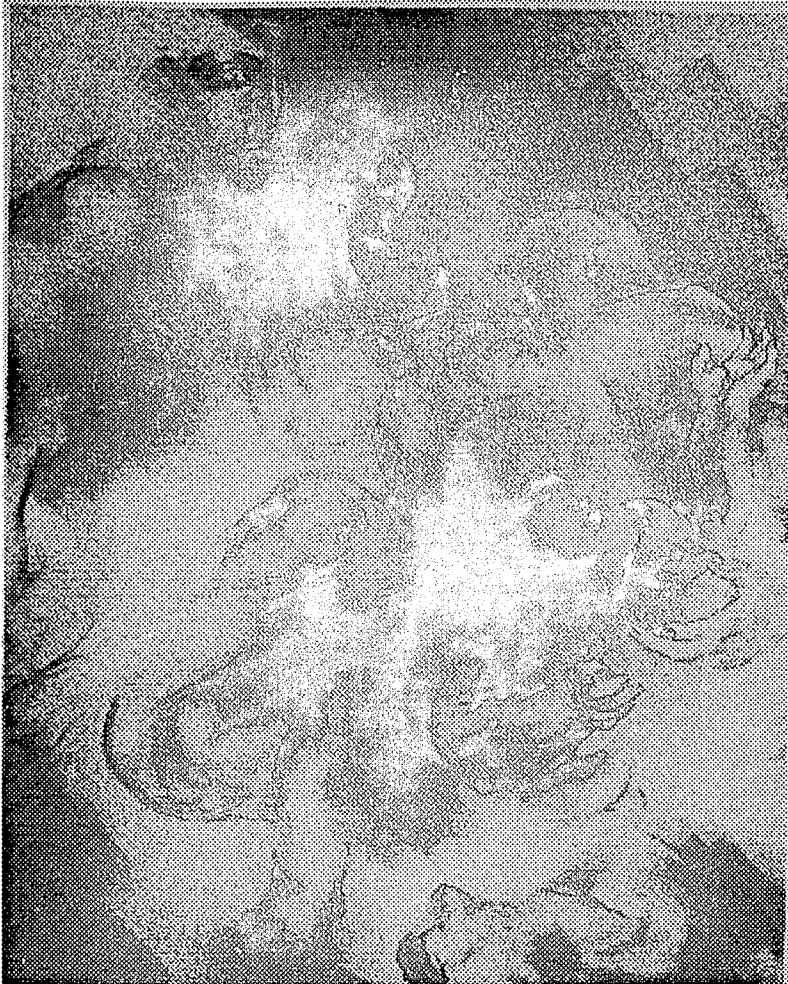


Fig. 37. *Nature Synchrony*, 1923, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 in.
Private Collection.



Fig. 38. *Arcady Synchrony*, 1924, oil on canvas, 30 1/8 x 22 1/8 in. Reproduced courtesy of Goldfield Galleries, Ltd., Los Angeles.

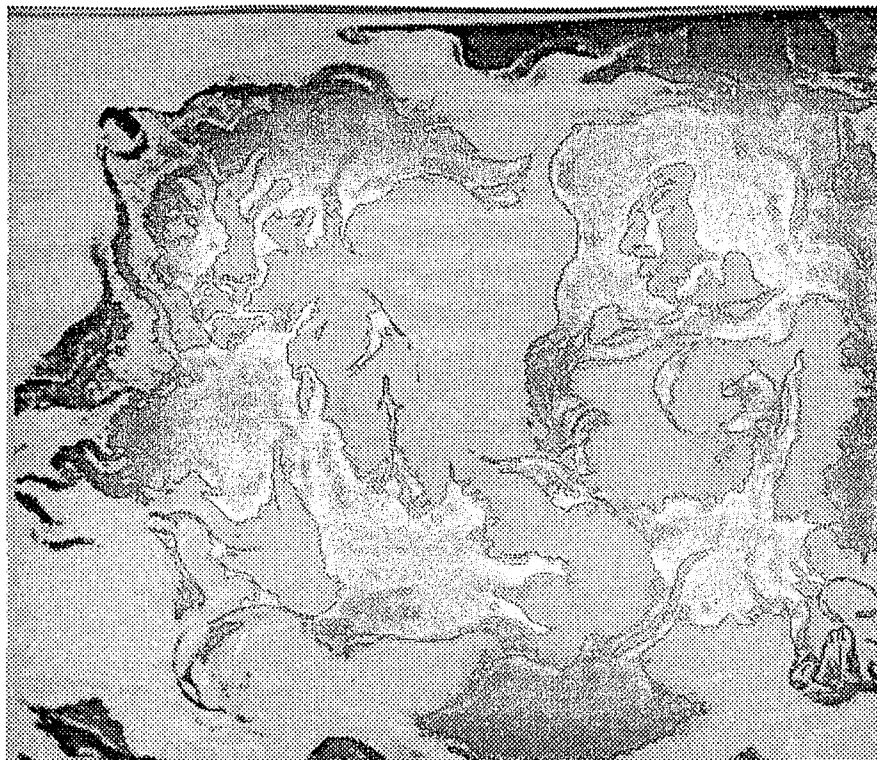


Fig. 39. *Yin Synchrony, No. 2*, 1925. Unlocated, image courtesy of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

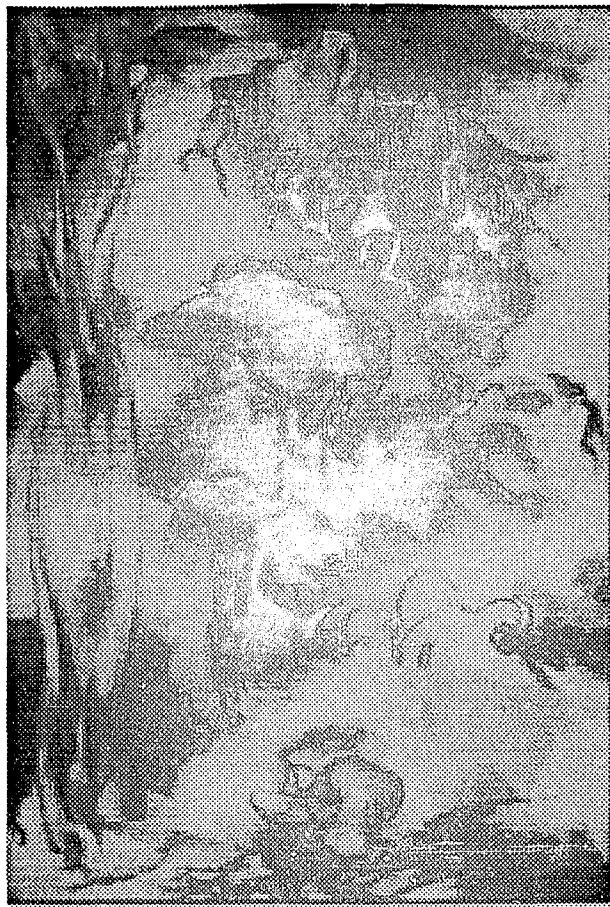


Fig. 40. *Chinese Valley Synchrony*, 1925, oil on canvas, 30 x 20 in. Estate of Stanton Macdonald-Wright. Used by permission.



Fig. 41. *Vision Synchrony*, 1924-25. Unlocated, image courtesy of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.



Fig. 42. *Chinese Theater Synchrony*, 1926. Destroyed by fire.
Image courtesy of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.



Fig. 43. *Fisherman Synchrony*, 1928, oil on canvas, 40 x 38 in. Estate of Stanton Macdonald-Wright. Used by permission.



Fig. 44. *Dragon Tail*, 1930, oil on canvas, 34 1/8 x 27 1/8 in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Bequest, 1981.



Fig. 45. *Dawn Synchrony*, 1929. Unlocated, image courtesy of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

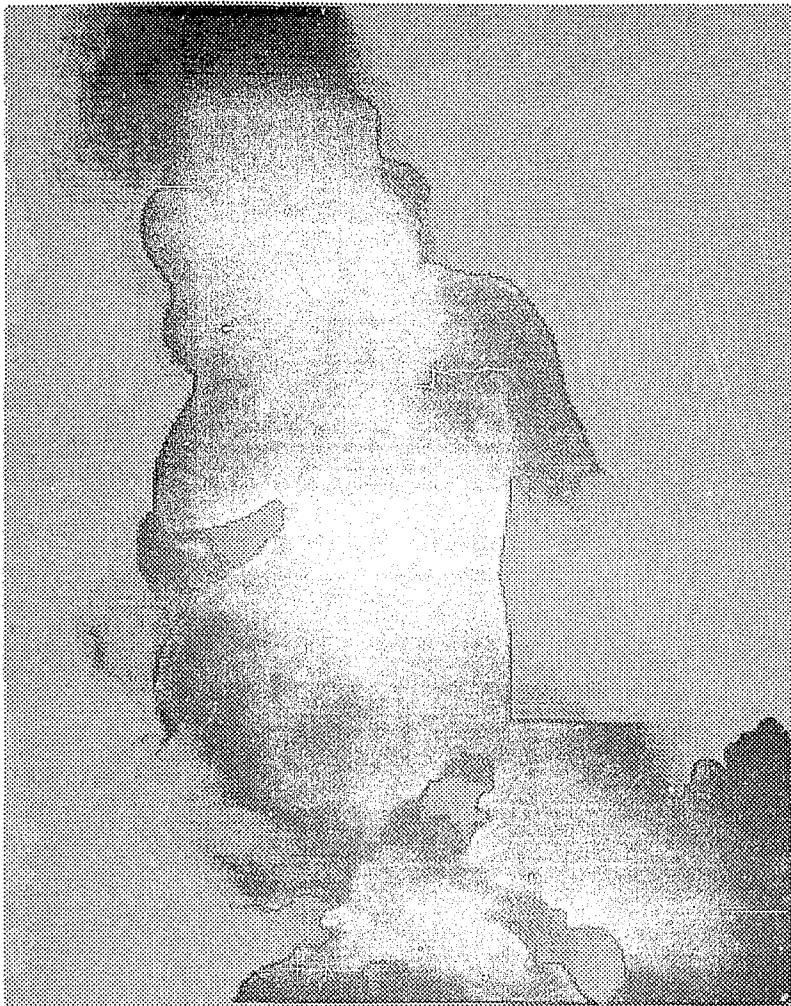


Fig. 46. *Night Synchrony*, 1929. Unlocated, image courtesy of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

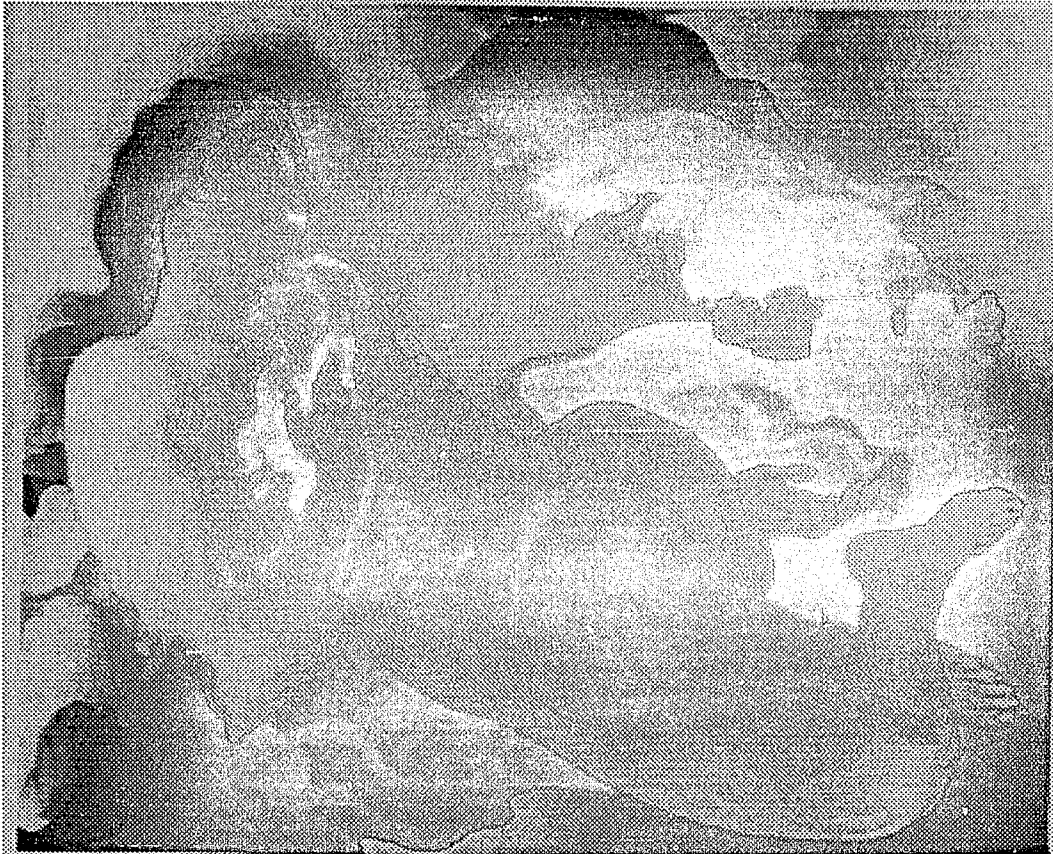


Fig. 47. *Yin Synchrony, No. 3*, 1930, oil on canvas, 33 x 39 1/2 in. Santa Barbara Museum of Art.



Fig. 48. *Zardusht and His Fravashi*, 1930. Unlocated, image courtesy of Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.



Fig. 49. *Lao Tzu and Yin Hi*, 1930, oil on canvas, 92 x 66 in. Estate of Stanton Macdonald-Wright. Used by permission.

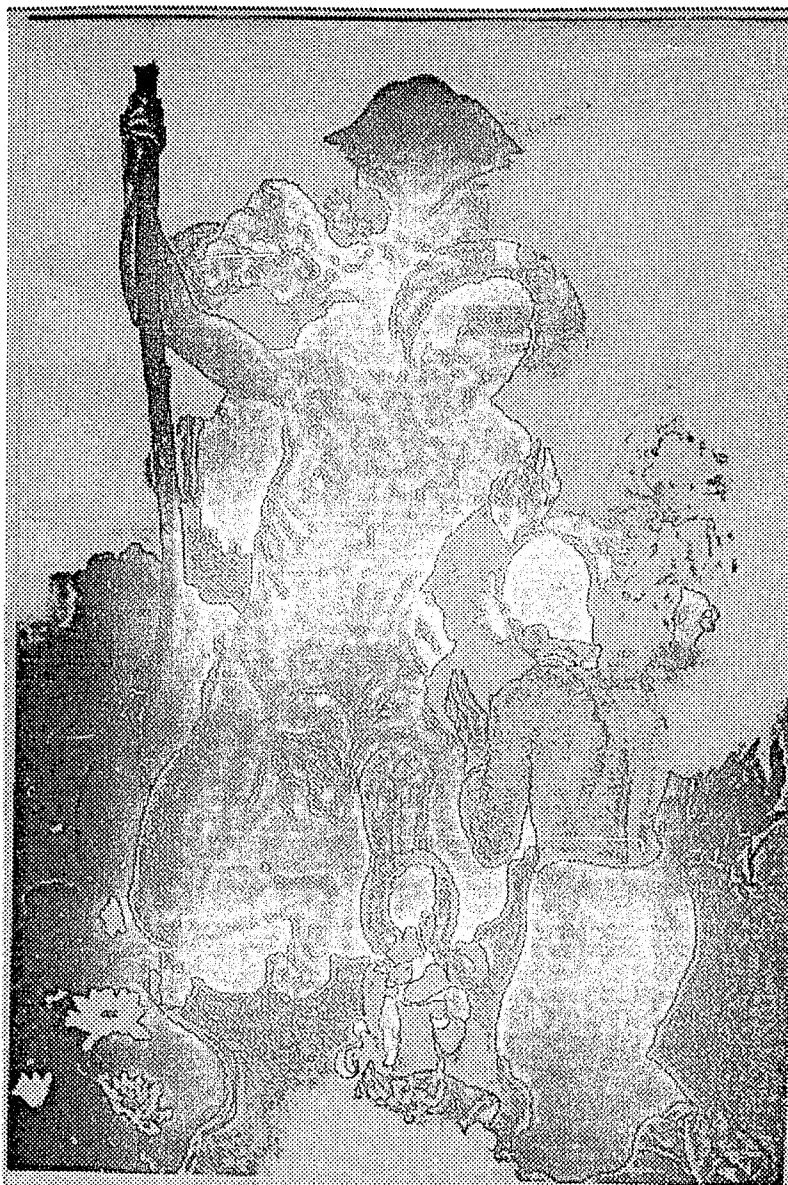


Fig. 50. *Siddhartha and Nanda*, 1930-31, oil on canvas, 102 x 66 in. Estate of Stanton Macdonald-Wright. Used by permission.

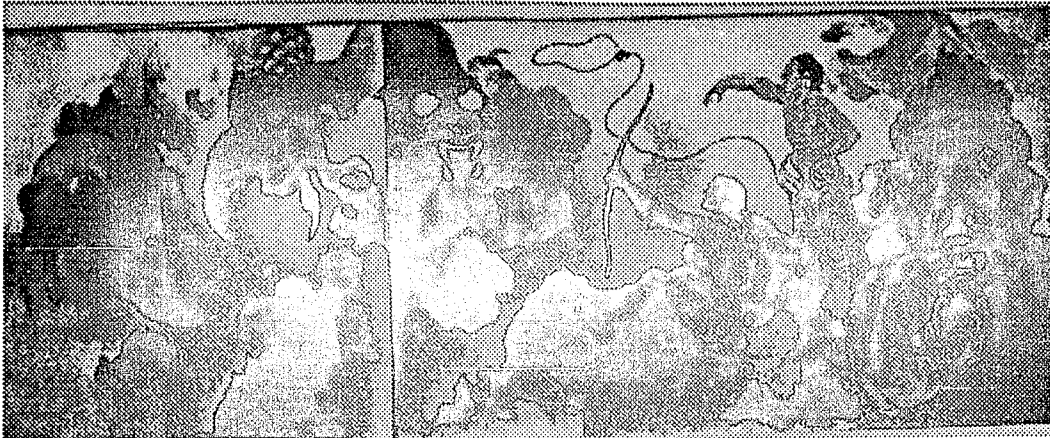


Fig. 51. *Prologue: Primitive Man*, mural panels depicting primitive man carving the wheel, and attempting to harness the forces of Nature, symbolized as a Makara, from the *Santa Monica Library Murals*, 1935, oil on linen stretch over panel, 72 x 120 in. Collection of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



Fig. 52. *Prologue: Primitive Man*, mural panels depicting primitive man carving reindeer horn and in fear of monsters, from the *Santa Monica Library Murals*, 1935, oil on linen stretched over panel, 72 x 120 in. Collection of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

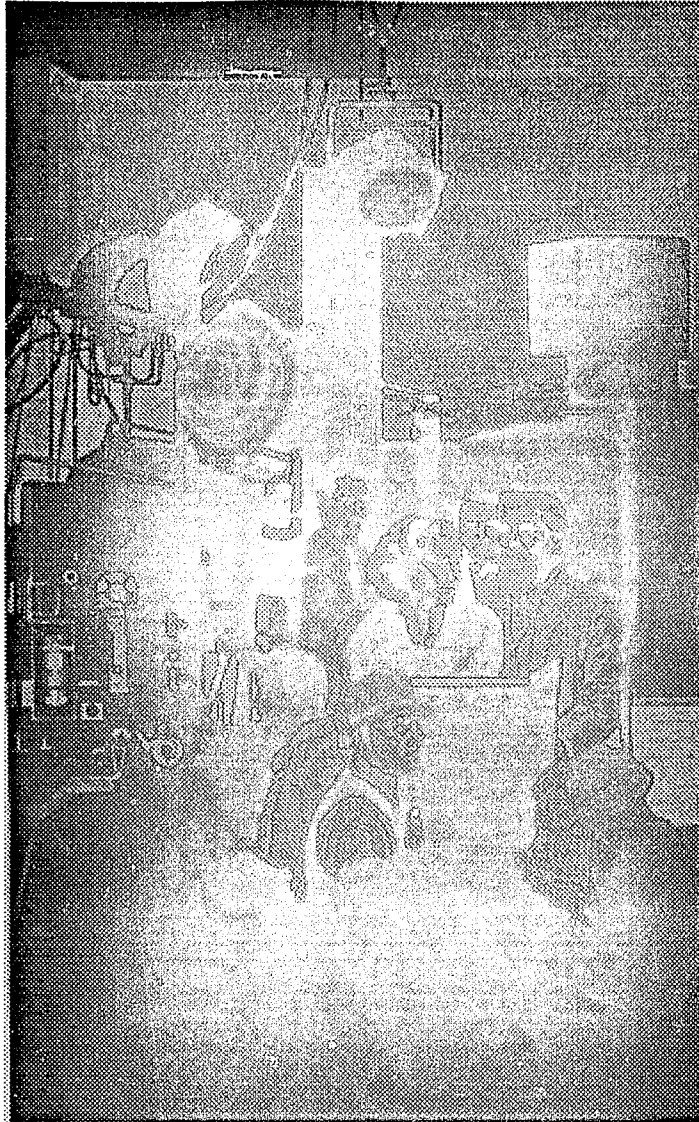


Fig. 53. *Motion Picture Studio*, mural panel from the *Santa Monica Library Murals*, 1935, oil on linen stretched over panel, dimensions unavailable. Collection of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



Fig. 54. *Michelangelo and Dante*, mural panel from the *Santa Monica Library Murals*, 1935, oil on linen stretched over panel, dimensions unavailable. Collection of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

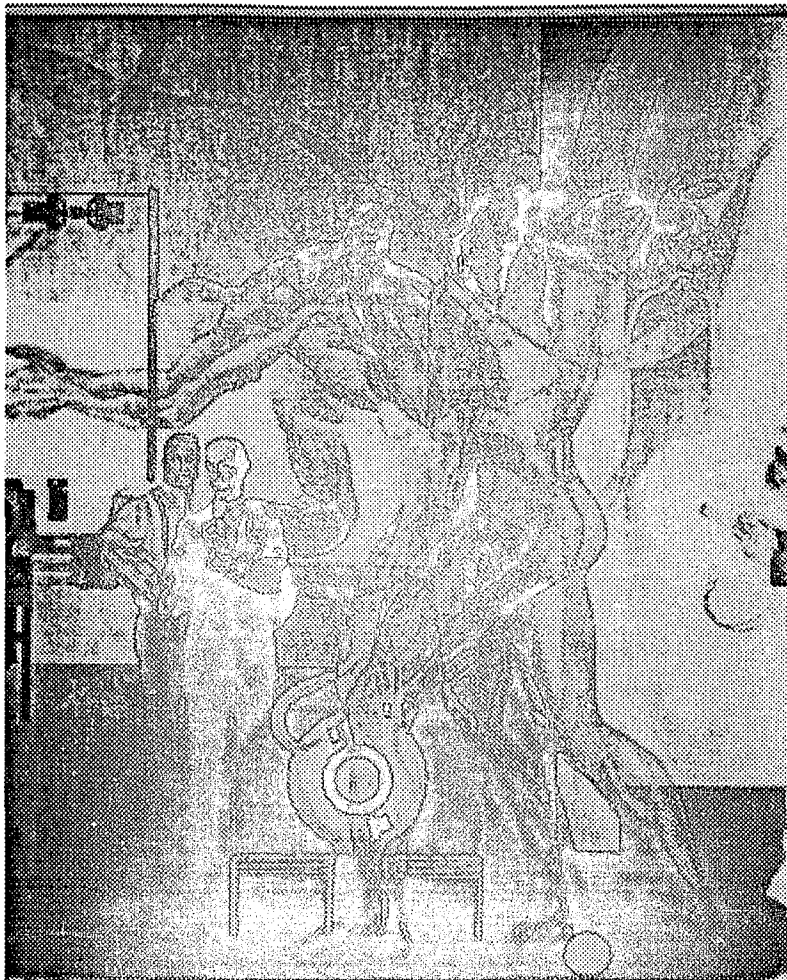


Fig. 55. *Michael Faraday and Clerk Maxwell*, with heroic figures symbolizing negative and positive electrical impulses, mural panels from the *Santa Monica Library Murals*, 1935, oil on linen stretched over panel, dimensions unavailable. Collection of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

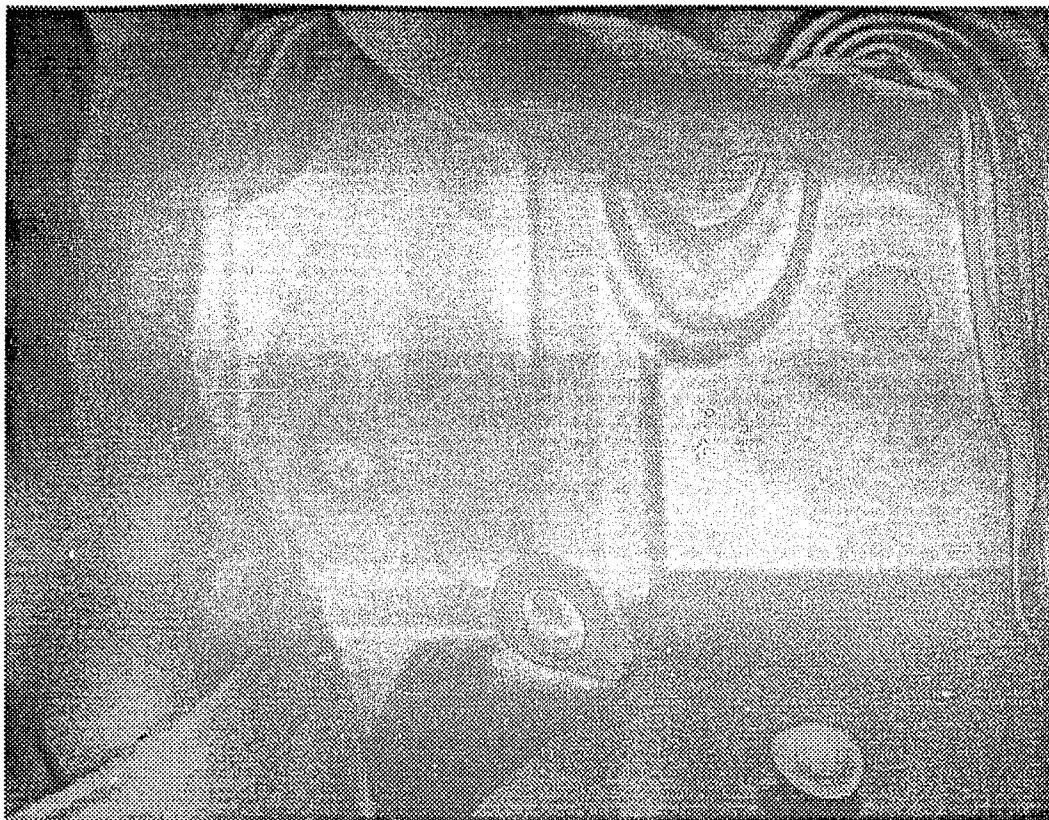


Fig. 56. Lorser Feitelson, *Genesis, First Vision*, 1934, oil on celotex, 24 x 30 in. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Helen Klokke.



Fig. 57. Helen Lundberg, *Double Portrait of the Artist in Time*, 1935, oil on masonite. Collection of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

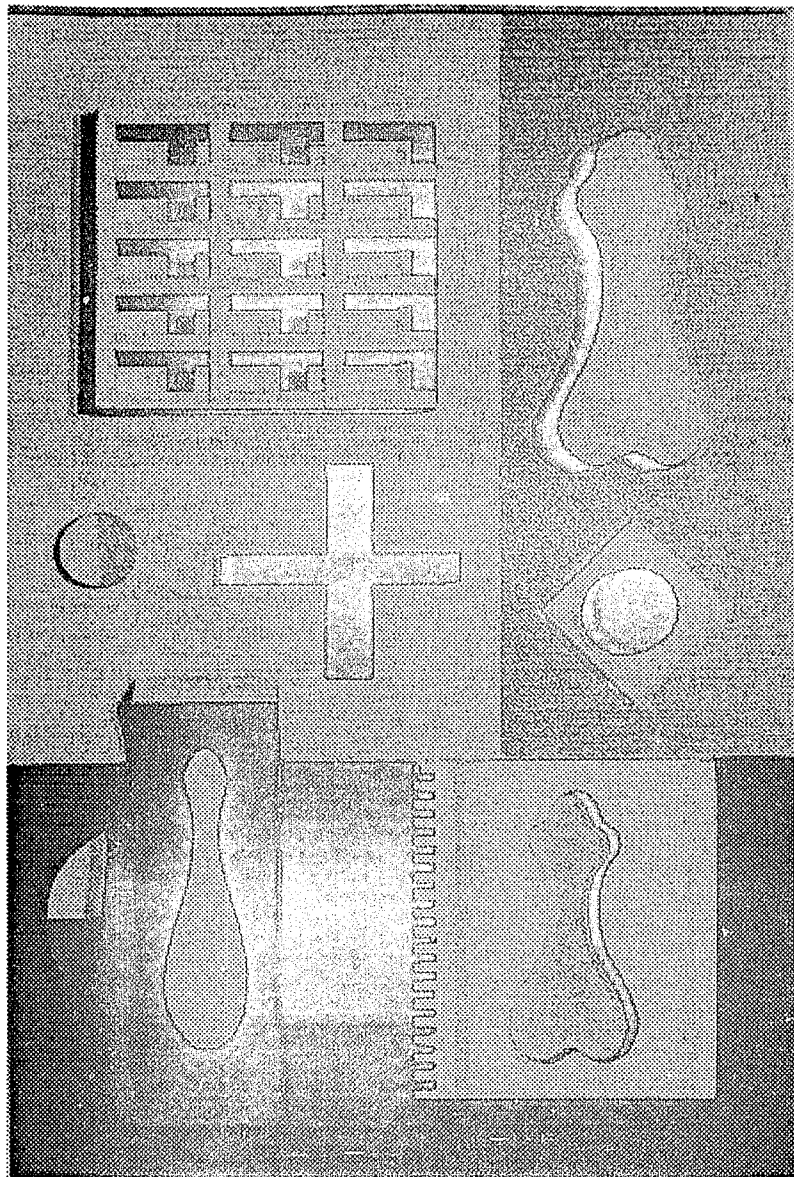


Fig. 58. Knud Merrild, *Equilibrium*, 1938, wood, metal, and paint, 21 5/8 x 14 7/8 in. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Arensberg.



Fig. 59. Agnes Pelton, *Primal Wing*, 1933, oil on canvas, 24 x 25 in. San Diego Museum of Art, Gift of the artist.



Fig. 60. *Long Beach Receptions*, original design by Henry Nord, redesigned by Albert King and Stanton Macdonald-Wright, 1938, mosaic, approximately 38 x 22 feet. Located on the Long Beach Promenade, Long Beach, California. WPA/FAP.

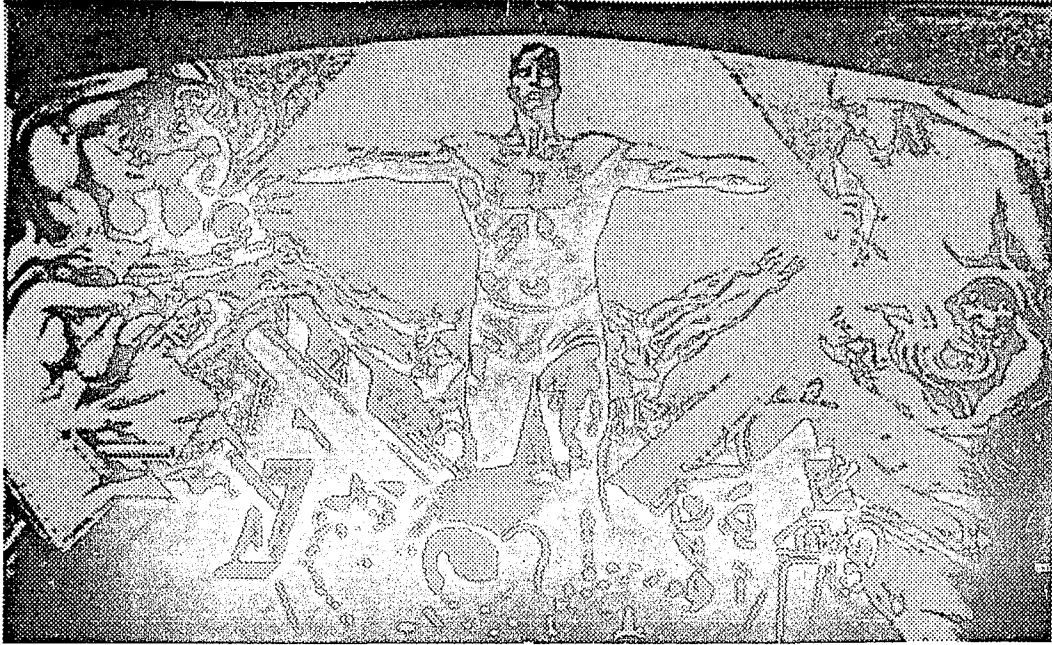


Fig. 61. Leo Katz, *Man and His Inventions*. PWAP Mural, formerly located at the Frank Wiggins Trade School, Los Angeles. Present whereabouts unknown.

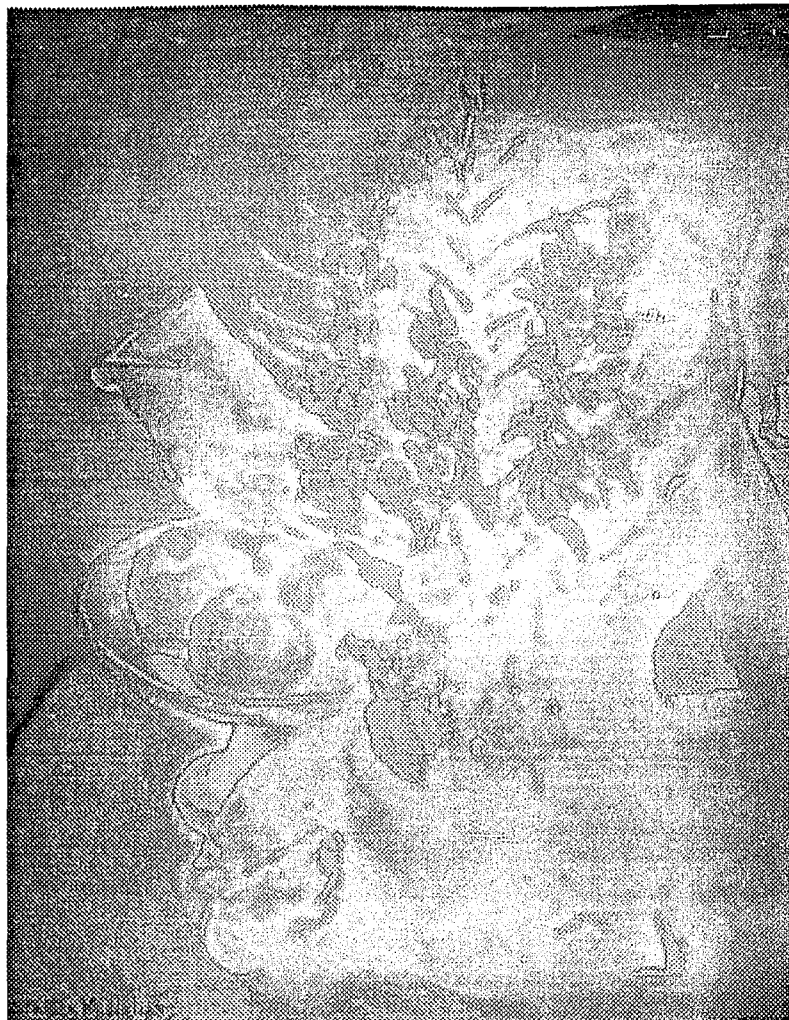


Fig. 62. *Still Life with Yellow Ginger*, 1940, oil on canvas, 24 x 19 in. Formerly collection of Messrs. Walter A. Nelson-Rees and James L. Coran. Destroyed by fire in 1991.



Fig. 63. *Homage to Pierre Louÿs*, 1942, oil on canvas. Present location unknown.

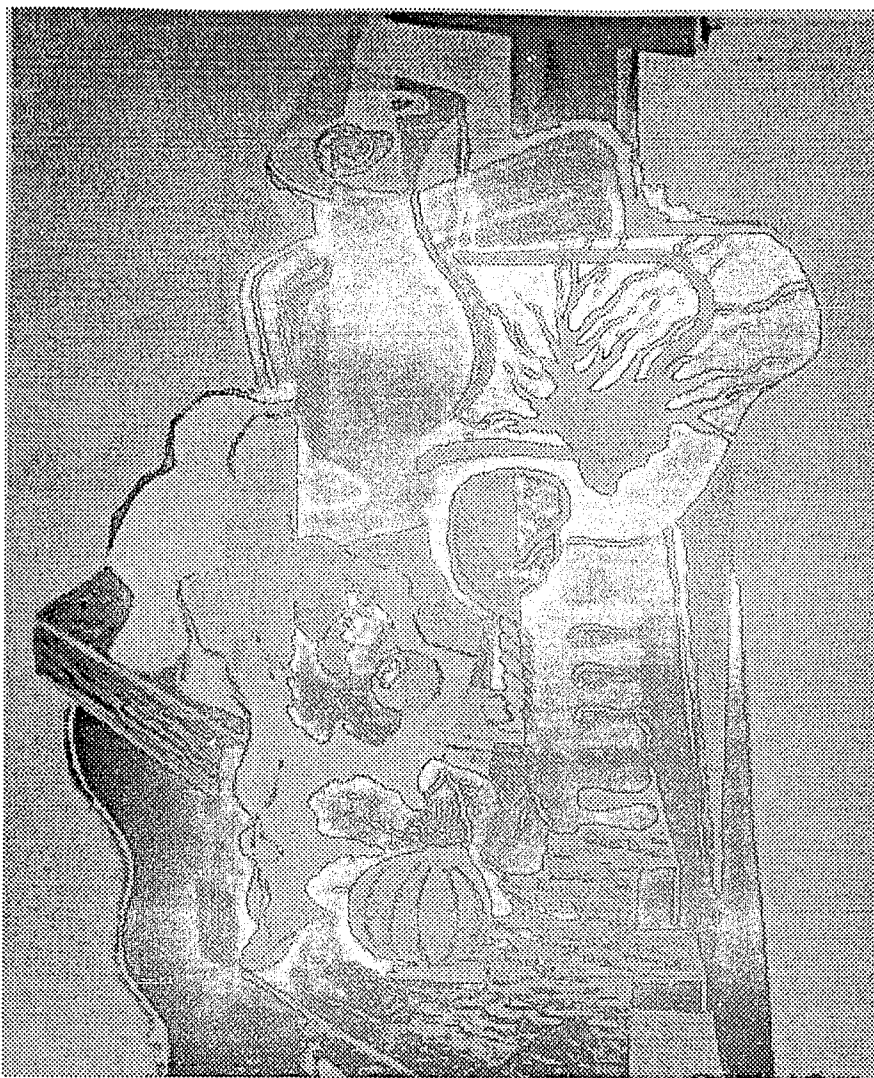


Fig. 64. *Still Life with Oxblood Vase*, 1945, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in.
Estate of Stanton Macdonald-Wright. Used by permission.



Fig. 65. *Six Women of Cassis*, 1945, oil on canvas, 85 x 155 in. Estate of Stanton Macdonald-Wright. Used by permission.



Fig. 66. *Self Portrait with Squash*, 1951, oil on panel, 24 3/4 x 30 1/4 in. Collection of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



Fig. 67. *Homage to Debussy*, 1952, oil on canvas, 96 x 59 1/2 in. Estate of Stanton Macdonald-Wright. Used by permission.



Fig. 68. Thomas Hart Benton, *Portrait of Stanton Macdonald-Wright*, 1961-62, oil on canvas, 40 1/4 x 35 1/4 in. The Thomas Hart Benton and Rita P. Benton Trusts.



Fig. 69. *Fish*, 1961, oil of canvas, 16 x 36 in. Present location unknown.



Fig. 70. *L'Age d'Or: A Triptych*, 1966-67, oil on panel, 96 x 144 in. Present location unknown.

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