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ART TO EDUCATE:
A HISTORY OF PUBLIC ART IN THE
NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1890-1976

by
MICHELE COHEN

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

2002

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

ART TO EDUCATE: A HISTORY OF PUBLIC ART IN THE NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1890-1976

by

Michele Cohen

Advisor: Professor Marlene Park

“Art to Educate” chronicles a history of public art in the New York City public schools from the beginning until the passage of the City’s Percent-for-Art Law in 1982. Its purpose is twofold: to bring to light public artworks in school buildings that are typically ignored in discussions of public art and to create a historical framework for understanding this collection.

To contextualize this collection, “Art to Educate” links public art in schools to school architecture and the Board of Education’s school construction programs over the last century; to a consideration of educational theory and viewpoints in art education; and to the concerns of audience, site, and patron. From this matrix several major themes emerge: public art as educator, public art as architectural enhancement, public art as commemoration, the tension between public art and abstraction, and public art and the politics of identity.

“Art to Educate” covers the period 1890 through 1976. Arranged chronologically, each chapter provides an overview of roughly a decade, illustrated by case studies. Chapter 1, the 1890s, focuses on the motives for placing art in schools with an examination of the practice of placing art reproductions in school-rooms, largely

inspired by John Ruskin's writings. Chapter 2 discusses the little known Board of Education architect, Charles B. J. Snyder and early stained glass windows. Chapter 3 expands on Snyder's contributions, focusing on several major murals by second-generation American Renaissance artists. Chapter 4 considers the commemorative function of public art in schools, particularly World War I memorials. Chapter 5 covers the New Deal period, and its emphasis on murals, focusing on those that tackle the ambitious history of civilization theme. Chapter 6 shows how modernist architecture ushered in the transformation of public school art, evidenced in abstract mosaics and sculptures by Hans Hofmann, Ben Shahn, and Mary Callery. And Chapter 7 establishes the roots of multiculturalism in public school art by examining a body of work by African-American artists.

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INTRODUCTION

The story of public art in the New York City schools and in other municipal school systems around the country begins in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Inspired by John Ruskin, who promoted art in schools to make classrooms more stimulating and students behave better, private groups purchased and distributed reproductions of artworks. Commonly referred to as “school-room decorations,” plaster casts and prints stood next to teachers’ desks and adorned classroom walls. From this tentative beginning, artworks in schools evolved into ambitious commissions of a permanent nature. In the New York City public schools, the first such commission occurred in 1905 with the creation of a pair of murals by Charles Yardley Turner for DeWitt Clinton High School. In addition to managing the largest public school system in the world, the New York City Board of Education now became a patron of public art.¹

Over the years, the Board of Education has amassed over 1,200 objects ranging from forgotten works by unknown artists to great masterpieces by twentieth-century art celebrities. The permanent stained glass windows, murals, mosaics, sculptures, and more recently mixed media installations decorating New York City’s public schools attest to an ongoing commitment to bring culture to our youngest citizens. Why, despite periodic assertions that public art in schools is an excess and a waste of taxpayers dollars does it continue to enhance new school buildings?² What is the basis of this practice? Does it

¹With the consolidation of the City of New York in 1898, the New York City Board of Education became the sole agency responsible for schools in all boroughs of greater New York.

²The latest attack was by Governor George Pataki in March of 1996.

stem from the vanity of architects, the democratic impulses of elected officials, or the enlightened vision of progressive educators? What is the nature of this public art?

This dissertation, “Art to Educate,” chronicles a history of public art in the New York City public schools. It is the first comprehensive study to assert that this group of objects should be viewed as a collection, implying with that term a particular patron, mission, and audience. Except for isolated examples, the artworks dispersed among 1,100 school buildings are virtually unknown to scholars and the general public. Not only do they include major works by prominent artists, but taken as a whole, they mirror changing educational philosophies and entrenched cultural values, providing a fertile area to investigate. The purpose of this dissertation is twofold: to bring to light public artworks in school buildings that are typically ignored in discussions of public art and to create a historical framework for understanding this collection, to view it “in the complex matrix in which it is conceived, commissioned, built, and finally, received.”³

To develop the “complex matrix” for contextualizing this group of objects, this dissertation links public art in schools to school architecture and the Board of Education’s school construction programs over the last century; to a consideration of educational theory and viewpoints in art education, particularly where there are obvious connections between curriculum and school decorations; and to the concerns of audience, site, and patron. From this matrix several major themes emerge: public art as educator, public art as architectural enhancement, public art as commemoration, the tension between public art and abstraction, and public art and the politics of identity.

³Harriet F. Senie and Sally Webster, eds., *Critical Issues in Public Art* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), xi.

“Art to Educate” covers the period 1890 through 1976. The earliest examples of public school decorations are art reproductions and architectural stained glass from the 1890s. The thesis ends with a case study from the 1970s, a date purposefully chosen to dramatize the significance of the Board of Education’s collection prior to the passage of the Percent-for-Art Law in 1982. This dissertation demonstrates that public art in schools is not a recent phenomenon and makes a strong case for placing recent developments in public art in a broader, historical context.

Arranged chronologically, each chapter provides an overview of roughly a decade, illustrated by case studies. The case studies highlight some of the best public art in school buildings and illustrate new developments within a given period. Chapter 1, the 1890s, focuses on the motives for placing art in schools and necessarily begins with an examination of the practice of placing art reproductions in schoolrooms. This shows that the impulse for adorning schools with art originated in art critic John Ruskin’s nineteenth-century British Art for School’s movement, aimed at furthering the moral imperative of education. Chapter 2 discusses the little known Charles B. J. Snyder, the architect, engineer, and administrator, who was responsible for three decades of public school architecture and who was philosophically a proponent of permanent, original, public art in school buildings. Without Snyder’s artful designs, willingness to collaborate with artists, and vision of the school as a community centerpiece, it is unlikely that the Board of Education would have assumed its role as a patron of public art. Chapter 3 expands on Snyder’s contributions, moving beyond the earliest stained glass commissions to a discussion of several major murals by second generation American

Renaissance artists. For most of these artworks, there is very little available literature and the discussions here are the most expansive to date. Chapter 4 considers the commemorative function of public art in schools in relation to memorials honoring educators and fallen soldiers of World War I. Chapter 5 covers the New Deal period, and its emphasis on murals, particularly those that tackle the ambitious history of civilization theme. It also provides new information on specific aspects of the New Deal programs, such as art education, in relation to the New York City schools. Chapter 6 shows that contrary to widely held opinions, modernist architecture did not mean the demise of public art in schools. Rather, modernist architecture ushered in the transformation of public school art, making it possible and almost essential for artists to apply an abstract vocabulary to school murals and sculptures. The case studies selected for this chapter prove, I would argue, that abstraction, although hard to sell in school public art, can be successful given the proper architectural and ideological context. And Chapter 7 establishes the roots of multiculturalism in public school art by examining a body of work by African-American artists for the new Boys' and Girls' High School, opened in Bedford-Stuyvesant in 1976. By providing an overview of eighty years of public art in schools, we can begin to distill commonalities that underscore how an institution shapes its collection: we can identify those characteristics that constitute the essence of "school art."

In choosing to focus on art associated with a single institution, the New York City Board of Education, one necessarily has to consider the motives of the patron in commissioning this body of work. An unwieldy bureaucracy, the New York City Board of Education was and is not a monolithic entity reflecting the will of a single individual.

If there is any consistency in the roughly eight decades I cover, it is the strong influence exercised by the consultant design architect or the Board's architect in charge of its building program. Other than making the opportunity for art possible, the Chancellor and Board had very little to say about the actual art being commissioned.⁴ Yet, certain unstated assumptions inform the actions taken by those involved in the commissioning process: art has to be suitable, inoffensive, and justifiable as an extension of a school building.

In addition to the Board of Education, over the decades there have also been other sources of patronage, including the Federal government during the New Deal, alumni associations, and arts advocacy groups such as the Municipal Art Society, particularly important during the early part of the twentieth century. Despite the source of funds, during any given period, the spirit of the work commissioned complied with the Board of Education's implicit guidelines.

Because there are no existing general surveys of public art in the New York City schools, my sources for this study are eclectic. The idea for the dissertation evolved out of the essay I contributed to the *Art for Learning* catalogue, the only modern overview of art in the New York City schools.⁵ It is also an outgrowth of my job as curator of this

⁴In evaluating the public art commissioned for the New York City public schools, we should keep in mind that, "Patronage, however enlightened, is always an expression of self-interest. Public art, in overt and covert ways, embodies the ideals and aspirations of its patron, be it a national government, a local community, an individual, or a corporation." *Critical Issues*, 101.

⁵The Municipal Art Society, *Art For Learning* (New York: The Municipal Art Society, 1994). After completing this dissertation, I discovered a privately printed catalogue detailing the art collection amassed by the Toronto school system. Most of their works are portable paintings and decorative objects, with a few murals and World War I memorial sculptures. Similar to New York, there is also evidence of Ruskin's

collection and my role as a public art administrator engaged in the commissioning of new art for new school buildings. As a result, I have relied on important primary source materials in the Board of Education's archives at the Office of Special Collections, Teacher's College, the files of the Art Commission of the City of New York and the files at the Division of School Facilities. Where possible, I have also interviewed teachers, architects and artists. In addition, I have consistently consulted the books by Foster Wygant on the history of art education and Diane Ravitch's history of the New York City Board of Education.⁶ These authors, experts in their fields, provide a parallel framework for this history of public art in schools. For some specific artworks, I was able to consult previously published accounts, though none provide the comprehensive information I have compiled here.⁷ Lastly, for the larger questions framing any discussion of public art, I have benefited greatly from work on the New Deal by Marlene Park and Gerald Markowitz and several recent studies including those by Harriet Senie and Sally Webster, Michelle Bogart, Erika Doss, and Tom Finkelpearl.⁸

influence in the Toronto schools. See Rebecca Sisler, *Art for Enlightenment: A History of Art in Toronto Schools*, (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, the Learnxs Foundation in cooperation with the Toronto Board of Education, 1993).

⁶ Foster Wygant, *Art in American Schools in the 19th Century* (Cincinnati: Interwood Press, 1993) and Foster Wygant, *School Art in American Culture, 1820-1970* (Cincinnati: Interwood Press, 1997). Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars, New York City, 1805-1973: A History of the Public Schools as Battlefield of Social Change* (New York: Basic Books, 1974; reprint with new introduction by the author, 1988).

⁷See The Municipal Art Society and Art Commission of the City of New York, *Adopt-A-Mural* (New York: The Municipal Art Society, 1991); Greta Berman, *The Lost Years: Mural Painting in New York City Under the WPA Federal Art Project, 1935-1943*. (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1978).

⁸Marlene Park & Gerald E. Markowitz, *New Deal for Art; the government art projects of the 1930s with examples from New York City & State*. (Hamilton, N.Y.:

The literature on public art falls into several different categories: the most basic form is the guidebook, a survey of public art, generally outdoor sculpture, in a particular city. Sometimes these are the only published accounts of a particular artwork. At the minimum they all provide basic identifying information. In *The Art Commission and Municipal Art Society Guide to Manhattan's Outdoor Sculpture* I tried to do more.⁹ Some studies focus on a narrow period or a particular program, or medium.¹⁰ Other books on public art are collections of essays by different writers focusing on a particular aspect of public art or taken as a whole, promoting a particular type of public art practice.¹¹ Similar to my approach, in *Critical Issues*, Senie and Webster address the multifaceted topic of public art by compiling essays that deal with a historical range and variety of object types to address larger concerns of patron, context, controversy, and

Gallery Association of New York State, 1977); Michelle Bogart, *Public Sculpture and the Civic Ideal in New York City, 1890-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Harriet F. Senie and Sally Webster, eds., *Critical Issues in Public Art* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992); Harriet Senie, *Contemporary Public Sculpture: Tradition, Transformation, and Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Erika Doss, *Spirit Poles and Flying Pigs: Public Art and Cultural Democracy in American Communities* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995) and Tom Finkelpearl, *Dialogues in Public Art* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001).

⁹Margot Gayle and Michele Cohen, *The Art Commission and Municipal Art Society Guide to Manhattan's Outdoor Sculpture* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1988).

¹⁰See Greta Berman, "The Lost Years: Mural Painting in New York City Under the WPA Federal Art Project, 1935-1943," John Wetenhall, "The Ascendancy of Modern Public Sculpture in America" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1988), and Ivy Annabelle Schroeder "Minimalism for the Masses: Public Sculpture Under the Federal Art-in-Architecture Program, 1972-89" (Ph.D. diss., U. of Pittsburgh, 1997).

¹¹For this approach, see J.W.T. Mitchell, ed., *Art and the Public Sphere* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), Finkelpearl, *Dialogues in Public Art*, and Arlene Raven, ed., *Art in the Public Interest* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989).

community. “Art to Educate” differs from these other investigations because it focuses on the collection of public artworks associated with a single institution.

This dissertation, then, provides a unique perspective on public art, ranging as it does over decades and types of objects. It is not just about murals or sculptures. It is not just about memorials, WPA/FAP murals in schools, or the relationship between public art and architecture or public art and the community. It touches on all these areas. In the end it makes the case that regardless of when an artwork was commissioned, in the context of school buildings, the underlying mission of public art is to educate. The ongoing issue for those of us who continue to participate in the commissioning of public art for schools is to consider just what the nature of this educational agenda is.¹²

¹²Ravitch reaches a similar conclusion in *The Great School Wars*, writing, “The school is the principal public institution, beyond the government itself, intentionally designed to influence the values, habits, and behavior of the rising generation. Since people do not agree on which values, habits, and behaviors should be encouraged, school policy will always be controversial, especially when traditional attitudes are undergoing change,” 404.

CHAPTER 1

THE ART OF REPRODUCTION: PLASTER CASTS AND PRINTS IN THE NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS

At the close of the nineteenth century, the proliferation of artworks, or at least their copies in plaster and silver emulsion, in the New York City public schools reflected a nationwide zeal for school beautification. As one educator noted:

nothing has occurred, educationally, in fifty years so significant as the beautifying of the schoolroom by the placing of art on the walls. There is now scarcely a city or town of any size in New England that has not one or more genuinely beautiful school buildings, because of numerous works of art, and this without the appropriation of a dollar from the public treasury.¹

Why the mania for art-in-schools? To understand the cultural forces that prompted this wave of civic improvement in New York City and elsewhere, we need to examine the origins of the art-in-schools movement and its relationship to the educational objectives of the period. What kind of art was considered appropriate and how did art-in-schools further the aims of educators and social reformers?

The ideological roots of the art-in-schools movement originated in the writings of John Ruskin who wielded tremendous influence in England and America. Art for schools fit into Ruskin's larger philosophy, shared by William Morris, that art, and in a broader sense, culture was essential for the betterment of society; all people, regardless of class, deserved and needed art. Ruskin reasoned, "The first and most important kind of public buildings which we are always sure to want, are schools: and I would ask you to

¹*Journal of Education* 46, no. 18 (11 November 1897): 280, quoted in Foster Wygant, *Art in American Schools in the 19th Century* (Cincinnati: Interwood Press, 1993), 124.

consider very carefully, whether we may not wisely introduce some great changes in the way of school decoration.”² For Ruskin, schools should be monuments to culture, “externally of a majestic character” and “internally to be hung with works of art.”³

Ruskin promoted art-in-schools for several reasons. Believing in the power of beauty and its necessity in all aspects of human life, he decried “cheap furniture and bare walls”⁴ warning that students respond in kind to their surroundings. Furthermore, Ruskin contended that learning should take place in a stimulating and attractive environment, because “it is just in the emptiest room that the mind wanders most; for it gets restless, like a bird, for want of a perch, and casts about for any possible means of getting out and away.”⁵ Art in the classroom would capture students’ attention, minimizing disruptive behavior and encouraging learning.

For American followers of Ruskin, even more convincing than his environmental argument, was the notion that art-in-schools would shape character, a process that would begin with the cultivation of taste. In his 1880 essay, *A Joy for Ever*, Ruskin observes,

²Library Edition, *The Works of John Ruskin*, E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds. Vol. 16, *A Joy for Ever* (London: G. Allen, 1903-12 and New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1903-1912), 89. This and all quotes from Ruskin are taken from the Library Edition, *The Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols. *A Joy for Ever and its Price in the Market* was published in 1880 but was primarily based on “The Political Economy of Art,” two lectures presented in Manchester in 1857, as well as other lectures given between 1856-60.

³*Fors Clavigera*, Letter 7, vol. 27, p. 121 and Letter 79, vol. 29, p. 156 quoted in E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, intro. to *The Library Edition of the Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 27, p. lxviii.

⁴*A Joy for Ever*, 89.

⁵*Ibid.*, 89-90.

“there certainly comes a period in the life of a well-educated youth, in which one of the principal elements of his education is, or ought to be, to give him refinement of habits; and not only to teach him the strong exercises of which his frame is capable, but also to increase his bodily sensibility and refinement, and show him such small matters as the way of handling things properly, and treating them considerately.”⁶ For Ruskin, and many like-minded educators in England and America, art-in-schools would influence taste and nurture incipient sensibilities, ultimately leading to education's higher purpose--moral edification. Ruskin declared, “Education does not mean teaching people to know what they do not know. It means teaching them to behave as they do not behave.”⁷ By beautifying the environment, exposing the impressionable child to the right kind of art, the schoolroom itself would more effectively transmit a moral message.

How does art teach morality? Is moral uplift encoded in the style? The subject? And how would art be a moralizing force? In his analysis of Ruskin's theories, George R. Landow explains that the basis for Ruskin's equation of art with morality rests on the premise that people must be moved toward moral action, and art, which for Ruskin embodies beauty, is just such a force. Using this logic, any tool that heightens a person's ability to empathize will lead that person to noble acts. Therefore if one is surrounded by art, i.e., beauty, that person's ability to be projected “into the emotional position of

⁶Ibid., p. 89.

⁷*Crown of Wild Olive*, vol. 18, p. 502 quoted in Cook, vol. 27, lxi.

another human being” increases, resulting in heightened moral perceptions.⁸ Constant exposure to art would cause a person to respond more ardently to social injustice, poverty, exploitation and, from Ruskin's perspective, seek what is good and true.

Although Ruskin first promoted his ideas about school decor in a series of lectures given in 1857, it wasn't until 1883 that a follower, Mary Christie, founded the English Art for Schools Association, of which Ruskin was the first president.⁹ The Association dedicated itself to the acquisition and circulation of prints in schools and their mission statement became the blueprint for the art-for-schools movement in the United States. James P. Haney, a New York City art educator who eventually became Director of Art for New York City high schools, even reprinted it verbatim in his 1899 article on school room decoration.¹⁰

⁸Landow provides a convincing and clear explanation of Ruskin's theory of beauty. See George R. Landow, *The Aesthetics and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 67-68. For Ruskin, the power of art was in beauty. Landow elaborates: "First, perception of certain modes of beauty exercises moral sympathy; and second, since according to Ruskin, the beautiful is a symbol of God, its perception becomes an essentially religious act which 'indirectly and occultly' informs the beholder of the nature of God," 68.

⁹See reference to the Art for Schools Association in Cook's intro. to vol. 27, Lsviii-lxix. The Kyrle Society, founded in 1877, also took steps to provide art for schools.

¹⁰James P. Haney, "Decoration of Schools and School-Rooms," *Municipal Affairs* 3 (1899): 675-76. The mission statement read: "1. To negotiate with art publishers for the purchase of prints, photographs, etchings, chromos, lithographs, etc., on advantageous terms, and to supply them at the lowest possible price to schools. 2. To reproduce, from time to time, by one or more of the processes familiar to engravers and printers, carefully selected examples, likely to have a large circulation. 3. To print a descriptive catalogue and price-list of the example which the Committee are prepared to recommend to the notice of schools. 4. To present to schools in special cases, and as the funds of the association shall allow, small collections and books explanatory of them. 5. To arrange

The primary aim of the Art for Schools Association was to place as much art as possible throughout England's publicly funded schools and to educate students about art. The Association was essentially an agent for the purchase and distribution of inexpensive prints, photographs, etchings, chromos and lithographs. For their purposes, art had little to do with originality or authenticity, and since their aim was to decorate as many schoolrooms as possible, they used the most economical means. In addition to purchasing prints, part of their goal was to prompt schools to obtain reproductions on their own, so they produced a descriptive catalogue and price list. To further educational objectives, they assembled model collections and explanatory books to illustrate groupings of reproductions. They offered guidance on appropriate subjects, setting a pattern evident in the selections made for schools throughout the United States in the following decade. The model standard collection should consist of:

(1) Pictures of the simplest natural objects--birds and their nests and eggs, trees, wild flowers, and scenes of rural life, such as town children seldom see, and country children often fail to enjoy consciously until their attention is specially called to them; (2) Pictures of animals in friendly relation with human beings, especially with children; (3) pictures of the peasant and artisan life of our own and foreign countries, incidents of heroic adventure, etc.; (4) Pictures of architectural works of historic or artistic interest; (5) Landscapes and sea-pieces; (6) Historical portraits; (7) Scenes from history; (8) and last, but by no means least, such reproductions as are available of suitable subjects among the numerous works of the Italian, Dutch and modern schools.¹¹

These recommendations clearly reflect Ruskin's biases--his veneration of nature, especially a Pre-Raphaelite intimacy, love of architecture, the idealization of peasant life

various loose collections to be placed at the disposal of schools on such terms as may prove convenient."

¹¹Ibid.

found in Barbizon painting, i.e. the *Angelus* by Jean-Francois Millet, and the usefulness of historical painting, which Ruskin advocated as the principal form of classroom decoration.¹² Keeping their audience in mind, the Association tried to identify images that would appeal to children and could be correlated with various subjects such as history and literature, but they also recommended reproductions of art for art's sake.

Ruskin's ideas, disseminated through lectures and publications of his works, stimulated a flurry of activity in cities throughout the United States. The progressive movement embraced the cause of art-in-schools, fairly widespread by the turn of the century. Women's groups led the campaign, establishing art-for-schools societies in cities throughout the Midwest and East Coast.¹³

Even before the movement got underway, there were isolated attempts earlier in the century to upgrade school buildings through improved architectural design and the inclusion of art. One of the earliest uses of paintings and sculptures to decorate

¹²Ruskin argued that historical paintings would "animate their history for them." Quoted in Cook, vol. 27, p. 91.

¹³Sol Cohen discusses the art-in-schools movement in *Progressives and Urban School Reform: The Public Education Association of New York, 1895-1954* (New York: Teacher's College, 1964), 54, 58. See also Kimberly Dawn Finley, "Cultural Monitors: Clubwomen and Public Art Instruction in Chicago, 1890-1920" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1989). In the 1890s, art-for-schools societies were established in New York City, Brooklyn, Baltimore, Chicago, Denver St. Louise, Boston, Cleveland, Albany, Minneapolis, St. Paul and Milwaukee. See Rho Fisk Zueblin, "Public School Art Societies," *Chautauquan* 38 (Oct. 1903): 169-172. For a history of the art-in-schools movement see Haney, "Decoration of Schools and School-Rooms," Henry Turner Bailey, "Art in the Schools," *New England Magazine* 17 (Jan. 1898): 643-649 and U.S. Bureau of Education, "Art Decoration in Schoolrooms," compiled by Stephen B. Weeks, Report of the Commissioner of Education for 1895-96 vol. 2 (Washington, D.C., 1897), 1363-1411.

classrooms occurred in the 1830s at the Temple School in Boston, a private school founded and operated by Brownstone Alcott and Elizabeth Peabody. Shortly thereafter, an article entitled “The Perception of the Beautiful” appeared in the *Connecticut Common Schools Journal* advocating that the entire school environment, inside and out, should be a model of beauty, both for students and the community.¹⁴

Interest in decorating schools picked up momentum in Boston with the efforts of the Educational Committee of the American Social Science Association. In 1868, aware of the new girls’ high school being designed in Boston, they urged the architect to plan space for plaster casts in the school’s main hall. Two years later Charles C. Perkins and John D. Philbrick pursued the matter and eventually obtained ten plaster statues, including the *Venus de Milo*, *Demosthenes*, *Diane of Gabies*, *Pudicita of the Vatican*, the Parthenon frieze and eleven antique busts, which they purchased in Rome, Paris, London and Boston for a total cost of \$1,500. Philbrick and Perkins carefully selected casts they thought would be appropriate for a girls’ school and were willing to go to Europe to obtain them. The *Diane de Gabies*, a female draped figure in the collection of the Louvre, already had been popularized extensively in various sizes and media. The *Pudicita of the Vatican*, better known as *Pudicity*, was one of the most acclaimed of all Roman female portraits.¹⁵ At the time of their acquisition, the only other collection of

¹⁴Llydia H. Sigourney, “The Perception of the Beautiful,” *Connecticut Common School Journal* 2, no. 8 (Feb. 1, 1849): 117-18; quoted in Foster Wygant, *School Art in American Culture 1820-1970* (Cincinnati: Interwood Press, 1993), 5.

¹⁵For a detailed discussion of these two famous statues, see Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 198, 300.

public casts on view in Boston was at the Boston Athenaeum.

Determined to place art in every Boston public school, in 1883, Perkins, a member of the committee on drawing of the Boston school board and author of several books on Italian sculpture, wrote a report urging the creation of an art-for-schools association. Committee members reasoned that they could more easily meet their objectives if they did this outside the official Board, stating that “we believe that the decoration of schoolhouse walls with good prints and photographs [of artworks] will not only bring good influences to bear upon the pupils, but will also materially aid teachers of drawing, history, geography, and natural history as objects of reference.”¹⁶ Finally, about a decade later, on 20 May 1892, the Boston Public School Art League incorporated and issued their mission statement. Many of their arguments reiterate Ruskin’s ideas adapted for American cultural aspirations, and they were the first group to recognize the value of original artworks. They proclaimed “that art refines the mind, enriches the heart, elevates the soul, that art is one of the essentials of the perfect life, and that the refinement which comes from the presence of an association with works of art is an important element and aid in the development of character, both mentally and morally.”

The mission statement continued:

(1) by daily contact with objects of art to bend, educate, and elevate the mind of the young to familiarity with, liking for, and due appreciation of things beautiful (not necessarily useful) and correct standards in the art of architecture, painting, and sculpture, and the lives of those who have made the arts noble, to the end that children of the present generation may, when they come to man’s estate, reject the false, demand the true, and so raise the art of our time and country to a plane which will, in ages yet to come, reflect true greatness and not material

¹⁶United States Bureau of Education, “Art Decoration in Schoolrooms,” 1364.

aggrandizement, (2) to place upon the walls of schoolrooms objects of art in the shape of casts, photographs, engravings of statuary, buildings, and paintings, illustrating recognized standards in art; also art centers, as Athens, Rome, Florence, Venice; also portraits of the old masters, also original works by leading artists, foreign and American.¹⁷

In the 1890s, the art-in-schools movement solidified in Boston through the leadership of Edwin D. Mead (1849-1937), editor of the *New England Magazine*. His editorial, "A More Beautiful Public Life," first published in May of 1894, became a credo for like-minded citizens. He urged his readers, "If we can once give beauty its rights in the schools, we shall have done the greatest thing which we can do toward securing for our people a more beautiful public life."¹⁸

The decoration of schoolrooms became a subject prompting a national discourse, resulting in an 1897 report compiled by the United States Commission of Education.¹⁹ This report surveyed activities in several American cities and even included a section entitled "Ruskin on the Decoration of Schoolrooms," which were primarily excerpts from

¹⁷Boston School Document No. 21, 1892, 32-34; quoted in United States Bureau of Education, "Art Decoration in Schoolrooms," 1364.

¹⁸Mead's essay was reprinted as a pamphlet and was distributed by the Civic Club. When the essay first appeared it coincided with a series of lectures that were being given by The Massachusetts Society for Promoting Good Citizenship. These subjects included, "The Lesson of the White City," "Boards of Beauty," "Municipal Art," "Art Museums and How to Bring Them Home to the People," "Art in the Public Schools," and "Boston - City of God."

¹⁹United States Bureau of Education, *Art Decoration in Schoolrooms*, compiled by Stephen B. Weeks, Report of the Commissioner of Education for 1895-96 vol. 2 (Washington, D.C., 1897), 1363-1411. Sections include: "First Efforts in Decorating Schoolrooms," "Work of Manchester Art Museum," "School Report of Quincy, Mass., 1892," "Work of Brooklyn Institute," "Interior Decoration of Schoolhouses," by Walter Gilman Page, "Art for the Schoolroom," by Barr Ferree, "Art in the Schoolroom Through Decoration and Works of Art," by Stella Skinner, "Creative Power in Art," by John S.

A Joy For Ever. The document encapsulates then current thought on the subject, providing the rationales American educators used in promoting art-for-schools. It chronicles the history of the art-in-schools movement, surveys activities around the country, and identifies specific artworks acquired by schools; thus this report provides an excellent contextual framework for the casts and reproductions acquired for New York City's public schools.

Four primary themes emerge in the various articles, reprints of education conference speeches, school board accounts, and other sources referenced in the Commission report. These themes are: (1) art will provide moral uplift; (2) children respond to their surroundings; (3) art supports the teaching of other subjects; (4) children should be cultivated to become future art patrons, and furthermore, when taste is instilled at an early age, American citizens will demand improved design. The moralizing, environmental, and subject correlation arguments are all present, but the report also introduces an economic and patriotic incentive, namely that Americans should develop their own art traditions and upgrade the quality of goods manufactured at home.

The report is also useful for the way it details how art was displayed in various schools, providing a 'picture' of just how art was integrated into school buildings and classrooms. Some school districts grouped casts and pictures into thematic installations, often by period, emulating museum practice. This resulted in the transformation of classrooms into a Greek room, Roman room or Venetian room. For example, Room No. 4 of Boston's English High School was made into a Roman room. It included

Clark, and "The Place of Art Education in General Education," by John S. Clark.

photographs of the *Arch of Constantine*, the *Temple of Vesta*, the *Coliseum*, St. Peter's exterior and interior and plaster casts of busts of Caesar, Virgil, Cicero, Eros, and the *Marble Faun*, popularized by Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel. In the Boston Rice Primary School there were casts of boys heads by Donatello, Luca della Robbia's bas-relief of dancing boys from the *Cantoria Frieze*, and a cast of Jean Antoine Houdon's bust of George Washington. At the Lawrence School in Brookline, Massachusetts, William H. Lincoln purchased for exhibition in a central corridor the Parthenon frieze, a bas-relief from the Greek temple at Pergamum, representing the battle of Minerva with the giants, statues of Minerva, Augustus, and Urania and busts of Marcus Aurelius, Julius Caesar, Cicero, Demosthenes and Homer.²⁰

In the Salem schools, the artist Ross Turner initiated and supervised the decorating of local schools. He had the classroom walls tinted and hung with engravings and prints, and above doors and blackboards mounted bracket shelves to support casts and busts of famous men. Pedestals stood next to teachers' desks. Turner grouped pictures thematically and made associations between statues and photographs, placing for example, a six-foot long photograph of the Mansion house at Mount Vernon next to a full-length figure of Washington.²¹

Among the activities catalogued in the Bureau of Education report, was the 1896 Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences' "Exhibition of Works of Art Suitable for the Decoration of School Rooms." Prior to consolidation of the City of New York in 1898,

²⁰Ibid., 1365.

²¹Ibid., "School Report of Salem, Mass, 1892," 68-70.

Brooklyn had its own school system. The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, founded in 1824, sought to provide information on a range of topics and had a Section on Art Education, which in turn had a committee on Decoration and Art Works for Public Schools. This exhibition was the first of its kind in the metropolitan area and followed the examples set in Boston and Philadelphia the previous year. According to the Brooklyn Institute's own accounting, over 6,000 people, many of them educators, visited the display.²²

In his forward to the catalogue, Walter S. Goodnough, director of Drawing for the Brooklyn Public Schools, formulated several rationales for art-in-schools, extensively quoting what he described as "a recent writer," who was probably Edwin Mead.²³ He emphasized the positive influence art has on character: "What better means can be used to inspire patriotism and chasten private life than the influence of those arts which embody the ideal? Where can this influence be exerted so well as in the public school?" Or put more practically and in response to critics of art education, "Surround young people during school hours with pictures and statuary, set off by tinted walls, and the silent beauty irradiating there from will quicken and purify the taste without encroaching

²²Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, *Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences Annual Yearbook*, vol. 8 (Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences), 181.

²³The sentiments expressed sound very much like those of Edwin D. Mead, published in his editorial, "A More Beautiful Public Life," referred to above, but they are not direct quotes. Mead writes that pictures hung in the public schools should never be of the "commonplace and meretricious order, but such as shall lift the taste of our children and our people to what is pure and beautiful and classical and great." See Mead, "A More Beautiful Public Life," 392.

upon school time or interfering with school work.”²⁴ In his own words Goodnough writes, “As a means of making more real the great events and facts of history, literature, science and art, as well as for the purpose of bringing greater culture, refinement, and more civilizing influences into the schoolroom, of cultivating an appreciation and love of the beautiful, and of educating the aesthetic and emotional nature of the child, good art works have an untold value.”²⁵

The Brooklyn Institute's catalogue of 412 items comprised an assortment of objects, an index of the period's prevailing taste. It listed photographs of Egyptian architecture, Greek temples, Renaissance churches, Greek and Roman sculpture. These would acquaint children with European cities and the great monuments of the world. It included drawings of paintings by American contemporary artists such as *At the Marston House* by John White Alexander and Kenyon Cox's *Captain R. Randall*. Surprisingly for an exhibition aimed at a secular school system, the catalogue mentioned some religious works, such as *Holy Family* by Bartolomé Estebán Murillo and a drawing of Donatello's *Madonna and Child*. There were also drawings after Michelangelo, Luca della Robbia, and Donatello. Reflecting the phenomenon of Japonisme, the display featured examples of Japanese art, “of value in the school room, because it presents simple beauty in a form quite different from the usual decorations.”²⁶ Among images of great Americans were

²⁴The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, *Exhibition of Works of Art Suitable for the Decoration of School Rooms* (Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1896), 6.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 7.

²⁶*Ibid.*

Gilbert Stuart's *George Washington* and Henry Inman's *John Marshall*, photos of busts of Washington Irving, Daniel Webster, and Abraham Lincoln. Completing the inventory were landscapes by Camille Corot, *Aurora* by Guido Reni, and a collection of Rookwood pottery, indicative of the popularity of the Arts and Crafts movement.

The 1896 exhibition was so successful, the Brooklyn Institute arranged another two years later. Many members of the sponsoring committee were teachers or principals in the Brooklyn public schools. The borough's three major high schools, Boys', Girls' and Erasmus Hall were all represented. The introduction for this second catalogue included more practical information concerning the size and clarity of the images, reminding readers that art should be visible from classroom seats. Images should also be chosen for a particular grade. In the Ruskinian tradition, "they should be such as will cultivate a love of nature, and exert a proper moral and refining influence," for "Admiration and appreciation of beauty in material things will lead to appreciation of nobility and refinement in character."²⁷ Again photos highlighted great European cities and architectural monuments. The reproductions of paintings by Anthony van Dyck, Claude Lorraine, Rembrandt, Joseph Mallord William Turner, Jacob von Ruisdael, Rosa Bonheur, Jean-Francois Millet, Sir Edwin Henry Landseer, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, George De Forest Brush, and Jules Breton, are a barometer of artistic taste of the period. This exhibition also presented casts of sculptures, including parts of the Parthenon frieze, casts after Michelangelo, Luca della Robbia, Bertel Thorwaldsen, Donatello, Greek

²⁷Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, *Exhibition of Works of Art Suitable for the Decoration of School Rooms* (Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1898), 9.

sculpture, Hermes by Praxiteles, and the adored icon of classical antiquity, the *Apollo Belvedere*.

The two exhibitions organized by the Brooklyn Institute generated interest in school decoration in that borough, prompting the Woman's Club, the Civitas Club, alumni associations, members of the Board of Education, school principals, teachers and pupils to purchase art for Brooklyn schools. Across the river in Manhattan, a single organization, the Public Education Association, led the campaign for art-in-schools, for the democratization of aesthetics was a credo well suited to the goals of New York City progressives working toward educational reform.

The Public Education Association began as the ladies auxiliary to Good Government Club E, an anti-Tammany group, and was originally called the Woman's Association for Improving the Public Schools.²⁸ In April 1895 it separated from Club E and in October 1895 became the Public Education Association (PEA). Men were not admitted until 1905, but they served on the advisory committee. Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, was chief advisor. Most original members were active philanthropists, upper class women involved in church work.²⁹ The PEA worked to professionalize school administration, cultivate support for public education, and along with the reform movement, expand the mandate of the New York City public schools,

²⁸For the definitive history of the Public Education Association, see Cohen, *Progressives and Urban School Reform*.

²⁹Members of the Art Committee in 1898 were: Mrs. Edward S. Mead, Chairman, Miss A. M. Vail, Treasurer, Mrs. Reginald De Koven, Mrs. James Markoe, Mrs. Lorillard Spencer, Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer (Mariana G. Van Rensselaer), and Mrs. Victor Sorchan. See Public Education Association Annual Report, 1899.

aiming to transform them into instruments of social change. Beneath the rhetoric, the underlying mission of the PEA and other school reformers was to Americanize and assimilate the huge influx of southern and eastern European immigrants pouring into New York's Lower East Side.³⁰

In their 1899 Annual Report, the PEA articulated their primary objective: "The main purpose of this Association, as expressed in its Constitution, is to stimulate public interest in the common schools."³¹ They accomplished this through the formation of various committees to work on specific issues, many of the same issues being addressed by the larger wave of school reformers.³² By 1905, the PEA had established the following committees: School Affairs, School Visiting, Tombs School, (school for imprisoned youth) Finance, Truancy, Evening Schools, Entertainment, Nature Material, and Art Committee, which gave rise to the Portfolio and Nature Material Committees.³³ The Art Committee had three primary functions: (1) decoration of classrooms and assembly rooms with framed reproductions and plaster casts; (2) provision of small,

³⁰See Cohen, *Progressives and Urban School Reform*, 4.

³¹*Public Education Association Fifth Annual Report* (New York: Public Education Association, 1899), 15.

³²Some of these issues are articulated in a report compiled by the sub-committee of the Committee of Seventy that focused on the public school system. This report noted the deplorable condition of school buildings and demanded proper playgrounds, improved sanitary conditions, increased seating capacity, and "all such modern improvements." On the administrative side, they advocated the creation of kindergartens and manual training programs. See Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 138.

³³See Public Education Association, *Report of Ten Years Work of the Public Education Association of New York: 1895 - 1905* (New York: Public Education Association, 1906).

unframed images illustrative of various subjects; and (3) creation of circulating libraries of pictures so that children could bring art into their homes. Of the organization's subgroups, the Art Committee was the most active, largely due to the highly respected art critic and author, Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, who was President of the PEA from 1896-1905. In her first public statement as President, Mrs. Van Rensselaer placed as much importance on art-in-schools as on establishing a school in the Tombs for boys awaiting trial.³⁴ During its first ten years, the PEA raised more than \$10,000 for art-in-schools, funding the decoration of three schools and the partial adornment of fifteen,³⁵ compared to \$5,000 for the Tombs School, and \$1,150 for lectures, entertainment and conferences. Generally, the committee focused on one school at a time, sometimes assigning committee members to a particular classroom, some of which received as many as twenty framed pictures. As a memorial to her son, Mrs. Van Rensselaer donated \$1,000 for the purchase of 146 pictures and 23 casts for the Boys Department at P.S. 7, located at Hester and Chrystie on the Lower East Side. Works were grouped into a Medieval and Renaissance room, Greek and Roman room, European room, and Asiatic room. The PEA's School Decorating Committee wanted to make this school, which also

³⁴*New York Tribune*, 21 November 1896, also quoted in Cohen, 53.

³⁵This is described in greater detail in Public Education Association, *Report of Ten Years Work*, 7. "For this purpose casts of famous statues and the finest photographic reproductions of landscapes and of the masterpieces of painting have been used. Nearly 23,000 small mounted pictures, costing over \$600, have been mounted and distributed among 188 schools for use in illustrating class-room studies. In 1903 it became unnecessary to continue this work, as the Board of Education itself undertook to supply the schools with these small pictures. Picture libraries have been established in ten schools."

hosted night classes, a model.³⁶

As part of its mission, the PEA strove to make schools into community centers, offering free concerts, and supporting evening, week-end and holiday hours for schools. They also experimented with using school buildings as art galleries. In 1901, they sponsored two exhibitions at P.S. 7 on the Lower East Side that presented reproductions of famous European and American paintings. Operating on the assumption that few immigrant families made their way uptown to the Metropolitan Museum, the art crusaders decided to bring the “art” to them.

The PEA became a clearinghouse of information on the decoration of schoolrooms. They received information requests from around the country, especially for lists of appropriate reproductions and casts. In their 1899 Annual Report, the PEA noted, “The Association has always endeavored to spread by spoken and written words a knowledge of the real need for school room decoration and of its true importance and indisputable good results, and the evidence of its success which these requests from other cities afford is very encouraging.”³⁷

What artworks were selected and how? Although the Board of Education had to approve all donations of casts and reproductions and prohibited religious subjects and nudity, the PEA still exercised a lot of freedom. The selections reveal a pattern, pointing to a canon of art reproductions suitable for schools. The choices hark back to the

³⁶For a description of P.S. 7, see “Pictures in the Schools,” *New York Tribune*, 16 June 1901, p. 12.

³⁷See PEA, *Annual Report 1899*, 18.

recommendations of Ruskin's Art for Schools Society as well as reflecting broader cultural attitudes and the growing debate about art education.

The Public Education Society and like-minded groups responded to two major currents of the day--the Ruskinian influenced art-in-schools movement (to improve the environment and provide moral uplift) and the discussions among educators about what the nature of art education in the public schools should be. By the turn-of-the-century, the teaching of art was fairly widespread and art education, now divorced from industrial design, meant more than instruction in drawing. It encompassed, among other things, aesthetics and picture study.³⁸ The activities of the PEA, even the very structure of its art committee with subcommittees for schoolroom decoration, resource images, and a circulating picture library, mirrored the ideas fueling the discussion in art education circles. Art educators viewed art as a tool for moral uplift, a teaching aid for other subjects,³⁹ and particularly in New York City, as a mechanism for Americanizing and

³⁸For an excellent discussion of picture study, see Wygant, *Art in American Schools in the 19th Century*, Chapt. 8. By 1902, when the report of the Committee of Ten was filed, art education included "form study, manual training, drawing, and the study of art works." See Wygant, 107. Wygant further explains, "Picture study, as the major approach to history and appreciation, aimed for narrative and social feelings more than for aesthetic qualities and dictated proper responses as authoritatively as the biographical facts. Yet this was the common attitude toward art, and picture study did represent an earnest effort which around 1930 was abandoned rather than improved." Ibid., 134. See also Nadine Carol Gordon, "A Mechanical Vision: Reproduced Works of Art Used as Instructional Resources in the American Public School System, 1870-1929," (Ed.D. Dissertation, Columbia U. Teacher's College, 1988).

³⁹The *Oswego movement* also contributed to the popularity of picture study. "Art was only one of many school subjects for which graphic instructional aids were promoted vigorously at the end of the century." Paintings were used as illustrations of geography, history, clothing, industry and family life. See Wygant, *Art in American Schools*, 124.

acculturating new immigrants. Sculptor George Bissell, a member of the Municipal Art Society's committee on the Decoration of School Buildings, makes this aim evident, urging the distribution of images which have national relevance: "Our history, thus illustrated, would be a perpetual lesson in history as well as in art and a patriotic inspiration which would make enthusiastic Americans of the thousands of children sitting in the presence of these works daily."⁴⁰ Bissell took Ruskin's interest in historical subjects to a new patriotic level.

The introduction of picture study or art appreciation in the public school curriculum during the 1890s coincided with other developments in American culture such as the growth of museums, art publications, and increased European travel. Art history itself was becoming a college discipline. William Henry Goodyear, curator of fine arts at the Brooklyn Institute, wrote several histories of art that became standard texts. In his 1888 *A History of Art for Classes, Art Students and Tourists in Europe*, he defined art history as "the study of good examples of art, considered in their most natural arrangement and sequence--that of time."⁴¹ He argued that it was important to establish a canon of great art so that taste would rise above the whims of individual teachers, and he presented masterpieces in stylistic succession beginning with the tombs of ancient Egypt. In his *Renaissance and Modern Art*, Goodyear discusses many of the same nineteenth century European and American artists who were featured in the World's

⁴⁰See George E. Bissell, "Art and Education," *Municipal Affairs* 6 (1902): 187.

⁴¹William Henry Goodyear, *A History of Art for Classes, Art-Students and Tourists in Europe*, 3rd ed. revised with new illustrations (New York: A. S. Barnes & Company, 1888 and 1889), iv.

Columbian Exposition and included in the Brooklyn Institute's exhibitions of reproductions suitable for classrooms.⁴²

Founders of the Metropolitan Museum of Art shared many of the same goals articulated by educators, both of whom viewed art as a “department of knowledge,” and they reasoned that a “diffusion of a knowledge of art in its higher forms of beauty would tend directly to humanize, to educate and refine a practical and laborious people.”⁴³ In its early years, the function of the Metropolitan and similar institutions was “basically social and moral--aesthetics were secondary.”⁴⁴ Likewise, it's not surprising that in picture study, the “art” of the picture was often overlooked, and teachers untrained in art avoided formal analysis, focusing instead on narrative. Teachers used images for moral education but not quite in the way Ruskin had envisioned, and often, pictures became paradigms of good behavior, more in the tradition of Hogarth's pictorial sermons.

As picture study developed as a component of art education, several companies produced texts to assist teachers. In 1898, Deristhe L. Hoyt published *The World's Painters and Their Pictures*. It was an opinionated appraisal of painters beginning with the “modern” painters of the Renaissance. The emphasis was on the French Barbizon

⁴²See William Henry Goodyear, *Renaissance and Modern Art* (New York: The Macmillan Company; London: Macmillan & Co., LTD, 1908).

⁴³Quoted in Calvin Tompkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: H. Holt, 1989), 16. The reference here is to the average American citizen, not new immigrants.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 31. Wygant also discusses this, explaining that “As part of society's instrument for the apparently limitless self-development or self-culture of its citizens, art education had a mission.” *Art in American Schools in the Nineteenth Century*, 131.

painters and the English Pre-Raphaelites, with scant mention of American artists.

Wygant observes, “It suggested that American art was not yet substantial, that the important painting near the end of the nineteenth century, which should form the ideas of art in education, was what England and France exhibited at the world expositions.”⁴⁵ In England, they were the Pre-Raphaelites and their followers together with Landseer and other painters of animals. In France, they were the Barbizon group, Millet and other painters of peasants, Rosa Bonheur, such painters of genre and history as Ernest Meissonier and Jean Léon Gérôme. Although Hoyt was less selective than Goodyear, who cites Landseer as an example of the “backwardness of English art,”⁴⁶ both writers ignored such new developments in painting as French Impressionism and promoted what was already sanctioned in official circles.

In contrast to this opinionated, somewhat limited history, Prang published a teacher's manual in 1898 that used famous art works to teach composition and technique.

Also in 1898, Prang published *How to Enjoy Pictures*, specifically aimed at an art appreciation audience, which included a section on the decoration of classrooms by Stella Skinner, who was director of Art Education for the City of New Haven and a leading proponent of art-in-schools. The text begins with a quotation from Ruskin and ends with Skinner's chapter. Using a variety of images, the book divides them into various subjects such as landscapes, architecture, animals, and portraits. Skinner summarizes the purpose of picture study, writing, “The highest purpose of picture study

⁴⁵Wygant, *Art in American Schools in the 19th Century*, 126.

⁴⁶Goodyear, *Renaissance and Modern Art*, 290.

in public schools is thus many-sided: it helps open a child's eyes to the beauty in the world around him; it helps bring him into inspiring communion with master minds in all the ages; and it helps out the best of his own creative powers."⁴⁷

Although few photographic reproductions are extant today, we can piece together what images were displayed in schools based on secondary accounts, such as the Brooklyn Institute catalogs and descriptions in PEA reports, and some tangible evidence found in schools.⁴⁸ Obviously, availability was a factor in establishing a canon of reproductions. New technologies made images accessible. Solar enlargements from photographic negatives produced enormous images, almost mural sized. All kinds of reproductions were used, including photographs, photogravures, engravings, chromos, and lithographs. Many photographs of European paintings were second-generation photographs, printed from American photos of foreign photos of European paintings.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Stella Skinner, "Pictures in the School Room," in M.S. Emery, *How to Enjoy Pictures* (Boston: The Prang Educational Company, 1898), 287.

⁴⁸About thirty photographs were found in an attic storeroom at Erasmus Hall High School. These illustrated architectural monuments and classical sculpture. Some measured almost 2' x 3'. Winifred Buck also describes the type of reproductions and casts selected by the PEA. "The pictures usually chosen by the sub-com for decorating school classrooms are large in size, and the best specimens that can be found of the various modern processes of reproduction. The subjects chosen are photographs, photogravures or engravings of the best paintings, statues and building; casts of statues and reliefs; photographs of scenery; and for very little children, chromos (which have been greatly improved in late years), or lithographs of animals, flowers or scenery. As pictures of a distinctly religious character are justly forbidden in the NYC public schools, and as anything suggesting nudity is also tabooed, the list of works of art which are available for the purpose of school decoration is distinctly limited. Every year, however, this list lengthens." Public Education Association, *Annual Report 1900-1901*, 23.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

As the art-in-schools movement developed, participants began to match specific types of images to different grades. The existing curriculum prompted some of these selections as did the growing Child Study Movement, which looked at children to see what their natural interests were and used those as a basis for structuring an educational program. In the area of picture study, educators solicited children's reactions to various images to identify subject areas of greater interest. The Public Education Association's promotion of art-in-schools supported the use of picture study, which was part of the new child-based thinking about art education.⁵⁰

Two educators took the lead in refining picture study. They were James P. Haney, Director of Art in New York City high schools, and Stella Skinner. Skinner, mentioned previously, published several articles on schoolroom decoration and was a leading authority on the subject.⁵¹ She contended that art in the classroom should serve two purposes--"general art culture or spiritual uplifting" and as background material for other subjects.⁵² In her chapter, "Pictures in the School-Room," Skinner suggests how picture study can be used in various grades. For younger children, emphasis should be placed on the subject but older children can also study style and learn to identify national traits in art. For smaller children, she suggests that pictures can be used as points of

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the Child Study Movement, see Wygant, *Art in American Schools in the Nineteenth Century*, 109-110.

⁵¹ See Stella Skinner, "Art in the Schoolroom," *Art Education* (Oct.-Nov. 1896): 7-8 and her chapter in Emery. Skinner also collaborated on a list of casts and pictures for public school class-rooms with M. Rachel Webster which was published in New Haven and contributed a chapter to the U.S. Bureau of Education Report.

⁵² Skinner, "Art in the Schoolroom," 7.

departure for discussion and can be the basis for reading, writing and spelling lessons.

Soliciting suggestions from teachers and principals, Skinner devised a master list organized on the principal of appropriate subjects for various grades. She also recommends limiting study to one or two artists per year. Paintings celebrating mother love, even religious images, she suggests for kindergarten and first grade.⁵³ She recommends works by an Italian Renaissance painter, Raphael, and an American counterpart, Abbott Thayer, as well as Elisabeth-Louise Vigée Le-Brun's self-portrait with a child. Pictures of childhood are also appropriate, such as Anthony van Dyck's *Children of Charles I* and Joshua Reynolds' *Angel Heads*. Michelangelo, Murillo, Jules Dupré, and Millet are also suitable. Skinner reasons that Dupré and Millet are particularly well matched for the second and third grades because cattle and sheep are studied in language and science. Specific recommendations are Dupré's *Escaped Cow* and *White Cow*, depicting a girl milking as her mother watches, Millet's *Shepherdess* and Bouguereau's *At the Fountain*. Other "sheep" artists are Henry Lerolle and especially Anton Mauve. In the intermediate grades (grades 3 and 4) pictures of animals without the human element are appropriate. For dogs, Skinner advises looking at Landseer, for horses Rosa Bonheur, Eugène Fromentin, and Frederic Remington. Jules Breton is the consummate painter of idyllic peasant life and for images illustrating the lives of the pilgrims, look to Boughton. The intermediate grades should also be exposed to "ideal

⁵³This, and the following subject recommendations, are taken from Skinner's article, "Art in the Schoolroom," as well as her chapter in Emery.

grace and beauty”⁵⁴ embodied in such works as Thorwaldsen's *Mercury*, or Edward Burne-Jones, *Hope and Temperance*. Children in the grammar grades (5 - 8) are old enough to appreciate landscapes and marine paintings and should look at Corot, George Inness, Thomas Moran, and Turner. Her recommendations for plaster casts follow a similar pattern: Madonnas and cherubs and miniature animals for the primary grades, choir boys, animals, mythological subjects for the intermediate grades, and Greek and Roman sculptures, busts of great men, and examples of historic art for the grammar grades. Art that inspired patriotism was also an important category. Gilbert Stuart's George Washington, Joseph Rodefer De Camp's Lincoln, and John Trumbull's *Declaration of Independence* were all highly recommended. Other picture classifications Skinner offered are: Art Culture, Literature, U.S. History, Geography, Historic Art, and Portraits of authors and presidents.

Haney reiterated some of the same ideas, likening pictures in the classroom to “gems of literature to be stored in memory,” and also promoted more of Ruskin’s original plan, urging the inclusion of nature studies, such as birds and flowers. For the primary and intermediate grades he suggests “pictures showing maternal love and family affection, pictures of children and their games, of animals especially in their relation to man and pictures of nature.” He further defines these as “soft-eyed Madonnas, jolly urchins and maidens, frolicking kittens and sleek sided cattle.” Moving toward a more child centered art philosophy, Haney also suggests the inclusion of children's art in school decor in elementary schools, recommending that a picture rail be hung above the

⁵⁴Skinner, “Art in the Schoolroom,” 8.

wainscot for display of drawings and paintings. Architectural subjects and prints of old masters are most suitable for high schools. Although Haney supports the display of children's art, he warns against hanging original paintings by unknown artists, as their artistic credibility is doubtful.⁵⁵

In their zealously and specificity, at times the argument of some art educators bordered on the ridiculous, in the end trivializing artists and their works. For them, art is not about aesthetics but is merely a teaching tool. Compounding the problem, educators attempted to be scientific in their evaluation of what was appropriate for different grades. Using the work of child psychologists such as G. Stanley Hall, they often lost sight of the meaning and context of the original objects. In fact, one wonders if the majority of proponents of art-in-schools had any real knowledge of art history or the stylistic development of European art from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century. One would have to conclude with Wygant that the general public's acquaintance with painting was extremely superficial, if not naive. In Skinner's defense, it seems clear that her strategy was to closely integrate art with the curriculum to increase the likelihood that it would be taught as a subject and displayed in the classroom. Unfortunately, it didn't seem to matter that images of sheep, horses, and dogs became just that, animal illustrations, and were only incidentally, paintings.

The picture study movement was connected to the popularity of plaster casts in the schoolroom, but other factors also influenced the selection of these objects. The

⁵⁵The quotes in this paragraph are all taken from Haney, "Decoration of Schools and School-Rooms," 673.

interest in casts goes back to an enthusiasm for the statuary of classical antiquity that began during the Renaissance. As Francis Haskell observes, “For many centuries it was accepted by everyone with a claim to taste that the height of artistic creation had been reached in a limited number of antique sculptures. They were repeatedly copied in every medium, and their forms and names thus became familiar to educated people throughout the Western world.”⁵⁶ To support this thesis, Haskell assiduously chronicles the evolution of taste and the step-by-step duplication and proliferation of these icons of western civilization. The production of some of these very same sculptures for schools can be seen as the last step in this process. Companies that specialized in the production of such plaster casts were merely copying a practice that had been common for some time. The Metropolitan Museum issued a catalogue in 1891 that identified forty-two suppliers of casts, all of them considered professional enough for museum purposes, and many of these suppliers provided the casts to companies which sold directly to schools.⁵⁷

The casts that made their way into New York City classrooms were among the most accessible and famous of Greek, Roman, and Renaissance sculptures. In contrast to two-dimensional art, it was easier for school authorities to determine what constituted great sculptures because the practice of making plaster replicas already narrowed down the field. This, coupled with a prevailing American bias that culture was synonymous with the high art of ancient Greece and Rome and the Italian Renaissance, resulted in a

⁵⁶Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, xiii.

⁵⁷See Metropolitan Museum of Art, Special Committee on Casts, *Tentative List of Objects Desirable for a Collection of Casts, Sculptural and Architectural, Intended to Illustrate the History of Plastic Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1891).

well-established canon of masterpieces of antique and Renaissance sculpture. Schools merely had to make appropriate selections from a “preapproved” master list.

Luca Della Robbia's *Choir Boys* (Fig. 1) and *Boys Singing from Scroll* (Fig. 2) are the two most frequently exhibited casts, common in both elementary and high schools. The Boston firm, P. P. Caproni and Brother, the primary supplier for school replicas, listed both in a 42 x 26" size for \$10.00.⁵⁸ These are two of ten panels sculpted for the Cantoria, which is in the collection of the Museum of Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence. Most likely, P. P. Caproni and Brother obtained these particular casts from the Berlin Museum which had its own mold department and sold casts of their holdings, whether originals or replicas. After Della Robbia's Cantoria frieze, the next most popular casts are pieces of the Parthenon frieze. Probably all of these were purchased directly from P. P. Caproni & Brother, which advertised a comprehensive inventory of the frieze. Other plaster casts still extant in city schools include Donatello's *Cherubs Dancing and Playing on Instruments*, original in the Museum of Santa Maria del Fiore, Greek and Roman portrait busts and standing figures, a replica used as a memorial plaque of the *Borghese Dancers*,⁵⁹ and the life-size Joan of Arc after Henri Chapu.

In general, few of the works selected reveal totally naked figures, and the majority depict children engaged in singing or dancing. The widespread distribution of plaster casts, which was common by the 1890s, continued into the 1930s, and some bizarre

⁵⁸P.P. Caproni & Brother issued several catalogues. See their *Art for Schools: A Special List of Casts Recommended for the Decoration of School-Rooms* (Boston: P.P. Caproni & Brother, 1902).

⁵⁹See Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, 195.

permutations occurred. As early as the 1910s, Caproni marketed sculptural replicas of paintings portraying events in American history.⁶⁰ Graduates of P.S. 3 in the Bronx proudly presented their school with Emanuel Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* and Boughton's *Landing of Columbus* and *Landing of the Pilgrims* in plaster. C. B. J. Snyder, Superintendent of School Buildings, couldn't refrain from snidely commenting in a letter to the Art Commission:

I do not in any way desire to have it appear that I am trespassing upon the domain of art which, as I recall it, has approved this particular grouping of the "Landing of Columbus" and "Washington Crossing the Delaware" for many, many years, but with these on the walls of the schoolroom how can anyone stand up and attempt to instruct the boys in even the fundamental rules for small boat handling. Perhaps the aforesaid heroes, together with their followers, were more expert in the use of such craft than we.⁶¹

The introduction of plaster casts into the schoolroom paralleled the interest in casts by museums, most notably the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Following the example of the Berlin Museum, the Metropolitan sought to acquire a complete inventory of plaster casts "to illustrate the progress and development of plastic art of all epochs."⁶² Seeking international recognition, the museum wanted to have the most extensive

⁶⁰In their 1929 catalogue, Caproni offered plaster reliefs based on John Trumbull's painting, *Declaration of American Independence*, Robert Reid's mural depicting Paul Revere's ride hung in the Boston State House, and *Aurora* after Guido Reni.

⁶¹Letter from C. B. J. Snyder to John Quincy Adams, Assistant Sec. Art Commission, 11 June 1914, Art Commission Correspondence File, 313, Item 266 a. Art Commission of the City of New York, New York. (Hereafter Art Commission.) The Art Commission was created in 1898 to ensure that all architecture, murals, and sculpture placed on city property met certain aesthetic standards.

⁶²See Metropolitan Museum of Art, Special Committee on Casts, Special Committee to Enlarge Collection of Casts; report of committee to members and

collection in the world, to be the “ideal museum of reproductions.”⁶³ Museum members were so serious about this purpose that they formed a special committee to expand their existing collection, begun in 1883 with the Willard bequest and augmented three years later by the Henry G. Marquand fund. In 1891 the “Special Committee to Enlarge the Collection of Casts,” hired Edward Robinson to travel through Europe and negotiate the acquisition of casts, and even went so far as to publish a wish list encompassing hundreds of objects. Apparently, they obtained most of these, evidenced by a 1910 catalogue of the cast collection which lists Egyptian, Oriental, Greek and Roman, Early Christian, Byzantine, Romanesque, Scandinavian, Saracenic, Gothic, Renaissance, and Modern sculpture. The museum justified their mission by arguing that few original works were available and that a collection of casts provided the best means to study the history of art: “In it the archaeologist finds indispensable material for his studies; the artist, the most perfect productions of all styles and schools; and the general public, a sure means of forming taste and cultivating an enjoyment of the beautiful.”⁶⁴ In order to properly display the collection, the Metropolitan intended to construct a building especially for that purpose, and to ensure the public would be educated, the new building would come complete with a lecture hall.

Of course plaster casts had long been the foundation of art schools. In 1803 in New York, the Society of Fine Arts (in 1817 renamed the Society Fine Arts) proudly

subscribers, 1 February 1892, p. 1.

⁶³Ibid., 12.

⁶⁴Ibid., 35.

exhibited sixteen casts obtained from statues on exhibit at the Louvre, followed by the creation of the National Academy of Design, whose Antique School boasted having 179 items by 1901. The city's own publicly funded college, the Free Academy established in 1847 (which became City College in 1866) reported that its collection of casts was choice, affording "extraordinary advantages (perhaps unequalled in this country) for the study of ornament, and for the general purposes of art."⁶⁵ Casts in the city schools, were used, however, much in the way museums used them rather than art schools--for art appreciation rather than studio art. Students drew from more simplistic things and casts were not used as part of the official drawing curriculum.

Contributing to its institutionalization, art-for-schools became an industry. In the United States, three primary firms specialized in the manufacture of reproductions and plaster casts and produced product lines aimed at schools. These companies were Prang Educational Company, The Soule Art Company, and P.P. Caproni & Brother. Other companies also targeted schools such as the J.R. Lynch Co. which advertised "Everything for School-Room Decoration" or the A. W. Elson & Co. which published a series entitled, "Makers of Our Nation and Our Battles for Freedom," featuring reproductions of Gilbert Stuart's *George Washington* and photographs of Abraham Lincoln and surpassing

⁶⁵New York City Board of Education Annual Report (1858), 107. The report lists: Elgin Marbles (presented by Charles M. Leupp, Esq. NY), Ilissus, Theseus, Colossal head of horse from pediment of the Parthenon, Metopes and frieze of Parthenon, colossal caryatids, Casts for the study of the Antique from Florence, Vatican & the Louvre; Minerva, Belvedere Hercules, Torso of Laocoon, Venus de Milo, Alto & Basso Relievo, Busts, examples of Michelangelo & Cellini and Casts from nature. All annual reports and other Board of Education documents can be found at the Department of Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York (hereafter Teachers College).

them all L. Goodrich Smith advertised “Art Reproductions for School Decoration” claiming “Thousands of Subjects for Study.”⁶⁶ A similar phenomenon occurred in Europe. In London, D. Brucciani produced casts of antique sculpture and eventually specialized in school markets, in 1914 publishing a photographically illustrated catalogue of casts for schools, including casts of most of the statues which the English Board of Education approved in their regulations for Art Examinations.⁶⁷ Other European firms supplying schools included the firm of August Gerber in Cologne and the cast department of the Louvre (established a century earlier under Napoleon). The Louvre, as we have seen, supplied many casts to American schools. In 1922 London's Board of Education took over Brucciani's business and in 1939 the Victoria and Albert acquired it.

Although art for schools received official sanction from New York State, which established a fund for pictures and casts and offered schools a matching grant,⁶⁸ not everyone was so enthusiastic. Art critic Russell Sturgis had some stern criticisms, commenting that picture study was not about art at all. He observed that actual artworks were not being placed in schools and emphasis was not being put on “the dealing of the artist's mind with the subject” but rather artworks were being used to illustrate historic

⁶⁶Various Public Education Association Annual Reports carried advertisements for these firms. Other companies included The Copley Prints, C.H. Dunton & Co., and William H. Pierce & Co.

⁶⁷See Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, 117 for a discussion of Brucciani.

⁶⁸Haney refers to this. See Haney, “Decoration of Schools and School-Rooms,” 684.

veracity, stimulate patriotism, or as an aid to geography.⁶⁹ He concludes, “It may be that the teaching of art in the schools (not the teaching of drawing which is wholly a different matter), is a dream, and that nothing good will come of it.”⁷⁰

Despite some serious failings, the art-in-schools movement did succeed in broadening the horizons of many students. One has to remember that this was the pre-television age, and it’s likely that visual images in the classroom left a strong impression. But perhaps of even greater significance for this study, the motivations leading to the widespread acquisition of art reproductions for schoolrooms continued to be used as rationales for placing public art in schools in subsequent decades. Arguments such as children learn more effectively in a stimulating environment, art supports learning, or art-in-schools will cultivate an adult art audience--are still current. In the following period, permanent public art in schools emerged--stained glass windows and murals made possible by the enormous school building boom that got underway in the 1910s. The Board’s financial commitment and support from arts organizations, coupled with the vision of the Board of Education chief architect, Charles B. J. Snyder, provided the foundation for an extensive school public art program. Public art advocates promoted art for many of the same reasons articulated by the Public Education Association, but with the objective of making it a permanent feature designed for a specific building. For art-in-schools to be truly effective, it had to be part of the architectural plan.

⁶⁹Russell Sturgis, “Art in the Schools: The New York Photographs,” *Scribners* 26 (Nov. 1899): 640.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

CHAPTER 2

C. B. J. SNYDER, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS, SETS THE STAGE FOR PUBLIC ART

Permanent public art in New York City school buildings evolved out of its architectural context, the walls and windows of the modern schoolhouse. But in order for art to become an extension of the architectural design, there had to be a commitment on the part of the architect and the bureaucracy he worked for. That man was Charles B. J. Snyder (1860-1945), the master builder of the New York City public schools. Not only was Snyder the Board's chief designer for over thirty years, he was also the Board of Education's first proponent of public art. With Snyder at the helm, it would now be possible to augment the size and ambition of public school art, moving away from plaster casts and prints to original stained glass windows and murals. Commissioned art would more closely reflect the identity of a specific school and the architect would have the opportunity to collaborate with a living artist. Public art furthered Snyder's vision of the school as a community center and neighborhood landmark; thus, to adequately appreciate the earliest examples of school stained glass windows and murals, one has to recognize how these permanent artworks were part of Snyder's overall plan to improve the design of the New York City public schools.

Snyder was born in Stillwater, New York, and not much is known about his professional training other than he studied architecture with William E. Bishop.¹ In

¹Bishop is an obscure figure, about whom little is known. For biographical information on Snyder, see Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Public School 31 Designation Report* (LP-1435), by Virginia Kurshan (New York: City of New York, 1986); *Who Was Who in America*, Vol. 4, 1961-68 (Chicago: Marquis-Who's Who, Inc.,

1891, at the youthful age of thirty-one, Snyder became Superintendent of School Buildings in Manhattan and the Bronx, and seven years later upon consolidation of the five boroughs, he assumed responsibility for school design and construction for the entire city. He remained Superintendent of School Buildings until his retirement in January of 1923.

During the three decades Snyder presided over school construction, public school enrollment tripled, making its greatest jump between 1900 and 1910 when it rose from 420,000 to 770,243.² He worked tirelessly to keep pace with the burgeoning population, declaring in one of his early annual reports, "The number of contracts to be let for new buildings during the year 1897 . . . will not only be the largest in the history of this city, but of the world."³ By 1904, construction was underway to provide 80,000 new seats "or more than the entire school population of the city of Boston."⁴ During his tenure, Snyder designed over 140 elementary schools, 10 junior high schools, and 20 high

1968), 883; "Obituary," *National Architect* 2 (January 1946): 13; Christopher Gray, "Architect Who Taught a Lesson in School Design," *New York Times*, 21 November 1999, Real Estate Section, p. 7. age of 85.

In the 1890s, Snyder lived at 337 St. James Street, Fordham Heights and when he died at the age of 85 in a freak gas accident in 1945, he was a resident of Babylon, L.I. Apparently, after he retired from the Board of Education, he maintained a small practice with an office at 110 West 40th Street.

²Ravitch, Appendix "New York City Population and Pupils, 1800-1970," 405.

³New York City Board of Education, *Annual Report of the Board of Education* (New York: Printed by William C. Bryant, 1896), 256.

⁴C. B. J. Snyder, "The Construction of Public School Buildings in the City of New York," *Proceedings of the Municipal Engineers of the City of New York* (New York: Municipal Engineers of the City of New York, 1905): 50 Reprint of lecture presented on 26 April 1904.

schools, plus numerous additions and other school improvements.⁵ Testifying to the quality of his designs, thirteen schools are New York City landmarks.

Concurrent with the tremendous need for additional schools was a new attitude about their function. School reformers argued that they should house more than classrooms: they should be community centers, providing after-school recreation, adult education and even health care. Progressives looked to schools to solve society's problems, particularly the acculturation of immigrants. As school historian Diane Ravitch recounts it, "... in the early twentieth century, the public school was transformed into a vast, underfinanced, bureaucratic social-work agency, expected to take on single-handedly the responsibilities which had formerly been discharged by family, community, and employer ... the idea took hold that the public school was uniquely responsible for the Americanization and assimilation of the largest foreign immigration in the nation's history."⁶ Snyder, like his fellow Progressives, also saw public schools as the great equalizer. He espoused faith in a public school system "for the children of the rich and poor, who are taught in the same class room," and recognized that the responsibility of transforming "all peoples of the earth" into American citizens

⁵These numbers are not exact and are based on the "Listing of Board of Education Buildings by Decade Constructed," compiled by the Division of School Facilities. It is difficult to determine an exact number because functions of schools have changed, buildings have been demolished or sold, and some of Snyder's designs were completed after his retirement. There is a small number of junior highs because the junior high school was not introduced until 1905.

⁶Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 176.

fell to the nation's public schools.⁷ Jacob Riis boldly stated this a decade earlier in his 1892 classic, *Children of the Poor*, writing, "the immediate duty which the community has to perform for its own protection is to school the children first of all into good Americans, and next into useful citizens."⁸ In essence, education should be the tool for the assimilation of immigrants and schools would be the vehicle.

The extended social function of schools was in keeping with philosopher John Dewey's (1859-1952) educational theories, demonstrated in his Chicago laboratory school in the 1890s and proposed in his 1899 *The School and the Society*. Dewey emphasized the social responsibility of the public school, stressing that the cultivation of the individual should also serve the community and that the ultimate mission of education was to advance the welfare of society. The school must prepare the child by replicating as much as possible of actual life and the child must be trained for all his various future roles: parent, worker, community member. Subjects should be connected to social applications and schools should provide students with actual life experiences, necessitating the inclusion of such subjects as manual and physical training, cooking, and sewing.⁹ This required an expansion of the physical plant and a greater diversification of rooms within the schoolhouse. So not only did Snyder have to build numerous schools,

⁷Snyder, "The Construction of Public School Buildings in the City of New York," 46.

⁸Jacob Riis, *The Children of the Poor* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892; reprint 1923), 8.

⁹ For a succinct discussion of Dewey's theories, see Herbert M. Kiebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893-1958* (New York and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 57-66.

he had to design more complex buildings to support increasingly varied functions.

From all accounts, Snyder met the challenge, attaining recognition and praise from fellow architects and engineers. He was a member of numerous professional societies, including the Society of Municipal Engineers, the American Institute of Architects, where he became a fellow in 1905, and he served as President of the American Society of Heating and Ventilating Engineers. He lectured and published widely and was considered an expert on school building design.¹⁰ He also had a reputation as a man of integrity. Early on in his career, in response to allegations made by a disgruntled contractor, the Board of Education defended him reporting at their 23 November 1898 meeting: "Resolved, That the Board of Education hereby expresses its absolute unshaken confidence in the uprightness, fidelity and ability of C.B. J. Snyder, and its appreciation of the eminent professional and personal qualities which characterize him."¹¹

The following year in 1899, fellow architect Edmund M. Wheelwright praised

¹⁰See Snyder, "The Construction of Public School Buildings in the City of New York," 47-66; Snyder's chapter, "Public School Buildings in the City of New York" in Alfred Hamlin, C.B. J. Snyder et. al., *Modern School Houses* (New York: The Swetland Publishing Co., 1910), 45-57, a reprint of a four-part series of articles which appeared in *American Architect and Building News* in January and March of 1908. See also Hamlin, et. al., *Modern School Houses Part Two* (New York: The American Architect, 1915), 9-16 for an article by Snyder on lighting. In addition to these comprehensive articles, Snyder published numerous plans and photographs of various schools. See also *American Architect and Building News* 74 (2 November 1901): 40; *American Architect and Building News* 75 (29 March 1902): 103; *American Architect and Building News* 105 (29 April 1914): 197-201; *American Architect and Building News* 112 (19 September 1917), a special issue devoted to vocational high schools.

¹¹New York City Board of Education, *Journal of the Board of Education* (New York: Board of Education, 1898), 689.

Snyder's design abilities, writing, "Under the present superintendent of school buildings of New York, radical and interesting innovations in schoolhouse architecture have appeared in that city."¹² Snyder was further lauded in a 1905 editorial written by Columbia University architecture professor, A. D. F. Hamlin. Reflecting on fourteen years of Snyder's career, he commented:

it is a matter of wonderful good fortune that the official architect [of the NYC Board of Education] chanced to be such a man as is Mr. C. B. J. Snyder, who not only at the outset showed distinct capacity for his task, but has proved himself a man able to grow as his opportunities opened before him. Mr. Wheelwright in Boston, Mr. Ittner in St. Louis, Mr. Mundie in Chicago have done excellent service to their respective cities in the way of building schoolhouses that not only serve their purpose as such, but are also agreeable to the citizens at large as architectural accomplishments; but they have not had to do their work under the same sort of pressure that has been put upon Mr. Snyder, and they have not had to adapt their architectural treatment to as closely restricted sites."¹³

Inventive and pragmatic, Snyder left his mark as an engineer, administrator, and designer. In each of these areas his innovations contributed to a successful school building campaign unparalleled in any other American city. Snyder himself, not shy about his own accomplishments, observed in his 1904 annual report, "... it is not therefore generally known that the Committee on Buildings of the Board has in its charge at the present time the most extensive building operations of any firm or corporation in the country."¹⁴

¹²See Edmund M. Wheelwright, "The American Schoolhouse. XVI," *The Brickbuilder* 8 (March 1899): 45.

¹³"Editorial," *The American Architect and Building News* 88 (29 July 1905): 33. A similar statement appeared in A. D. F. Hamlin, *Modern School Houses*, 4.

¹⁴New York City Department of Education, *7th Annual Report of the Department of Education of the City of New York*, 1904, 286.

Snyder's first priority was to provide for the health and safety of students. This meant more seats in fireproof buildings with improved natural light, ventilation, and sanitary facilities. When Snyder became Superintendent, there was only one fireproof building under his jurisdiction. In his earliest designs, he specified a fireproof first story, which was paved with asphalt instead of more flammable floorboards. By 1894, entire buildings had to be fireproof in compliance with the 1894 Building Law which mandated that all school buildings over thirty-five feet, approximately three stories, had to meet fire codes.¹⁵ Within two decades, 186 schools of 501 were completely fireproof, 62 were partly fireproof, and half were still non-fireproof.¹⁶ Snyder describes his fireproof construction at some length. For floors, he used segmental terra cotta blocks, or another form of reinforced concrete construction. Channel iron furring and metal lath was used in ceilings. Stairs were made of steel, with cut stone or asphalt treads, and separated from corridors by wire glass set in steel frames. Fireproof doors provided access to each landing.¹⁷

Faced with inordinate overcrowding and the high price of real estate, Snyder's

¹⁵During this period, standards of what made a building fireproof underwent drastic revisions as a result of several devastating fires in buildings believed to be fireproof.

¹⁶The Committee on School Inquiry of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment of the City of New York commissioned a report by Ernest Carroll Moore, which they ultimately rejected. In the preparation of this report, Snyder responded to a detailed questionnaire about the design and construction of New York City public schools. See Moore, *How New York City Administers its Schools; A Constructive Study* (Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York: World Book Co, 1913), 584. This report was also printed in part in the *City Record* (November 1912), 9051-9074.

¹⁷Snyder, "Public School Buildings in the City of New York," 46.

buildings were necessarily large. It was virtually impossible for the Board of Education to maintain pace with the flood of immigrants pouring through New York's harbor. In the late 1890s this condition was particularly acute on the Lower East Side, where real estate was scarce and expensive, forcing the city to undertake condemnation proceedings at a cost of \$250,000 to \$300,000 for a 20,000 square foot plot.¹⁸ The situation was so grave that Snyder seriously contemplated an 8-story building equipped with an escalator and elevators as the only cost effective solution.¹⁹ By 1908, land values had risen to excess of \$12 per square foot.²⁰ The density also forced school buildings, like office buildings, to be sited close to the plot line with land reserved at the rear to provide light. Buildings of four stories or more used skeletal steel construction in order to allow for large window openings without increasing wall thickness. Snyder wanted to maximize interior space, particularly for classrooms, and if load bearing walls had been used, the first story walls would have been thirty-six inches thick as compared to sixteen inches made possible by skeletal steel frame construction. As it was, children were packed into classrooms. Those measuring twenty-six by twenty-two feet were intended to accommodate forty grammar age students (grades 5-8) or fifty primary pupils (grades 1-

¹⁸Wheelwright, "The American Schoolhouse. XVI," 45.

¹⁹*7th Annual Report of the Department of Education of the City of New York*, 1904, 304. Interestingly enough, a year later, Dwight D. Perkins submitted plans for a 15-story skyscraper commercial high school in Chicago. This was never built. See Donna R. Nelson, "School Architecture in Chicago During the Progressive Era: The Career of Dwight H. Perkins" (Ph.D. diss., Loyola University of Chicago, 1988), 57.

²⁰Snyder, "Public School Buildings in the City of New York," 46.

4), which translated into thirteen square feet per pupil.²¹

Coupled with his efforts to fireproof school buildings, Snyder focused on improving ventilation and natural light, beginning with larger and more numerous windows. He stated, "I believe that a schoolroom should be lighted from one single source of light stretching as nearly as may be from the rear to within four feet or so of the front of the room at the left side of the pupils, and not by a series of windows alternating with brick or stone piers, which means light and shadow for each alternate four or five feet, hence cross lights."²² To achieve this, he was the first architect to introduce enormous double hung windows in classrooms, and he also broke new ground in the development of mechanical ventilation for school buildings.²³

Snyder was well aware of the correlation of proper ventilation to good health. Tuberculosis was rampant in cramped tenements and school authorities and health officials strove to prevent the spread of the disease in the city's public schools. Once a fair number of schools had been built using mechanical ventilation, in order to determine its effectiveness, in 1913 the Committee on School Inquiry of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment commissioned a report from chemistry professor, Charles Baskerville and

²¹ John Beverly Robinson, "The School Buildings of New York," *Architectural Record* 7 (January-March 1898): 372. In Chicago, classrooms were 26'6" x 33'. See Nelson, "School Architecture in Chicago During the Progressive Era: The Career of Dwight H. Perkins," 53.

²² Wheelwright, "The American Schoolhouse. XVI," 46, quoted from letter written by Snyder to Wheelwright.

²³ Robert A. M Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and John Massengale, *New York 1900* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), 79.

biology professor C.-E. A. Winslow. They sampled air in thirty-two schools to determine temperature, humidity, levels of carbon dioxide, bacteria, and dust. They concluded in their 1913 report, entitled, "The Air of New York City Schools," that in cases where results were poor, it was not because of inferior design or construction of ventilating systems but because of their improper use.²⁴ Essentially, they validated Snyder's methodology and the report did not cause Snyder to make major changes in his approach to school room ventilation.²⁵

Snyder's ingenuity also surfaced in smaller building details. Concerned about long-term maintenance and durability, Snyder specified a six-foot high wainscot in green or brown glazed block for all first floor playrooms. He also improved these spaces by providing higher ceilings, larger windows, and more durable asphalt floors.²⁶ Beginning around 1898, Snyder also oversaw the upgrade from gas to electric lighting in the older schools and specified electric lights for all new buildings. But perhaps one of his most

²⁴See New York City School Inquiry Committee, "The Air of New York Schools," 605-702. In order for the mechanical ventilating systems to work properly, the custodian had to make proper adjustments for heating and cooling and perform basic maintenance.

²⁵The results of this report are contradicted by another report issued by the Health Department, which compared incidents of respiratory illness in children learning in mechanically ventilated classrooms with no fresh air with children learning in classrooms with only window ventilation. This report concluded that fresh air was significantly better. See City of New York, Department of Health No. 68 Reprint Series (February 1918) report entitled, "Classroom Ventilation and Respiratory Diseases Among School Children," by S. Josephine Baker. Snyder did not advocate purely mechanical ventilation but was aware that in classrooms fronting noisy, dirty streets windows could not be kept open.

²⁶Robinson, "The School Buildings of New York," 377.

intriguing innovations was his snow-melting apparatus, which was heated by steam and used for disposing of snow on roofs. He also invented a catch basin for the yard pavement, a unique improvement “that cannot be plugged with paper or anything else by the cleverest infant mind.”²⁷

As Superintendent of School Buildings, Snyder headed the Building Bureau and reported to the Board of Education’s nine-member Committee on Buildings. He was responsible for preparing all plans and specifications, overseeing construction, and insuring the continued maintenance of the city’s existing school buildings, close to 600 by 1904.²⁸ Snyder’s task was enormous and to tackle it he radically changed the internal structure of his division, centralizing the various units under one head. Borough deputy superintendents, who were either architects or engineers, reported to him and they in turn supervised a staff divided into six divisions that were loosely organized around the various trades. The divisions were: 1. Design and planning, including general construction; 2. Heating and ventilating; 3. Electricity; 4. Plumbing and drainage; 5. Furniture; and, 6. Inspection and records.²⁹ Apparently, this administrative structure resulted in better coordination among the trades and ensured that a modification made for one building would be carried through on others under construction. Snyder explained it

²⁷Ibid., 383.

²⁸In contrast, as of 1910, Chicago had 189 schools, 72 of which were built between 1900 and 1910. See Nelson, “School Architecture in Chicago During the Progressive Era: The Career of Dwight H. Perkins” 50.

²⁹Snyder, “The Construction of Public School Buildings in the City of New York,” 51.

this way: "The development of school building during the last ten years has been an evolution; some say a revolution. One thing is certain, the progress has been made possible only by having all of these divisions under one responsible head, whose suggestions for improvement can be incorporated in the work day by day, instead of spasmodically."³⁰

Beyond his engineering and administrative skills, Snyder's most lasting contribution was as a designer, sensitive to the overall plan as well as building details. His work certainly embodies the principals articulated a half century earlier by renowned educator and self-taught architect Henry Barnard. Barnard understood that a child's environment affects his or her capacity to learn, writing and lecturing repeatedly about "the close connection between a good school-house and a good school."³¹ He stated that the school should be designed "for children whose manners and morals whose habits of order, cleanliness and punctuality, - whose temper, love of study, and of the school, are in no inconsiderable degree affected by the attractive or repulsive location and appearance . . . of the place where they spend or should spend a large part of the most impressionable period of their lives."³² Beginning in 1838 in his capacity as Secretary of

³⁰7th Annual Report of the Department of Education of the City of New York, 1904, 289.

³¹See Henry Barnard, *School Architecture; Or Contributions to the Improvement of School Houses in the United States* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1848), 7. For an expanded discussion, see the excellent introductory essay, "Architecture and Pedagogy," by Jean McClintock and Robert McClintock in their *Henry Barnard's School Architecture* (NY: Teachers College Press, 1970), 1-28 and Nelson, "School Architecture in Chicago During the Progressive Era: The Career of Dwight H. Perkins," 7-11.

³²Barnard, *School Architecture; Or Contributions to the Improvement of School*

the Board of Commissioners of Common Schools in Connecticut, Barnard visited numerous schools and eventually formulated basic principles of school architecture, setting standards for all major building elements, which subsequent architects, including Snyder, addressed.³³ As listed in the Table of Contents in *School Architecture*, they were: Location-Style-Construction; Size; Light; Ventilation; Temperature; Seats and Desks for Scholars; Arrangements for Teacher; Apparatus; Library; Yard and External Arrangements. Barnard understood that classroom efficiency and the comfort of students and teachers were essential to the cultivation of spiritual and moral growth.

Snyder, too, took a pragmatic approach to the problem of school architecture, particularly for a dense, urban environment. His solution was the H-plan. This configuration allowed him to plan schools for less expensive mid-block sites away from busy avenues, yet provide ample light, reduce street noise, maximize space, and provide a protected outdoor play area. Architectural critic Beverly Robinson commented, "All architects will appreciate the skill with which this plan has been devised to cover the needs of the case. It is two hundred feet in its greatest dimension, that being the distance between the streets in the regularly laid out parts of New York City. In width it may be a hundred and fifty feet or more, that shown is of that width. New York City lots are twenty-five feet wide."³⁴ Above all, the H-plan was Snyder's answer to deafening street

Houses in the United States 7.

³³Barnard first presented these ideas in his 1838 "Essay on School Architecture," which became a manual on school construction by 1842 and was eventually published in the expanded form cited above.

³⁴Robinson, "The School Buildings of New York," 371.

noise which made hearing and speaking next to impossible in classrooms in congested parts of the city. Snyder elucidates, "This H type of building has been designed to meet the needs when avenue property is expensive and the traffic so great, either by trolley, elevated, or otherwise, as to render it practically impossible to open the windows at any time, and in fact to hear with the windows closed."³⁵

Snyder reportedly arrived at this solution in 1896 after a Board of Education sponsored trip to London and Paris, where he visited the Hotel Cluny and recognized the potential of organizing a school building around three sides of a walled courtyard.³⁶ By creating an H-shaped configuration, Snyder provided for two courtyards on either side of a central corridor, which was two classrooms deep. In a typical H-plan building, the basement contained heating and ventilation equipment, the first floor was an indoor play area which could also be converted to an evening lecture hall, the second, third, and fourth floors contained classrooms, and the fifth floor, with its high pitched roof, provided space for specialized rooms for manual and physical training, cooking, clay modeling, and sewing. The gymnasium and the library were also on the fifth floor. In numerous schools, sliding partitions formed classroom walls along the second floor central corridor so that this space could also be converted to an auditorium. Dressed in a variety of styles, such as Modern French, Dutch Colonial, and especially Collegiate Gothic, the prototype would be repeated all over New York City.

³⁵"The American Schoolhouse. XVI," 46, quoted from letter written by Snyder to Wheelwright.

³⁶Richard Dattner, *Civil Architecture: The New Public Infrastructure* (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1995), 67.

In addition to the H-plan, and its most common variation, the U, Snyder also introduced the roof-top playground for schools with extremely limited surrounding land. Fences enclosed the space, which was an outdoor play area for children in the upper grades who occupied the third and fourth floors of the building.

In summation, Snyder's design innovations equaled his mechanical ingenuity. He devised an overall layout that was economical, functional, and responsive to educational currents of the day. He developed specialized rooms, such as laboratories and gyms, and arrived at a solution for outdoor play space in congested areas. But he also went a step further. Swept up in the City Beautiful Movement, Snyder conceived of school buildings as civic monuments, never losing sight of the visual impact of the building, both on the exterior and interior. His achievements prompted Jacob Riis to enthusiastically note, "Snyder did for schools that which no other architect before his time ever did or tried. He 'builds them beautiful.' In him New York has one of those rare men who open windows for the soul of their time."³⁷

Snyder is credited with being the first architect to apply the Collegiate Gothic style, previously associated with universities, to public schools.³⁸ (Fig. 3) Not only was

³⁷Jacob Riis, *The Battle with the Slum* (New York: Macmillan, 1902), 353.

³⁸The case for Snyder's development of the Collegiate Gothic style as applied to public school architecture is made by Virginia Kurshan in her Landmark Preservation Commission report on P.S. 31, Bronx, built 1897-99. See Landmarks Preservation Commission, 15 July 1986; Designation List 185, LP-1435. However, there are Gothic Revival precedents in New England and in New York City, itself. In *School Architecture*, for example, Barnard illustrates the Gothic Revival Union School House in Pawtucket, Rhode Island and undoubtedly of more significance for Snyder was James Renwick's Free Academy. This was New York City's first public college, constructed shortly after the Board of Education established the college in 1847, which eventually

this style replete with associations with higher education, according to some architectural writers, it also provided greater flexibility in fenestration, since windows could be as high and wide as desired, and it was also more economical than Colonial or Classic because it did not require heavy cornices, balustrades, pediments or high pitched roofs.³⁹ In Snyder's buildings, distinguishing Collegiate Gothic features include Tudor-arched doorways, pointed windows topped with stone tracery, a central tower, gabled bays, and label moldings.⁴⁰ Many of these motifs carry into the interior decorative scheme and are evident in the stair rail design, lobby floor, and moldings of numerous schools. John Beverly Robinson commended Snyder's design sensitivity, noting, "With all this the architecture of the buildings has not been neglected, for as education ceases to be conducted by factory methods it is well that the walls where education dwells should signalize the change by forsaking their factory appearance."⁴¹

In view of Snyder's architectural philosophy, it is not surprising that he introduced permanent decorative features into his buildings and became the Board's first proponent of public art. In his 1906 Annual Report he argued for institutional support for school art. (See Chapter 3.) However, even before he made his case publicly, he

became City College.

³⁹See J.C. Betell, "Architectural Styles as Applied to School Buildings," *American School Board Journal* (April 1919): 27, 75.

⁴⁰For an excellent description of the exemplary Collegiate Gothic school, P.S. 31, Bronx, see Kurshan, Landmarks Preservation Commission, 15 July 1986; Designation List 185, LP-1435.

⁴¹Robinson, "The School Buildings of New York," 383.

created spaces for decorative stained glass windows set into the rear wall of shallow auditorium stages.

Stained glass suited the Collegiate Gothic style of the buildings and its introduction in schools parallels its earlier reemergence in Gothic Revival churches in England and America. By the mid-nineteenth century the medium was gaining popularity and was even featured in New York's 1851 Crystal Palace exhibition,⁴² and by the time Snyder was designing school buildings, stained glass studios were numerous⁴³ and stained glass was a common feature in domestic and public buildings around the country. It was used, for example, in several Pittsburgh schools of the 1890s, particularly the more impressive buildings such as the classical Romanesque Wightman, the Second Renaissance Revival Sterrett, and the Beaux Arts Friendship.⁴⁴ The craft of stained glass was even taught in some of New York City's manual training schools.⁴⁵

⁴²See B. Silliman, Jr. and C. R. Goodrich, editors, *The World of Science, Art, and Industry Illustrated, from examples in the New-York Exhibition, 1853-1854* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Co., 1854), 7 cited in Julie Sloan, "Conservation of American Nineteenth Century Architectural Stained Glass" (MA thesis, Columbia University, 1982)

⁴³According to 13th census of the United States in category of glass, cutting, staining and ornamenting," in 1899 there were 411 shops and in 1909 there were 583. *Ornamental Glass Bulletin of U.S. and Canada*, vol. 6, no. 10 (Nov. 1912): 4.

⁴⁴For a discussion of Pittsburgh school architecture, see Jean L. Harchelroad, "The Evolution of Public Elementary School Architecture in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 1835-1915: An Analysis of Changing Styles and Functions, (M. Ed., University of Pittsburgh, 1980), 132.

⁴⁵In regard to Grammar School No. 40, "Some of the designs are above the average for wall paper and the designs for colored glass windows are most commendable." See "The Public Schools of NY," *The Tribune Monthly* (March 1896): 43.

Stained glass came in a variety of types. There was painted glass, leaded clear glass, sheet prism glass, hand blown or antique glass, beveled plate glass, machine-rolled or cathedral glass, and opalescent glass. Opalescent glass, which contains impurities to give it a milky and variegated appearance, was a uniquely American innovation, invented almost simultaneously by John La Farge and Louis C. Tiffany in the 1870s.⁴⁶ None of the early decorative stained glass windows found in New York City school auditoriums bear the name of a designer, and most likely Snyder picked them out of a catalogue such as the Shaw-Thompson Company's *Catalogue of Art Glass*. An architect could obtain windows in a variety of sizes like any other building hardware. Windows, however, could be customized with painted emblems, inscriptions, and various combinations of colors and patterns.

The earliest stained glass windows adorn auditoriums on upper floors. In these pioneering H-plan schools, due to real estate costs, Snyder could not create a dedicated assembly room; therefore, he designed classrooms with sliding walls or curtained partitions which could be opened to form a larger space, generally on the second floor. This type of auditorium was supported by cast iron columns and was relatively inexpensive to construct. However, the columns blocked sight lines and the partitioned classrooms were too noisy, and when the space was converted to an assembly room, it was often poorly lighted and ventilated. Turn of the century writer Adele Shaw describes

⁴⁶See Sloan and Helene Barbara Weinberg, "John LaFarge and the Invention of American Opalescent Windows," *Stained Glass* (Autumn 1972): 4-11. For a detailed description of John La Farge's experiments in stained glass, including a reprint of his patent for opalescent glass, see Weinberg, *The Decorative Work of John La Farge* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977) chapt 8, "Stained Glass."

one of these crude auditoriums: "In one dim assembly hall I groped my way to a platform on either side of which was drawn a cloth curtain. Behind the curtains two classes went on in simultaneous confusion, and I talked with the principal in a kind of cloth-bound cave, with grammar on one side, arithmetic on the other, and a 'bad boy' awaiting discipline down in front. The gas jets that eked out the scanty daylight in the curtained recesses had in one instance been replaced by Welsbach burners which were always breaking."⁴⁷ Beginning in 1904, Snyder moved away from the upper floor auditorium, providing instead, assembly rooms beneath the larger courtyard, illuminated by a skylight from above and accessible by stairs directly from the street. This layout allowed the community freer access to the space, which could be used even when the rest of the school was closed.⁴⁸

Based on a sampling of stained glass windows at P.S. 25, Bronx, P.S. 31, Bronx and P.S. 84, Queens, all of which were designed for a second or third story auditorium, it appears that without adding significantly to the cost of the building, Snyder transformed a functional element into a decorative feature. He certainly improved on the type of space described by Shaw. The stained glass windows pivot, allowing some ventilation. The glass also increased the light level in the auditorium by transmitting light from exterior windows across the corridor. At P.S. 31, five sets of windows, each consisting of a ventilator and a transom, fit into an elaborate wooden backdrop which encircles the

⁴⁷Adele Marie Shaw, "The True Character of New York Public Schools," *World's Work* 7 (December 1903): 4209.

⁴⁸Board of Education Annual Report, 1906, p. 372.

platform and creates a free-standing stage. (Fig. 4) Three sets of windows illuminate the rear wall and two pierce the sides. In addition, there are two transoms over the doors leading into the auditorium on either side of the stage. The windows are decorative, combining heraldic motifs within a pattern of plant-like intertwining branches, and they incorporate opalescent, colored and textured glass in blue, gold, pink, and red. The wooden enclosure is stained a dark mahogany to contrast with the brightness of the glass and its vertical edges are further embellished with seashells, shields and heraldic motifs. A decorative wood lintel above the stage bears the inscription: "No Disguise Can Long Conceal the Truth." A curved leather settee nestles into the rear of the shallow, apse-like platform and a lectern stands in front.⁴⁹

The most striking feature of Snyder's early auditoriums is the religious tone of these secular spaces. This is even evident in the makeshift auditorium of P.S. 6, Manhattan, described and illustrated by Shaw. The photograph shows a small wooden platform with a large reproduction of Gilbert Stuart's portrait of George Washington hanging in the center. The near-by American flag gives the whole arrangement the air of an altar to patriotism. At P.S. 31, Bronx, the low, shallow platform crowned with a lintel and moralizing inscription suggests a temple bema, the elevated platform at the front of the synagogue, while the stained glass evokes a church. The improvised nature of the early auditoriums no doubt dictated the small platform; however, that feature coupled

⁴⁹Lettered mottoes or inscriptions were often incorporated in the proscenium arch of the auditorium stage. Another example is "To Thine Own Self Be True Thou Canst Not Then Be False to Anyone" at P.S. 27, Bronx, built 1896-97. For a discussion of auditorium design, particularly in regard to the use of moralizing inscriptions, see J. G. Betell, "Assembly Halls," *American School Board Journal* 52 (1916): 79-80.

with the built-in sofa and lectern suggests an entirely different use of the space than what is customary today.

In a 1917 Board of Education report on assemblies, the writer urges principals and teachers to use the assembly to develop social solidarity, and his remarks underscore the sacred quality of the space and the religiosity of the activities it supported. “The assembly period is the common meeting ground; it is the family altar of the school.”⁵⁰ Its chief purpose “is the fulfillment of the inspirational and recreative functions of education.”⁵¹ In addition to guest speakers, Bible readings, primarily from the Old Testament, were common. Selected passages emphasized moral righteousness, and just in case the point was lost on listeners, special programs, such as “Thrift Day,” were presented. The session would begin with an opening hymn, followed by reading of the scriptures, culminating in quotations on thrift presented by the children, themselves.

Clearly Snyder’s auditorium designs of the 1890s, the effect of which was heightened by the inclusion of stained glass, concretized and reinforced pervasive educational values. The character of the space and the activities it supported were one and the same. Considering that the Board of Education espoused a secular brand of public education, even forbidding reproductions of religious imagery in the classroom, it is noteworthy, that above all else, the architecture and art of school buildings gave lasting

⁵⁰Eugene A. Nifenecker, “The School Assembly,” Dept. of Education - The City of New York, Div. of Reference and Research, 1917, 70.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 32.

expression to the moral imperative of education.⁵²

Within a few years, modest decorative stained glass windows in the rear of small auditorium stages evolved into elaborate pictorial compositions. This was made possible by the creation of grand auditorium spaces required for the city's new high schools. 1897 marked the beginning of a programmatic approach to building more high schools, a direct result of the 1896 School Reform Law that mandated that the New York City Board of Education should provide free, secondary public education. The state authorized the city to issue bonds in the amount of \$2,500,000 for sites and construction of four high schools, the first such buildings to be designed by Snyder. They were Morris High School in the Bronx, a co-ed high school, and in Manhattan, Wadleigh for girls, DeWitt Clinton for boys, and also for boys, Manual Training High School, which eventually became known as Stuyvesant. Other schools followed. Perhaps the grandest of them is Brooklyn's, Erasmus Hall High School, one of Snyder's four great Collegiate Gothic high schools.⁵³

Erasmus began as the private Erasmus Hall Academy in 1787. The original Federal-style wooden frame building now stands in the center of a quadrangle constructed over the course of three building campaigns, the first of which stretched from 1903 to 1911. The centerpiece of phase one was the Flatbush Avenue tower and the

⁵²Perhaps this is not so surprising given that school prayer wasn't officially banned from New York City public schools until 1962. The prayer was: "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our Country."

⁵³The others are Curtis (1904) on Staten Island, Morris (1904) mentioned earlier, and Flushing High School in Queens (1914).

auditorium, also known as the chapel.⁵⁴

The auditorium at Erasmus is connected to the Flatbush Avenue tower on the south and west sides, with exterior exposures along the north and east. However, when inside the space, it appears to be a free-standing architectural structure. It is long and narrow, suggesting a church nave. An arcade of five bays of pink and gold opalescent stained glass windows articulates the length of the nave on either side. Like a Gothic cathedral, the windows rise in three stories--a ground floor, balcony, and clerestory, and although the peaked roof lacks the intricacies of ribbed vaulting, it recalls its Gothic antecedents. The main entrance is at the rear, facing the stage and the majestic *Life of Erasmus* stained glass window. (Fig. 5)

Snyder, no doubt, designed the auditorium with the possibility that the fifteen feet by fifteen feet chancel-like window would some day be transformed into a gorgeous display of refracted light and color. As is often the case in churches, donors

⁵⁴For an excellent description of the architecture of Erasmus Hall, see Carol Herselle Krinsky's piece in *The Chronicles of Erasmus Hall High School 1937 - 1987* (New York: New York City Board of Education, 1987), 19-21. Krinsky argues that Snyder used the Collegiate Gothic style at Erasmus in part to aid in the assimilation of immigrants: associations with the great universities at Oxford and Cambridge would help indoctrinate foreigners to English standards. Krinsky writes, "Educators considered it necessary to assimilate the newcomers from southern and eastern Europe into a society based on the use of English and conditioned by English notions of behavior." Snyder, himself, describes his intentions in designing the chapel, explaining, "This, as designed, would be called a chapel were it part of a college, but if we may not aspire to this, yet I have thought that it might be known as 'the Hall.' As such the endeavor has been to design a harmonious, impressive room, in a style permeated with history and romance; a place which, of all others, will stand out clearly in the loving memory of the student in after years for his Alma Mater. Its walls, columns and arches should bear the trophies won in athletic and scholastic contests, there to be preserved and handed down as a part of the glorious history of the school." Quoted from letter to E. W. Harter dated 16 March 1906, reprinted in the *Chronicles of Erasmus Hall* (1906), 177-178.

commissioned this prominent stained glass window after the auditorium was built.

Snyder, however, conceptualized the basic structure of the window, which harmonizes with the massing of the more decorative windows along the sides. He also provided artistic guidance, criticizing the proportion and pose of some of the figures shown in an early watercolor sketch, and commenting on the overall effect of the window writing, "I have requested the Committee of the Alumni, who are handling this matter, to keep the tone of the window as low as possible in order to prevent the unpleasant effect to the eyes of pupils who must sit facing the platform and window, as in cases where the tone of the glass is so much higher that light becomes dazzling."⁵⁵

Soon after the auditorium was completed, in 1910 the Alumni commissioned the window, which was to be fabricated in stages as they could raise money. The central portion was dedicated on 18 June 1911 and the side panels followed a year later. Apparently, the Alumni financed only the central portion, which was so successful the school funded the side panels in the hope they would be finished in time for the 125th anniversary of Erasmus Hall in September of 1912.⁵⁶ The Alumni hired Church Glass and Decorating Company, a leading stained glass firm, known for their work for colleges and schools. They had recently completed a commission for City College and had also fabricated windows for Harvard, Yale, the University of Chicago, and Cornell, among

⁵⁵Correspondence File 313, 111a, Art Commission.

⁵⁶Snyder writes that the school "is anxious to complete it and does not desire to wait for the Alumni to raise further funds for this particular purpose." Letter from Snyder to Robert W. De Forest dated 26 June 1912, Correspondence File, 313, item 157, Art Commission.

others. With offices in New York and England, the watercolor sketch was made in England, the cartoon was executed in New York, and then the window itself was fabricated in England, where a superior grade of pot metal glass was available.⁵⁷

The Collegiate Gothic architecture of the auditorium and the notion that the window should be representative of Tudor art, contemporaneous with Erasmus's lifetime, 1466-1536, dictated the style of the window.⁵⁸ Like the sixteenth-century windows of King's College Chapel at Cambridge, the windows combine a medieval mosaic of pot metal glass with the naturalistic painted surfaces characteristic of Renaissance art. Lead lines define the boundaries of the figures' robes and major architectural elements, while intricate painted passages read like an illusionistic painting. *The Life of Erasmus* window, like William Jay Bolton's Gothic revival windows executed fifty years earlier for Brooklyn's Church of the Holy Trinity, illustrates the fine line stained glass designers walked between the urge to paint realistically and the desire to be true to the purity of the Medieval craft.⁵⁹

⁵⁷This is explained in letter from Snyder to Robert W. De Forest, 11 November 1910, Correspondence File, 313, item 111, Art Commission.

⁵⁸According to Snyder, the window's subject "really covers the period of Erasmus's life, portions of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth centuries, and effort is being made to have the window [sic] fit that period. It has therefore been thought admissible, inasmuch as there was such an influx of Italian artists in England during that time, to permit the Renaissance motive which is shown in the upper portion of the windows." Correspondence File 313/111a, Art Commission.

⁵⁹For an excellent discussion of the windows by Bolton, especially the hybrid style of American stained glass, see Willene B. Clark, "America's First Stained Glass: William Jay Bolton's Windows at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Brooklyn, New York," *American Art Journal* vol. XI, No. 4 (October 1979): 32-53.

The window honors Erasmus, the northern Renaissance scholar for whom the school is named, so logically its focal point is the seated figure of Erasmus. (Fig. 6) He marks the center of the window, which is essentially a grid three panels high by seven across. A Doctor of Theology, he wears a recognizable fur-lined purple robe, the device used to identify him in each of the panels. On either side of Erasmus, groups of English female and male students are engaged in Greek lessons. Below him, forming both the metaphorical and visual foundation of the window, is a triptych depicting Erasmus at Cambridge dictating the Greek text of the New Testament, a translation which quickly became indispensable to future generations of scholars.⁶⁰ Above Erasmus, an angel flanked by personifications of Philosophy, Literature, Science and Theology, swoops down with a laurel crown, marking his momentous achievement. Above the angel and unifying the six central panels with the uppermost peaked portion of the window, is a triumphal arch based on an amalgam of architectural styles. The left and right segments of the window feature Erasmus as a pupil and teacher and illustrate various honors bestowed upon him. No doubt, sponsors of the window hoped the subjects would inspire generations of high school students who would gaze upon the window as they sat in this auditorium. The diptychs on the left from top to bottom are: Presentation to King Henry VII by Sir Thomas Moore and Lord Mountjoy; Erasmus at Paris Instructing Several Englishmen, 1492; and Erasmus a Pupil in the School for the Brothers of the Common Life at Deventer, 1478. On the right from top to bottom are: Making Acquaintance of

⁶⁰The author is indebted to Gregory Frux, who in numerous discussions and field visits, has provided many insights about the art and architecture of school buildings.

Colet, Dean of St. Paul's, 1497; Visiting Italy and Being made Doctor of Theology at Padua, 1506; and Admitted Bachelor and Doctor at Cambridge and Oxford, 1506.

In this shrine to learning, we encounter the "Triumph of Education" as personified in the life of secularized "saint" Erasmus. Instead of the Virgin Mary or scenes from the life of a saint, this window celebrates a scholar, metamorphosing the rays of spiritualism into the rays of enlightenment. Here Snyder has achieved the apotheosis of secular education.

As the architect of school buildings, Snyder set the tone for permanent public art. He conceived and implemented the conceptual and physical structure needed to support it. Stained glass was a logical beginning, for it virtually evolved out of the Collegiate Gothic architecture around it. Without much additional expense, a functional element could take on a new purpose. When used in auditoriums, the place for communal gatherings and the spiritual center of the school, stained glass imbued an ordinary space with a sacred purpose, satisfying both the architect and the educators he served.

Stained glass windows, however, required the right kind of architectural context and were not always practical to commission. Concurrent with the creation of the window at Erasmus Hall, Snyder had been making plans for several mural cycles to complete the interiors of other new high schools. Murals would prove to be the most adaptable and suitable vehicle for public art in an educational setting.

CHAPTER 3

THE 1910S: BEAUTIFYING PUBLIC SCHOOLS MURALS FOR EDUCATION

If public art in schools can be associated with a particular art form, it is murals. More murals have been commissioned over the course of a century for New York City's public schools than stained glass windows, freestanding sculptures or bas-reliefs combined. From a pragmatic angle, murals are easy to integrate into a pre-existing space, are relatively cheap, and most importantly, they are a natural educator for a mass audience; hence they are an obvious extension of the school environment.

The earliest school murals were commissioned at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the heyday of the American Renaissance.¹ Several factors coincided to support this emerging development: school buildings were becoming more elaborate and important as community centers; the Board's chief architect, C. B. J. Snyder, was a strong proponent of public art; a nexus of organizations facilitated communication between school reformers and City Beautiful advocates, sometimes the very same individuals; and lastly, a second generation of American artists trained in mural painting were anxious to try their hand at public commissions. Thus, to fully appreciate the message public school murals imparted and how and why they were commissioned, they should be understood in the context of other American murals of the period and the spirit

¹The term American Renaissance, coined in 1880, describes the art and architecture of the period 1876-1917. American Renaissance buildings and artworks hark back to European and classical art of the past, and are often characterized by opulence and eclecticism. For what still is the definitive study of the American Renaissance, see Richard Guy Wilson, et. al, *The American Renaissance 1876-1917* (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1979).

of educational and urban reform which engaged so many of New York City's social progressives.

The American Renaissance marks the period of great collaborative efforts between architects, sculptors and painters, resulting in grand private mansions and civic buildings recalling the splendors of Renaissance Europe and classical antiquity. No school project aspires toward the opulence of the most notable examples, such as the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., or the Appellate Court House in New York, but undoubtedly such precedents guided Snyder, the commissioned artists, and their patron, the Board of Education. While school design did not include complex sculptural and decorative programs executed by teams of artists, there was a consensus that at least one prominent mural cycle was needed to complete the decor of a school building.

During the period 1900 - 1920, close to twenty murals were commissioned for New York City public schools, although a fraction are extant. They range in artistic significance and illustrate a variety of styles and subjects, including American history, literature, and allegories of education. Given the secular foundation of public education, none make the overt religious references seen, for example, in John Singer Sargent's murals in the Boston Public Library. Instead, the subjects selected for school murals highlight the critical debate taking place on a national level around the proper approach to mural making: should artists mine American history and promote a nationalistic message or design timeless allegories based on the classical tradition? Based on the evidence, it appears that the majority of artists painting murals for the New York City public schools chose to record events in local history, providing a specific geographic

and historical context for a particular school. Of course artists had to respond to the parameters and directives established by their client, and educators often viewed artistic embellishment as an adjunct to the curriculum.

In 1904 when the Board of Education awarded its first official commission to Charles Yardley Turner (1850-1918) for a pair of murals at DeWitt Clinton High school, there were relatively few major mural cycles in public buildings in the United States.² John La Farge provided the first example in his decorations for Trinity Church in Boston (1876-1878) followed by William Morris Hunt's short lived cycle for the New York State Capitol at Albany (1878).³ During the 1880s religious institutions and wealthy industrialists initiated the majority of commissions for churches and private homes. The 1890s brought the three most widely publicized and ambitious mural programs: the Boston Public Library (begun in 1890 and finished in 1919), the World's Columbian

²For an early overview of American murals at the turn of the century, which includes numerous reproductions, see Selwin Brinton's "Modern Mural Decoration in America," *International Studio* 51, no. 213 (December 1910): 175-90. For a list of murals in the United States painted before 1911, see Florence N. Levy, "Mural Painting in the United States," *American Art Annual* 9 (1911): 12-33 and her later listing, "Mural Paintings in Public Buildings in the United States," *American Art Annual* 19 (1922): 407-438. There are no books in print on American mural painting but several studies are forthcoming: Bailey Van Hook is preparing a book on mural painting in America, 1893-1914; Francis O'Connor has compiled an entire history of mural painting in America; and Richard Murray is currently completing an overview of mural painting. For a comprehensive bibliography on American mural painting, see Janet Cecelia Marstine, "Working History: Images of Labor and Industry in American Mural Painting" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1993): 623-664.

³For a comprehensive discussion of La Farge's work at Trinity Church, see Barbara H. Weinberg, "John La Farge and the Decoration of Trinity Church, Boston," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (December 1974): 323-353. The definitive study of the Albany murals can be found in Sara B. Webster's *William Morris Hunt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Exposition, particularly the works commissioned for the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building (1892-1893), and the Library of Congress (1895-96).⁴ Of all these projects, the World's Columbian Exposition was the strongest impetus behind the flowering of American mural painting.⁵

In New York City, in 1895, the same year that the Library of Congress murals were commissioned, Edward Simmons completed three allegorical murals entitled *Justice*, *The Rights of Man*, and *The Fates* for New York's Old Criminal Court House.⁶ (These were transferred in 1941 to the eleventh floor of the new Criminal Court

⁴Numerous studies have been written on all three of these projects. See Marstine for an examination of the murals at the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building of the Columbian Exposition and the Library of Congress from the perspective of the themes of labor and industry. Herbert Small's, *The Library of Congress, Its Architecture and Decoration* (Boston: Curtis & Cameron, 1902; reprint ed., New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), still provides the most detailed description of all murals and sculptures in the Library of Congress, and for a discussion of library murals, see Derrick Randall Cartwright, "Reading Rooms: Interpreting the American Public Library Mural, 1890-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1994).

⁵Several writers, past and present, have commented on the relationship between the Columbian Exposition and the growth of the American mural movement. In *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876-1914*, Bailey Van Hook observes, "The more public or official aspect of the mural movement in America was largely inspired by the success of the architectural decorations at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893." See Bailey Van Hook, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876-1914* (University Park, Pa: Penn. State University Press, 1996), 112. Turn-of-the-century critic Selwyn Brinton noted, "The movement was already in the air, and needed only a strong external impulse to focus its scattered forces together into a new and living creative element in American life. That impulse was given by the Columbian Exposition." Selwin Brinton, "Modern Mural Decoration in America," *International Studio* 42, no. 167 (January 1911): 184.

⁶For a description of this mural, see The Municipal Art Society and Art Commission of the City of New York, *Adopt-A-Mural* (New York: The Municipal Art Society, 1991), 20-21.

Building.) Four years later decorations were underway for New York City's Appellate Court, which like the Library of Congress, aspired to be a showcase of decorative painting and sculpture.⁷ These projects, coupled with a handful of murals commissioned for hotels and the earlier precedent of John La Farge's mural, *Ascension* (1886-1888) for New York's Gothic Revival Church of the Ascension, constitute the major American Renaissance murals in public buildings in New York City prior to Turner's commission.

Proponents of murals, whether they be for schools or courthouses, stressed their educational value as a rationale for expending public dollars to decorate public buildings. Evangeline Blashfield, one of the founders of New York's Municipal Art Society, made this dramatic plea linking civic art to an educational agenda:

Our learning and our history and our art are shut up under glass, behind bolted doors, in private houses, in museums and libraries. They must be brought out into the open air, into the sunlit street, made living and dramatic and human pro bono publico. Above all, we want to increase the sum of our pleasures, to teach the ignorant through its direct appeal to the eye, to create and stimulate patriotism, to educate our masses, to ennoble our civic life.

The strongest appeal that can be made for municipal art is that it is a municipal educator. And have we no greatness to celebrate? Ah! It is not the great men we lack; it is the country, which is ingrateful [*sic*].⁸

Evangeline's husband, muralist and mural promoter, Edwin Blashfield, reiterated

⁷For information on the art and architecture of the Appellate Courthouse, see *Temple of Justice, The Appellate Division Courthouse* (New York: Association of the Bar of the City, 1977).

⁸Evangeline Blashfield, address to the Nineteenth Century Club, 12 March 1895, reprinted in *How to Make New York a Beautiful City* (New York: Nineteenth Century Club, 1895) and more recently in Gregory F. Gilmartin, *Shaping the City* (New York: Clarkson Potter/Publishers, 1995), 5.

this point in numerous lectures and publications, entreating, “Public and municipal art is a public and municipal educator. The decoration of temples and cathedrals and town halls has naturally taught patriotism, morals, aesthetics, in a far larger sense than has that of private palaces or houses.”⁹

Numerous critics expanded upon this sentiment. A writer for the *Craftsman* asserted a case could be made for murals that went beyond decoration and advanced communal values.¹⁰ In *Modern Civic Art*, Charles Mulford Robinson defined what civic art should be, explaining “this art, which serves so many social ends, is municipal, in the sense of communal.”¹¹ Civic art should not be art for art's sake: “We do not find men and women banding themselves together to create a public sentiment and fund in order that some sculptor may do a noble bit of work to the glorifying of his field of art.”¹² Or to put in another way, civic art “will be one which joins utility to beauty.”¹³ Robinson was alluding to benches and lamp posts, but for the purposes of our discussion of art-in-schools, utility could mean serving an educational purpose. Lastly, civic art is public and belongs to everyone. Robinson likened it to “a fire built upon the market place, where

⁹Edwin Howland Blashfield, *Mural Painting in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 24. See also Leonard Amico, *The Mural Decorations of Edwin Howland Blashfield* (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, 1978).

¹⁰See “Mural Painting-An Art for the People and a Record of the Nation's Development,” *Craftsman* 10 (April 1906): 54-66.

¹¹Charles Mulford Robinson, *Modern Civic Art* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904, 1913) 26.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Robinson, 29.

every one may light his torch; while private art is a fire built upon a hearthstone, which will blaze and die out with the rise and fall of fortunes.”¹⁴

Closely intertwined with mural painting's educational potential and civic responsibility was the notion that murals were “essentially a democratic form of art, and the greater part of it must respond to the demands of the people.”¹⁵ Unlike easel paintings, “the paintings on the walls of public buildings are for the people, and to the people they appeal chiefly because of beautiful symbolism or vivid recording of some historic event of which the nation or state is justly proud.”¹⁶ Thus, by virtue of their placement, murals were egalitarian. But in promoting murals as a democratic art form, artists and critics were advancing a carefully constructed notion of democracy, one that was virtually synonymous with patriotism. Painters and patrons of American Renaissance murals did not view them as celebrations of diversity; rather they were meant to minimize ethnic differences and unify viewers behind a banner of civic and national loyalty.¹⁷ As Blashfield argued, “In its important examples, all municipal art

¹⁴Robinson, 36.

¹⁵“Mural Painting-An Art for the People,” 60.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷American Renaissance murals considered cultural diversity in terms of world civilizations, whereas in contemporary American murals diversity is communicated by portraying Americans of varying ethnicities. For a discussion of diversity as it applies to American Renaissance murals, see Van Hook who notes, “At a time of great immigration and shifting patterns of employment and urban settlement, these patriotic appeals were a form of socialization; they denied ethnic and cultural diversity and created a common history for all, even recent Americans to share.” Van Hook, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society*, 125.

should be at once a decoration and commemoration. It must beautify and should celebrate; thus becoming a double stimulus, first to the aesthetic sense, second to the sense of patriotism.”¹⁸ To achieve that purpose, Blashfield proposed subjects that focused on American inventions, history, and exploration, themes which would figure prominently in school murals. This was a change for Blashfield, who in his earlier writings had argued for the timelessness and universality of classical allegories in mural painting. Over time, he adjusted this view to accommodate a nationalistic bias that emphasized American progress in technology and the advancement of democracy.

Just as education was of paramount concern for muralists and their patrons, it was of equal concern to social progressives promoting an improved urban environment. This effort to beautify cities and proselytize about the benefits of upgrading one's physical surroundings is at the heart of the City Beautiful movement.¹⁹ Arising toward the close of the American Renaissance, the City Beautiful movement wedded a social awareness to an artistic and architectural style characterized by opulence and grandeur. Though buildings and images may have evoked ancient Rome or Tudor England, public art and architecture of the period promoted patriotism and good citizenship. The primary

¹⁸Blashfield, “Mural Painting,” *Municipal Affairs* 2 (1898): 98.

¹⁹Appropriated by New York artists from the English Arts and Crafts movement, the term “City Beautiful,” first appeared in 1899 in the New York reform periodical *Municipal Affairs*. The expression originated in 1896 when the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society of London sponsored five lectures on “the application of the idea of beauty as well as of utility to the organization and decoration of our greater cities.” Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, London, *Art and Life, and the Building and Decoration of Cities* (London, 1897), 5, 43 quoted in Peterson, “The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings,” *Journal of Urban History* 2, no. 4 (August 1976): 419.

spokesman for the City Beautiful movement was Charles Mulford Robinson, who in 1901 published *The Improvement of Towns and Cities*, followed by his 1903 *Modern Civic Art or The City Made Beautiful*, which was republished three times during the next fifteen years.²⁰

During the City Beautiful movement's heyday from 1900-1910, middle and upper middle-class urbanites participated in a variety of reform efforts bent on improving urban life. The purposes of various groups intersected and it wasn't long before a national organization emerged linking an assortment of associations around the country and acting as a clearinghouse for information. Initially named the National League of Improvement Associations, in 1901 it urged "all organizations interested in the permanent improvement and beautifying of American homes, and their surroundings, whether in country, village, or city, to unite with us in membership."²¹ These groups included municipal art societies, village and civic improvement associations, architectural and art

²⁰The City Beautiful movement arose out of several interrelated trends and possessed an aesthetic and utilitarian dimension. William H. Wilson and other recent writers on the subject have minimized its connection to the World's Columbian Exposition and its city planning aspect, stressing instead its antecedents in village improvement societies, sanitary and park commissions, municipal art and landscape architecture (outdoor art). They have also argued for the movement's political ramifications. For an excellent discussion of the City Beautiful movement, see William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989). See also Jon Peterson who posits that the City Beautiful movement was more than a taste for classic-Renaissance architecture and monumental city planning in Jon A. Peterson, "The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings," *Journal of Urban History* 2, no. 4 (August 1976): 415-432.

²¹*Dayton Daily Journal*, Oct. 12, 1900 quoted in Peterson, "The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings," 421.

organizations, the Chautauqua institution, and local and state women's clubs.²² Within a year the National League of Improvement Associations redefined itself as the American League for Civic Improvement, a name which reflected the nationwide enthusiasm for "the new civic spirit."²³ By its third convention in 1902, the League had experts participating in fourteen advisory councils focusing on issues ranging from municipal art to municipal reform, from social settlements to sanitation.

Not surprisingly, a number of the same individuals played key roles in City Beautiful organizations and public school reform groups. A noteworthy couple were Rho Fisk Zueblin and her husband Charles Zueblin. Mrs. Zueblin was a member of the Public Education Association and an active contributor to its Art Committee. She typifies other women of her generation and class who crusaded for art-in-schools as well as civic enhancements. (See Chapter 1.) Charles Zueblin, a University of Chicago sociologist, was the second president of the National League of Improvement Associations and he steered that organization toward the larger wave of Progressive reform. A popular lecturer and prolific writer, he wrote numerous articles on the City Beautiful and was a frequent contributor to the *Chatauquan*. Another prominent figure, Marianna Griswold Van Rensselaer, was a highly respected art critic, who not only was

²²For an expanded discussion of the National League of Improvement Associations, see Peterson, "The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings," 423-425.

²³Peterson explains, "By emphasizing 'civic improvement' over 'village improvement' in its new title, the League aligned itself with the reform ethos of the era or what Zueblin repeatedly called 'the new civic spirit.'" Charles Zueblin, "The New Civic Spirit," *The Chatauquan*, 38 (1903): 55-59 quoted in Peterson, "The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings," 423.

president of the Public Education Association (1896-1905) but also was an early promoter of the new profession of landscape architecture.²⁴ She combined her interests in schools and municipal art by becoming a dynamic member of the Municipal Art Society's Committee on the Decoration of School Buildings, to be discussed later in this chapter. And last, but not least, Superintendent of School Buildings C. B. J. Snyder, himself, was a Municipalian.

School reformers and City Beautiful proponents shared many of the same ideas, particularly the belief that environment can mold morality, or as Wilson puts it, they recognized the “meliorative power of beauty.”²⁵ There was a sense that a city's physical appearance reflected the moral fiber of its citizenry.²⁶ Like their counterparts in the art-in-schools movement, City Beautiful proponents believed upgrading a person's physical surroundings would spark spiritual regeneration. Robinson makes several allusions to that effect, stressing that beautification efforts in poorer neighborhoods would “awaken ambition,” “encourage the love of the beautiful,” and ultimately create “purer souls.”²⁷

In the early decades of the twentieth century, commitment to the common “church” of the city became a “religion,” and the notion of civic loyalty as a social

²⁴Van Rensselaer was involved with first group of landscape architects called American Park and Outdoor Art Association and wrote the book, *Art Out-of-Doors: Hints on Good Taste in Gardening* (NY: Charles Scribner's, 1893).

²⁵Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 79.

²⁶For an excellent discussion on the connection between various reform efforts and the desire of reformers to institute moral control, see Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press 1978).

²⁷Quoted in Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 265.

religion took hold.²⁸ Middle-class reformers believed, or at least hoped, that citizens would practice self-restraint to advance the greater good of the urban community, resulting in a higher social order more in keeping with their own middle class values.²⁹ An equation developed, linking civic loyalty to urban morality. "Loyalty to the city itself--or to a rarefied, abstract civic ideal--could serve as a potent instrument for at last bringing harmony, order, and moral cohesion to urban America."³⁰ Among other things, this impulse led to the formation of city history clubs, aimed at educating new immigrants and inspiring allegiance to the city.³¹

The City Beautiful Movement also saw the birth of numerous professional and civic organizations in New York City, without which the mural movement in schools would have floundered. Leading sponsors of murals included the Municipal Art Society, the National Society of Mural Painters, the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects and the

²⁸Edward A. Ross coined the term "social religion" in his 1901 book, *Social Control*, arguing that that was ultimately the goal of the City Beautiful system. For a discussion of Ross, see Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 81. Boyer also talks about the idea of a new religion grounded in "civic loyalty." He writes, "civic loyalty was a new basis for urban morality." Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 256.

²⁹Wilson writes extensively about this. He explains, "Middle-class and upper middle-class people inspired and staffed the widely ranging progressive movement. Their aims included the spreading of middle class values through the uplift of unfortunates and the establishment of their own cultural hegemony... they wished to tame the apparently disorganized wildly growing city and to establish or restore a sense of community - that is a feeling of civic responsibility, of commitment to a common purpose, and of municipal patriotism." Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 41.

³⁰Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 260.

³¹See Frank Bergen Kelley, "The Teaching of Civic Patriotism: The Work of the New York City History Club," *Municipal Affairs* 3 (1899): 61-71.

Board of Education, itself. During this early period of public art in schools, outside groups played a larger role than they have in subsequent decades. Despite Snyder's appeal for institutional support, civic art was not always sponsored by the city, and private groups filled a major gap.

To demonstrate the diversity of Beaux-Arts murals in the schools, I have selected four very different case studies funded by different sources: two historical murals, one based on literature, and one based on an allegory of education. The four case studies are: Charles Yardley Turner's *Opening the Erie Canal* (1905) commissioned by the Board of Education for DeWitt Clinton High School; Edwin Deming's *The First Treaty of Peace made between the Weekquaisgeek Indians and the Dutch at the Residence of Jonas Bronck in 1642* and *Gouverneur Morris Addressing the Convention for Framing the Constitution of the United States* (1907) commissioned by the Municipal Art Society for Morris High School, Bronx; Barry Faulkner's *Scenes from the Early History of Manhattan* (1915-1920) also commissioned by the Municipal Art Society for Washington Irving High School, Manhattan; and Frederick Lincoln Stoddard's *The Birth and Development of Education* (1915-1916) commissioned by the Division of High Schools in collaboration with the National Society of Mural Painters for Eastern District High School, Brooklyn.

**Charles Yardley Turner, *Opening the Erie Canal* (1905)
DeWitt Clinton High School, Bronx**

When DeWitt Clinton High School was built, the Board's chief architect, C. B. J. Snyder, who tended toward hyperbole, proclaimed, "Without doubt, it is the largest

secondary school in the world . . .”³² It was completely equipped with advanced laboratories, enormous cafeteria, two gymnasiums, library, elevators for students and teachers, and a grand auditorium. The school was one of four that opened in 1897 as a result of the School Reform Law mandating that the state should support secondary schools. It operated in separate annexes until February 1906 when it moved into its new million dollar plus home on 10th Avenue between 58th and 59th streets.³³ Conceived as a boys’ college preparatory school for 3,750 students, it was modeled on the Boys’ Latin School of Boston. In addition to conventional subjects, the school offered courses in botany, Greek, ethics, zoology, astronomy, and physiology.³⁴ At the time of its construction, DeWitt Clinton was New York City’s elite all boys public high school. Speaking at the school’s dedication, long-time proponent of public secondary education, Nicholas Murray Butler, proudly noted “there is no other nation on earth that can show more than 8,000 tax-supported public secondary schools for the education of the people’s children at the period of adolescence.”³⁵

³²New York City Department of Education, *7th Annual Report of the Department of Education of the City of New York* (1904), 290.

³³The actual cost was \$1,162,130.54. In 1929, the original DeWitt Clinton High School became Haaren High School and in 1988, after an extensive renovation, it reopened as John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

³⁴For a description of the early curriculum of DeWitt Clinton, see David W. Fuchs, “A History of DeWitt Clinton High School, 1897-1979: A slide and Commentary Presentation,” available in the archives of DeWitt Clinton in the school’s library.

³⁵*The Clintonian* (1907): 24. The dedication was covered in the *New York Times*. See “Educators Dedicate Clinton HS,” *Times*, 19 December 1906, 11, col 7. For an expanded discussion of Butler’s educational philosophy, see Gary Hermalyn, *Morris High School*, 36-37. “There is a wide-spread belief that elementary education under

In designing DeWitt Clinton, Snyder wanted to make a sweeping gesture--to create a building that was both school and civic monument. (Fig. 7) The facade, although remodeled, is still its most striking architectural element. In keeping with the scientific eclecticism typifying art and architecture of the American Renaissance, Snyder quoted Dutch colonial elements such as large gables and dormers covered by high pitched roofs. These references were likely inspired by the school's connection to DeWitt Clinton, a name that conjured up associations with New York's Dutch Colonial past.³⁶ Tucked into the facade are carvings of students in cap and gown, boys reading, owls, and other allegorical elements. Fronting the building along 10th Avenue, is a wide stairway leading up to a forty-five foot wide loggia with eight doors opening into the entrance lobby.³⁷ Snyder elucidated his thinking behind this atypical design solution,

government control is a matter of right, but that secondary and higher education under government control are improper invasions of the domain of liberty. There is no ground in our public policy for this belief. The government has the same right to do for higher education that it has to do for elementary education." Quoted from Butler's address, "Some Fundamental Principles of American Education" address before the Convocation of the University of the State of N. Y., Albany, 30 June 1902. *Meaning of Education Contributions to a Philosophy of Education*, 333.

³⁶This idea was explored in an early article on the school. The writer explained that the choice of the Dutch Colonial style for DeWitt Clinton came as the result of a suggestion "that the design of a school bearing the name of a man who had 'made history' should follow that which is associated with the early history of the city." See "Two Recent High Schools," *Architects' and Builders' Magazine* 8 (March 1907): 251. Quoted in Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin and John Massengale, *New York 1900* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1983), 80. The Board of Education decided to name academic high schools after individuals to distinguish them from manual and commercial training high schools.

³⁷The model of the loggia of DeWitt Clinton was exhibited at MAS in 1906. See Gilmartin, *Shaping the City*, 228.

which seems more appropriate for a town hall than a school: "It is the intention that the entire school shall enter through this loggia, thus greatly facilitating the supervision of the pupils, and giving them a sense of dignity and part-ownership in the building."³⁸

Snyder believed "that when a boy has reached the age permitting him to enter high school he has also reached the age when he is entitled, as it were, to a night-key, and should go and come through the front door."³⁹

The school was based on an H-plan and contained a sub-basement, basement housing the gymnasiums, five floors of classrooms, and attic. It was designed to provide seats for 3,750 students. The enormous cafeteria with a wall of windows facing the Hudson River was intended to serve 2,000 - 3,000 students during a thirty-minute lunch period. Snyder made sure that there was direct light in every room and that "every effort has been made to provide for the comfort and convenience of both teachers and pupils."⁴⁰

Coupled with his sensitivity to the building's users, Snyder did not stint on materials, for example specifying a marble finish for the foyer and entrance walls capped with an ornamental plaster ceiling. Despite the lavish finishes and comprehensive plan, the cost

³⁸New York City Department of Education, *7th Annual Report of the Department of Education of the City of New York* (1904), 290.

³⁹C. B. J. Snyder, "The Construction of Public School Buildings in the City of New York," *Proceedings of the Municipal Engineers of the City of New York* (New York: Municipal Engineers of the City of New York, 1905): 60. Reprint of lecture presented on April 26, 1904.

⁴⁰New York City Department of Education, *7th Annual Report of the Department of Education of the City of New York* (1904), 293.

per pupil was about \$230 as compared to \$550 per pupil for Boston High School.⁴¹

The ceremonial main entrance to DeWitt Clinton brought visitors to the gallery level of the auditorium, which had side entrances almost at grade with sloping 58th and 59th streets. The lower level of the auditorium could be entered from the basement. During the day, skylights in the court directly above the auditorium illuminated the space. The auditorium was cavernous, with seats for 2,250 people. (Fig. 8) The platform was designed to accommodate a pipe organ and a graduating class of 100-150.

Snyder intended that DeWitt Clinton's auditorium be used both by students and the general public. It could be entered directly from the street, facilitating access for such community programs as Board of Education sponsored adult lectures. Free lectures were widespread by 1906, with a total of 156 lecture centers in New York City schools.⁴²

The impetus behind the adult lecture series was to educate new immigrants about the Federal and city government, to engender "loftier civic pride and nobler national ideals,"⁴³ but before long participants could choose from subjects ranging from physics to Shakespeare.

The free lecture program gave a new meaning to the function of the schoolhouse. One commentator observed, "More and more it is recognized that the schoolhouse

⁴¹C. B. J. Snyder, "The Construction of Public School Buildings in the City of New York," 63.

⁴²They began in 1889 with the passage of a New York State law. New York City Department of Education, 1906 Annual Report, 420.

⁴³Henry M. Leipziger, "Free Lecture System of New York City," *Municipal Affairs* 3 (1899): 472.

should become a social and civic center.” He continued, “. . . the inclusion in school buildings of auditoriums for lecture purposes indicate the fact that the school is no longer regarded merely as a place for the instruction of children, but also a place for the education of men and women. To what nobler purpose,” he concluded, “can our schoolhouse be put than to hold within its influence all the children of the republic, young and old?”⁴⁴ The lecture program provided an additional rationale for ornamenting school buildings. Reflecting on the impact of the lecture series, another commentator noted, “Not the least important result of the pioneer work of this lecture system has been the wider use of the schoolhouse . . . and greater care in the decoration of the school buildings, both internally and externally, bespeaks improvement in the ideal of what the schoolhouse should really represent.”⁴⁵ As schools took on a greater community role, their symbolic function increased. “The gym, the lecture hall, the social hall, the playroom, are parts of the new schoolhouse, and the growth in the public mind of the idea that all these places should be things of beauty, externally attractive and internally beautiful to the eye, brings the indirect and unconscious influence of art to bear upon the auditor.”⁴⁶

Without question, the lecture program stimulated the improvement of auditorium

⁴⁴New York City Department of Education, *9th Annual Report of the Department of Education of the City of New York* (1906), 420. See also, Leipziger, “Free Lecture System of New York City,” 466.

⁴⁵New York City Department of Education, *18th Annual Report of the Department of Education of the City of New York* (1915), 192.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 193.

spaces, particularly the relocation of the auditorium from the upper level to street level, a change Snyder introduced in 1904. In DeWitt Clinton, he transformed the auditorium into a grand civic center, complete with space for a pair of twelve foot by fifteen-foot mural paintings to grace either side of the stage. Here, Snyder could implement his philosophy of public art, which he outlined in his 1906 Annual Report in a section entitled, "Decoration of Schools." In this chapter, the Board's chief architect reviewed previous efforts to decorate school buildings and set forth his views on school buildings as public monuments. He wrote, "It has become an accepted fact that it is desirable that the interior walls of our schools be used for art educational purposes."⁴⁷ Making the argument for systematic decoration that is institutionalized, he continued, "In the small town or city this can be easily and quickly accomplished by a few public-spirited citizens if the School Board does not feel able or willing to take it up. But in a city like this, where there are over 500 school buildings, it is a task of gigantic proportions involving the expenditure of hundreds of thousand of dollars if done even passably well." Here Snyder summarized the efforts of the Public Education Association and cited donations of etchings, photo engravings, lithographs, and photographs. (See Chapter 1.) "Artistic framing has been the general rule and apparently free use has been made of the opportunity to select the best examples of art suitable for the purpose from the large collections gathered by various concerns, which have led rather than followed the

⁴⁷New York City Department of Education, *9th Annual Report of the Department of Education of the City of New York* (1906), 343.

movement in the art decorations of the schools of this country.”⁴⁸ However, in order to commission larger, permanent public art, Snyder recommended that a percentage of the construction cost of DeWitt Clinton be allocated for art, presaging policies adopted during the New Deal and more recent Percent for Art legislation. The Committee on Buildings adopted Snyder’s scheme and advised “that a clause be inserted in the specifications for general construction, requiring the contractor in his bid to set aside the sum of \$3,500 to be paid to the artist designated by the Committee.”⁴⁹ This was about .5% of the cost of general construction for DeWitt Clinton, which was \$650,400. Snyder reported, “Everything worked smoothly and satisfactorily. The artist chosen was a man of national repute. The Board of Education has reason, I think, to take not a little pride in the result and it is anticipated that similar action will be taken looking to the decoration of the interior of other high schools, notably the Commercial High School of Brooklyn, where similar provision has been made in the design of the Assembly Room for paintings at each side of the platform.”⁵⁰ Snyder did not initiate this commission. Apparently the school’s principal began the effort about a decade later, and after the principal’s death, the pair of murals was dedicated to him.⁵¹ Concluding his discussion on art in school buildings, Snyder proudly noted, “It will thus be seen that there has been

⁴⁸Ibid., 344.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid., 345.

⁵¹The murals are *Ancient and Modern Commerce* by A. J. Bogdanove, completed in 1918. The Board of Education conserved the murals, and in 1995 they were relocated to Tottenville High School, Staten Island.

a very substantial beginning made in the right direction in the interior decoration of our schools, with confidence that it will meet with such popular approval that it will follow naturally as a part of the design and finish of the new buildings.”⁵²

Unlike Erasmus Hall High School, where the moral imperative of education gave rise to public art, at DeWitt Clinton, the Board of Education's recognition of its civic responsibility resulted in the first official murals commissioned for a school building. Entitled, *Opening the Erie Canal*, the murals painted by Charles Yardley Turner (1850-1918) fulfilled several functions: they complemented and harmonized with the architectural space; they had a didactic purpose, illustrating an event in American history which was relevant to the high school curriculum; and they celebrated DeWitt Clinton, the namesake of the school, former President of the Free Public School Society, former Mayor and Governor, and the man behind the creation of the Erie Canal.

There is no record of a competition for the project, and it appears that Snyder and the Board of Education's Committee on Buildings selected Turner to undertake the commission. He was a good choice. Like Snyder, Turner was a member of the Municipal Art Society, even signing its incorporation papers, and was prominent in various art organizations. He was also an active member of the National Society of Mural Painters, eventually becoming a vice president. He lived in New York City at 35 West Fourteenth Street and he taught at Cooper Union from 1904-1909. When he was selected for the DeWitt Clinton commission, he was at the peak of his professional

⁵²New York City Department of Education, *9th Annual Report of the Department of Education of the City of New York* (1906), 347.

career, with several major mural projects under his belt.⁵³

Turner began his artistic training at Maryland Institute for the Promotion of the Mechanic Arts. Upon moving to New York from Baltimore, he attended the National Academy of Design from 1872-1878, leaving to help found the Art Students League. In 1878 he departed for Paris, where he studied for three years with John Paul Laurens, Leon Bonnat and the Hungarian muralist, Munkacsy. Upon his return to New York, he taught at the Art Students League and in 1884 became President of the League. Two years later he was elected an academician of the National Academy of Design, eventually becoming a vice president there in 1903. Turner's big break as a muralist came in 1892-3, when Francis Davis Millet, the director of decorations for 1893 Columbian Exposition, asked him to be his assistant. Shortly thereafter, he received his first major mural commissions, *Triumph of Manhattan* for the Manhattan Hotel (1896), followed by several commissions for New York City hotels, all designed by Henry J. Hardenbergh. In 1899 Turner contributed murals to the Appellate Division Court House and in 1900-1901 executed his first series of murals for the Baltimore Court House. He was in charge of developing and executing the entire color scheme for all buildings at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo. His 1905 commission for DeWitt Clinton was his first opportunity to be the only featured artist in a decorative scheme and was his only school commission.

By choosing Turner, Snyder was selecting an American artist associated with a

⁵³For the best source on Turner's life and work, including a complete list of all of Turner's murals, see Cynthia H. Sanford, et. al. *Heroes in the Fight for Beauty: The Muralists of the Hudson County Court House* (Jersey City: Jersey City Museum, 1986).

national art, whose views on mural painting paralleled his own. Turner preferred historical subjects to allegories, feeling that historical murals “awakened an interest in the spectators which incited them to seek further information.”⁵⁴ He, like fellow artists decorating state capitals between 1900 and 1910, chose local history over allegory, preferring to depict events that situated a geographic area in the drama of national history.⁵⁵ From their inception, the murals at DeWitt Clinton were intended to record historical episodes in the life of DeWitt Clinton. In the earliest known reference to the murals, Snyder explains, “The mural paintings will be placed one on either side of the platform, and being about 12 x 16' in size, will afford a fine opportunity for the artist to set forth two of the most important events from an historical standpoint, in the life of DeWitt Clinton, after whom the school has been named.”⁵⁶ Apparently, Turner modified his assignment and decided to paint two images based on a single event—the opening of the Erie Canal. The left panel, (Fig. 9) entitled *Entering the Mohawk Valley*, (DeWitt Clinton and Party Formally Opening the Completed Erie Canal Entering the Mohawk Valley, October 1825) depicts DeWitt Clinton and company approaching Lake Erie, the northern end of the canal, and the right panel, (Fig. 10) entitled, *Marriage of the*

⁵⁴William Walton, “Mural Painting in this Country Since 1898,” *Scribner's Magazine* 40 (Nov. 1906): 637, quoted in Sanford, *Heroes in the Fight for Beauty: The Muralists of the Hudson County Court House*, 25.

⁵⁵For a discussion of murals painted for state capitols, see Sarah J. Moore “In Search of an American Iconography: Critical Reaction to the Murals at the Library of Congress,” *Winterthur Portfolio* (Winter 1990), 235.

⁵⁶New York City Department of Education, *7th Annual Report of the Department of Education of the City of New York* (1904), 293.

Waters, shows the former Governor as he ceremoniously pours water from Lake Erie into the Atlantic Ocean. Both images are based on the celebrations that occurred between October 26 and 4 November 1825. Turner could have picked other events in the life of DeWitt Clinton, who had been Mayor and President of the Free School Society of New York. Undoubtedly, it was harder to illustrate his actions as an educator or a politician, so the artist seized on a dramatic moment that had a national impact and a tremendous effect on economic growth in New York State. The canal spanned the width of New York State, connecting Lake Erie and the Great Lakes to the Hudson River and ultimately the Atlantic Ocean and European trade. From the artistic perspective, this subject also allowed Turner to combine portraits and multiple figure groupings against the backdrop of a spectacular landscape, an approach that characterized his later murals at the Hudson County Courthouse.⁵⁷

The murals contain many recognizable details. To demonstrate the workings of the canal, Turner shows the party of Governor Clinton on a boat that has just passed a lock and has dropped down to a new level. The youth in the upper left corner rests against the beam used to operate the lock. In the far distance, crowds of rural New Yorkers cheer as the boat passes. Turner used a combination of models and portraits to depict the various figures. DeWitt Clinton in distinctive profile leads the group toward the prow of the boat. One account identifies the seated women shielded by the umbrella as Catherine Jones, the second wife of DeWitt Clinton, but that puts in question the

⁵⁷See Sanford, *Heroes in the Fight for Beauty: The Muralists of the Hudson County Court House*, 26.

identity of the woman standing by his side. On the right of the stage with figures facing inward, is *Marriage of the Waters*. In this mural, DeWitt Clinton also positioned at center stage, stands on deck of a steamboat in the lower bay off Sandy Hook, New Jersey. Gracefully posed, DeWitt Clinton dramatically pours water from Lake Erie into the Atlantic as a group of admirers look on. This group features New York City politicians, including former and current New York City mayors. Directly to the right of DeWitt Clinton is an admiral, and to the right of him is Dr. Samuel L. Mitchell, distinguished by his doctor's gown. The balding figure behind him to the right is Ricard Riker, the Recorder, and behind Dr. Mitchell to his left is Cadwallader D. Colden, who was mayor in 1819 and was made a Major General by D. Clinton. Finally, the then current Mayor of New York, Phillip Hone, stands next to the Brigadier-General.⁵⁸ The group gathers around a table topped with an assortment of bottles. These contain water from great rivers around the world which were also poured into the ocean, giving the event international import. In the distance on the left is a steamboat and a British frigate which happened to be in port at the time. The symbolic marriage of the waters took place on November 4, 1825, eight years after construction of the canal began.

Studies in the collection of the Cooper Hewitt demonstrate that Turner modeled the bodies of many of the figures from life.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, he had to refer to portraits to

⁵⁸Charles de Kay provided the most detailed account of portraits in his "Great Events in the Life of DeWitt Clinton Will Decorate New High School," *New York Times* 29 October 1905, pt. 3, p. 4. Before the paintings were installed, Turner exhibited them with works by Edwin H. Blashfield at the American Fine Arts Building, where they were reviewed by de Kay. See also *American Art News* 4, no. 4 (4 November 1905): 1.

⁵⁹See Gail S Davidson, "Training the Hand and Eye: American Drawings from the

obtain likenesses of the various figures, and there is a disjunction between the faces and their bodies, particularly evident in *Marriage of the Waters*. The complementary panel is more natural and artfully composed.

The murals took about a year to complete. F. C. Stahr assisted Turner on the project Commissioned in early 1905, by March 16th of that year, Turner submitted sketches and studies to the Art Commission.⁶⁰ On 20 March 1905 the Art Commission appointed a committee consisting of painter J. Carroll Beckwith, Chairman, John Bigelow and Walter Cook to monitor progress of the project. On that same day, Turner wrote to the Board of Education's Committee on Buildings to inform them that his drawings and sketches were accepted. He also requested exact dimensions of the spaces and asked for payment. "On motion, it was ordered that a duly certified order for the first payment be transmitted to Thomas Cockerill and Son, the general contractors, and that Mr. Turner be notified of said action."⁶¹ On 11 April 1905, the Art Commission's Committee reported progress and recommended that "additional information regarding the mural decorations including decorative treatment of the auditorium, in which these mural paintings are to be placed, be called for by the Commission."⁶² In response to this request, on 20 April 1905 Snyder wrote a letter to committee chairman J. Carroll

Cooper Hewitt Museum." Exhibition 22 January – 5 March 1989. See entry 13.

⁶⁰See Exhibition File 154-A, Art Commission.

⁶¹New York City Board of Education, *Minutes of the Committee on Buildings* (1905), 293.

⁶²Exhibition File 154-A, Art Commission.

Beckworth detailing the exact color and treatment of the auditorium. In this letter he excerpted the paint specifications which were bid out. These included four coats of a “light tone” with gold trim to outline panels and highlight parts of the plaster ornamental work. Snyder also specified that all woodwork and trim was to be painted and rubbed “to form a dull ivory white finish.” As Snyder conceived the space, the murals were to be the main color accents, with the exception of a carpet for the stage and the covering of the entrance doors. However, Snyder emphasized, “The color scheme has not as yet been worked out it being understood that it was to be given to us by Mr. C. Y. Turner, the artist in order to have the whole thing harmonize. The color of what little upholstery there will be, will also be decided in a similar manner.”⁶³ Satisfied with this reply on 9 May 1905 the Art Commission granted Preliminary Approval to the sketches.

Apparently, Turner completed a portion of the murals by 18 September 1905, when he requested \$500 to be paid as soon as he furnished an insurance policy on the paintings.⁶⁴

On 9 October 1905 Turner informed the Committee that the paintings were completed and he requested permission to place them on public exhibition. He invited committee members to inspect the completed murals, which they did on October 30th.⁶⁵ In February of 1906 the new DeWitt Clinton opened, but only the top floors were occupied

⁶³Correspondence File 313, item 18 and item 18a, Art Commission.

⁶⁴New York City Board of Education, *Minutes of the Committee on Buildings* (1905), 871.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 963.

until construction was completed. The murals were installed shortly thereafter.⁶⁶

Finally, on 18 December 1906, DeWitt Clinton High School was formally dedicated with the murals intact.

Clearly Snyder and Turner maintained open communication throughout the course of the project and both professionals shared a goal of creating a harmonious whole. The spirit of collaboration characterized many ambitious American Renaissance projects and the effort at DeWitt Clinton was no exception. To ensure that all aspects of the auditorium worked in concert, Snyder explained to Turner, "In connection with your selection as artist for the mural paintings at the DeWitt Clinton High . . . I beg to draw your attention to paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 page 79, of the specifications for the work, wherein is set forth the requirements for the painting of the walls and ceilings of the auditorium, entrances, etc., colors to be as directed. It was the intent that the color scheme for this work should be laid out by you in order to harmonize with your paintings.

You are therefore hereby designated, under clause B of the contract, as my assistant in charge thereof, and as such to give directions and exercise full authority over said work."⁶⁷ This of course suited Turner, who was himself a leading advocate of collaboration between artists and architects. Writing about his previous work for the Pan-American Exposition he asserted, "I think it absolutely necessary that the architect,

⁶⁶This date can be deduced based upon a letter of 14 March 1906 from the Art Commission's Assistant Secretary to C. Y. Turner, inquiring when the Art Commission's committee can go to the school to inspect the installed murals. See Correspondence File 313, Art Commission.

⁶⁷C. B. J. Snyder to Charles Y. Turner, 9 May 1905, Correspondence File 313, item 21a, Art Commission.

sculptor, colorist, and landscape architect should begin the work of preparation simultaneously, and plan jointly instead of being called in at the eleventh hour to light, plant, adorn with sculpture, and color structures which others have planned.”⁶⁸

Art critics and politicians alike applauded the murals. Architect and Municipal Art Society president Charles Rollinson Lamb remarked: “These exemplify in the very best way the possibilities of mural decoration, not only for embellishment, but for the purpose of instruction in our public school buildings. No public building is complete without some form of sculptural or pictorial embellishment in keeping with the character of the building, and in the decorations selected, the DeWitt Clinton High School has achieved the happy combination of the practical with the artistic.”⁶⁹ Because the murals were in a school, most observers emphasized their educational value. Art critic Charles DeKay noted, “They offer in flat decorative tints suited to the architecture of the room two incidents which schoolboys and schoolgirls learn by rote in their books and promptly forget. They will not forget the main facts of the Erie Canal if they see these pictures.”⁷⁰

De Kay also complemented the Board of Education, continuing, “It is well that a beginning has been made for mural decorations for schools. The Board of Education is to be congratulated. This is the first instance of the placing of historical scenes on the

⁶⁸C. Y. Turner, “Coloring and Decorating the Pan-American Exposition.” *Quarterly Bulletin of American Institute of Architects* 2 (Oct. 1901): 165, quoted in Sanford, *Heroes in the Fight for Beauty: The Muralists of the Hudson County Court House*, 75.

⁶⁹*The Clintonian* (1906), 33, Collection of DeWitt Clinton High School.

⁷⁰Charles de Kay, “Great Events in the Life of DeWitt Clinton Will Decorate New High School,” *New York Times* 29 October 1905, pt. 3, p. 4.

walls of a public school.” A critic writing for *Art News* commented, “The educational value of these paintings - both as works of art and accurate depictions of momentous scenes in American history is great, and the city is to be congratulated on their possession. They are perhaps the best works the artist has yet produced.”⁷¹ Snyder echoed this sentiment, remarking the murals are “interesting from a historical standpoint to the person who may be insensible to the great charm of color and drawing with which the artist has carried out his work, while to the person who loves the beautiful there is gratification and inspiration.”⁷² Even the City's comptroller, Herman Metz, became an art advocate, declaring that “If we go no further in artistic achievement than to make a beautiful place for our children to attend school, the money will be well expended.”⁷³

**Edwin Deming, *The First Treaty of Peace made between the Weekquaisgeek Indians and the Dutch at the Residence of Jonas Bronck in 1642* and *Gouverneur Morris Addressing the Convention for Framing the Constitution of the United States* (1907)
Morris High School, Bronx**

The next murals to be painted for a school were a pair by Edwin Deming that the Municipal Art Society commissioned in 1906: (Figs. 11) *The First Treaty of Peace made between the Weekquaisgeek Indians and the Dutch at the Residence of Jonas Bronck in 1642* and (Fig. 12) *Gouverneur Morris Addressing the Convention for Framing the*

⁷¹*American Art News* 4, no. 4 (November 4, 1905):1.

⁷²New York City Department of Education, *9th Annual Report of the Department of Education of the City of New York* (1906), 345.

⁷³“Educator’s Dedicate Clinton High School,” *New York Times*, 19 December 1906, 11, quoted in Gregory F Gilmartin, *Shaping the City: New York and the Municipal Art Society* (New York: Clarkson Potter/Publishers, 1995), 228.

Constitution of the United States. The Society, established in 1893 with the motto “To make us love our city, we should make our city lovely,” played an active role in promoting public art in New York City buildings and in particular the public schools.⁷⁴ The Society was one of several organizations formed during the 1880s and 1890s that supported artists and proselytized for civic art. Other groups were the Architectural League which began hosting exhibits illustrating collaborative or decorative artwork in 1886, the National Sculpture Society, created in 1893, the National Society of Mural Painters established in 1895, and the Fine Arts Federation created in 1895.

Unlike these other organizations which had a specialized membership, the Municipal Art Society brought together a diverse group of New Yorkers, many of whom were key players in New York's reform movement and crusade for civic beautification. C.B.J. Snyder was a member as was Public Education Association president and advocate of art-in-schools, Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer. In view of MAS's efforts to support public art in all city buildings, they were a natural springboard for expanding the mandate for art-in-schools. To carry out this work, in 1902 MAS formed a Committee for the Decoration of Public Schools, chaired by sculptor George Bissell. Members included: F. Wellington Ruckstull, a sculptor with a conservative bent, the architect and developer Albert E. Davis (head of MAS's Bronx Committee), Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, and Superintendent of Schools, William H. Maxell.⁷⁵ As

⁷⁴For the best account of the Municipal Art Society, see Gilmartin, *Shaping the City*.

⁷⁵*New York Times* 23 January 1904, 16, quoted in Gilmartin, *Shaping the City*, 227. In the Municipal Art Society Bulletin no. 8, members listed are: George S. Bissell,

stated in their 1904 report, the Committee's aim was the promotion of art-in-schools,

not for the promotion of art for art's sake, nor for the opening of new avenues for artistic endeavor, but for the commonsense, practicable and laudable purpose of introducing object lessons, through the influence of which, aesthetic tastes and desires for more agreeable surroundings and civic pride might be developed among the pupils; also through the illustration of all subjects taught in public schools, susceptible of such interpretation . . . for example; history, geography and kindred subjects, and lastly, for the value of art in the education of the sentiments and emotions which are of such importance in character forming; patriotism is a sentiment which illustrations of our national history conspicuously placed upon the walls of school rooms would arouse and foster as no printed text book could ever hope to do.

Furthermore the Committee recommended mural painting to "convey an idea of permanency which should be associated with all public works" and "advocate and advise that the decoration shall be the work of our ablest artists, and in the highest, broadest sense, educational and adapted to the intelligence of the young."⁷⁶ The aims of the Committee were clear--foster civic pride, instill patriotism, and support the educational objectives of the school.

In order to develop a comprehensive program, the Committee asked the Board of Education to identify potential schools for the trial art program. The Board recommended two of its new high schools: Morris (originally called Peter Cooper) and Wadleigh, and two elementary schools: P.S. 165 at 108th and Amsterdam in Manhattan, and an unidentified school in Brooklyn. Captivated by the elegant auditorium at the

chairman, Miss Mary R. Davis, and F. Wellington Ruckstuhl.

⁷⁶George E. Bissell, "Report of Committee on Decoration of Public Schools," *Municipal Art Society Bulletin no. 8* (1904), unpagued. Also reprinted in letter of George E. Bissell to President of the Municipal Art Society, 27 April 1906, Papers of the Municipal Art Society, Roll #15, frame 463, Archives of American Art.

collegiate Gothic Morris High School, the committee targeted the first co-educational public high school in the Bronx for a series of murals. The conceptual framework for the mural program called for scenes depicting local Bronx history for the auditorium, the focal point of which would be a mural symbolizing Education to be painted in brilliant colors at the rear of the auditorium stage. A series of paintings correlated to curriculum subjects would adorn the corridors--great architecture on the first floor, world history on the second floor, great inventions and discoveries on the third floor and biology on the fourth.⁷⁷ The proposed subjects reflected the curriculum instituted at Morris. The City's first co-educational high school was intended to be a "college of the people," providing a general course of study particularly for students who would be going to work upon graduation.⁷⁸

The proposed program for Morris was more ambitious than the art programs that were implemented at DeWitt Clinton and Erasmus Hall. Here the focus extended beyond the auditorium. The intent was to commission a series of murals correlated to various subjects to be spread throughout the building, artistic "signage" of a sort. Conceptually, the plan combined elements of Erasmus and DeWitt Clinton, uniting allegory with history painting.

As it turned out, an organ was added to the auditorium at Morris High School that

⁷⁷"Report of Committee on Decoration of Public Schools," *Municipal Art Society Bulletin* no. 8 (1904), unpagued.

⁷⁸For a detailed description of the curriculum at Morris High School, see Gary Hermalyn, *Morris High School and the Creation of the New York City Public High School System* (New York: The Bronx Historical Society, 1991).

prevented the Municipal Art Society from carrying out its initial artistic scheme. Instead, the Society organized a competition for two historical paintings measuring eight feet by eleven feet to be placed on either side of the school's entrance vestibule. To accommodate them, Snyder changed the dimensions of the marble wainscoting on the vestibule walls so murals could be lowered to avoid shadows cast on the upper part of the wall.⁷⁹ On 30 April 1906 the committee reported that a circular advertising the competition had been issued to artists throughout the country.⁸⁰ Designs were due by 15 May 1906. To judge them, MAS appointed a jury consisting of ten professional artists, architects, painters and sculptors, and five laymen. \$3000 was to be awarded to the winner for finished paintings, \$200 for second prize, \$100 for third prize, and two honorable mentions at \$50 each. Funds for the competition came from money raised by popular subscription and MAS contributed the rest.

Like the murals at DeWitt Clinton, the subject for the Morris High School paintings was also American history, with a local twist. According to Bissell, Morris High School principal Mr. Denbigh suggested that the artist portray "incidents in the public life of Gouverneur Morris, and the visit of Washington, escorted by the Westchester Horse Guards, to the Van Cortlandt mansion."⁸¹ The community "taking

⁷⁹Municipal Art Society, "Minutes of the Board of Directors," 13 March 1906, Papers of the Municipal Art Society, Roll #15, frame 437, Archives of American Art.

⁸⁰Municipal Art Society, "Minutes of the Board of Directors," 30 April 1906, Papers of the Municipal Art Society, Roll #15, frame 451, Archives of the American Art.

⁸¹Municipal Art Society, "Minutes of the Board of Directors," 13 February 1906, Papers of the Municipal Art Society, Roll #15, frame 427, Archives of American Art.

much interest in the matter” also voiced an opinion, recommending that two historical figures be represented, Governor Morris and Jonas Bronk, both of whom had a regional significance. Governor Morris’s family estate was Morrisania where the school was located and Jonas Bronk was the first European to settle in the area; thus the origin of this borough’s name.⁸² Finally, the Municipal Art Society settled on the subjects, *The First Treaty of Peace made between the Weekquaisgeek Indians and the Dutch at the Residence of Jonas Bronck in 1642* and *Gouverneur Morris Addressing the Convention for Framing the Constitution of the United States*.

The competition’s first place winner was Edwin Willard Deming (1860-1942). A painter, sculptor, and illustrator, Deming grew up on the Illinois frontier in close proximity to Indians, eventually making Native Americans and animals of the west his signature subjects. Largely self-taught, he spent the winter of 1883/1884 at the Art Students League, followed by a year at the Académie Julian where he studied with Boulanger and Lefebvre. Upon his return, he painted cycloramas and began his periodic trips out west, visiting the Apaches and the Pueblo Indians. He painted Indian portraits in 1889-90 and exhibited Indian paintings in 1891. When he received the commission for Morris High School he was a novice mural painter.⁸³ Contemporary critics praised

⁸²Municipal Art Society, “Minutes of the Board of Directors,” 13 February 1906, Papers of the Municipal Art Society, Roll #15, frame 434, Archives of American Art.

⁸³For information on Deming and his work, see “Edwin W. Deming and the Return of the Red Man,” *The International Studio* 27 (1905-06): xv-xx and Peggy and Harold Samuels, *The Illustrated Biographical Encyclopedia of Artists of the American West* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976): 135-136. The most comprehensive account of Deming can be found in Thomas G. Lamb, *Eight Bears* (Oklahoma: Griffin Books, 1978). Deming’s papers, which contain a scrapbook on the

Deming for his understanding of Native Americans. The time he spent living and working among various tribes allowed him to avoid stereotypes of the noble savage or vicious warrior and to concentrate instead on the individuality of his subjects. It is perhaps this trait that won him the competition.

By November of 1906 Deming had sketched in all the figures in preparation for the final painting.⁸⁴ The following spring, Deming exhibited the paintings at MAS prior to their installation at Morris in time for graduation. Although the Art Commission disapproved the murals on account of the proposed locations in the vestibule,⁸⁵ MAS moved forward with their plans to install them. They were eventually relocated to the auditorium.⁸⁶

Due to severe damage, the murals have suffered over time and it is difficult to judge their aesthetic merits.⁸⁷ Most of Deming's original glazes are lost because of vandalism and over cleaning. Because of this surface scrubbing, many of the figures appear stilted, but the palette retains Deming's typical pastel hues. The compositions are mirror images of each other, with a standing figure in the foreground juxtaposed against a

Morris High School commission, are in the collection of the University of Oregon Library.

⁸⁴Municipal Art Society, "Minutes of the Board of Directors," 27 November 1906, Papers of the Municipal Art Society, Roll #15, Archives of American Art.

⁸⁵Exhibition File 260-A, Art Commission.

⁸⁶After renovation of the high school, in 1995 the paintings were relocated to a corridor on the first floor.

⁸⁷Margaret Watherston conserved paintings in 1992.

semi-circle of seated figures that observe the action. Both scenes are illuminated by natural light coming through the windows on the rear plane of the picture. The paintings take on the quality of a staged historical drama with the viewer cast as a member of the audience. The best passages illustrating Deming's painterly technique are in *The First Treaty of Peace made between the Weekquaisgeek Indians and the Dutch at the Residence of Jonas Bronck in 1642*. The squaw looking through the window on the far right and the supple leather of the boots of the seated figure are fresh and vibrant.⁸⁸

**Barry Faulkner, *Scenes from the Early History of Manhattan* (1916-1920)
Washington Irving High School, Manhattan**

Having begun their campaign to decorate public schools at Morris High School, the Committee on the Decoration of School Buildings turned their attention elsewhere, aspiring to transform "the bare walls of the schools into playgrounds of fancy."⁸⁹ Under the leadership of painter John White Alexander, a special effort was made to decorate Snyder's newest high school, Washington Irving, a school for girls near Gramercy Park completed in 1912. Mrs. Edward H. Harriman provided \$35,000 for the lobby murals, the artistic centerpiece of the school.⁹⁰ A private donor paid for an overmantel by Frances

⁸⁸Gilmartin criticizes Deming murals, writing "E. Willard Deming won the competition, but his murals weren't very successful. Indeed they might serve as an illustration of Kenyon Cox's argument that the historical subject was the most difficult to handle successfully in America. "Unfortunately our history is short, our modern costume formless and ugly, and American historical subjects particularly unfitted for pictorial and, especially, decorative treatment." See Gilmartin, *Shaping the City*, 228.

⁸⁹*Municipal Art Society Bulletin no. 4* (Oct. 1915), unpagd.

⁹⁰An unidentified clipping says Mrs. Harriman made the donation because the

Grimes and MAS appropriated an additional \$1,000 to underwrite the decoration by Salvatore Lascari of the grand staircase. MAS also made an appeal to raise funds for Washington Irving decorations, and in response, the St. Nicholas Society presented a bronze tablet of Washington Irving by Victor Brenner to the school. In addition, R. K. Ryland won the competition to execute a mural for the area beneath the gallery of the auditorium and there was also an unsuccessful attempt to paint a mural cycle for the second floor gallery outside the auditorium.⁹¹ The aim was to make Washington Irving a model school boasting civic art, inaugurating “a new era of art as an educational influence.”⁹²

A vocational high school for girls, Washington Irving featured specialized courses, prompting the school's first principal to boast, “It fits for college, for business, and for matrimony.”⁹³ Among the school's unique offerings were classes in housekeeping, nursing, baby care, embroidery, office management, stenography, and entertaining. Built in a congested part of the city, Washington Irving has a small

school has always been interested in art and has held loan exhibitions. Files of the Art Commission.

⁹¹The Art Commission approved the Preliminary Design for three panels on 16 November 1915 but only the central panel was executed. Katherine S. Drier, President of the alternative Co-operative Mural Workshops, proposed the mural, “Queen Isabella Before Granada,” which was to be a gift of Roswell Skeel. The Art Commission disapproved the sketches on 19 September 1916. See Exhibition File 359-BC and 359-DD, Art Commission. Dreier’s proposal is also described in the *American Art Annual* 11 (1914): 215.

⁹²“Mural Painting in the Schools,” *The American Architect* 105, no. 1997 (1 April 1914): 141.

⁹³*American Architecture* (19 March 1913): 148.

footprint and rises nine stories, serviced by four elevators in each of the four corners. The exterior is austere, even the entrance is modest, but the interior unfolds into a gracious Tudor-style foyer. Snyder explained, "The foyer hall is designed to be used partly as a working space and the controlling motive was to obtain a domestic feeling."⁹⁴ Finished in fumed oak and large enough to accommodate dances of up to four hundred people, the space is unduplicated among Snyder's high schools. The focal point, emblemizing the school's domestic orientation and welcoming visitors, is a massive hearth directly opposite the main entrance. In the school's early days, sewing classes gathered around this monumental fireplace.

Before the commission was actually awarded or the foyer murals were painted, they were described as twenty panels depicting scenes from *Rip Van Winkle*, *Headless Horseman*, *the Sketch Book* and other works by Washington Irving.⁹⁵ In fact, there are only twelve panels, and only in the most general way do they derive from a book by Irving--his *Knickerbocker's History of New York*. Snyder purposefully provided spaces for the murals, noting in a letter to the Art Commission, "I think not only yourself, but also several members of your Commission, are aware of the fact that in designing the building I provided these panels for mural decoration."⁹⁶ Snyder did not, however, select the artist. Rather, Faulkner was chosen by Mrs. Harriman, for whom he had recently

⁹⁴Exhibition File 359A, Art Commission.

⁹⁵*American Architecture* (March 19, 1913): 148.

⁹⁶C.B.J. Snyder to Robert W. De Forest, 3 March 1915, Correspondence File 313, item 320, Art Commission.

completed an award winning mural cycle entitled, *Famous Men and Famous Women* (1907-1910), based on Perugino's frescoes of allegorical figures in the Sala del Cambio in Perugia.⁹⁷ Given Mrs. Harriman's involvement in the project, perhaps she guided Faulkner toward Irving's *Knickerbocker's History of New York* as a framework for the cycle.

Following to some degree Irving's history, Faulkner focuses on the period of the Dutch occupation in New York, but he does not illustrate specific scenes described in the author's comic account or adopt his satirical viewpoint. For example, Irving takes great pains to debunk the myth of the hero patterned on a Greek Adonis and in his characteristically humorous way describes Henry Hudson as a pipesmoking, "short, square brawny old gentleman, with a double chin, a mastiff mouth, and a broad copper nose."⁹⁸ In contrast, Faulkner's Hudson stands majestically on the ship's prow, poised with Dutch flag over his shoulder and hand on hip, his cape billowing behind him. Depicted in profile, Faulkner gives the explorer a Roman nose and full beard, completing the impression of a formidable presence. While Irving's account is full of fictional details, Faulkner treats his historical subject seriously and records real events, consulting various sources for accuracy.⁹⁹ A third of the panels are maps, for which Faulkner

⁹⁷Faulkner, *Barry Faulkner: Sketches from an Artist's Life*, 65. This won the Architectural League's Medal of Honor.

⁹⁸Washington Irving, *Diedrich Knickerbocker's History of New-York* (Norwalk, Ct: The Heritage Press, 1940, 1968), 43.

⁹⁹Studies for the murals bear notations to the source materials "New Amsterdam, New Orange, N.Y." by W. L. Andrews and to a book entitled, *Views of Early New York*. The author is grateful for information provided by Andrei Givotovsky. See also the

required detailed source material. Clearly, Faulkner did not rely exclusively on Irving's version of New York's Dutch period, possibly because he wanted to create a mural cycle that would be credible as an educational tool.

The panels unfold from the southeast corner of the room around to the north wall. The subjects are: "The Indian Hunters," (Fig. 13) "Henry Hudson Landing on the Island of Manhattan," (Fig. 14) "Trees and Animals of Manhattan Island with *The Tiger*, one of the first trading vessels to come to Manhattan," (Fig. 15) "Trees and Animals of Manhattan Island with the *Unrest*, first ship to be built on Manhattan," (Fig. 16) "Dutch Pioneer Women," (Fig. 17) "The Peach War," (Fig. 18) "Picture Map of Peter Stuyvesant's Bouwerie Farm," (Fig. 19) "The Kissing Bridge," (Fig. 20) "Map of Long Island," (Fig. 21) "The Path of the Fur Trade," (Fig. 22) "Governor Stuyvesant Leading his Army Against the Swedish Settlement," (Fig. 23) and "Map of New Amsterdam with the British Fleet in the Harbor." (Fig. 24) Faulkner worked on the murals between 1915 and 1920, and apparently when he began the project, he had not devised the entire scheme. In a letter of 17 November 1915, Snyder revealed to the Art Commission that he had never seen a description of the whole program, writing "and I wonder if, in the absence of this, we will be enabled to assure ourselves of either the continuity of thought

Master's Thesis by Givotovsky, "The Conservation of Barry Faulkner's Mural Cycle *Scenes from the Early History of Manhattan (1916-1920) at Washington Irving High School*" (M.A., SUNY Fashion Institute of Technology, 2001) and The Municipal Art Society of New York, *The Faulkner Murals: The Barry Faulkner Murals at Washington Irving High School: History, Conservation, and Education* (New York: The Municipal Art Society, 1999).

or purpose.” He continued, “This, of course, is not to be taken as a criticism of Mr. Faulkner, but simply as carrying out the theory which I understand is always adopted in similar instances of knowing precisely what the completed series will contemplate, rather than to approve them one at a time without knowing the ultimate scheme or object to be attained.”¹⁰⁰ The sketches for the first two panels to be completed--“The Indian Hunters” and “Trees and Animals of Manhattan Island with the *Tiger*,” which included a grille design to cover the heating vent,--had been submitted eight months earlier in March of 1915.¹⁰¹

Next, Faulkner completed the designs for “Henry Hudson Landing on the Island of Manhattan,” and “Dutch Pioneer Women,” which the Commission approved with the stipulation that the artist consider “minor changes in the proportions of certain figures.”¹⁰² By 1 February 1916 the preliminary designs for all the murals had been worked out and Snyder applied for preliminary approval for the entire cycle.¹⁰³ Two

¹⁰⁰C. B. J. Snyder to John Quincy Adams, 17 November 1915, Correspondence File 313, item 373 and 373a, Art Commission. The Art Commission response to Snyder on 18 November 1915 confirms that Faulkner never submitted the program for the entire twelve panels. See Correspondence File 313, item 375, Art Commission.

¹⁰¹Snyder submitted these along with a blueprint of the construction plans and photographs to the Art Commission on 3 March 1915.

¹⁰²Assistant Secretary to C. B. J. Snyder, 18 November 1915, excerpted from Minutes of the Art Commission from meeting of 8 November 1915, Correspondence File, file 313, item 374, Art Commission.

¹⁰³As of April 1916, Faulkner installed two of his panels and received approval for the cartoons of the remaining ten. See Bulletin of the Municipal Art Society, No. 6 (1916), unpagged. Faulkner also recounts, “Spent most of 1916 painting Washington Irving panels and by following Spring 1917 had completed 10 of the 12.” Barry Faulkner, *Barry Faulkner: Sketches from an Artist's Life* (Dublin, New Hampshire: William L.

weeks later the Art Commission approved the designs, suggesting “that the relief over the fire-place and the spaces at each end of the mantel and also the spaces at each end of the room above and between the doors be tinted so as to harmonize with these mural decorations.”¹⁰⁴

Faulkner carefully dated individual panels. Based on technical evidence and photographic documentation, it appears that he needed to see the work in situ to satisfactorily complete the panels. For example, after it was installed, Faulkner covered a night sky and moon in the top left of the Henry Hudson panel with a gilded faux mosaic, and in the “Path of the Fur Trade,” he added a group of deer in the top right.¹⁰⁵ The last panels to be finished were “The Kissing Bridge” and “Governor Stuyvesant Leading his Army Against the Swedish Settlement,” which has noticeably looser brushwork. Faulkner completed both panels in 1920 when he returned from his service in the camouflage corps of the United States Army.

Characteristic of Faulkner’s style, the panels draw on a variety of sources. They combine figures in classical poses with the crisp outlines of Japanese woodcuts and are framed in a decorative border patterned on medieval manuscripts.¹⁰⁶ Gilded faux-mosaic

Bauhan Publisher, 1973), 84.

¹⁰⁴ Assistant Secretary to William G. Willcox, 25 February 1916, excerpted from Minutes of the Art Commission Meeting of 14 February 1916, Correspondence File 313, item 390, Art Commission.

¹⁰⁵ Luca Bonetti conserved the panels in 1997/98 and provided this information based on photographic evidence. See Luca Bonetti Final Report, June 1998, Files of Public Art for Public Schools, New York City Board of Education.

¹⁰⁶ The decorative borders are based on bird motifs from the Book of Lindisfarne.

sections in all the panels help to unify the cycle, which is a combination of maps and figurative compositions. Several panels bear a direct connection to classical precedents, best exemplified in “The Peach War.” (Fig. 18) Preparatory sketches as well as the final composition for this section reveal Faulkner’s familiarity with such famous icons as the east and west pediments of the Temple of Aphaia on Aegina. Substituting settlers and Indians for Greeks and Trojans, Faulkner uses Greek warriors as models for the Native Americans the Dutch encountered on Manhattan. The central striding figure of the Indian with raised spear and outstretched shield and the wounded Indian in the bottom right corner are clearly derived from the reconstructed sculptural frieze of the temple’s west pediment. The arched panels themselves frame a composition similar to the triangular format of Greek pedimental sculpture. Coupled with his references to classical prototypes, Faulkner emulated the technique of the Old Masters and painted the panels on plywood, using a complicated system of glazes. For example, in the panels depicting the fauna and flora of Manhattan, Faulkner created green pine needles by applying a dark blue underpainting covered with a heavy brown glaze.¹⁰⁷

The Washington Irving murals cycle was a significant accomplishment for Faulkner, who was an emerging artist at the time he received the commission. He was among the second generation of artists who studied at the American Academy in Rome and he developed a reputation as an accomplished decorative painter. Giles Edgerton

See Luca Bonetti Final Report, June 1998, Files of Public Art for Public Schools, New York City Board of Education.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

praised Faulkner, asserting his “decorations are always arresting, they are always fresh and clear and joyous. There is great variety in the subjects, the feeling usually classic and the presentation quite modern.”¹⁰⁸ Blashfield also mentioned Faulkner in his book on American mural painting, commenting, “one at once associates a highly developed decorative sense with the names of such painters as Vedder, Cox, Parrish, Miss Oakley, Barry Faulkner, Jules Guerin and indeed many others.”¹⁰⁹ Faulkner executed numerous screens and murals for private homes, and when the opportunity presented itself, assisted in the decoration of entire spaces, believing the mural should dictate the surrounding decor. This is evident in the Washington Irving cycle where he artfully designed pictorial grilles to camouflage the heating vents, although Snyder had offered to relocate them.¹¹⁰ His taste in furnishings was as eclectic as his painting style, and he often combined Japanese and Chinese elements with traditional European pieces. His screens illustrate a dramatic flair with their black background contrasted with rich tones of red, yellow, and gold.

Faulkner spent several years abroad prior to executing the murals at Washington Irving. He lived and studied in Italy for extended periods, making his first trip to Rome in

¹⁰⁸Giles Edgerton, “Mural Decorations and Painted Screens,” *Arts and Decoration* 23, no. 1 (May 1925): 27.

¹⁰⁹Blashfield, *Mural Painting in America*, xi.

¹¹⁰Characteristic of his desire to collaborate with artists, Snyder advised Faulkner that “the rectangular fresh air inlets in four of the twelve panels can be relocated outside the panel entirely or repositioned so the upper line of the vent would be parallel with the line of the arch.” Faulkner responded that he had already completed the sketches and it was too late to make a change. C. B. J. Snyder to Barry Faulkner, Correspondence File 313, items 320 and 320a, Art Commission.

1901 with his uncle, the artist Abbott Thayer, and his cousins. While in Rome he became fascinated by frescoes and recalls spending many hours studying the murals in the Stanze, the Borgia Apartments, and the Sistine Chapel.¹¹¹ In Perugia, he looked at work by Perugino and the youthful Raphael and Pintoricchio. In Florence, the budding artist studied the sculptures of Donatello. Faulkner returned to New York in June 1901 and attended Frank Vincent Dumond's life drawing class at the Art Student's League. In 1906, he exhibited at the Architectural League, and won the coveted fellowship to the American Academy in Rome, where he spent the next three years. During this second trip abroad, he also stayed in Florence, where he learned academic figure painting from George de Forest Brush. Faulkner mined all his resources to successfully complete the cycle at Washington Irving. His classical training, technical mastery, penchant for drama, and youthful enthusiasm resulted in one of New York City's finest public school murals.

**Frederick Lincoln Stoddard, *The Birth and Development of Education* (1915-1916)
Eastern District High School, Brooklyn**

The Municipal Art Society's efforts set an example and prompted other organizations to follow suit.¹¹² The murals at Eastern District High School, our last case study, came about through the collaboration of the Art Department of the City's high schools, the National Society of Mural Painters and the General Organization of Eastern

¹¹¹Faulkner, *Barry Faulkner: Sketches from an Artist's Life*, 44.

¹¹²For a discussion of Board of Education murals commissioned before 1915, see "Mural Decorations in Schools," *Bulletin of the Municipal Art Society* No. 4 (Oct. 1915).

District High School. Commissioned in 1914, Frederic Lincoln Stoddard's (1861-1940) mural cycle began with three panels and over the course of thirteen years evolved into a total of twelve panels depicting a range of subjects.¹¹³ (Figs. 25 – 27)

Canadian-born, Stoddard began his career as a stained glass designer, taking up murals after a five-year sojourn in Paris. There he worked under the guidance of Constant and Laurens. Returning to St. Louis in 1896, Stoddard received mural commissions for the St. Louis City Hall and several high schools in the city. In 1904, he was a silver medalist at the St. Louis exposition. Shortly thereafter he moved to New York and in 1908 executed a large lunette for the Hebrew Technical School for Girls.¹¹⁴ His next major commission was the panels for Eastern District High School. According to the Art Commission submission form, William Laurel Harris, President of the National Society of Mural Painters and former president of the Municipal Art Society closely supervised the project, and it is likely that Harris recommended Stoddard for the job.

For the Brooklyn high school, Stoddard searched for an allegorical equivalent of education, picturing a mythical past marking the origin of language, the arts, and humankind's quest for knowledge. Nude or partially draped, the figures are meant to be timeless, evoking a secular Garden of Eden. Three panels comprise the first set entitled, *Birth and Development of Education*, designed for three Gothic arches in the lobby of the

¹¹³In 1985, the Board of Education conserved and relocated the panels to the auditorium of the new Eastern District High School.

¹¹⁴The school, located at 240 Second Avenue, is now the Manhattan Comprehensive High School. Entitled *Womanhood* (1908), the mural was conserved in 1992.

school's Keap Street entrance. Stoddard received preliminary approval from the Art Commission on 8 June 1914 and final approval a year later, when the panels were completed but not yet installed. The themes of the panels recall the murals at the Library of Congress where the development of writing, enlightenment, and the centrality of the family in the evolution of civilization figure prominently. The left panel entitled, *Gift of Fire to Man*, (Fig. 25) shows Prometheus bound upon a rock in the background, while in the foreground a male figure grasps at a flame, symbolic of enlightenment. Lurking nearby is a snarling tiger, representative of the animal kingdom, and by inference, ignorance. The central panel, *Dawn of Civilization*, (Fig. 26) features Truth holding aloft her torch behind the archetypal family in the foreground. The father fashions a piece of pottery, while the mother looks on as their child draws a wreath of flowers around a recumbent lion's neck, symbolic of the taming of Brute Force. The image implies that civilization originates in the family unit and that only through cultural development, signified by the pottery, will primitive instincts be conquered. The cycle concludes in the right panel, which is entitled, *Invention of Writing*. (Fig. 27) Here the first student scratches letters with a broken spear while two warriors look on disparagingly and a serpent shrinks away from the light of education. Again, Stoddard emphasizes that the intellect is more powerful than physical force. Linking the panels is a changing sky that begins as a gray field, giving way to dawn in the center panel, culminating in a bright midday sky, signaling the arrival of enlightenment.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵For a contemporary description of the panels, see "Decoration of City High Schools," *International Studio* 56 (August 1915): XLIII. *The Dawn of Civilization* was exhibited in the Municipal Art Society's "Exhibition of Civic Art." See *Bulletin of the*

Although Stoddard's murals share thematic similarities to decorations at the Library of Congress, the style and overall conception of the three panels are heavily influenced by the work of Puvis de Chavannes.¹¹⁶ Stoddard quoted liberally from the works of the French master and closely emulated his style. Having studied in Paris, he was obviously familiar with Puvis's cycle celebrating the life of St. Gen  vieve in the Pantheon as well as his later work for the Boston Public Library. The compositional simplicity, use of classical mythology and semi-nude allegorical figures in a landscape, even the scale of figures to the landscape, aspire toward the timelessness associated with Puvis's work. Stoddard also applied Puvis's bold contours, muted, pastel colors, and format with a decorative border and inscription on bottom. Going beyond stylistic affinities, Stoddard recalls specific elements from Puvis's work at the Boston Public Library, quoting a similar image of Prometheus bound upon a rock. This mythological figure in Puvis's panel *Aeschulus or Dramatic Poetry* also appears in Stoddard's *Gift of Fire* panel. Stoddard's reliance on Puvis is even more apparent in a subsequent part of the commission, later conceived for the arched spaces opposite *The Birth and Development of Education*. The panels completed in 1926 continue the theme of Education. *The Study of the Humanities*, depicting figures representing biology, literature and art is closely based on Puvis's precedent of 1877 entitled, *St. Gen  vieve as a Child at Prayer*. Both compositions share the same visual rhythm, mood, and vantage

Municipal Art Society No. 4 (Oct. 1915), unpag  d.

¹¹⁶For a recent study of Puvis, see Brian Petrie, *Puvis de Chavannes* (England and the United States: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1997).

point. Genéviève kneeling in prayer in the left middle ground becomes a seated contemplative figure, looking dreamily upward. The family in the right foreground of Puvis's mural becomes two seated figures studying a book and flower in Stoddard's conception. The position of the horizon line and use of tree trunks to provide a vertical counterpoint also derive from the French example.

Stoddard's homage to Puvis was well received. Critics praised *The Birth and Development of Education*. They said the murals, "mark an epoch in school decoration, being conceived and executed with great breadth of view and refinement of technique."¹¹⁷

School murals of the American Renaissance illustrate the eclecticism characteristic of that period. The most successful examples meet the criteria established by critics of the time. The murals harmonize with their architectural surroundings in color and scale, they avoid trivial subjects, bear a connection to the site, and their meaning is easily communicated to the general public.¹¹⁸ Although there are exceptions, artists working in schools took on the mantle of educators, seeking to instruct not symbolize, and they favored historical or literary subjects over allegorical ones. Allegory, in fact, presents special problems when seen through the lens of time.¹¹⁹ Most

¹¹⁷*Bulletin of the Municipal Art Society of New York*, No. 4 (October 1915).

¹¹⁸See Ralph W. Holbrook, "An Important Quartet of Mural Paintings" *Brush and Pencil* 11 (November 1902): 96-106; Will H. Low, "Mural Painting - Modern Possibilities of an Ancient Art," *Brush and Pencil* 11 (Dec. 1902) 161-77; and Royal Cortissoz, "Mural Decoration In America," *Century Magazine* 51 (Nov. 1895): 110-21.

¹¹⁹For a discussion of allegory in American murals, see H. Wayne Morgan, *New Muses: Art in American Culture, 1865-1920* (Norman : University of Oklahoma Press,

contemporary viewers are unfamiliar and generally uncomfortable with classical symbolism, making allegorical murals difficult to decode. And even if viewers know classical mythology, American Renaissance artists often took liberties, mixing elements of modern life with symbolic figures of their own invention; thus complex mural cycles like the hundreds of square feet covering the Library of Congress require a detailed explanation for viewers to understand them.

Even more problematic for contemporary viewers of turn-of-the-century allegorical murals is the singular vision of American society they offer. By reflecting the dominant social structure, though consistent with the ideals of the entire educational enterprise of that time, they provide a constricted vision of American culture difficult for school audiences to accept today. Stoddard's imagery featuring an ideal white family is somewhat incompatible with the reality of New York's multi-ethnic communities, then and now.

Murals based on historical and/or literary subjects, such as Turner's and Faulkner's, weather the passage of time better. The subjects depicted maintain their educational relevance without alienating contemporary viewers. The murals recreate events in American history connected to the namesake of their respective schools, and in the case of Faulkner's, remind viewers of one of America's notable literary achievements.

School murals furthered the aims of City Beautiful proponents and school

1978), 55. Morgan explains that the use of classical symbols legitimized the pursuits of modern life, as illustrated by a picture of a goddess seated on a huge cog to symbolize industry. Van Hook makes the same argument, explaining that artists used allegory to bolster American identity and that allusions to classicism lent credibility to American culture and practices. See Bailey Van Hook, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American*

reformers. As education was increasingly viewed as a tool for the assimilation of New York City's immigrants, so school murals became another strategy employed by social progressives to Americanize the city's burgeoning population. They were a vehicle for communicating a message to a mass audience, largely comprised of new immigrants, while providing lasting and permanent embellishment in public buildings. After the initial flurry of activity, murals and stained glass windows took on secondary meanings and were often commissioned to commemorate principals, superintendents, and honor victims taken on the battlefields of World War I. In the post-War period, commemorative public art dominated commissions for New York's public schools and the debate about what is appropriate art for schools broadened.

Society, 1876-1914, 116-117.

CHAPTER 4

THE 1920S: ART AND MEMORY PUBLIC SCHOOL MEMORIALS

Public art is commonly the art of commemoration. Whether recalling a human life, heroic act, or outstanding achievement, memorials replay a specific drama for a community of viewers: they reinforce collective memory. For over a century, they have been part of the fabric of the New York City public schools, reminding us of esteemed teachers and principals as well as events that have shaped the modern era. They appear as bronze plaques, painted portraits, stained glass windows, sculptures, and murals.

World War I changed the nature of public school memorials. The subjects to be honored were no longer educators or other public figures: they were the students themselves. The “war to end all wars” left a trail of New York City public school memorials in its wake, and in the context of a century of public school art, it would not be an exaggeration to label the 1920s the decade of commemoration.

When honoring individuals, debate has often accompanied the placement of memorials in schools. By virtue of their location, they bear an institutional imprimatur, the sanction of an authoritative body. Over the years, this responsibility has made some Board of Education officials nervous, prompting one to complain, “If every mediocre principal or teacher is to have a tablet or a memorial window, our schools must soon take on the appearance of a mausoleum, instead of educational institutions for which they were originally intended.”¹ Despite these reservations, the urge to draw attention to a

¹Chairman, Committee on Buildings to the Art Commission, 30 October 1912, Correspondence File 313, item 179a, Art Commission.

person or event in the New York City public schools has remained strong, and over the last century numerous groups have sponsored various types of commemorative art in school buildings. This chapter will provide an overview of public school memorial art, with an in-depth look at World War I murals.

The first to be used and most universal form of public school commemoration is the school name itself. The tradition started with the creation of the city's high schools at the turn of the century. Dr. William H. Maxwell, the first superintendent of the consolidated school system, advocated naming academic high schools after an individual to distinguish them from manual training high schools. The person to be honored had to be deceased and have historical significance, such as DeWitt Clinton or Governor Morris. Sometimes the school's locale provided the rationale for the name, i.e., Washington Irving High School located on Irving Place. Important educators also attracted recognition, such as Lydia F. Wadleigh, a pioneer of higher education for women for whom the first girls' high school was named.² Gradually, the practice broadened and primary schools took on associations with specific individuals, supplementing the institutional numbers assigned to them.³

²Wadleigh High School, located at 215 West 114th Street, is now Intermediate School 88.

³Naming schools remains a current practice. The Division of Community School District Affairs must approve all names, and approval is based on information submitted by the District Superintendent. Petitioners must explain how the person whose name is being submitted is identified with the school or area in which the school is located. Petitioners are also required to identify the contributions of the individual whose name is selected. Schools can be named after educators, community figures, or national figures that are deceased.

After school names, the painted portrait is the most common form of commemorative art in school buildings. Like any corporation with a board of directors, the Board of Education displayed a sizeable portrait collection honoring former presidents in their headquarters building known as the Hall of the Board of Education, formerly located at Park Avenue and 59th Street. In 1902, the portraits on view were *DeWitt Clinton* (1854) by William H. Powell (1824-1879) and *DeWitt Clinton*, n.d. by Thomas Hicks (1823-1890); *George T. Trimble* (1854) by Thomas Hicks; *Thomas Jeremiah* (1864) by William Ver Bryck (1823-1899); *Townsend Harris* (1855) by James Bogle (1817-1878); *Robert P. Kelly* (n.d.) by Daniel Huntington (1816-1906); *Erastus C. Benedict*, n.d. artist unknown; *William E. Curtis* (1864) by Henry Augustus Loop (1831-1895); *James M. McLean* (1867) by Daniel Huntington; *Richard L. Larremore* (1870) by Thomas Hicks; *Bernard Smyth* (n.d.) artist unknown; and *J. Edward Simmons* (1890) by Thomas Waterman (1823-1903).⁴ All these individuals were either former Presidents of the New York Public School Society or the Board of Education, which replaced the Society in 1843. Concerned that the portraits reflected an accurate institutional history, in 1905 the Board passed a resolution mandating that they be rehung in chronological order according to dates of service and that the portrait of DeWitt Clinton occupy the

⁴These portraits were listed in a letter from the Secretary of the Board of Education to Milo R. Maltbie, Art Commission of the City of New York, 1 August 1902, Correspondence File, item 313/2,2a, Art Commission. See also *Catalogue of Works of Art Belonging to the City of New York* (New York: Art Commission of the City of New York, 1909) Vol. 1.

chief place of honor.⁵ After all, DeWitt Clinton was the first President of the Free Public School Society, a former Mayor and Governor. The resolution refers to a portrait that eventually made its way to DeWitt Clinton High School where it is on view in the principal's office.

Following the precedent set by the central Board, several high schools amassed portrait collections of former principals, often commissioned upon their retirement. Both DeWitt Clinton High School and Erasmus Hall High School have notable collections, including a portrait of Erasmus principal Walter B. Gunnison by John White Alexander (1856-1915).

In several instances, educators are the subjects of more elaborate permanent memorials. Stained glass windows and murals are the most common forms. The first such memorial window to be commissioned honors Lydia F. Wadleigh (1817-1888) and Susan K. Bourne, pioneers of higher education for women. Wadleigh High School's associate classes of 1909 sponsored the window, fabricated by Lederle Studios. Conceived as an allegory, the window is a tour-de-force in stained glass design. A brilliant wash of colors forms a sunset backdrop, alluding to life's end, behind the central figure symbolizing Wisdom. (Fig. 28) Only the inscription links the window to specific individuals.

Equally impressive is the mural honoring Dr. William H. Maxwell (1852-1920), who was Superintendent of public instruction in Brooklyn and then of Greater New York

⁵New York City Board of Education, *Journal of the Board of Education*, 23 February 1905, 344.

from 1887-1918. A giant among New York City public school educators, he sought to revolutionize the school system by revamping the curriculum and professionalizing teaching. In 1912, at a ceremony at Carnegie Hall honoring Maxwell for twenty-five years of service, he affirmed, "To provide and to improve the means of training teachers in this city was, from the beginning, and still is, my first and highest aspiration To eliminate political, social and religious influences from the appointment and promotion of teachers, to make appointment and promotion depend solely on merit and to secure the best available teachers, whether they come from this city or from any other place, was and is the object for which I have never ceased to strive."⁶ To further this aim, Maxwell campaigned for a State law passed in 1895 that fixed standards for individuals seeking teaching licenses in the State of New York. Supplementing that effort, he established special teacher training schools in New York City. Appropriately, the mural honoring him is entitled *Education Providing Leadership* and is installed in the entrance to P.S. 138 in Brooklyn, formerly the Brooklyn Training School for Teachers, after his death renamed the Maxwell Training School. (Fig. 29) In 1922, shortly after Maxwell died, a group of teachers commissioned Francis Luis Mora (1874-1940) to paint a commemorative mural.⁷ Like the designer of the window honoring Wadleigh, Mora created an allegory celebrating education and by inference, Maxwell. Technically, the

⁶Samuel P. Abelow, *Dr. William H. Maxwell* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Scheba Publishing Co., 1934), 112.

⁷The mural is undated. Mora writes in his diary for 28 June 1922: "Splendid news from Brooklyn - The Maxwell Memorial is mine - got my first contract money, so that now it is up to me." F.L. Mora Papers, Roll no. 3569, Frame # 1377, Archives of

memorial is really two oil on canvas paintings set into an existing elaborate wood frame opposite the school's main entrance. In the center of the two images is a lengthy inscription, the key to the memorial. The teachers who commissioned the artwork undoubtedly chose this phrase for Mora to illustrate: "In honor of William Henry Maxwell/ It is the teacher's privilege to bring light and leading into the child's life and who can say how far that light and leading may extend/from an address by William Maxwell." In the left panel, the Angel of Enlightenment entreats a group of children robed in the timeless garb of classical antiquity to reach toward Knowledge, symbolized by the sun. (Fig. 30) She reappears in the second panel standing vigil over a group of children dressed in vaguely contemporary garb clustered around a young woman reading, presumably their teacher. (Fig. 31)

Stylistically, the mural combines elements of Mora's work as an illustrator and decorative painter, although he was also an able portraitist. The outlined figures and simplified composition make the narrative easy to follow but the colorful, impressionistic landscape belies Mora's exposure to Impressionism when under the tutelage of Frank W. Benson (1862-1951) and Edmond C. Tarbell (1862-1938) at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, followed in 1895 by travels in Spain and France. Mora began his career as a muralist in his twenties, receiving his first mural commission in 1900 for the reading room of the Lynn Library in Massachusetts, followed by commissions for the Orpheum Theatre in Los Angeles, Red Cross Headquarters in Washington, D.C., and at the end of

American Art.

his career the U.S. Post Offices in Clarksville, Tennessee and Catasauqu, Pennsylvania. Shortly after completing the Maxwell commission, in 1925 Mora had a one-man show at the Cincinnati Art Museum.⁸

Over the years, school anniversaries have prompted a number of commemorative artworks, usually commissioned by alumni or graduating classes. At Old Girls' High School in Brooklyn, the class of 1914 funded a double stained glass window marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the school for the new library edition. The window depicts Knowledge and Wisdom, typical motifs for public school art.⁹

World War I Memorials

Reluctantly and after much provocation, America joined Britain and France and declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. The United States was in the war for nineteen months, during which time 4,800,000 men served in the armed forces. 367,864 came from New York State, more than any other state.¹⁰ 53,000 U.S. troops died in combat and another 63,000 died from wounds and other causes.

⁸There is no monograph on Mora. Biographical information can be found in Patricia Jobe Pierce, *Edmund C. Tarbell and the Boston School of Painting 1889-1980* (Hingham, MA: Pierce Galleries, Inc, 1980), 166. See also Artist File, Public Art for Public Schools, New York City Board of Education.

⁹The school, located at 475 Nostrand Avenue is currently known as the Brooklyn Adult Training Center. A fire destroyed the library and the windows were relocated to a multi-purpose room. For a photograph of the windows in their original location, see John J. Donovan, *School Architecture* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1921), 302.

¹⁰United States War Department, *The War with Germany; A Statistical Summary* (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1919), 23.

The United States had to mobilize an army quickly, which in 1917 was a meager force of 130,000 regulars and a reserve of 70,000 national guardsmen. To achieve this end, in May 1917, Congress passed the Selective Service Act--the draft. All men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-one were required to register, which was done in thousands of districts throughout the country. In New York City alone, 540,000 men registered in answer to the first call, but a much smaller number was actually inducted.¹¹

A year later, Congress expanded the pool of eligible draftees by extending the age limits from eighteen to forty-five. Male high school students too young for the draft received military training, a minimum of three hours per week in addition to regular instruction.

It didn't take long for pro-war propaganda to filter down to the nation's schools. Teachers were seen as "the pioneer outpost of the government, standing at the threshold of the nation's homes."¹² Just days after President Wilson's address to Congress, the New York City Board of Education passed several resolutions to enlist the aid of teachers and students. To begin with, the Board asked teachers to sign a petition declaring their patriotism and loyalty to the government and their willingness to "pledge ourselves by word and example to teach and impress upon our pupils the duty of loyal obedience and patriotic service as the highest ideal of American citizenship."¹³

The Board required teachers to instruct students in all grades about the origins of

¹¹Teacher's Council, N.Y. Committee on School Records and Statistics. *War Work in the Public Schools of the City of New York* (New York, F. Hubner & Co., Inc., 1933), 64.

¹²*Ibid.*, 33.

¹³*Ibid.*, 12.

the conflict and why it was necessary for America to send over troops. In elementary school curricula, instructors emphasized “patriotism, heroism and sacrifice.”¹⁴ Older students learned about the evils of German autocracy in contrast to the goodness of American democracy. Although a significant number of educators argued a thoughtful approach should be taken to a discussion of patriotism and democracy, ultimately educational authorities permitted no ambiguities and patriotism became inseparable from nationalism. The nature of the conflict, its causes, and the necessity for American involvement were presented in black and white terms. Samuel B. Harding, Prof. of History at the University of Indiana formulated a course for high schools. Harding originally prepared the course for troops in training camps but the government eventually distributed it to nearly 800,000 secondary school teachers and students. On the surface, Harding's account appeared to be objective, but it was based on heavily biased sources such as information promulgated by the Committee of Public Information, the government's propaganda machine. Germany came across as the evil enemy. Dispensing with all academic objectivity, Harding harangued, “Germany does not really wage war. She assassinates, massacres, poisons, tortures, intrigues.”¹⁵

Schools took an active role in the war effort, providing space and equipment for

¹⁴For a discussion of the impact of government propaganda on the nation's schools, see David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 53-59 and Lewis Paul Todd, *Wartime Relations of the Federal Government and the Public Schools 1917-1918* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1945).

¹⁵Harding, *the Study of the Great War*, 55 quoted in Lewis Paul Todd, *Wartime Relations of the Federal Government and the Public Schools 1917-1918* (New York:

training specialized troops and raising funds. Collections of all types were taken up. For example, in response to a government appeal for fruit pits and nut shells needed to provide carbon filters for gas masks, New York City public school students and teachers donated over two hundred tons.¹⁶

When the guns finally quieted, and the Treaty of Versailles made peace a political reality, previously warring nations turned inward and began the process of national healing. The creation of war memorials was an important part of that process. Although no one disagreed about the necessity of honoring America's slain soldiers, there was extensive debate about how best to do it. There was a large thrust toward utilitarian memorials, such as parks and amphitheaters and an equally strong counter movement to commission traditional memorials.¹⁷ But no matter what your opinion on the best type of memorial was, there was a shared sense that memorials should not just glorify the general or admiral but should recognize the contributions and ultimate sacrifice made by the common soldier.

Soon after the war ended, the American Federation of Arts entered the fray and issued guidelines to steer groups toward artistic solutions. They listed numerous types,

Teachers College, Columbia University, 1945), 53.

¹⁶Teachers Council, *War Work*, 80-81.

¹⁷For a discussion of World War I memorials, see James M. Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 79-99 and Kurt G. Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), Chapt. 3 "The War to End all Wars," 92-125. See also the entire issue of *The American Magazine of Art* 10, no. 7 (May 1919) which considers the problem of World War I memorials in the context of past examples.

including memorial rooms, but there was no mention of murals. However, the Federation advised, "Any form that can be made to express feelings of honor, respect, love of country, devotion to freedom and the glory of the triumph of democracy will be appropriate." Further, "The most impressive monument is one which appeals to the imagination alone, which rests not upon its material use but upon its idealism."¹⁸

National and local groups sponsored memorials. On the national level, the government established overseas cemeteries and monuments, since it was not feasible to bring home the remains of all dead soldiers. At home, the federal government built the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. The ritual of internment began on Memorial Day 1921, when the body of an unknown soldier who fought in the Marne Valley was selected for burial, and concluded on Veteran's Day, 1921, when the body was laid to rest. President Harding and hundreds of dignitaries witnessed this symbolic funeral. The inscription on the tomb says: "Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God." The most complex World War I memorial is the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City, completed in 1926. It consists of a tower and court, memorial halls, and a commemorative frieze. The Liberty Memorial was intended not only to remember those who died in the war but also to serve as a symbol of peace.¹⁹

¹⁸American Federation of Arts, *War Memorials*, 24 February 1919, n.p.

¹⁹See Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape*, 86-89. For an amplification of the government's hidden agenda in commissioning war memorials, see Piehler who writes, "National leaders conceived of the overseas cemeteries and monuments, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and Armistice Day ceremonies as a way of mythologizing America's first European war at a time when Americans of all regions, classes, and ethnic groups united behind a common goal. At the same time, they offered a message

In New York City, World War I memorials are much more modest. The most notable among them is the *107th Infantry Memorial* (1927) by Karl Illava (1896-1954) at the edge of Central Park at East 67th Street. The monument conveys the terror and courage of soldiers charging the front lines. The sculptor, himself a sergeant with the 107th Infantry, based the monument on his own experience. Responding in a different way, in the *Washington Heights-Inwood War Memorial* (1921), Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875-1942) shows soldiers in the aftermath of battle as they struggle to safety. Like Illava, Whitney also witnessed the war from the battlefield. She served as a volunteer at a field hospital in France, where she made numerous sketches of wounded soldiers. In the work, Whitney honors the dead without glorifying their suffering and forces the viewer to confront war's brutality.²⁰ By the close of the 1920s, there were over 130 World War I memorials dotting the five boroughs.²¹ They marked small neighborhood parks, stretching from Woodlawn Heights in the Bronx to New Dorp, Staten Island. It is within this context that New York City school memorials should be seen.

The majority of public school World War I memorials are simple bronze plaques.

that stressed peace and assured Americans that this conflict was a 'war to end all wars.'” Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way*, 185.

²⁰Margot Gayle and Michele Cohen, *The Art Commission and Municipal Art Society Guide to Manhattan's Outdoor Sculpture* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1988), 201, 323.

²¹The most comprehensive list of New York City war memorials is the “Draft Master List of War Memorials,” compiled by the Office of Arts and Antiquities, of the New York City Department of Parks.

Contrary to expectations, roughly half of them are in elementary schools not high schools, which numbered twenty-three when America entered the war.²² However, more elaborate memorials designed by artists rather than foundries were commissioned for high schools where there was more space and the memory of fallen soldiers was poignantly fresh. With the exception of one sculptural monument at Jamaica High School, Queens by Paul Fjelde (1933), these memorials take the form of murals, in keeping with the established tradition of public school art.

In school buildings, World War I memorials became sites for collective bereavement, a place where a dead soldier's extended family of teachers and students could grieve and honor him. By acknowledging sacrifice, the memorials also convey a feeling of indebtedness. They point to a better future made possible by those who gave their lives.²³

Public school World War I commemorations also provided an opportunity to promote patriotism and democracy, values already encoded in American public education. Just as President Wilson solicited American support for the war by arguing

²²There are WWI memorial tablets at Old Stuyvesant-M, DeWitt Clinton-X, P.S. 56-X, Erasmus Hall H.S.-K, P.S. 93-K, P.S. 113-K, P.S. 129-K, P.S. 134-K, P.S. 1-M, playground lower East side boys plaque, P.S. 40-M, P.S. 114-M, Bryant H.S.-Q, Newtown H.S.-Q, P.S. 72-Q, P.S. 87-Q, P.S. 94-Q, P.S. 10-S.I., stele with bronze eagles, and Boys' High School-K.

²³For a discussion of ideology underlying World War I memorials, see Jay Winter who writes, "Hope is a central theme in secular commemoration of the Great War . . . At the time, communal commemorative art provided first and foremost a framework for and legitimization of individual and family grief." Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 93.

we had to fight to make the “world safe for democracy,” reminders of the war, particularly for students, reinforced commitment to national ideals. Like the American flag in every school auditorium, World War I memorials became symbols of patriotism. As one principal explained, a memorial tablet would be “a reminder of the patriotism of the teachers, alumni, and undergraduates who have served in the Great War. This tablet has been donated by the class that graduated in January this year as an earnest [sic] of its patriotism and of its desire that patriotism endure in the school in after years.”²⁴

**Auguste-Francois Gorguet, *In Memoriam* (1925-26)
Morris High School, Bronx**

On November 10, 1926, Armistice Day Eve eight years after the end of the war, the grand collegiate Gothic auditorium of Morris High School in the Bronx filled to capacity to dedicate *In Memoriam* by French painter Auguste-Francois Gorguet (1862-1927). (Fig. 32) The ceremony brought together a cross-section of the school and local community, co-mingling secular and religious sentiment. The proceedings began with a prayer by John R. McCurdy, Executive Secretary of the Bronx Y.M.C.A. and the singing of Morris teacher Charles Ballard's *Processional*.²⁵ Participants in the ceremony included the Reverend Irving F. Reichert of Tremont Temple, Reverend Francis P. Duffy,

²⁴ Arthur James to John Quincy Adams, 10 February 1919, Correspondence File 313, item 557, Art Commission. Mayo also discusses how memorials expressed nationalistic pride. See Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape*, 79.

²⁵ The lyrics combine patriotic fervor with visions of heaven in such lines as: “To you who passed/This word:/When the call came you heard/ And, smiling, offered all/For God and the world.”

Chaplin, 69th Regiment, and Forest Grant, Director of Art in High Schools, who formally accepted the mural for the Board of Education. Other speakers were a student representative, Miss Dela P. Mussey, Chairman of the Mural committee, artist Mr. Ernest Peixotto, former Morris High School principal, Dr. John H. Denbigh, and current Morris principal, Elmer E. Bogart. Also present were several relatives of the honored dead, including Gold Star mothers.²⁶ The ritual of remembrance enacted around the mural effectively transformed the auditorium into a sacred space.²⁷ *The Morris Piper* recounts, "The anthems, the addresses, the roll call of Morris patriots will remain indelibly fixed on the hearts of those who were in the audience. There was present throughout the services a spirit of reverence, of sadness, and yet of exaltation. There were none who gazed that evening upon the glorious tribute to the hero dead of Morris without being profoundly stirred."²⁸

According to the *Morris Piper*, 867 graduates of Morris fought in the war. Eighteen died.²⁹ Those who lost their lives were a combination of volunteers, draftees

²⁶Mothers of soldiers were urged to display a gold star in their homes during the war. At the end of hostilities, mothers whose sons were killed took on the identity of Gold Star Mothers. For a discussion of Gold Star mothers, see Piehler, chapt. 3 "The War to End all Wars," 92-125.

²⁷Mayo explores the idea of sacred space. See Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape*, 4.

²⁸*Morris Piper*, November 12, 1926, vol. XXI.

²⁹Of the number of soldiers inducted, high school graduates actually constituted a small percentage of the armed forces. Of the total number of native-born white males who served, fewer than 18% had high school diplomas. See Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, 188.

and officers. They ranged in age from seventeen to twenty-five.³⁰ Stretching some fifty feet, the arched space spanning the proscenium arch was long considered a prime mural site. School architect C. B. J. Snyder described it as “perhaps the largest available space for mural decoration there is in the entire borough.”³¹ Prior to Gorguet’s commission and before America entered the war, Morris High School’s principal had made inquiries about how long it would take to create a wall painting for that site.³² Shortly thereafter,

³⁰The most extensive biographical information on the Morris High School graduates killed in the war can be found in the 12 November 1926 edition of the *Morris Piper*. The paper listed the following names and circumstances of their deaths: John C. Bryan, Henry W. Gundlach, Philip Hassinger, Jeremiah S. Hennesey, Philip G. Hewitt, Newberry Holbrook, Frank H. Mason, William Novy, Isidore Rotgard, Edwin F. Sampson; Emanuel Abel, graduates class of June 1914. Left Cornell University and enlisted in the Company A. 39th Infantry. Member of the Regular Army and left for France immediately. Died at the battle of the Argonne-Meuse, 30 September 1918 at age of 21; Lieutenant James Cowan Andes, graduate class of 1910, was a member of Morris High School rifle team, died July 19, 19? heroically leading platoon near Soissons; Elliott B. Clark, Jr. died while carrying a dispatch on motorcycle at age of 17; Sergeant Lawrence F. Condon, killed on 4 September 1918 in action; Sergeant Matthew Crosson, graduate class of June, 1912. Went to France, August, 1914 with Company F. of the 54th Pioneer Regiment, died of pneumonia on 7 October 1914 at age of 25; Frederick Eriksen, entered service in 1917, sailed with the 107th of New York’s famous 27th Division for France in June, 1918. Regiment was combined with British and French forces on the western front. Eriksen on going over the top was struck by gunshot and instantly killed. Comrades buried him at Abeele, France; William Jones graduate class of June 1913. Was on Morris High School football team, graduate of City College, June 1917. Entered Officers’ Training Camp at Plattsburg, died there after three months of para-typhoid; David W. Miller, served with the 30th Engineers at Camp Upton, died 17 March 1918 from appendicitis.

³¹C. B. J. Snyder to John Quincy Adams, 1 July 1916, Correspondence File 313, item 407a., Art Commission.

³²There are several letters regarding this. James P. Haney, Director of Art in High Schools, advised it would have to be painted in situ and would require “three or four months of quite strenuous labor.” James P. Haney to John Quincy Adams, 1 July 1916, Correspondence File 313, item 406a, Art Commission. Adams disagreed with

on 1 July 1916, the Board of Education submitted sketches by H. Ledyard Towle for a mural over the proscenium arch to the Art Commission for preliminary approval. At the July 11, 1916 meeting, without an explanation, the Art Commission disapproved the sketch entitled, "The Arrival of the Continental Army at Morris Heights."³³

Gorguet's mural has been variously known as *After Conflict Comes Peace* and *In Memoriam*, indicative of the multivalent meanings imbedded in the painted image. Stylistically, it is a combination of a classical allegory and an actual landscape based on careful observation. It features a cenotaph bearing an honor roll inscribed with the names of the Morris boys who died. On the left, an angelic Immortal Glory holds an antique lamp to perpetually illuminate the names of the dead. To the right of the cenotaph is the seated figure Good Government shown holding a sheathed sword and tablet of the law, implying that good government, i.e., democracy, will prevail. Next to her is the semi-reclining figure, Peace. The backdrop is the scarred landscape of Chateau-Thierry with the victorious allies coming over the horizon in the upper left. In correspondence, Gorguet himself referred to the mural as *In Memoriam* and inscribed the phrase in the upper right segment of the mural, so it seems that is the correct title.³⁴ However, the dedication program calls the mural *After Conflict Comes Peace*. The

Haney's assessment and advised Denbigh that the amount of time would be impossible to estimate and would vary depending on the artist and complexity of the design. John Quincy Adams to John H. Denbigh, 5 July 1916, Correspondence File 313, item 408, Art Commission.

³³See Exhibition file 906-A-E, Art Commission.

³⁴Letter from Auguste Gorguet to Marshall, 28 August 1925, Correspondence File 313, item 1115c, Art Commission.

mural's dual identity, underscored by its two titles and highlighted in its imagery, points to its role as memorial and promoter of democracy. It illustrates the victory of the Allied Forces, but at a price. While parts of the mural transcend the reality of war, other sections force the viewer to confront the detritus of war at close to a panoramic scale. Although Gorguet acknowledges war's devastating impact, he also celebrates the heroism of Morris graduates killed in the war and provides a ray of hope, affirming that democratic ideals (i.e., "Good Government") can prevent such mass destruction in the future. The mural both pays tribute to those who died and validates the fact they fought.

In developing the design, Gorguet had to carefully consider the architectural parameters of the space. The existing plaster work and pilasters frame the image, painted on seven canvas pieces, carefully cut to fill the exact shape of the arch.³⁵ The focal point, marking the mural's center, is the pyramidal allegorical group positioned over the apex of the arch. The figures project against an expansive landscape that tapers to narrow sections, ending where the balcony meets the arch. Two carved oak Tiffany tablets incised with gold leaf lettering, originally placed at the lower part of the proscenium arch, completed the war memorial at the time of its dedication. Of Gothic design, the plaques expand upon the intent behind the mural. One under the heading *In Memoriam* lists the names of the eighteen Morris students killed in the war followed by the phrase quoted from the memorial poem read at the dedication: "When the call came you heard/ and smiling offered all." The inscription on the other reads: "This mural

³⁵As part of the 1991 conservation of this mural, the two lowest sections on each side were recreated from photographs.

painting/ is a tribute/ to the service and sacrifice/ of Morris Men and Women/ in the World War/ Placed here/ in proud and grateful/ remembrance/ by pupils alumni and teachers/ of the Morris High School/ Dedicated /November 10, 1926.”³⁶

Beginning the process in 1921, it took several years for Morris teachers, students, and alumni to raise the \$9,000 needed to commission the mural, awarded to Gorguet in 1925.³⁷ The artist and his assistant, American Edward S. Dubuque from Pawtucket, R.I., painted the mural in France at a studio at the École Américaine des Beaux-Arts in Fontainebleau, where Gorguet taught and Dubuque was a student. The Morris High School mural was Gorguet’s last major commission before his death. The French artist was well known as a muralist, tapestry designer and illustrator. Prior to the Morris High School project, Gorguet had collaborated with Pierre Carrier-Belleuse (1851-1933) and over one hundred other artists on a monumental war memorial mural depicting thousands of the political and military figures of the Allied Forces, and it’s likely that experience contributed to his selection for the Morris High School project.³⁸

A product of solid academic training, Gorguet studied painting with Gustave Boulanger (1824-1888), Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904), and Léon Bonnat (1833-1922) and architecture at the College of Fine Arts. He began exhibiting in 1883 and

³⁶See Exhibition File 906-L, Art Commission.

³⁷In the *Morris High School Annual* of 1927, the writer proudly notes: “For six long years the dream of our faculty and of the student body has been slowly materializing, until now, on the eve almost, of our graduation, it has become a reality.” *Morris High School Annual* (1927), 53. The Bronx County Historical Society Research Library, Bronx, New York.

³⁸This mural is now in Kansas City. See discussion later in this chapter.

participated in the Universal Exposition of 1889. He first attracted recognition as a painter of mythological subjects in paintings such as *Aphrodite and Eros* and *Pomone et le Dieu Vertumne*, formerly exhibited in the Musée du Luxembourg. His first acclaim came in Salon of 1894 with his *Jardin des Hesperides* (Musée de Beziers). Gorguet was a member of the Superior Council of Decorative Art and a member of the Jury of the Paris Salon. As a committed muralist, Gorguet believed that historical murals were the apogee of the painter's art. He admired the Italian Renaissance painter Benozzo Gozzoli's frescoes and the work of Giotto, Piero della Francesca, Ghirlandajo, Filippo Lippi, and the French primitives.³⁹

Gorguet never abandoned classicism, but he recast subjects in a contemporary light. In his 1907 *Art et Decoration* article on Gorguet, Alfred Poulet wrote about Gorguet's modernity, citing his *Jardin des Hesperides* as an example. In this painting, Gorguet avoids specific mythological details and portrays two women in contemporary dress. Poulet summed up Gorguet's appeal: "Modern by inclination, but classic in the most profound sense of the word, by the purity of design, the beautiful arrangement of composition and style: all the charm of Gorguet will henceforth continue between the two terms of this happy opposition."⁴⁰ Gorguet's ability to balance careful observation

³⁹For biographical information on Gorguet, see Thieme-Becker Vol. XIV, 399-400 and Alfred Poulet, "A.-F. Gorguet," *Art and Decoration* 2 (1907): 69-80.

⁴⁰"Moderne de velléité, mais classique au sens le plus profond du mot, par la pureté du dessin, la belle ordonnance de la composition et le style: tout le charme de Gorguet se maintiendra désormais entre les deux termes de cette heureuse opposition." Alfred Poulet, "A.-F. Gorguet," *Art and Decoration* (1907) vol. II: 71.

based on the real world with a timelessness and purity of design also characterizes the Morris mural where the allegorical figures project with a sculptural presence against a realistic landscape.

By the spring of 1925, Gorguet was ready to submit a sketch to the Art Commission for preliminary approval.⁴¹ Gorguet explained, "In the distance and to the right are the French fields with a view of Chateau-Thierry where the Americans fought. Near the barbed wire lies a village in ruins, shell holes and on this field of battle be two bodies of dead soldiers (American)." Continuing, Gorguet noted, "The whole scene takes place against a clear and radiant sky, a cloudless sky. It is early morning, Chateau-Thierry still smolders and one can see the smoke clouds patterned against the sky. The fields are rain soaked and the roads battered. One should feel that a terrible storm has just passed, and that peace is once more with us."⁴²

As correspondence and comparison with the completed mural illustrate, after receiving Preliminary Approval from the Art Commission, Gorguet made numerous changes, some because of dimension discrepancies, which the artist corrected by taking his own measurements, and some because of artistic reasons. Neither the Art Commission nor Morris High School requested that these modifications be made. Dubuque, who acted as translator and intermediary to the Art Commission as well as Gorguet's assistant, itemized these alterations in a letter to the Art Commission:

⁴¹The Art Commission granted Preliminary Approval on June 9, 1925. See Exhibition File 906 F, G, H, and I, Art Commission.

⁴²Artist's statement submitted with Art Commission application for preliminary

3. We conserve entirely the symbolical figure of immortal glory illuminating the eighteen names of the heroes. 4. We have sought in the figure symbolizing good government one of more commanding attitude. It is the dominating figure for color and form. 5. We have added to the right and at the foot of government a third, symbolizing peace. She holds an olive branch. 6. To the right side of our cartoon from the studies we have made at Chateau-Thierry we have considerably developed the landscape in giving Chateau-Thierry its due importance and by increasing the ruins that have a historic importance. 7. The battered, broken, half buried cannon signifies the end of war. 8. On the left the victorious armies do not as in the first sketch represent the American and French forces, but all the allies. The American, the French, the English, the Belgian and Italian armies etc. 9. The small color sketch is a faithful copy of our second color sketch.⁴³

In developing the cartoon, Gorguet used clay maquettes, live models and the actual landscape of Chateau-Thierry.⁴⁴

In the completed mural, Gorguet toned down the realism of the original conception. He replaced the dead soldiers with an allegorical figure representing Peace and a mangled canon, a more palatable image than corpses sprawled in the dirt. As a replacement, the battered canon takes on the symbolism of battered flesh. In the final design, Gorguet also increased the prominence of the village in ruins, and on the left side of the composition he pushed the barbed wire away from the foreground, with the effect of allowing viewers entry into the scene. The laurel tree, symbolic of Glory, becomes an oak in autumn colors, symbolic of the Armistice Day season and life's end, and assumes

approval. Exhibition File 906 F,G,H, and I, Art Commission.

⁴³Dubuque to Henry Marshall, n.d. stamped received by Art Commission, 1 October 1925, Correspondence File 313, item 1112, Art Commission.

⁴⁴Dubuque mentions this in an earlier letter to Henry Rutgers Marshall, received 10 September 1925. Correspondence File 313, items 1115, 1115a, 1115b. Art Commission.

a more symmetrical form rising over the cenotaph like a protective umbrella. In the finished mural, Gorguet also changed the features and headdress of the figure of Good Government to resemble the figure of Victory in the monumental *Pantheon de la Guerre* mural.

In the completed mural, the pockmarked landscape takes on a prominence equal to the allegorical figures at its center. Gorguet carefully recorded the physical remains of trench warfare. The barbed wire used as a last defense before the line of trenches, the water-filled shell holes, wrecked canon carriage, and blasted brick and stucco buildings are evidence of the savage battle that took place. Gorguet, an eyewitness to the war and a parent who also lost a son on the battlefield, nevertheless edited the most gruesome aspects of the scene.⁴⁵ He, unlike anti-war novelist Erich Marie Remarque in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, does not want to disgust viewers. Gorguet's depiction of a battlefield contrasts markedly with this vivid description from Remarque's searing account: "The brown earth, the torn, blasted earth, with a greasy shine under the sun's rays; the earth is the background of this restless, gloomy world of automatons, our gasping is the scratching of a quill, our lips are dry, our heads are debauched with stupor- thus we stagger forward, and into our pierced and shattered souls bores the torturing image of the brown earth with the greasy sun and the convulsed and dead soldiers who lie

⁴⁵When the mural was dedicated, Gorguet explained, "The mural represents the best I had to give. My own privations in the Great War gave me inspiration to paint it. I have lived and felt what I have put into the Morris High School Memorial." *The Morris Piper*, 12 November 1926, clipping file, Morris High School Library.

there . . .⁴⁶

In placing the scene, Gorguet chose Chateau-Thierry because it represented the second major American victory in the war after Cantigny. It was also a battle where the American and French forces fought side by side, a fact that did not escape the French muralist. Chateau-Thierry was built on both banks of the River Marne and marked the border of the German advance after the massive German offensive of March-July 1918. It was the point closest to Paris, and if the Germans had crossed the bridges unifying the town, it was likely that Paris would have been taken. The Americans joined the battle on May 31st with the American Third Division fighting and the American 7th Machine Gun Battalion defending the troops.

Shortly before executing the mural for Morris High School, Gorguet contributed to a French monumental commemorative mural celebrating the victory of the Allied Forces. The most ambitious mural of its kind, the project started during the war after the French victory of the Marne in October of 1914 and was dedicated on October 19, 1918 by French President Poincaré. Pierre Carrier-Belleuse initiated the project and enlisted the help of Gorguet, who with twenty-eight other French artists and the assistance of more than one hundred additional artists covered a canvas 402 feet long by forty-five feet high. The artists painted the mural to lift morale and serve as a visual record of the war. The mural includes over 6,000 life-size portraits of World War I heroes and military and political figures of all the allied nations. These are set against realistic depictions of

⁴⁶Erich Marie Remarque, translated from the German by A. W. Wheen, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1930), 115-116.

battlefields in France and Belgium.⁴⁷

Gorguet assisted Carrier-Belleuse by developing a compositional structure for the sprawling image, which in its original installation was hung like a circular curtain with a 130-foot diameter. He recommended using architectural elements to organize the space. Gorguet explained: "At this juncture I recalled the study of architecture which I had pursued at the College of Fine Arts, in the studio of the great decorator Gallaud, and I made a proposition to my friend Carrier in which architecture, as a matter of fact, played a considerable part. I suggested an antique temple, a temple of glory, in front of which would be erected a monumental (bronze) statue of Victory, with a stairway to be not less monumental, upon the steps of which we might place our heroes."⁴⁸ Carrier-Belleuse suggested the detailed, panoramic landscape for the background.

The overall conception for the Morris mural as well as specific elements derive from the *Pantheon de la Guerre* precedent. Both feature a "Monument to the Dead," figures which signify mourning, and funereal embellishments like a wreath wound in crepe. Gorguet even modeled the head of Good Government on the head of Victory that

⁴⁷For information on the mural see pamphlet entitled *Pantheon de la Guerre*, 1932 in the archives of the Liberty Memorial Museum of World War One, Kansas City, Missouri. The *Pantheon de la Guerre* was brought to the United States in 1927 following negotiations between the French government and the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, which wanted to use the mural to raise funds for the Monticello shrine in Virginia. Subsequently, the mural was displayed in connection with the Washington Bicentennial and Century of Progress exposition in Chicago in 1933. In 1959, Daniel MacMorris, a student of Gorguet in 1924 and painter of a mural at Memorial Hall, restored and redesigned sections of the mural for its installation in Memorial Hall.

⁴⁸*Pantheon de la Guerre*, (1932), 3. Archives of the Liberty Memorial Museum

he had painted for the *Pantheon de la Guerre*. In the Morris mural, the monument to the dead is of course on a much smaller scale. Instead of the archetypal grieving mother, wife or sister, seen prostrate on the stairs leading to the Temple of Victory in the *Pantheon de la Guerre*, in the Morris mural, Gorguet includes a reclining figure of Peace whose face conveys the anguish of loss. The most striking similarity between the two murals is the synthesis of a realistic landscape based on actual battlefields with classical architecture and allegorical figures.

Gorguet's use of allegory and traditional commemorative conventions eloquently demonstrates historian Jay Winter's observation that in World War I memorials traditional art forms offered solace to mourners in a way that modernist forms could not.⁴⁹ In his mural, Gorguet provided the Morris High School community a strategy for reconciling their grief with notions of patriotic service. But he also conceived of an image that in its combination of historical specificity and timeless allegory succeeds in engaging contemporary viewers in the drama and tragedy of World War I.

**Abraham J. Bogdanove, *Peace* (1922)
Manual Training High School, Brooklyn**

In *Peace*, unveiled at Brooklyn's Manual Training High School (now John Jay High School) on 7 November 1922, Abraham J. Bogdanove (1886-1946) expresses similar ideals. (Fig. 33) He also stresses peace and unity but he removes his image from

of World War One, Kansas City, Missouri.

⁴⁹Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory; Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

the trenches of the battlefield and situates it in the metropolis of New York. The mural has a more overt didactic message, placing the experience of the war in an educational context. The figure of the returning soldier becomes the teacher instructing a new generation of students. Seated in the foreground facing three students, he gestures upward in an effort to explain why soldiers fought and died. In the background linking the soldier with the students and placing the memorial in a specific locale is the Manhattan skyline. Above these “real life” figures painted with sculptural solidity, rises a vision of universal peace, executed in an unnaturalistic palette of vermillion, golden orange and lavender. Inspired by the well-known passage from Isaiah, “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks,” four muscular colossal male figures veiled in smoke strain under their labors at the anvil. As if levitated out of the heat and fire, the figure of Peace towers above. With arms outstretched and body erect as an arrow, in her right hand she holds a crystal representing Enlightenment and in her left the traditional olive branch. A deep turquoise blue envelops the whole mirage. The inscription from Isaiah decorates the lower border. In its original installation near the school’s main stairway, the thirteen foot high by eleven foot wide image was set in a marble frame above a bronze plaque bearing the names of the twenty-five graduates of Manual Training High School who gave their lives in the war. Seals of the State of New York and the Board of Education bracketed the dedication plaque.⁵⁰

⁵⁰In the 1960s, John Jay school officials removed the mural and replaced it with a mural commemorating veterans of the Viet Nam War. The mural remained in storage

In the initial conception of the mural, as described for Art Commission preliminary approval, Bogdanove viewed the four figures at the anvil as representatives of four races, coming together in quest of world peace. In the final painting, ethnic differences are minimized.⁵¹ It's not clear why Bogdanove made these changes.

In developing the design for the memorial mural, commissioned by the General Organization of Manual Training High School at a cost of \$2,500, Bogdanove submitted various sketches to the school. The committee in charge of the commission seriously considered one other design. In a letter to the students of Manual printed in the school newspaper, the principal described both conceptions, revealing the message the school hoped to impart by sponsoring the mural. The principal provided this description: "One depicted an American farm-boy hearing the call to arms, seeing his duty revealed in a vision, and saying good-bye to his loved ones. The vision, occupying the centre of the sketch showed *Young America* a heroic figure brimful of energy, courage and enthusiasm, snatching the *Torch of Civilization* from the hand of an exhausted but equally heroic figure, *Europe*." Bogdanove's design is a close visual parallel to the widely popularized perception of youthful, vigorous America going to the aid of a worn and ailing Europe. Principal Snyder elucidated further:

The sketch was splendidly conceived and beautifully executed; and, I think, would have been chosen but for the fact that many of us felt that the story was not true. The Great War was necessary in order to *save* civilization. Is war ever a justifiable instrument to *advance* civilization? . . . We confidently believed we

until 1998. The Board installed it at Newcomers High School in Long Island City, Queens.

⁵¹Exhibition File 1098-A, Art Commission.

were fighting in order that wars might end forever, and that mankind might find permanent peace. We wanted the memorial to Manual's soldiers to tell this story and to tell it simply, to all boys and girls who shall enter this school forevermore.

And so in the picture we finally selected, we have our soldier boy telling you why he went to war. And just above, you can see what he is saying, and all his hopes. You see the energy of mankind, turned from the fabrication of war materials, to the construction of those of peace. You see the glorified figure of Peace, rising majestically from the smoke and vapors of the forge. In her left hand she holds aloft the symbolic olive branch, and in her right, the pure crystal of wisdom by which she is sustained.⁵²

When Bogdanove received the commission he was well known to school officials. He had been teaching mural painting at the New York Evening School of Industrial Art since 1913 where he remained until 1939 and art at Townsend Harris High School from 1919-1942. In 1918 he completed two murals, *Ancient Commerce* and *Modern Commerce* for Commercial High School, the first of several murals he was to paint for the New York City public schools.⁵³

Bogdanove had solid training as a muralist, first studying at Cooper Union from 1900-1903 with Charles Yardley Turner, who coincidentally was working on his murals for DeWitt Clinton High School. (See Chapter 3). Following Cooper Union, he attended the National Academy of Design (1903-1911), supplemented by studies at the Columbia School of Architecture (1908-1910). Bogdanove served as a studio assistant to muralist

⁵² *Prospect*, vol. XIX (December 1922). The author is indebted to Seth Bogdanove for kindly providing this information from his files.

⁵³ In 1997, the Board of Education conserved and relocated the murals at Commercial High School to Tottenville High School, Staten Island. The other murals Bogdanove painted are *Wisdom Giveth Life* (1925) also for Commercial High School; *Arrival of the Mayflower* (1926) for P.S. 43, Bronx; and *Caravels of Columbus* (1930) P.S. 43, Bronx.

Frank Millet and in 1912 received his first independent mural commission from the Hebrew Sheltering and Guardian Society in Pleasantville, New York.⁵⁴

Frederick Lincoln Stoddard, *Education as the Actuating Force in Patriotism* (1922) Eastern District High School, Brooklyn

Unlike Gorguet and Bogdanove, Frederic Lincoln Stoddard avoided all religious references in his World War I mural for Eastern District High School and emphasized instead the role education can play in promoting patriotism. Pupils, teachers and friends of Eastern District staged a pageant to raise the \$3,000 needed for the mural, which honors the 322 students and teachers from Eastern District who served in the war. Described as “Education as the Actuating force in Patriotism,”⁵⁵ Stoddard expands upon the theme he had inaugurated in the first set of panels completed for the high school. (See Chapter 3). The resultant image is more like a poster for the draft than a commemorative icon; it is a pictorial counterpart to the nationalistic sentiment promulgated by the government before and during the war. (Fig. 34)

With the American flag unfurled behind her and silhouetted by the harbor in the background, the personification of Patriotism is a combination of the *Statue of Liberty* and *Uncle Sam*. Majestic, steadfast, and elevated on a pedestal, she draws a group of

⁵⁴In addition to murals, Bogdanove was an accomplished landscape painter, a genre he pursued during summers spent on Monhegan Island in Maine. See Jessica Nicoll, *Abraham J. Bogdanove: Painter of Maine* (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 1997).

⁵⁵Exhibition File 807-H, I, J, Art Commission. The Art Commission granted preliminary approval on 20 February 1922 and final approval on 10 July 1922.

students toward her. With their backs turned to the viewer, they give her their undivided attention. The figure on the lower left removes his jacket as he prepares to take up the arms of industry. To the right of Patriotism, the helmets and uniforms of two soldiers are visible. Beyond them two battle ships float in the harbor. Designed for three Gothic arches for the school's Rodney Street entrance, the image was originally the focal point of two side panels with decorative borders bearing the names of the Eastern District students and teachers who served in the war.

The unabashed celebration of patriotism seen in World War I memorial murals is evident in other types of school murals commissioned during the 1920s. An example is George Lawrence Nelson's murals at P.S. 55, Bronx entitled *Education Inspiring Youth to Service and Loyalty*, submitted to the Art Commission for preliminary approval in 1926. This and similar school murals reflect the mood of America in the post-War World I period, a time when the country was swept up in a wave of nationalism and isolationist sentiment.

Although the number of commemorative artworks in schools swelled in the aftermath of the "war to end all wars," sadly, there have been subsequent tragic events which have also prompted the creation of memorial murals, but fewer examples than spawned by World War I.⁵⁶ And schools continue to honor beloved teachers by

⁵⁶It's likely that a combination of factors contributed to fewer World War II commemorative murals. Typically, schools added WW II plaques to existing WWI memorials. Secondly, after the flood of murals unleashed by the WPA, there was less available wall space in school buildings. The only significant WWII mural in the New York public schools is *Sacrifice of Youth for Democracy* (1952) by Abraham Joel Tobias at Madison High School, Brooklyn. However, in the aftermath of the World

sponsoring permanent commemorations.⁵⁷ Fueled by a basic human need to acknowledge life and share grief, commemorative art will always have a place in the New York City public schools.

Trade Center attack on 11 September 2001, several new schools that will be the recipients of permanent artwork have requested that these projects be modified to recognize the heroism of local firefighters and other community members.

⁵⁷ Students and alumni of Stuyvesant High School commissioned Madeleine Marx to create a memorial sculpture honoring Dr. Richard Rothenberg, a beloved science teacher who died in 1998.

CHAPTER 5

THE 1930S: THE NEW DEAL COMES TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The work relief programs spawned by the Great Depression of the 1930s shaped a decade of public art in the New York City public schools. Based on numbers alone, the impact of government art projects on the Board's collection was staggering,¹ but federal support of art in schools extended beyond auditorium walls. The New Deal institutionalized public art, providing the blueprint for government sponsorship of the arts which would eventually give rise to the Department of General Services' Art in Architecture program and city and state Percent for Art legislation. The federal art programs provided schools with new types of art, such as portfolios of original graphics, and reawakened interest in old mediums, such as true fresco. With work relief for artists came artistic diversity, and for the first time greater numbers of women and artists of color had opportunities to provide art for the schools. The decade also ushered in a more inclusive world view, anticipating multiculturalism and a preoccupation with the evolution of civilization, themes not previously addressed in public school art. Finally, the New Deal's desire to involve a broader public in the decision-making process associated with public art and to emphasize education encouraged the empowerment of students in the commissioning of school murals and validated the creative processes of students themselves.

¹Between 1930 and 1937, the Board of Education submitted 173 works of art to the Art Commission of the City of New York for approval. See Art Commission of the City of New York, *Condensed Report of the Art Commission of the City of New York for the Years 1930-37* (New York: Art Commission of the City of New York, 1937), 53.

The Depression and the New York City Public Schools

Government-funded art commissioned for public schools was a by-product of the widespread unemployment caused by the Great Depression. The stock market's plunge in the fall of 1929 shook the foundations of industry and finance and by 1933 the American economy had reached its nadir. The gross national product had dropped by 29 percent, consumption expenditures by 18 percent, construction by 78 percent, and investment by 98 percent. Concurrently, unemployment had risen from 3.2 to 24.9 percent.²

Mirroring conditions on a national level, thousands of New York City public school children faced severe poverty. In response to the worsening situation, in 1930 New York City Board of Education officials organized a School Relief Fund to raise money to feed and clothe thousands of needy pupils. Appealing to all principals, teachers, custodians and other school workers, Schools Superintendent William O'Shea noted, "the acute suffering and distress which now exists among thousands of families in this city is well known to the principals and teachers of our schools All classes are affected without regard to creed, race, or color Therefore, the Board of Education has authorized the sending of this call for contributions from all members of our teaching, supervising, and administrative staffs"³ During the next four and one half years, Board of Education employees raised over four million dollars to sustain the

²Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression : America, 1929-1941* (New York, N.Y. : Times Book, c1984 and New York, N.Y.: Time Reprint Edition, 1994), 75.

children they were charged with educating. The fund provided food, carfare, eyeglasses, and almost 700,000 pairs of shoes. In May of 1935, New York City Superintendent of Schools and Chairman of the School Relief Committee, Harold G. Campbell, issued a circular stating that due to inadequate funds the School Relief Committee would cease operating at the end of the term.⁴ Shortly after the termination of the School Relief Fund, the federal government began providing these and other essential services for public school children.

While teachers struggled to ensure that pupils had enough to eat, the Board of Education optimistically approved the largest school building program in its history. The 1931 plan, encompassing buildings in construction, on the drawing board, and proposed, appealed to the City for \$62 million to construct and furnish 136 new buildings and additions.⁵ Despite the grandiose vision, by 1936 when the next long-term plan was adopted, only thirteen projects costing \$8 million had been completed. This was a

³Circular dated 29 October 1930, Vertical File 517, School Relief, Teachers College.

⁴He reflected: "The curtain has rung down on all but the final act of a drama in which teachers, principals and other educational employees have borne an active part for nearly four years. While schools in a few favored neighborhoods have escaped prolonged contact with the victims of the depression there are others, and their number is many, that have faced it steadily month after month and day after day. No better test of character could be devised than this unremitting struggle to soften misery, to provide help for the helpless, to deal with the selfish who demanded that to which they were not entitled, and, notwithstanding, to continue to help those in need." School Relief Committee, 5 May 1934, Vertical File 517, School Relief, Teachers College.

⁵Board of Education of the City of New York, *Journal* (1931) vol. 1: 420-436. *New York Times* article dated 26 February 1931 declared, "Board of Education Approves

dramatic decrease as compared to the period 1926 - 1931, when the Board of Education had spent upwards of \$118 million on 140 new schools.⁶

As the Depression persisted, many schools were left partially constructed, or if the buildings were complete, the Board was unable to equip and furnish them. By the fall of 1933, the Board of Education had a huge back-log of uncompleted projects and made a plea for Federal funds in the amount of 27 million.⁷ At that time, thirteen elementary and six high schools could not be completed. By November of 1933, the request for federal funds to construct new schools rose to more than \$33 million.⁸ Within the year, the press reported that seventeen schools would soon be opened as a result of a

Largest Building Program in History of City System," Scrapbooks, vol. IV (1922-1932), 167, Art Commission.

⁶Board of Education, *Journal of the Board of Education* (1931) vol. 1, 430. The situation in New York City was representative of other urban centers in the state. Between the years 1931-34, the teaching staff decreased by 2.3 percent, current expenditures dropped by 13.1 percent, and capital outlay came to a screeching halt, plummeting by a 97.0 percent decrease. Statistics quoted from National Education Association, "Current Conditions in the Nation's Schools," *Research Bulletin* 11 (November 1933): 111, reproduced in David Tyack, et. al, *Public Schools in Hard Times* (Cambridge, Mass and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1984), 34-35. New York City teachers, along with other city employees, also experienced pay reductions. In 1932 the average pay decrease for all public school teachers was 6.5 percent. See Board of Education of the City of New York, "Report of the Superintendent of Schools: The First Fifty Years 1898-1948," (New York: New York City Board of Education, 1948), 115.

⁷"More Federal Funds Sought," *New York Sun*, 26 October 1933, Scrapbooks, vol. V, 154, Art Commission.

⁸"33,697,420 Asked for New Schools," *New York Times* 19 December 1933, Scrapbooks, vol. V, 187, Art Commission.

Federal loan for \$2,200,000.⁹ However, it wasn't until 1936 that the Board of Education reactivated a comprehensive school construction program. In this plan the Board reshuffled the building program to take advantage of federal loans, available only for projects providing immediate work. The Superintendent of Schools' annual report for the academic year 1935-36 stated: "After a considerable period of inactivity due to the economic situation new school building has been resumed and we have at present time fourteen new buildings actually under construction and twenty-two others on the planning tables."¹⁰ The report further confirmed that the Board's capital budget for 1936 would be \$25,250,000, and for 1937, \$30,000,000.

The Public Works of Art Project and the Works Projects Administration Federal Art Project

As the curve of school construction declined in the initial years of the Depression, the number of public artworks commissioned through various relief programs for the New York City public schools increased. Public assistance for artists and others went through numerous incarnations, beginning with private, then city, state and finally federal initiatives. New York City led the nation in establishing relief programs specifically for

⁹"17 Schools to Open," *New York Sun*, 9 April 1934, Scrapbooks, vol. VI, 43, Art Commission.

¹⁰New York City Board of Education, *All the Children: Thirty-eighth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools City of New York for School Year 1935-1936* (New York: New York City Board of Education, 1936), 115. See also, New York City Board of Education, *Report of the Superintendent, The First Fifty Years* (New York: New York City Board of Education, 1948), 117.

artists under the guidance of Harry Hopkins and the city's Emergency Relief Administration. The first such programs became operational in December of 1932.

One should keep in mind that these efforts, whether private or governmental, were experimental. Never before had the country been faced with an economic calamity of this magnitude; never before had government officials mustered this degree of ingenuity to combat unemployment in every sector of the economy. The federal programs which had the largest impact on the New York City public schools were the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) which operated from December 1933 to June 1934 and the Works Progress (later Projects) Administration Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP) in effect from August 1935-1943.¹¹

After the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in November of 1932, the federal government began to implement dramatic measures to bolster employment. By

¹¹There is an extensive literature on New Deal art projects. For sources most useful in a study of the PWAP and the FAP in New York City, see Greta Berman, *The Lost Years: Mural Painting in New York City Under the WPA Federal Art Project, 1935-1943*. (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1978); Eleanor M. Carr, "The New Deal and the Sculptor: A Study of Federal Relief to the Sculptor on the New York City Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration, 1935-43." (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1969); Marlene Park & Gerald E. Markowitz, *New Deal for Art; The Government Art Projects of the 1930s with Examples from New York City & State*. (Hamilton, N.Y.: Gallery Association of New York State, 1977); Francis V. O'Connor, *Federal Support for the Visual Arts: The New Deal and Now* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, Ltd., Second edition, 1971) and Audrey McMahon, "A General View of the WPA Federal Art Project in New York City and State," in Francis O'Connor, ed. *The New Deal Art Project: An Anthology of Memoirs* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972), 51-76. For the most inclusive bibliography on the New Deal, see Martin R. Kalfatovic, *The New Deal Fine Arts Projects: A Bibliography, 1933-1992* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1994) and for electronic sources see <http://Newdeal.feri.org>.

December of 1933, the Civil Works Administration, aimed at providing employment for white collar workers, began operations. This became the funding source for PWAP, the first federal program created to assist unemployed artists. In contrast to murals and sculptures commissioned by another federal art program, the Section of Fine Arts,¹² artists on the PWAP and later on the WPA/FAP did not compete for projects. For the PWAP, they merely had to be in need and for the WPA/FAP they had to be certified on relief. Many mural projects began under the PWAP, continued under the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA), which briefly redirected funding back to state control,¹³ and were completed under the WPA/FAP.¹⁴ Although the government agency changed, there was no major shift in how art was commissioned for schools or in the subjects artists chose, with the exception that under the PWAP artists received the

¹²For a discussion of the Section of Fine Arts, see Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1984).

¹³TERA began in 1931 as a state program.

¹⁴It is difficult to separate murals commissioned under various programs, because several were begun under the PWAP, continued under TERA and were completed under the WPA/FAP. Scholars have typically attributed these to the WPA/FAP. For example, Berman includes Maxwell Starr's *The History of Mankind in Terms of Mental and Physical Labor* with her inventory of WPA/FAP murals although it was begun under PWAP in 1934 and completed in 1941. See Greta Berman, *Mural Painting in New York City Under the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project*, 223 and Gregory Frux, "Brooklyn Tech's Magnificent Mural, *The History of Mankind in Terms of Mental and Physical Labor*" at <http://www.bthsalum.org/mural.htm>.

directive to paint some aspect of the “American Scene” and stick to representational art.¹⁵

Both the Art Commission of the City of New York and the New York City Board of Education mobilized quickly to support the PWAP and benefit from its initiatives. The Art Commission established emergency committees on painting, sculpture, and architecture to provide consultations on designs within a forty-eight hour period. In addition, the Commission’s assistant secretary, Dr. A. Everett Peterson, formulated guidelines outlining appropriate subjects and locations for public art projects in schools.¹⁶ On January 6, 1934, the *New York Times* reported that “356 artists Get Jobs on Buildings Here.”¹⁷

The Board of Education also took immediate action. The Board of Education’s bureaucratic machinery was well suited to working with the federal government. The Board had its own internal chain of command and procedures that could be smoothly integrated with a project of national scope. To expedite the process, the President of the Board appointed a mural committee to work with Juliana Force, New York City’s

¹⁵There are very few examples of abstract New Deal artworks in schools. A notable exception is Ilya Bolotowsky’s abstract fountain mosaic at Theodore Roosevelt High School, Bronx.

¹⁶Art Commission of the City of New York, *Condensed Report of the Art Commission of the City of New York for the Years 1930-37*, 83. A copy of this report, written by Dr. A. Everett Peterson, could not be found by the author.

¹⁷Scrapbooks, vol. V, 194, Art Commission.

regional director of the PWAP, in the selection of sites and the approval of designs.¹⁸

On January 17, 1934, Board President Ryan appointed a committee consisting of Louis S. Posner, Chairman, Walter Jeffreys Carlin, and Ralph McKee "to act, in conjunction with the Board of Superintendents, upon proposed mural decorations in public school buildings, which will be undertaken by artists employed in connection with the Civil Works Administration, and to report from time to time to the Board of Education."¹⁹

The Board also took the unusual step of soliciting input from students in the selection of subjects for artworks. To further this aim, Superintendent of Schools William O'Shea issued a circular to all school administrators:

The Committee on Buildings and Sites of the Board of Education on December 16, 1933, considered and approved a proposal of the Civil Works Administration to utilize the services of artists otherwise unemployed to make studies for murals and other interior embellishments in public school buildings. The project contemplates the authorizing of selected artists to consult with principals as to the subjects and placements of the several works.

The C.W.A. is represented by Miss Juliana Force, Chairman of the Regional Committee of the Public Works of Art Project. The Honorable George J. Ryan, President of the Board of Education, has appointed the Honorable Louis S. Posner, member of the Board, as chairman of a committee to act with the Board of Superintendents and Miss Force in this project.

This Committee suggests as a valuable educational activity the cooperation of the pupils in the selection of themes for the preliminary studies. Such participation should awaken interest in local history and geography as well as in art appreciation, and a spirit of community and school pride.

¹⁸Audrey McMahon, in some ways Force's successor, described Force who was also the Director of the Whitney Museum as "one of the most extraordinary women I've ever met. Her will was law." Interview with Audrey McMahon conducted by Harlan Phillips, November 18, 1964, Archives of American Art, transcript page 11.

¹⁹Board of Education, *Journal* (1934) vol. 1, 11.

It is, therefore, requested that principals of schools that may be selected for such works, endeavor through the medium of appropriate lessons, exercises or contests, to secure pupil cooperation in suggesting the motifs or themes for the proposed paintings.²⁰

This was such a novel approach that the *Sun* publicized it.²¹ Despite the progressive stance taken by Board of Education officials, there is no evidence that suggestions made by students were actually followed. In fact, under the PWAP, and later under the WPA/FAP, the principal often exercised autocratic control over commissions. For example, the principal of Abraham Lincoln High School rejected a mural by Louis G. Ferstadt which was subsequently praised by artists and critics when exhibited in a National Society of Mural Painters exhibition in February of 1934. Ferstadt's mural depicted children engaged in school activities; still the principal rejected it because it was "too realistic and modern and lacking in the inspirational qualities which ... should characterize paintings for a high school."²² Although he vetoed the design, in a show of democratic spirit, the principal allowed it to be temporarily displayed. The majority of students liked it, but nonetheless, Ferstadt never received permission to execute it for the main lobby.

²⁰Special Circular No. 21, 1933-1934, IV A.I.C., Circular Special 1933-1934, Box #31, NYC, Teachers College.

²¹See "Pupils Preferences to be Consulted in Preparing School Murals." *Sun*, 31 Jan. 1934, Scrapbooks, vol. V, 197, Art Commission.

²²"Rejected Painting Wins Show Honor," *New York Times*, 24 January 1935, Scrapbook, vol. VI, 223, Art Commission.

Some PWAP murals planned for schools failed because the Art Commission rejected the designs, but the majority of unexecuted PWAP murals remained in preliminary design because PWAP was terminated before they received funding and they were not carried over to the WPA/FAP.²³ During the period 1934-1937, city agencies submitted 241 mural designs to the Art Commission. In his report for the period, I. N. Phelps Stokes, President of the Art Commission, noted that "many of the earlier submissions were disapproved, but a greater degree of care on the part of project officials, the artists' added experience, and the encouragement and constructive criticism of the painter members of the Commission, have caused a very marked improvement in quality, so that of late the Commission has rarely found it necessary to disapprove designs, although it has often suggested radical changes."²⁴ When McMahon took over

²³An example of a mural approved by the Board of Education but rejected by the Art Commission was Abraham Champanier's decorative maps and ceiling constellation for the lecture room at DeWitt Clinton High School. See Exhibition File, 1380- AJ, Art Commission. For P.S. 150, Queens, both the Board of Education and the Art Commission approved a pair of murals by Robert K. Ryland representing Literature and Science for either side of the auditorium stage, but Ryland never painted them. Shortly after the Art Commission granted approval on June 12, 1934, the PWAP ended. Eventually, in 1937 under the WPA/FAP, Daniel Celentano was chosen to execute a different mural pair, *Children in Creative Activities* and *Children in Their Cultural Activity*, for the same location. A sampling of other murals which received Board of Education approval and preliminary approval from the Art Commission were Ettore Caser's mural, *The Dutch Settlers of Utrecht*, for New Utrecht High School's entrance foyer, (Exhibition File, 1121-K); John Ferris Connah's mural depicting music for the area over the proscenium of Brooklyn Technical High School's auditorium, (Exhibition File, 1121-K); Jared French's mural cycle, *Girls in Athletics*, for the lobby to the girl's gymnasium at Lincoln High School (Exhibition File 1504-P); and David Karfunkle's mural for the auditorium of DeWitt Clinton High School (Exhibition File 1380-AH).

²⁴*Condensed Report of the Art Commission of the City of New York for the Years 1930-37*, 93.

the project, to minimize disapprovals, she involved the Art Commission in the selection of artists for the mural division. To help identify artists who would succeed, she asked Art Commission painter member, Ernest Peixotto, to sit on the committee qualifying artists for this division of the Federal Art Project.²⁵

According to an Art Commission report, through the PWAP, the federal government spent \$335,000 in New York City, primarily on monument restoration and easel paintings.²⁶ As recorded by Francis O'Connor, in New York City the PWAP funded 392 mural designs, 1,284 easel paintings, 232 sculptures, and 2,907 prints. Of the 392 mural designs, *The New York Times* reported in March 1934 that designs for twenty-four schools were in progress.²⁷ And the PWAP was effective in providing immediate relief for large numbers of artists. At Manhattan's Julia Richman High School and Bayard Rustin High School for the Humanities (formerly Straubenmueller Textile High School, Manhattan) a total of 104 artists were working on several mural cycles and easel paintings.²⁸ With the demise of the PWAP in June 1934, projects were continued under state sponsorship and were eventually absorbed by the WPA/FAP.

²⁵Interview with Audrey McMahon, Archives of American Art (1964?), 16.

²⁶*Condensed Report of the Art Commission of the City of New York for the Years 1930-7*, 13.

²⁷*New York Times*, 11 March 1934, Scrapbooks, vol. VI, 14, Art Commission. For the most authoritative statistics on numbers of objects produced and their cost, see Francis V. O'Connor, *Federal Support for the Visual Arts: The New Deal and Now* (Greenwich, Conn: New York Graphic Society, 1969, 2nd ed., 1971, 54, 57.

The creation of the Works Progress Administration had far reaching effects on the New York City public schools. This complex federal initiative touched schools on many levels, ranging from improving the physical plant to advancing art education and supplementing the general education programs provided by the Board of Education. Peaking in 1939, there were 13,574 people assigned to WPA Education projects sponsored by the Board of Education. Government programs more than supplemented Board programs; they supplied staff in areas the Board had inadequately addressed in the past. WPA workers provided adult education, tutoring in math and reading, home teachers for homebound children, presentations on safety education, recreation programs, and school lunches.²⁹ As President Roosevelt made clear in his radio address of 28 April 1935 the WPA's chief goal was to provide temporary employment leading to permanent jobs. "Our problem," Roosevelt stated simply, "is to put to work three and one-half million employable persons now on the relief rolls."³⁰

In August 1935 Federal Project Number One took shape. It mainly comprised the music, theatre, writing and art projects. Its heyday, 1936-39, corresponds to the

²⁸"CWS Starts Art Classes." *New York Times*, 1 June 1934, Scrapbooks V, 195, Art Commission.

²⁹For a detailed account of all WPA programs in the New York City schools, see New York City Board of Education, "What the WPA Does for the Schools," *All the Children: 40th Annual Report* (New York: New York City Board of Education, 1940), various pages. See also Board of Education, *Report of the Superintendent of Schools, The First Fifty Years: 1898-1948* (New York: New York City Board of Education, 1948), 113-148 covering the years 1931-1940.

³⁰<http://www.mhree.org/2inchat7.html> (linked to Mid Hudson Regional Information Center)

period when most school murals were completed and numerous sculptures, graphics, and paintings were placed in school buildings.³¹ From 1939-43 the projects were turned over to state control and sponsorship requirements increased.

Holger Cahill, formerly a curator at the Newark Museum, became Director of the Art Project and completed the "Federal Art Project Manual" in October of 1935. Cahill applied the President's guidelines for all WPA projects to the arts, stressing a project's usefulness and ensuring that most of the funding paid for labor. For artists, the chance to work was a lifeline, enabling professional development to continue. Observers of the art scene viewed the Federal Art Project as "a spiritual factor in the encouragement and development of contemporary art."³² It allowed artists, like workers of all types, to conquer what Roosevelt described as "enforced idleness an enemy of the human spirit generated by this depression."³³ From a broad cultural perspective, art program supporters hoped that the government art projects would prevent American art from entering "a dark age from which it might not recover for generations."³⁴ To ensure that the program was useful and artists had employment, the federal government had to

³¹Many schools also acquired objects in 1943 when the Federal Government warehoused them and invited public institutions to take them. See article in *Life*, 17 April 1944:85, quoted in Park and Markowitz, *New Deal for Art*, 24.

³²Carlyle Burrows, "New Mural Designs for Local Settings," *Tribune*, 8 August 1937, Scrapbooks, vol. IV (1937), 92, Art Commission.

³³http://www.mfrec.org/far_chat7.html

³⁴Holger Cahill, *New Horizons in American Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 15-16.

identify recipient institutions. Public schools, particularly in metropolitan areas like New York City, were the direct beneficiaries.

Cahill wanted the Federal Art Project to be as inclusive as possible. He envisioned a broad based art program which embraced a range of activities from undertaking architecturally integrated public art to art education for the general public.

Cahill wrote:

The Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration will employ persons of training and experience in the art field who are certified to the Works Progress Administration as eligible to participate in the Works Program. The primary objective of the project is the employment of artists who are on the relief rolls. The Federal Art Project will draw at least ninety per cent of its personnel from relief. The project is planned in the belief that among these artists will be found the talent and the skill necessary to carry on an art program which will make contributions of permanent value to the community. Where necessary, artists may be drawn from non-relief sources, but in no case in excess of ten per cent of the total number employed.

The plan of the Federal Art Project provides for the employment of artists in varied enterprises. Through employment of creative artists it is hoped to secure for the public outstanding examples of contemporary American art; through art teaching and recreational activities to create a broader national art consciousness and work out constructive ways in using leisure time; through services in applied art to aid various campaigns of social value; and through research projects to clarify the native background in the arts with the daily life of the community, and an integration of the fine and practical arts.³⁵

Cahill emphasized the project's aim to conserve skills and its desire to have artists of varying talent work in different capacities. Above all, it cast a wide net, drawing in artists of varying abilities, ages, and prior experience. Many artists interviewed about the WPA/FAP fondly remembered the camaraderie and interaction of

³⁵Federal Art Project Manual, October 1935, n.p. Xeroxed copy available in the library of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

the artists. Charles Alston recalled, "One of the very important things of that period was that artists, for the first time, got some sense of an identity . . . so younger artists had an opportunity to talk to the artists who were prominent. There was a democracy about the whole thing that was very rewarding, very beneficial."³⁶ Democracy was, in fact, at its core. Cahill noted, "The organization of the Project has proceeded on the principle that it is not the solitary genius but a sound general movement which maintains art as a vital, functioning part of any cultural scheme. Art is not a matter of rare, occasional masterpieces . . . In a genuine art movement a great reservoir of art is created in many forms, both major and minor."³⁷ Holger Cahill and other administrators/theorists of the WPA wanted to prove that you could attain culture for the masses, to disprove that "democracy operating under the idea of progress is incompatible with 'culture.'"³⁸

The Federal Art Project also expanded public art opportunities in schools for women and artists of color. More women worked on the New York City art project than anywhere else in the country.³⁹ Kimm Carlton-Smith estimates the number of women artists working in New York City in 1936, the peak year of the Federal Art Project, at

³⁶Interview with Charles Alston, Archives of American Art (1964?), 13.

³⁷ Cahill, *New Horizons in American Art*, 18.

³⁸Charles A. Beard, ed., *A Century of Progress* (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1933), 13.

³⁹For the best study of women artists and the Federal Art Project, see Kimm Carlton-Smith, "A New Deal for Women: Women artists and the Federal Art Project, 1935-1939." (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers The State University of New Jersey - New Brunswick, 1990).

602.⁴⁰ Women worked in every division of the Project. They were administrators, painters, sculptors, clerical workers, models, artist teachers, and graphic artists.

Interestingly enough, many women artists working on the projects in the 1930s in New York City came from the same immigrant families City Beautiful proponents and progressives had sought to educate with moralizing art and patriotic murals in the 1910s. Sculptor Concetta Scarvaglionone, born in the Lower East Side in 1900 of Italian immigrant parents, is a case in point.⁴¹ Another example is abstract painter Irene Rice (later Irene Rice Periera) who enrolled in evening courses in fashion design and drawing at Washington Irving High School. Both artists eventually worked on the WPA and provided art for the very school system they attended.⁴²

The New Deal art programs were a great equalizer. Previously, major mural commissions had been monopolized by male artists, many of whom were members of male-only professional groups. During the American Renaissance, few women had the training needed to execute large-scale public commissions but more importantly, few had access to architects and patrons in charge of awarding such work.⁴³ During the 1930s, the Federal government reinvented the whole system of art patronage, opening the door

⁴⁰Carlton-Smith, "A New Deal for Women," 76.

⁴¹See discussion in Carlton-Smith, "A New Deal for Women," 79.

⁴²Concetta Scarvaglionone's exterior sandstone sculpture, *Girl with Fawn*, is located at William Cullen Bryant High School, Queens and two paintings by Periera have been located at Midwood High School, Brooklyn and Abraham Lincoln High School, Brooklyn.

for women art administrators and artists. If unmarried, female artists could demonstrate the same level of economic need as their male counterparts and prove they were professional artists, they received equal pay for equal work. Once assigned to specific divisions on the project, qualified women even held supervisory positions. Among public school murals, the most notable examples by female artists are Lucienne Bloch's *Evolution of Music* (1936-38) at George Washington High School, Manhattan and Ruth Reeves' *Student Activities in School* (1940-41) at Andrew Jackson High School, Queens.

Coupled with supporting the work of women, the New Deal art projects also brought work by non-white artists into the schools. Prior to the government programs, artists of color were not represented in the art collection of the Board of Education. The New Deal and its philosophy of cultural democracy radically changed that trend and permanently broke down barriers. As a result of the WPA, African-American artists received commissions for murals and sculptures, but as Carlton-Smith has shown, the majority of black women found employment on the teaching division and black artists in general were given priority on projects within the black community.⁴⁴ The most notable example of this was at Harlem Hospital, where murals were painted by Charles Alston, Vertis Hayes, Georgette Seabrooke, Elba Lightfoot, Selma Day and Sara Murrell.⁴⁵ No

⁴³For a discussion of women muralists of this period, see Bailey Van Hook, *Angels of art : women and art in American society, 1876-1914* (University Park : Pennsylvania State University Press, c1996).

⁴⁴See Carlton-Smith, "A New Deal for Women," 59.

⁴⁵For information on murals in New York City hospitals, see Health and Hospitals Corporation, *For a Permanent Public Art: WPA Murals in the Health and Hospitals*

African-American artists on the WPA received mural commissions for schools, with the exception of Norman Lewis, who created two collaborative murals with students while teaching at a Manhattan junior high school. (See Chapter 7.) By 1937, the number of black men and women artists on the New York City Federal Art Project reached 120.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, there are few examples of extant WPA works by African-American artists in the New York City schools, but one such example is *People of the Village* by Charles Alston at Lincoln High School, Brooklyn.⁴⁷

In furthering the Project's ideal of cultural democracy, Cahill acknowledged his indebtedness to the Mexican mural movement of the 1920s and to the philosophy of John Dewey. The Mexican precedent provided a programmatic model. The murals of Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco inspired many New Deal artists, some of whom actually had worked with Diego Rivera in Mexico and the United States and then painted murals for schools.⁴⁸ In addition, murals by the Mexican artists

Corporation's Collection, catalogue for exhibition 5 December 1988 – 25 January 1989 (New York: Health and Hospitals Corporation, 1989) and The Bronx Museum of the Arts, *A New Deal for Public Art: Murals from Federal Work Programs*, exhibition 30 September 1993 – 23 January 1994. For a review of this exhibition, see William Zimmer, "Worlds of Work and Play in a Tribute to New Deal Artists," *NYT* 21 November 1993, Section 2, 24.

⁴⁶Carlton-Smith, "A New Deal for Women," 188. See also Ruth Ann Stewart, *New York Chicago: WPA and the Black Artist* (New York: Studio Museum of Harlem, 1978).

⁴⁷Black artists contributed other pieces, such as a portrait bust by Selma Burke, but the whereabouts of this and other works is unknown.

⁴⁸Both Jean Charlot, who painted *The Art Contribution to Civilization of All Nations and Countries* for Bayard Rustin High School for the Humanities (formerly

could be seen in the United States. Orozco had painted murals at Pomona College in California, New School for Social Research in New York City, and at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. Rivera had painted murals at the San Francisco Stock Exchange, the California School of Fine Arts, the Detroit Institute, and the infamous 1933 commission at Rockefeller Center. In addition he had a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in 1931. American artists painting WPA murals responded to the Mexican example in several ways: artists extrapolated subjects from Mexican examples and tailored them for American audiences, revived the fresco technique, and borrowed stylistic and iconographical elements. John Dewey's influence was more subtle. His impact was most evident in the realm of art education, particularly in the community art center movement and in the creation of the Index of American Design.⁴⁹

Nationally, the WPA/FAP had four primary categories: 1. Fine Arts, which included murals, sculpture, easel painting, graphic arts and employed about 48% of the

Straubenmueller Textile High School, Manhattan) and Lucienne Bloch, mentioned above, worked with Diego Rivera. Charlot worked with Rivera in Mexico and Bloch worked with Rivera in New York and Detroit. See Lucienne Bloch, "On Location with Diego Rivera," *Art in America* 2 February 1986): 102-123. See Jean Charlot, *An Artist on Art; collected essays* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1972).

⁴⁹Certainly, in responding to John Dewey, Cahill was in step with other art educators of the 1930s. For Cahill's interest in Dewey, see Holger Cahill "American Resources in the Arts," reprinted in Francis O'Connor, *Art for the Millions*, 38. With the publication of *Art as Experience* in 1934, John Dewey's theories dominated the approach to art education during the New Deal years. Dewey stressed that art appreciation is best learned through doing and that art shouldn't be segregated from the activities of daily life just as the artist should be integrated with the community. For a good summary of Dewey's impact and the key elements of art education in the 1930s, see Foster Wygant, *School Art in American Culture*, 75, 77.

workers; 2. Practical and Applied Arts, which included posters, photography, Index of American Design, arts and crafts, dioramas and models and employed 29%; 3. Educational Services, which included the federal art galleries, community art centers, art teaching, research and information and employed 17%; and lastly 4. Technical Supervisory Personnel, which employed 6%.⁵⁰ In order to qualify for various divisions, artists had to submit examples of their work to a committee composed of the division directors. In New York City, under the directorship of Audrey McMahon, Burgoyne Diller supervised murals, Girolamo Piccoli took charge of sculpture, Russel Limbach and later Gustave von Groschwitz supervised graphics, and Alexander Stavenitz was responsible for teaching.

New York City public schools benefited from all of these sub-divisions; in fact, the arrangement was symbiotic. By working with the school system, the WPA/FAP advanced its two primary goals: they needed to find sites for public art--on school walls and in school courtyards,--and secondly, they needed to cultivate an audience and attract participation in art education programs,--and schools provided such audiences.⁵¹

⁵⁰See O'Connor, *Federal Support for the Visual Arts*, 28. Kornfeld also provides a close analysis of the program in New York City. See Kornfeld, 67. For an administrative history, see William Francis McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts: The Origins and Administrative History of the Arts Projects of the Works Progress Administration*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1969.

⁵¹Perhaps equally important but less visible to us today, are the art education programs of the WPA. They had a significant impact on the New York City schools and are part of the story of New Deal art in public schools. For the best account of the art education programs, see Paul Kornfeld, "The Educational Program of the Federal Art Project," (Ed.D. dissertation, Illinois State University, 1981). The FAP also gave children's art a new credibility. Some schools supported murals designed and painted by

A variety of objects including paintings, murals, portable and architectural sculptures, graphics, stained glass, examples from the Index of American Design and even costumed dolls from the objective teaching division can still be found in school buildings. The number of extant artworks⁵² falls far short of the tally provided in the Board of Education's 38th Annual Report for the school year 1935-36, documenting just the first year of the Federal Art Project. That report summarized WPA art contributions made to the schools, noting numerous high school murals and "hundreds of sculptures in stone, wood, and terra-cotta . . . graphic work consisting of 146 etchings, 188 lithographs, 28 aquatints, 34 wood engravings and 30 linoleum cuts." The report continued, "Easel work allocated to the schools under this project consists of 16 portraits, 133 oil paintings, 45 water colors, 5 monotypes and 2 pastels."⁵³

High schools amassed the largest collection of paintings, graphics, and sculptures. Unlike the process of commissioning murals, schools had to take the initiative to acquire all WPA/FAP portable art, but generally they did so in response to solicitations made by the WPA/FAP. Generally, in cases where a school had a strong art department, teachers

students and work by students was even included in the *New Horizons in American Art* show at the Museum of Modern Art. MOMA retained nine pieces for their collection. Significantly, the High School of Music and Art opened its doors in February of 1936, another example of how the promotion of art under the WPA/FAP encouraged the creation of a high school dedicated to nurturing talented New York City public school students.

⁵² We have located 44 paintings, the same number of sculptures and 170 graphics.

⁵³ *All the Children*, 38th Annual Report, 130. For a summary of work accomplished on the New York City project see Francis O'Connor, *Federal Support for the Visual Arts*, 46.

sought out original artworks in a variety of media. Cahill recounts the process of obtaining paintings:

If a school wanted to get a painting allocated to itself, it came to the Projects, saw the paintings in the racks and bins in the Exhibition Gallery, and would pay for the cost of the paint, canvas, the frame. The basic costs of these three items, which amounted to, let us say, \$6.00 for an 18" x 24" canvas, or \$12.00 for a 30 x 40" . . . The cost of everything else was met by the U.S. government."⁵⁴

The process was similar for obtaining a sculpture. Project administrators encouraged principals to visit the sculpture shop of the Federal Art Project to select items for their school. Preference was given to schools that became co-sponsors of the work, meaning they paid for cost of materials, ranging from \$3.00 to \$10.00. In order to publicize the program, the Board of Education issued a circular to all principals authorizing them to select objects on a permanent loan basis:

The Sculpture Department of the Federal Art Project is now in a position to offer a considerable amount of its work for placement in tax-supported institutions under state, county, or municipal jurisdiction.

The works are of plaster or cast stone, finished in patina or polychrome executed by capable artists and suitable for interior and exterior decorations or adornments for fountains, pools and playgrounds. The objects comprise: free figure works, monuments, plaques, ceramics, low-relief panels, high-relief panels. Small statuettes vary in height from 8" to 24"; larger sculptures up to 36".

The objects will be allocated as permanent loans to any of the above mentioned institutions, especially to institutions which become co-sponsors to the extent of furnishing the cost of the material used in executing the works. Such costs vary

⁵⁴Holger Cahill interview, AAA, tape 1, p. 10.

from \$3.00 to \$10.00 except in cases where the work is desired in terra cotta or cast stone.⁵⁵

Given the expense and logistical requirements, the majority of schools selected small, portable works.

Evander Childs High School in the Bronx amassed an exceptional collection of WPA/FAP art, which included paintings, sculptures, photographs and graphics.⁵⁶ Original artworks commissioned through the Federal Art Project and art reproductions were spread throughout the building in corridors, department offices, and in the library. The school's "Guide to the Art Collection," listed over three hundred items, over half of them original artworks acquired through the Federal Art Project. The breakdown was as follows: 38 paintings, 157 graphics, 4 sculptures. Among the painters, notable artists included Byron Browne and Stuart Davis. The school also boasted a collection of 28 photographs of New York City by Bernice Abbott, hung in the 3rd floor corridor outside the history office. Interspersed among the contemporary original artworks, were reproductions of Japanese prints as well as original prints, reproductions of Impressionist and Renaissance paintings, photographs of Greek sculpture and great architecture. Part of this collection harkens back to the type of reproductions placed in schools at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵⁷

⁵⁵Item 3. "Products of the Sculpture Department of the Federal Art Project," 24 April 1936, General Circular No. 24, 1935-1936, Circular General 1935-1936, Box #10, Teachers College.

⁵⁶See "Evander Purchases W.P.A. Paintings G.O. Enriches Art Collection by Donation," *Evander News* 6 May 1936, vol. 28, no. 6, p. 1.

Depression Era Murals

Today, only a small fraction of New Deal art in the New York City public schools is extant. Murals are the most visible part of the collection. Of the 2,566 murals commissioned nationwide, over two hundred permanent and portable murals decorated New York City buildings, with schools and hospitals receiving the largest share, approximately fifty mural cycles each. Currently, twenty-three school murals are visible, the rest are either painted over or the buildings have been destroyed or radically altered. Despite the loss of much New Deal art, there are enough extant murals and archival materials to reach conclusions about the nature of the work commissioned and to consider how New Deal murals both furthered a tradition of public art in schools and introduced new themes and attitudes about the purpose of school decorations.

Self-conscious about their mission as employees of the federal government, artists and art administrators of the 1930s thought carefully about the function of murals in a variety of public buildings. They sought to make public art relevant and immediate, rejecting the allegory and symbolism characteristic of many earlier American murals and still evident in artworks such as Ezra Winter's 1933 *Quest of the Fountain of Youth* at Radio City Music Hall or Florence Lundberg's 1932 mural, *Quest for Knowledge* at Curtis High School, Staten Island. Holger Cahill emphasized that mural painting is communal expression: "Mural painting is not a studio art; by its very nature it is social. In its great periods it has always been associated with the expression of social meaning,

⁵⁷In 1975, the National Museum of American Art acquired Evander's collection as transfers from the General Services Administration. Letter from W. Robert Johnston to

the experience, history, ideas, and beliefs of a community.”⁵⁸ WPA/FAP administrators celebrated the fact that a new mural tradition had been inaugurated. They had a grand vision: “When art historians of the future record this country's achievements in the late 1930s, they will be able to offer tangible evidence of art's renaissance in the mural paintings of that period. Murals in public buildings will attest to their function in the community and provide indisputable testimony of an art movement closely related to the life of the people.”⁵⁹ Artist Michael Siporin explained the goal of the muralist, saying that artists reevaluated “the mural art of the past in the attempt to bring about a new synthesis of form and content, growing out of the artist's own milieu and the new social functions in our society.”⁶⁰

As fast as artists generated mural studies, other project workers churned out press releases and organized exhibitions to promote the new art and demonstrate how murals could play a role in modern society. In the 1938 exhibition and accompanying pamphlet for “Murals for the Community,” murals fell into one of four categories: “educational, decorative, therapeutic, and propagandic.”⁶¹ Another section of the exhibition featured the functions that murals have historically performed in society. To illustrate this point, a prehistoric panel of cave paintings demonstrated the magical power of murals, a

Paul Groman 19 February 1982, Evander Childs collateral file, Art Commission.

⁵⁸Holger Cahill, *New Horizons in American Art* (New York, 1936), 32.

⁵⁹Federal Art Project “Murals for the Community” (1938).

⁶⁰Quoted in O'Connor, *Art for the Millions*, 21.

⁶¹Federal Art Project, “Murals for the Community,” (1938).

Renaissance panel illustrated the religious purpose of murals, and a modern Mexican example highlighted the use of murals to promote democracy.⁶²

In view of the broader democratic aims of the WPA/FAP and the desire to use murals as an educational tool, program administrators involved principals and other Board of Education personnel in the process of commissioning murals for schools. Program administrators were careful not to foist art on an unknowing public: they wanted to cultivate an audience and clientele for mural projects. By having institutions initiate requests and pay for materials, the WPA/FAP hoped they would become invested in the program.⁶³

In an interview given almost twenty years after the WPA ended, Diller recalled the steps of commissioning a mural for a school. He emphasized the number of approvals required and the role that building administrators played in determining subject matter. To initiate a project, Diller had to scout out a wall, which he did by visiting schools and approaching school principals. Once Diller found a site, he recommended the artist best suited to the job. Diller emphasized that his objective was to put numerous

⁶²This exhibition at the Federal Art Gallery included 36 projects, including Lucienne Bloch's *Evolution of Music*, to be discussed later. This exhibition got a fair amount of press. See "Federal Artists Stage Exhibit of Mural Work," *Tribune*, 25 May 1938, Scrapbooks, vol. X, 76, Art Commission.

⁶³"The cost of the materials which the sponsoring institution paid was usually about \$1 - \$2 per square foot for WPA/FAP murals." See Park/Markowitz, *New Deal for Art*, 34. For example, James Michael Newell's 1,200 sq. foot *Evolution of Western Civilization* at Evander Childs High School cost the school a mere \$100.00 for materials. See Exhibition File 1543, Art Commission.

artists to work quickly. Once an artist was assigned, it meant jobs for research assistants and eventually workers to execute the mural. Diller recalled that:

as fast as we could get these institutions committed to the sponsorship, . . . we could assign artists to make tentative sketches for the job I think that in most cases it wasn't too difficult to secure sponsorship of high schools and libraries. I mean it took some considerable amount of talking perhaps and so on, but once they realized that this was something that was within their own discretionary powers, and that the work would be subject to their complete approval, they didn't feel too great a hesitancy about ordering, or becoming sponsors.⁶⁴

If a principal wanted a mural, he/she completed a form and submitted that along with a preliminary sketch created by the chosen artist to the Board's architect. If the Board architect approved, it was passed on to the Board of Superintendents, who in turn formulated a resolution to be passed by the Board. Finally, the whole package--preliminary sketch, artist's statement, and site plan--came before the Art Commission of the City of New York for approval. Recognizing the number of individuals that had to approve a design, Diller exclaimed, "Now if through that barricade you could ram an idea . . . down the throats of the innocent taxpaying public, I'd like to know how the hell it could be done!"⁶⁵

Schools engaged in lengthy debates concerning subject matter and often the artist collaborated with the principal to develop a particular subject. Diller recollected that there was "quite a bit of consultation between the artist and the principal before it [the

⁶⁴Interview with Burgoyne Diller conducted by Harlan Phillips, 2 October 1964, Burgoyne Diller Papers, transcript, p. 21, Archives of American Art.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 22-23.

design] started out on that long siege of approvals.” In most cases the principals were cooperative, seeking input from teachers and going to “great lengths to aid in the research because in some subjects it was rather difficult.”⁶⁶

Diller conceded that the Board of Education was open minded in sponsoring the number of murals that they did. He recognized that resources were scarce and the Board of Education could be criticized for spending money on art, yet “they could see the needs of this in human terms and at the same time aesthetic terms for the school and within those limits allow employment which but for this process would not exist at all.” Diller acknowledged that “they were in a delicate position in relation to the running of the schools where even a penny spent on something that wasn’t an absolute necessity could be challenged.”⁶⁷ What perhaps Diller overlooked was that private citizens--students, teachers and parents--often paid for materials. For example, teachers at Sarah J. Hale High School provided material funds for murals depicting the Silk and Wool industries. At Julia Richmond High School in Manhattan the General Organization underwrote the cost of materials and at P.S. 216, Brooklyn the Parent Association raised the \$60 required for their pair of murals at the school’s entrance.

For artists painting murals in schools the mission was clear: murals should educate. But, naturally, the type of school and space available were factors that influenced the size, subject, and location of murals. Typically, murals commissioned for elementary schools were designed as a pair for the entrance lobby or auditorium, and

⁶⁶Ibid., 24.

they depicted scenes from local history and neighborhood themes aimed at children, such as youngsters playing. A good example of a local history mural is Francis Costa's *The Old Bronx and the Bronx Today* (1939), at P.S. 11. The panels on either side of the auditorium stage contrast the agrarian lifestyle of native Americans and the first Dutch settlers with the twentieth century urban activities of construction and commerce. In his mural of the modern Bronx, Costa incorporated such recognizable landmarks as Yankee Stadium (then under construction) and the Bronx Hall of Fame. For P.S. 150, Queens, Daniel Celentano pictured children and young adults happily engaged in what he termed "constructive recreation" and "cultural activity," an example of the work ethic characteristic of murals of the period adapted for school audiences. Reflecting social biases of the time as evidenced in gender stereotyped activities taught in the schools, Celentano shows the boys doing carpentry and architecture and the girls engaged in dress making. Celentano used the architectural space to his best advantage, employing the door lintels as a ledge in the murals.

The majority of New Deal murals are in high schools, larger buildings with ample lobbies, auditoriums, and libraries where artists had greater liberty to paint more ambitious subjects and grander cycles. Two primary subject groups emerged: murals about the history of civilization for academic high schools and murals chronicling the industrial process of specific industries for vocational high schools. This dichotomy in

⁶⁷Ibid., 29.

subject matter reflected educational divisions inherent in the public school system of the 1930s.⁶⁸

In the resultant body of commissioned New York City school murals, the majority, about fourteen, portray the development of civilization, nine pictorialize industrial production, six focus on an aspect of local history, five portray juvenile activities, three illustrate literature, and five are on miscellaneous themes. The murals portray the dignified worker, the common person engaged in ordinary activities, frequently a child playing or learning, and recognizable landmarks. In a sense, muralists adapted aspects of the American Scene, which characterized so many WPA murals, to a school context.⁶⁹ Of the murals commissioned for schools, none were totally non-objective.⁷⁰ The most abstract of those executed was *Power* by Eric Mose (assisted by Burgoyne Diller) at Samuel Gompers High School in the Bronx. Unfortunately, it is

⁶⁸For a discussion of this aspect of school murals, see Park and Markowitz, *New Deal for Art*, 46 and for an analysis of subject differences between New York City and New York State murals, see Marlene Park, "City and Country in the 1930s: A Study of New Deal Murals in New York," *Art Journal* 39 (Fall 1979): 37-47. Park convincingly shows that murals painted for city schools and other types of municipal institutions explored dynamic themes of national and international import while murals for state sites focused on local history and industry.

⁶⁹Greta Berman discusses this aspect of WPA murals and argues that these wall paintings are Regionalist rather than Social Realist in nature. See Berman, 82. Cahill defended the tendency of muralists to celebrate American Scene subject matter. See Holger Cahill, *New Horizons in American Art* (New York, 1936), 32.

⁷⁰Although Diller was an abstract painter he encouraged all styles, but he realized it was a better strategy to call abstract murals decoration, not art, to gain public acceptance. See Diller interview, Archives of American Art, 41. For another view, see Stuart Davis, "Abstract Painting Today," in O'Connor, ed. *Art for the Millions*, 121-127.

currently painted over, but photographs and descriptions of the completed mural portray a fascinating composition of machine components and brilliant colors illustrating the production of electricity and the energy of light.⁷¹

In contrast to the transient nature of audiences for post office or hospital murals, the audience for school murals was relatively constant. Artists and administrators understood that murals commissioned for schools would become part of a child's education for several years and that students would see murals with an increasing awareness as they, themselves, matured. There was great potential for children to be affected on many levels. In her 1938 radio talk, Audrey McMahon expressed this zeal for murals in educational institutions:

When five thousand school children assemble in an auditorium to listen to the morning address of their principal, are they not more alert and alive to what is said from the platform because the very room in which they sit is given special significance by its murals painted on its walls by a group of fine artists? And when they have had the absorbing experience of watching these murals being created, from inception to completion, do you not believe that they carry away a profounder understanding of the message from their principal? And has not this experience so stimulated them that lasting meaning is brought into their lives?⁷²

Significantly, the largest number of New Deal murals in the New York City schools explores the history of civilization, a theme not previously addressed in public school wall paintings. Described by the Federal Art Project as representing "epic themes

⁷¹See Exhibition File 1704, Art Commission.

⁷²Audrey McMahon, "Art in Democracy," Radio Talk, WEVD, Press Release, Department of Information, WPA Federal Art Project, 26 August 1938, Record Group 69, box 76,. 3-4, quoted in Park and Markowitz, *New Deal for Art*, 45.

of the rise of civilization,"⁷³ these murals are more common in New York City than in any other region of New York State. Instead of painting the history of education for school buildings, which would be rather dry, artists viewed their murals as educational tools and so linked education to the larger construct of civilization.⁷⁴ Earlier murals such as the *Opening of the Erie Canal* or *Governor Morris* (see chapter 3) illustrate and aggrandize the achievements of individual American heroes, portraying them as actors in a historical drama. New Deal murals introduced a new approach to depicting history: in contrast to these Beaux-Arts precedents, there is a departure from a static, snapshot view of key events and important figures.⁷⁵ Instead, artists of the 1930s tended to portray history as an ongoing continuum enacted through the labors of the ordinary person: history becomes synonymous with social history. Even the titles of the murals reveal a preoccupation with change, progress and civilization. Among the murals painted for New York City high schools were *Spirit of Modern Civilization*, *World Progress in*

⁷³"WPA Muralists Paint for the Public Schools," press release, 9 February 1939, RG 69, box 75, p.1, quoted in Park and Markowitz, *New Deal for Art*, 46.

⁷⁴Park and Markowitz note that "In academic high schools the most typical murals are great histories of the progress of civilization. They typically begin with the cave men or the Egyptians and, to stress technological innovations, they culminate with America's achievements which are seen primarily in terms of technology-airplanes, locomotives, ships, skyscrapers and scientific equipment." Park and Markowitz, *New Deal for Art*, 46. See also Greta Berman's chapter, "Murals of Civilization and Philosophy" in *The Lost Years*, 128-135.

⁷⁵Park and Markowitz point out that the sense of history is different in post office murals, which depict events, disconnected from the present. "It is also pastoral and static because the events of the past are not clearly connected to the present or the future." Park and Markowitz, *New Deal for Art*, 42-43.

Written and Printed Arts, Evolution of Music, Major Influences in Civilization, and the Evolution of Western Civilization.

Based on the work produced, there is little doubt that WPA/FAP muralists were attuned to the theoretical concerns of the day. In the 1920s and 30s American scholars fixated on the notion of civilization as a key to understanding American culture.

Historians Charles and Mary Beard asserted: "The view of the world, of life and its surrounding universe, called the idea of civilization, was unmistakably a center of interest in America as the middle of the 20th century drew near."⁷⁶ In *Century of Progress*, a collection of essays edited by Beard, published in 1933 in conjunction with the Century of Progress exposition in Chicago, Beard wrote, the "concept of progress is one of the most profound and germinal ideas at work in the modern age Briefly defined, it implies that mankind, by making use of science and invention can progressively emancipate itself from plagues, famines, and social disasters, and subjugate the materials and forces of the earth to the purposes of the good life--here and now."⁷⁷ Beard's idea of progress was predicated on the belief that there will be continued improvement for all humankind. He identified three factors as essential to the idea of

⁷⁶Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *The American Spirit: A Study of the Idea of Civilization in the United States*. (New York: Collier Books, 1942), 21. For an excellent discussion of how civilization monopolized the interest of intellectuals, politicians, and the general public, see Chapter 2, "Civilization-Center of Interest," 19-62. *The American Spirit: A Study of the Idea of Civilization in the United States* is the 4th volume in the series. The other volumes are *The Agricultural Era*, *The Industrial Era*, and *America in Midpassage*. These constitute *The Rise of American Civilization*.

⁷⁷Charles A. Beard, ed., *A Century of Progress*. (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1933), 3.

progress: "respect for industry and labor, a preoccupation with secular enterprise, and a spirit of experimentation and invention."⁷⁸ These keys to progress are the hallmarks of New Deal school murals portraying the history of civilization.

In *The American Spirit* the Beards compiled a detailed overview of publications and symposia dedicated to defining the idea of civilization, of interest to us because, taken together, they constitute an ideological framework for understanding this group of New Deal school murals. In 1922 Harold E. Stearns edited an anthology entitled *Civilization in the United States*, including contributions from Lewis Mumford, H. L. Mencken, and Van Wyck Brooks and touching on subjects ranging from law to sports. In 1928 Charles A. Beard edited *Whither Mankind: A Panorama of Modern Civilization*, a compendium of writings based on an international symposium. It included contributions from American, Chinese, German, and British writers and touched on eastern and western philosophies, all historical periods, and all areas of human endeavor.⁷⁹

The themes explored in a variety of WPA/FAP school murals are visual corollaries to the topics then being discussed by historians, scientists, and writers. A group of New York City engineers gathered to evaluate the impact of technology on

⁷⁸Ibid., 11.

⁷⁹For a description of this symposium, see Beard, *The American Spirit*, 32. Coincidentally, an article in the *Evander News* mentioned that the school acquired Beard's, *Whither Mankind* in 1934 along with *America Faces the Future*, also by Beard. Other books on similar themes in Evander's library at the time were, *A New Deal* by

civilization. This interchange fueled the publication, *Toward Civilization* (1930), perhaps the conceptual blueprint for Maxwell Starr's mural, *The History of Mankind through Mental and Physical Labor* at Brooklyn Technical High School.⁸⁰ Of course the love affair with progress was celebrated by Chicago's 1933 *Century of Progress* exposition which featured scientific discoveries and their applications in industry and in Eveready life. In 1935 Harry Elmer Barnes completed his *History of Western Civilization*, an interdisciplinary study which encompassed biology, archaeology, anthropology, and sociology and clearly situated America in this historical lineage. Finally, as the culminating event in this string of symposia and publications, in 1937 Harvard instituted the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in "the History of American Civilization."

With the advent of the Depression, and the threat of world war on the horizon, it is not surprising that Americans of the 1930s struggled to comprehend from whence they came and whither they were going. It was as if America had come of age and was destined to take her place among the great nations of the world, and an investigation of civilization legitimized America's position at the apex of this grand evolution. At the

Stuart Chase, *Epic of America* by J. T. Adams, and *Rise of the Common Man* by C. R. Fish. See *The Evander News*, 18 April 1934, 1.

⁸⁰Professionals in industry, architecture and the arts contributed various papers with such titles as "The New Age and the New Man, Science Lights the Torch, The Spirit of Invention in an Industrial Civilization, Power, Transportation, Communication, Modern industry and Management, Agriculture, Engineering in Government, Art in the Market Place, The Machine and Architecture, Work and Leisure, Education and the New Age, Machine Industry and Idealism, and Spirit and Culture under the Machine." See Beard, *The American Spirit*, 34-35.

very least, with the spread of totalitarianism in Europe, America was justified in her self-appointed role as the guardian of Western civilization.

Civilization meant an ongoing sharing, accumulation and addition to the sum of knowledge, arts, skills, and technology that various cultures had invented over time. When painting murals for New York City high schools, artists qualified civilization in terms of Western culture with passing acknowledgment of eastern influences. For the grand auditorium at Brooklyn's Tilden High School, Abraham Lishinsky created forty-two panels illustrating *Major Influences in Civilization* (begun 1937) encompassing such diverse subjects as agriculture, science, art, political philosophy, and technology. Using the whole space, Lishinsky placed panels in opposition to emphasize dichotomies, for example contrasting democracy with theocracy on either side of the auditorium stage.

Artists frequently equated civilization with technology and civilization became synonymous with the machine age. Often artists portrayed technology as the catalyst in this historical progression. Beard idealized the potential of technology, rhapsodizing, "Universal in its reach, as transcendent as the gods, it cannot be monopolized by any nation, period, class, government, or race. Its catholicity surpasses that of all religions."⁸¹ Maxwell Starr's elaborate cycle, *The History of Mankind Through Mental and Physical Labor*, reflects the educational mission of the school and presents history through the lens of invention. Premised on the Darwinian notion of evolution, Starr explained, "Starting with ape-men they follow the Darwin route up the line to Steinmetz

⁸¹Beard, *Century of Progress*, 18.

with panels for the Egyptians, the Greeks, Italians and physicists, chemists and biologists of all nations."⁸² The mural is a pictorial encyclopedia of scientific luminaries coupled with the application of their theories. The story begins in the central image of Scientific Man, branches left and right, and culminates in the opposite wall with the Riveraesque clenched hands, symbolizing the union of mind and body.

**James Michael Newell, *Evolution of Western Civilization* (1935-1938)
Evander Childs High School, Bronx**

Of all the murals on the history of civilization in the New York City public schools, James Michael Newell's (1900-1985) *Evolution of Western Civilization* at Evander Childs High School is the most intriguing, partly because over the last half century there has been a rupture between Newell's original intent and audience perception of the cycle. With this ambitious fresco, Newell joined the national discourse on the meaning of civilization. His mural celebrates technology and America's role as inheritor and protector of western culture. When Newell began the project in 1935, largely because of the support from Evander's art teacher, a Miss Bebarfald, the principal had requested a mural portraying the history of the Bronx, more in keeping with the themes previously outlined by Schools Superintendent. Newell complied, but he also

⁸²"History of Science to be Shown in Huge High School murals" *News* 23 Dec. 1934, *Scrapbooks*, vol. VI, 204, Art Commission.

developed sketches for this broader historical epic and ultimately convinced school authorities that this was a better subject.⁸³

Newell initially estimated one year to paint the mural, proposed from the beginning as a true fresco. Considering he created designs to cover 1,400 square feet, basically all available wall space in the main room of the library, it is not surprising that it actually took two and one half years to complete.⁸⁴ Newell's assistants on the project included DeRocco, Koven, Botto, Cavallone, Lagambino, Buzzelli, and Van Aalton. They helped with research, preparation of the plaster wall, transfer of the cartoon, and execution of the mural.

The process of making a fresco was labor intensive. Newell's mural is one of thirteen of the two hundred WPA murals in New York City painted in true fresco.⁸⁵ In creating the work, Newell had to remove the finish layer of the painted wall and replace it with a layer of rough plaster before he could outline the major areas in sinopia. When he began painting, an assistant had to prepare a small area with a thin finish coat of

⁸³Several articles in Evander's school newspaper provide details about Newell and this commission not found elsewhere. See "Colorful Murals in Library Portray Panorama of Occidental Civilization," *Evander News*, 25 September 1935, 2; "New Mural Shows the Rise of Man," *Evander News*, 7 October 1936, 1 and for the best account by the artist, see James Michael Newell, "The Evolution of Western Civilization," in *Art for the Millions*, 60-62.

⁸⁴The Art Commission gave the mural preliminary approval on 9 July 1935 and final approval, two and half years later on 13 December 1938. The school hosted the dedication of the mural on 9 November 1938.

⁸⁵See Berman, 45. In the New York City public schools, true frescoes (meaning painted on wet plaster) are Monty Lewis' *History of the Cotton Industry* at Sarah J. Hale H.S. and Lucienne Bloch's *Evolution of Music* at George Washington H.S.

mortar, which Newell then covered in a single session before it dried. Although fresco painting was arduous, it suited two aims of WPA administrators: it was labor intensive, providing employment for more people, and it had an educational potential. In fact, the WPA made a film about painting frescoes, using Newell's mural as the case study. And Newell, himself, maximized the medium's educational qualities by talking to students about the process as he painted and creating an exhibition on the history and technique of fresco for the library at Evander.

Newell was among the minority of WPA artists who had training in fresco and prior experience painting murals. He was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1900. After serving in the first World War, he studied in New York at the National Academy of Design and the Art Student's League, followed in 1927 by a trip to Paris, where he attended the Academie Julian and Ecole des Beaux Arts. In 1928, Newell won the Fontainebleau Prize, enabling him to travel to Italy where he studied frescoes in Rome, Naples and Florence. Shortly before his commission at Evander Childs, he completed a mural cycle for the Potomac Electric Power Company in Washington, D.C. During the period of Roosevelt's administration he was a favorite artist and several of his paintings decorated the White House.⁸⁶

The Evolution of Western Civilization exemplifies the tenets of mural painting as defined by Holger Cahill. "The mural," Cahill asserted, "must have definite relation to

⁸⁶Several new websites include biographical information on Newell. See bronxart.lehman.cuny.edu/pa/evander-childs.htm and lsb.syr.edu/projects/newdeal/artist.html. Both of these sites were accessed March 2002.

its surroundings and be an integral part of an architectural scheme. The color, the scale, and the character of the painting must harmonize with the color, scale and character of the surrounding architecture. The composition as a whole must have clarity, largeness, carrying power, and a rhythmic order that leads the eye easily through the whole space."⁸⁷ Newell's subject is appropriate for a school library and the mural complements and harmonizes with its architectural setting. The forms are bold, carrying across the large space, and the panels lead the eye in a natural progression.

From the start, Newell didn't want to create textbook illustrations of a conventional history showing a progression from ancient Egypt to Greece, Rome and so on. Rather he wanted to capture in a visual language the forces that have shaped western civilization: humankind's basic need of sustenance and shelter, human curiosity, the desire for communal life resulting in the formulation of a common set of laws. Newell explained it this way: "I have tried to interpret in pictorial symbols the important historical forces that determined the evolution of western civilization." In his mural, in keeping with Beard's interpretation of civilization, rational science replaces superstition and technology as the key to a better way of life. In developing his historical panorama, Newell took liberties, conflating places, cultures, and time periods. He also quoted various artistic sources, particularly Giotto and Diego Rivera, and synthesized a style indebted to these masters of fresco art.

Newell provided this description of the *Evolution of Civilization*:

⁸⁷Holger Cahill, *New Horizons*, 32.

the murals . . . show primitive man building his society, youth migrating from it to new lands, the meeting and mingling of tribes, the clashing of eastern culture and scientific knowledge with western force, building knowledge and ideas of law and democracy.

The dark ages of plague are shown next, with the church alone perpetuating knowledge. Then come the beginnings of scientific experiment and the awakening of the people to nature, the force of which destroys their bondage and leads to the great flowering of the Renaissance. The exploration which follows founded a new country to which all nations and all time have contributed, and which has developed into a varied, dynamic, and powerful civilization.⁸⁸

Throughout the cycle, which occupies all available space (including panels above doors) framed by stained wood work, Newell repeats the motifs of migrating figures, the act of writing or disseminating knowledge, and agricultural activities. The progression follows the natural architectural divisions of the walls and the composition of the panels grow in complexity, particularly when Newell reaches modern America. In this extensive panel which bridges several doors, Newell fractures the space and shows various but concurrent activities, approximating the complexity of modern, industrial life.

In an unconventional fashion, the cycle reads from right to left, perhaps because Newell wanted to devote several panels to America and could only accomplish that by ordering them in this way. He begins by reinventing Prometheus seen in the seminal figure on the right, who seizes a bolt of lightening in one hand while cradling fire in the other. (Fig. 35) Stone Age tools above the doors frame the central panel, featuring a primitive, nameless, agricultural society, whether Babylonian, Egyptian or Peruvian. (Fig.

⁸⁸James Michael Newell, "The Evolution of Western Civilization," in *Art for the Millions*, 62.

36) Figures are harvesting wheat and corn, historically an impossible combination, which suggests the synthesis of the new and old worlds. Newell also shows the building of protective shelters and the codification of laws, represented by the figure chiseling a tablet next to another figure pointing skyward, perhaps an allusion to the Babylonian code of Hammurabi. The repetition of figures in similar poses, their facial characteristics and generalized anatomy, and the very subject of an agrarian society, recall Rivera's depictions of Mexico's Aztec past in such murals as the *History of Mexico* (1929) in the National Palace in Mexico City. Out of this basic social order, civilization evolves, moving to the next phase through the migration of its youth. (Fig. 37)

The next panel combines elements from several different periods and locales. (Fig. 38) Directing the viewer's eye toward the center is the figure of Galileo pointing toward the rings of Saturn and an astronomical sphere. Also in this panel is a group of hooded warriors with spears, perhaps representing the western movement of nomadic tribes from the east; an artist chiseling a sculpture; a figure bent over a map showing outlines of the silk trade, juxtaposed with two sheaves of wheat, a link to the first panel and a reference to the exchange of goods. A scribe refines written language, moving from the pictographs of the previous panel to a more recognizable, although generalized alphabet. The message of the panel is that the growth of science, trade, and art pushed civilization forward.

Next comes the panel partially inspired by Giotto's *Lamentation*. (Fig. 39) A sick man replaces the body of the dead Christ. Prostrate figures praying for his health shield

him from the aggressive specter of death.⁸⁹ Other figures have already succumbed to the ravages of the plague. The panel's composition and articulation of the figures with their elongated bodies and small heads bear a striking resemblance to Giotto's figurative style. Like Giotto's figures, Newell's make dramatic gestures but they lack the psychological intensity of the proto-Renaissance master. Of course Giotto, who based his paintings on specific Biblical narratives, was an interpreter, while Newell, who created his own pictorial story, was both synthesizer and formulator. Also like Giotto and Rivera, Newell does not visually pierce the wall with deep pictorial space, but respects the wall's planar surface, a cardinal rule of mural painters. In some sections Newell uses the compositional simplicity of Giotto, while in others he applies Rivera's compacted figurative groupings.⁹⁰

Although Newell described the next panel as the "awakening of the people to nature," suggesting a strong secular orientation, the image of the head with flowing hair against a brilliant sun evokes Christ; however the Riveraesque torch and fist give it a militant nuance. (Fig. 40) In the following panel, reason destroys superstition, portrayed as a devilish monster filled with a spring, and the printing press disseminates knowledge. (Fig. 41) This image, together with the preceding panel, suggests that exploration of the

⁸⁹Ernest Fiene employs a similar figure to portray Greed in his 1938 mural entitled *History of the Needlecraft Industry* at High School of Fashion Industries, Manhattan.

⁹⁰Berman notes that the Mexican influence on Newell can be seen "in the large, stylized Indian figures working in the fields, the superstitious scene, and the large hands with broken chains..." Berman, *The Lost Years*, 132.

natural world, the basis of scientific inquiry, supports the destruction of superstition.

Newell painted this panel last, inscribing it with: "In the years 1937 and 1938 these murals were designed and executed by James Michael Newell... under the Federal Art Project sponsored by the United States government."⁹¹

Jumping several centuries and across the Atlantic, the next panel shows European explorers--Norsemen, Spaniards, the Dutch and the English--arriving in the New World, leading to the pioneer migration westward and the vanquishing of the Native American, represented as a defeated Indian brave modeled on the classical sculpture of the *Dying Gaul* (Pergamum, c. 240 B.C. Hellenistic period) to the lower left. (Fig. 42) One explorer holds the Masonic tablets encoded with numbers 1- 10. His fingers point to 3 and 8, suggesting the mural's completion date and/or the 8th commandment "Thou Shalt Not Steal," Newell's veiled commentary on the white man's arrival in the New World.

Following the discovery of the New World, *The Evolution of Western Civilization* culminates in a panorama of 1930s America showing three primary geographic areas: the west--represented by cattle ranchers and the railroad; the south--represented by miners and black workers picking cotton; (Fig. 43) and the northeast--represented by an electrical generator, steel workers, surgeons, and a chemist. Also depicted is American justice in the form of a contemporary jury and the new one hundred-inch Mount Palomar telescope, another symbol of cutting edge technology. (Fig. 44) Here Newell celebrates humankind's mastery of nature, industrial growth, and scientific progress.

⁹¹In a photo of the mural in an Evander Yearbook for 1937, this is the only wall that is blank.

In Newell's discussion of the mural he emphasized his desire to avoid obscure allegories and to invent a pictorial language based on real life activities. Many of the motifs he used were part of a standard vocabulary of New Deal murals. These became the new symbols of the 1930s: construction workers with pneumatic drills, steel workers riveting, surgeons gathered around a patient on the operating table, the chemist, pioneers, Indians bundling sheaves of wheat and corn, and the superstition of the Middle Ages vanquished by modern science.⁹²

Newell crowns his narrative with the last two lines from Walt Whitman's "With Antecedents" from *Leaves of Grass* (1891-92): (Fig. 45)

"And that where I am or you are this present day, there is the center of all days, all races. And there is the meaning to us of all that has ever come of races and days, or ever will come."⁹³

The quote implies that history is fluid and that peoples across the globe are interrelated. It is also Newell's way of dating the mural, of recognizing that his mural is an interpretation of history in the year 1938. The quote, pictured against an open book resting in dark-skinned hands broken free of shackles, suggests freedom and knowledge for all. This element, coupled with the imagery of the mural, conveys an optimistic view of civilization's progress and America's role in its evolution.

⁹²See Berman, who notes that similar subjects are depicted in murals by Laning, Refregier, Guston, Brooks, Mose, Crimi, Palmer, Alston, and Penney. Berman, *The Lost Years*, 132.

⁹³Quoted here from Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 2000; a Signet Classic reprint of the 1892 edition), 205-207.

The poem in its entirety can also be seen as a philosophical treatise for Newell's mural. Whitman makes references to "Egypt, India, Phenicia, Greece and Rome," to a range of human endeavors - "maritime ventures, laws, artisanship, wars and journeys," to the "crusader" and the "monk ." He evokes the solar system and former kingdoms. Whitman writes, "I respect Assyria, China, Teutonia, and the Hebrews, /I adopt each theory, myth, god, and demi-god . . ." Whitman speaks of the contradictory forces of "materialism" and "spiritualism" and how America is the inheritor of all those things, and at the center stands the individual.

Newell was being fashionable in quoting Walt Whitman, viewed as the quintessential American poet for the working man and symbol of democracy at a time when fascism was on the rise in Europe. Whitman appears in several murals of the 1930s, including Ben Shahn's *America at Work* (1939) at the Bronx post office and the *History of the Needlecraft Industries* by Ernest Fiene at the High School of Fashion Industries in Manhattan. Coupled with these pictorial venerations, several studies on Whitman were published during the 1930s.⁹⁴

One would think, given Newell's progressive stance and effort to be inclusive, the mural would be well received. It was in its time. It won top honors in the Architectural League's 50th Annual exhibition in 1936. It was included in the Museum of Modern

⁹⁴These include John Erskine's 1938 biography, *Walt Whitman and the Springs of Courage* by Haniel Long, Esther Shephard's *Walt Whitman's Pose*, Newton Arvin's, *Whitman*. Cited in Alfred Haworth Jones, "The Search for a Usable American Past in the New Deal Era," *American Quarterly*, 23 (December 1971)723. On Walt Whitman

Art's New Horizons show featuring art commissioned under the Federal Art Project. Two films were made about it: *The Making of a Fresco*, previously mentioned, and a short clip made by Paramount News documenting WPA art projects throughout the country.

Critics praised it. Edith Halpert, an assistant to Burgoyne Diller, remarked, "the Newell mural is really extraordinary. After careful consideration I sincerely think that it is superior to any of the American murals I have seen As a young person he has the advantage of a fresh vision, but added to that Newell understands and handles the medium with real maturity. This fresco should raise the standard of mural painting in America to a high degree." And Mrs. Roosevelt herself and Mayor LaGuardia were invited to its unveiling on 9 November 1938.⁹⁵

However, by the late 1960s, the mural became a target of student unrest and parts of it were severely defaced. (Fig. 46) Sensitized by the civil rights movement, African-American students did not view the black share croppers picking cotton as emblematic of the south, but as a stereotype, a negative image of African-Americans reminiscent of slavery. Viewers didn't perceive the men on horses as western cowboys but as overseers of the black workers picking cotton. Although Newell had intended this panel to be a panorama of America, within three decades after the mural was completed, it struck a

Berman comments, "The very choice of quotation from Walt Whitman indicated the artist's intention to include social commentary in his work."

⁹⁵See Holger Cahill, *New Horizons in American Art*, exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, Sept. 14-Oct. 12, 1936; Paramount News Cameramen Take Reels of Prize Winning Murals in Library; James Newell Interviewed," *Evander News*, 23 December 1936, Vol. 29, No. 8, p. 1; "High School to Get WPA Mural Today," *New York Times* 9

discordant chord. By showing people of color and quoting Walt Whitman, Newell had wanted to be inclusive. Ironically, in the context of the civil rights movement, these references took on other meanings and students objected to the very images Newell had included to broaden the mural's appeal.

Some members of the school community wanted to have the mural removed. It got to the point that the chairman of the art department began a petition to save the mural, even writing to William Agee, then a curator at the Whitney, for support. Agee's reply is of some interest to us here:

The murals record one artist's conception of the development of our history, a theme to which many devoted themselves in other WPA murals now located throughout the country in public buildings. In these others – as in the Evander Childs murals – artists portrayed in certain sections some of the unjust aspects of our history. However, that the artist portrayed these aspects does not necessarily mean that he condoned them. Rather, and this is also true of other murals, he depicted injustice to show how civilization would then move to a new phase of freedom. As the title states, the theme is the evolution of man, and just as the artist shows man conquering disease in the middle ages, so too does he show the beginning of a new age where injustice has also been conquered.

If this view of history today seems to us sentimental and far from the slow and harsh realities of progress, we should not doubt the artist's sincerity of integrity. We do not erase those cruel chapters from our history by removing all traces of them from our records, whether in books or paintings. By erasing our history are we not, as Ortega y Gasset predicted long ago, doomed to repeat that history?"⁹⁶

November 1938, Scrapbooks, X, 138, Art Commission; Edith G. Halpert to Thomas Parker, n.d. copy in collateral file Evander Childs High School, Art Commission.

⁹⁶Even in his letter, Agee seems to miss Newell's real intent. William C Agee to Irving Seidenberg (chairman, Art Dept. Evander) 9 October 1968, Evander Childs High School collateral file, Art Commission.

The school ended the dispute by erecting a curtain in front of the panel depicting the cotton pickers.⁹⁷

**Lucienne Bloch, *Evolution of Music* (1936-38)
George Washington High School, Manhattan**

In contrast to Newell's mural, Lucienne Bloch's (1909-1999) *Evolution of Music* (1936-38) at George Washington High School was controversial in its time but has since become an exemplary WPA school mural. (Fig. 47) The technique, content, style, and above all the artist's ability to communicate with high school students have contributed to its longevity. It is of particular interest to us here because of its multicultural slant.⁹⁸

Bloch was well suited to her assignment at George Washington High School. She had already successfully completed one WPA/FAP fresco for the Women's House of Detention at Riker's Island. She also had extensive art training, beginning with four years in Paris where she studied with sculptor Antoine Bourdelle and the cubist painter André

⁹⁷In 1998, the Board of Education received funding from the Open Society Institute to undertake conservation of the mural in conjunction with creation of a new mural in dialogue with it and the creation of a project web site. See web site newdeal.feri.org/echs/ for additional information about the controversy and the recent project. At the time Newell was painting his mural, another project in New York prompted controversy. A mural at the County Courthouse depicting the history of law included one panel about America focused on the emancipation of the slaves. The panel showed African-Americans eating watermelon. Black New Yorkers objected to this cliché image and argued it was demeaning. As a result of their protest, the artist substituted the figure of Frederick Douglas. See "Court Art Altered on Negro Protest," *Times* 1 December 1936, Scrapbook 1936, p. 176, Art Commission.

⁹⁸Berman praises the mural, writing, "She succeeded in combining music, social comment and modernism into a rhythmic, well composed mural, well adapted to its setting." Berman, *The Lost Years*, 70.

Lhote. She supplemented this more conventional training by spending a year in Germany where she studied industrial design. As a muralist, she was most influenced by Diego Rivera, whom she met in New York City in 1931 when he was preparing for his show at the Museum of Modern Art. She first worked with him in Detroit, recalling "I learned there, fully, the technique of painting frescoes. Rivera was a marvelous teacher. He didn't teach, but he gave you tremendous jobs."⁹⁹ Rivera also influenced Bloch's conceptual approach, serving as a role model emphasizing the artist's social responsibility. He may have also made her more sensitive to themes of racial unity, beginning with the first assignment he handed her in Detroit where she had to enlarge drawings for four sketches of the "white race, the yellow race, the black race and the Indian race."¹⁰⁰ Her interest in interracial harmony influenced her approach to both of the commissions she painted in New York City.

Bloch believed that subject matter must reflect the function of the building and in the case of a school, should be educational:

A mural should not exist of itself. It exists in a room, with the architecture, with the light. It exists with the building, and is a continuation of the ideals of the building. It is almost a concentration of the ideals of the building.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹Interview with Lucienne Bloch, 11 August 1964, conducted by Mary McChesney, Archives of American Art, 14. In this interview Bloch includes a detailed biographical sketch. See also Lucienne Bloch, "On Location with Diego Rivera," *Art in America* (2 February 1986): 102-123.

¹⁰⁰Interview with Bloch, 14.

¹⁰¹WPA Gives Artist Big Opportunity, [material for press release], RG 69, box 77, p. 6 quoted in Park and Markowitz, *New Deal for Art*, 44-45.

Bloch used this approach in developing her design for the music room. Painted in rich earth tones around the music room of George Washington High School, the mural conveys Bloch's vision of music as a unifying force. Panels represent African, Asian, European, and American musical forms and art, each a melange of instruments, patterns and figures engaged in music and dance. Carefully researched, the mural contains many recognizable details such as Persian miniatures, Turkish rugs, even a shofar, constituting what Bloch describes as a "sort of a travelogue."¹⁰² Wedged between Balinese cymbals and a Medieval harp, stands the Modern Chorus, a multi-racial ensemble with voices uplifted in song, a positive affirmation of ethnic diversity and racial harmony.

In an interview given several decades after the mural was painted, Lucienne recaptured her initial response to the walls of the music room at George Washington High School:

First I saw the wall and it had four long narrow panels--horizontal panels, and then one small panel over the door . . . Therefore I figured, in true thinking of my ten commandments of a mural painter: it had to fit the room; it had to correspond to the subject of the room; and it had to give something more than decoration to the students...First, I thought of music, naturally, and I decided there would be five different kinds of music - marching music, dancing music, singing music, instrumental music . . .

Bloch ultimately rejected this scheme, explaining that,

there was too much motion and too much picture. It was not a mural decoration. Slowly another development came and that was to do something historical, to show the history of music, to show the history of music in visual terms, which meant for primitive music I would show the primitive instruments and I would also show the primitive art, which to me resembles the music. Then there would be Oriental music and Oriental music would have Oriental instruments and would have the Oriental art approach. Then there would be the medieval music with the

¹⁰²Interview with Lucienne Bloch, 63.

same idea, and modern music . . . Then the little panel over the door would be music in the high school. It would be the high school children themselves singing together. Because they were long horizontal panels, I thought it would be interesting to ask, what is its time-space? You can't see it all at once. It is like music, which also comes by time.¹⁰³

Bloch did additional research, searching for a visual corollary to music. She concluded that other than instruments, the only other way to picture music was through sound waves, and so she “decided to pattern my entire mural on sound wave designs,” represented in the mural as an oscillating pattern of lines. Bloch acknowledged her debt to cubism, explaining, “I had never before painted in a modern way, in a sort of cubistic technique where I used geometrical lines and I interwove the sound waves, the instruments, the figures and also reminiscing with the art of that period.”¹⁰⁴

Surprisingly, despite its warm reception today by students and teachers¹⁰⁵, in its time, Bloch's mural generated controversy. Bloch recounted what happened, explaining that her completed drawings had been approved by the art teachers, the principal, the Board's architect and school's superintendent. The Art Commission had granted preliminary approval on 12 May 1936. Bloch had intended to work all through the summer. She had about five assistants, one of whom had worked on the Index of American Design, who did detailed sketches of instruments and other research. By September of 1936, they were all finished with research and had the drawing on the wall,

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵This observation is based on conversations with students and teachers when the mural was conserved in 1991.

but the principal, Arthur Boylan, halted the project, saying work interfered with classes. Bloch argued that it would be educational for students to see the fresco in progress but the principal refused, so she photographed the work and went on other WPA assignments. Bloch returned next May to discover the mural had been plastered over.

Bloch notified her supervisor, painter Burgoyne Diller, and he came to the school with technical supervisor, Harry Knight, and an attorney to confront the principal about the destruction of federal property. When the project representatives interviewed the principal to determine why he had Bloch's design obliterated, he evaded the question. Interestingly enough, when Bloch first proposed the mural, he had written to Geoffrey Norman, Asst. Project Supervisor, that "the color sketches for the music room shown by Miss Lucienne Bloch were, with a few modifications, approved by the Art Department. We hope that the work will be approved by the Board of Education."¹⁰⁶ This letter indicated he had supported the project. In the interview with Diller, the principal did not state that he disliked Bloch personally or that he objected to the design and he provided no reasonable explanation. Berman discusses the fact that the mural was painted over and surmises that the principal disliked it because of the racial integration and world peace message. According to Berman, Audrey McMahon theorized that the principal rejected it because he didn't understand it.¹⁰⁷ Reflecting upon this episode, Burgoyne Diller said that the principal had Lucienne Bloch's mural destroyed because he suspected her of

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Arthur A. Boylan to Geoffrey Norman, 4 March 1936, Item 1697c, Correspondence Files, Art Commission.

being a Communist because they had discovered that she had worked on a mural by Diego Rivera, and "that, as far as they were concerned, made her a Communist."¹⁰⁸ Given the principal's original support for the project, that appears to be the plausible explanation. As a result of Diller and Knight's confrontation with the principal, Bloch received permission to execute the mural but she had to remove the plaster and re-do the design. The second time, she was allowed to paint during the school year, and the mural was finished in 1938.¹⁰⁹

Of all the New Deal murals painted for schools, Bloch's mural makes the strongest polemic in support of an inclusive world view.¹¹⁰ But she wasn't the only artist to promote a pluralistic view of society.¹¹¹ Other school murals also include people of

¹⁰⁷Berman, *The Lost Years*, 70.

¹⁰⁸Archives of American Art Interview with Diller, 25.

¹⁰⁹Bloch provides a detailed account of this episode in her interview at the Archives of American Art.

¹¹⁰Berman observes, "again in this mural, she stressed a joining together of children of different races, singing in harmony. Peace and the universality of mankind are emphasized through a depiction of the origins of musical instruments on the continents of Africa and Asia, as well as Europe and America." Berman, *The Lost Years*, 69.

¹¹¹In the 1930s, the term pluralism was used to describe what we would call multiculturalism today. Foster Wygant provides this definition of pluralism: "The valuing of people themselves, the ultimate resource in depression; an assertion and acceptance of the cultural needs and contributions of ethnic, regional, and socioeconomic groups." Foster Wygant, *School Art in American Culture 1820 - 1970*, 69. In her examination of controversy and public art of the 1980s, Erika Doss equates pluralism with multiculturalism, linking both to kitsch as defined by Clement Greenberg. Doss writes, "In a replay of the antipublic hysteria that had gripped postwar intellectuals such as Clement Greenberg in the 1950s, fears of American pluralism-now called

color and references to the art of non-European cultures. In a mural completed for another music room, Seymour Fogel gave equal emphasis to African and European music in his pair of murals for Lincoln High School, prompting one teacher at the time to criticize this equation of musical traditions.¹¹² In several cycles illustrating the evolution of civilization and various industries, there are allusions to Indian, Chinese, Mayan, and Native American cultures. In *The Cotton Industry in Contemporary America* at Sarah J. Hale High School, Monty Lewis portrays African-Americans overseeing the picking of cotton and working in the fields and Native Americans weaving. In *Important Women in the Silk and Wool Industry* by Guy Maccoy, also at Sarah J. Hale, in a style approximating Chinese art, McCoy shows Chinese women carrying out all phases of silk production and in *The Art Contribution to Civilization of All Nations and Countries* at Bayard Rustin High School for the Humanities, Jean Charlot's catholic vision celebrates the art of Japan, China, and India in addition to showing a more typical Eurocentric progression.

Artists also explored multiculturalism in other media, generally in a less public scale than found in the murals. Cesare Stea's small sculpture *Negro Group* (Evander Childs High School library) is a sensitive portrayal of a couple embracing. Another example is a cast stone sculpture attributed to Francois H. Rubitschung (P.S. 8, Brooklyn, library). The piece, showing an oversize mother cradling an infant and

multiculturalism-surfaced with renewed vigor." Erika Doss, *Spirit Poles and Flying Pigs* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 78.

¹¹²Park and Markowitz, *New Deal for Art*, 106.

embracing children of various ethnicities, marks the emergence of a new allegory--the universal family.

Critical Response

Critical appraisal of WPA/FAP school murals, as of WPA/FAP murals in general, was mixed. Even New York's administrator, Audrey McMahon, admitted in 1964: Many of the murals, as I now see them, I don't think were very good, many of the things were absolutely brilliant."¹¹³ Diller made a similar observation and recognized that McMahon balanced aesthetics with public opinion, saying "she was extremely broad in her viewpoint." McMahon thought some things were "rottenly academic," viewing them more as illustrations than works of art. As works of art she considered them nothing, but on the other hand, they were in places where those people wanted those things and they performed a certain kind of function."¹¹⁴

In evaluating school murals, critics were quick to judge artworks according to their educational potential. Of the pictorial maps being painted at Julia Richmond High School under the supervision of Ben Knotts and Guy Maccoby, *New York Times* critic Edward Alden Jewell noted, "The educational value of these handsome panels ought to prove considerable, and the work is being accomplished with painstaking and distinguished artistry." Jewell also praised Eric Mose and Burgoyne Diller for their

¹¹³Interview with Audrey McMahon, 18 November 1964, Audrey McMahon Papers, p. 16, Archives of American Art.

¹¹⁴Interview with Burgoyne Diller, 41.

mural, *Abstraction of the Machine Age*, at Samuel Gompers High School writing, “. . . these murals dramatize energy, as harnessed and transmitted into power by the genius of man. The well integrated design is intelligently, imaginatively and never egregiously abstract in its use of symbols. Here is a mural that, besides serving the purpose of decoration, may be called quite as ‘functional’ as a class-room blackboard.”¹¹⁵ Art Commission painter member, the muralist Ernest Peixotto, also remarked upon the educational value of WPA/FAP school murals as did Brooklyn Technical principal, Albert L. Colston, who declared that Starr’s encyclopedic history of science was “a great educational factor with our student body.”¹¹⁶

The New Deal art programs gave rise to the most ambitious mural cycles ever painted in our public schools. Labor was cheap, resulting in far more painted square footage than could be commissioned today. Paralleling the trend for physical expansiveness, artists tackled sweeping epic histories, encompassing centuries and all parts of the globe. These progress of civilization murals added a new chapter to suitable subjects for school murals and mark a pervasive cultural phenomenon. In addition, several school wall paintings introduced multiculturalism as a theme, long before the term was coined and before it became a standard of educational parlance.

¹¹⁵Edward Alden Jewell, “Diverse Mural Projects,” *New York Times* 19 May 1935, Scrapbooks (1935) vol. VIII, 111, Art Commission.

¹¹⁶“Peixotto Calls W.P.A. Murals Good Teachers,” *Tribune*, 7 June 1936, Scrapbooks, vol. VIII, 93, Art Commission.

The New Deal's commitment to the democratization of art, the desire to "bridge the gap between the American artist and the American public,"¹¹⁷ also affected the kinds of murals commissioned for schools and how they were approved. Unlike the period of the American Renaissance, in the 1930s the architect had little voice regarding public art in schools, since artists painted murals for pre-existing spaces and had no opportunity for collaboration. Instead, the client assumed a larger role in the commissioning process, extending beyond the Board of Education central bureaucracy to principals, teachers, and even students.

¹¹⁷Cahill, *New Horizons in American Art*, 21.

CHAPTER 6

THE 1950S: MODERN ARCHITECTURE AND THE EMERGENCE OF ABSTRACTION IN PUBLIC SCHOOL ART

Freed from severe budget constraints, liberated by technological innovations, and shaped by a range of building types, public school art of the 1950s takes many forms. Artworks exhibit a range of materials, themes, and styles, reflecting concurrent but conflicting attitudes about the nature and purpose of art and of art in a public context. In the post-war era, several artists continued the approach favored by New Deal artists and celebrated local history or school activities using representational imagery. Others returned to a more traditional model of public school art and sought to inspire by their use of figurative allegory. Still others at the most extreme end of the aesthetic spectrum abandoned all figuration and provided completely nonobjective murals and sculptures. In fact, approximately half of the sixty major sculptures, reliefs, mosaics, ceramic murals and stained glass windows commissioned in the 1950s could be described as modernist, meaning they incorporate cubistic devices, combine abstract forms with recognizable imagery, or are totally abstract.¹

The emergence of abstraction in public school art of the post-war period is the focus of this chapter. Although the problem of abstraction and public art was not a new

¹For example, works include Donald DeLue's traditional cast bronze *Creation of the Universe* (1953) for I.S. 198, Queens; Frank Reilly's illustrative mosaic *The Humanities Protecting Biology* (1959) at the Bronx High School of Science; Hans Hofmann's abstract mosaic, *Untitled* (1958) for the New York School of Printing in Manhattan (renamed High School of Graphic Communication Arts) and Gwen Lux's stainless steel constructivist sculpture, *Vapor Trails* (1958) for Aviation High School, Queens.

one for American artists,² abstraction didn't become relevant for artists engaged in school commissions until the 1950s, and its use in school art prompts a series of questions: How can art based on an inner subjectivity, such as the abstract expressionism of Hans Hofmann, be reconciled with the need to communicate to a mass audience, and what are the implications of that for school art?³ Can abstract public art be more than decorative?⁴ What was the catalyst in the 1950s that made abstract public art in schools possible? Finally, how had the Board of Education's expectations for public art in schools changed and who was the arbiter of taste?

A glance back at the 1930s is somewhat relevant here. As head of the WPA/FAP mural division in New York City, Burgoyne Diller, himself a geometric abstract painter, developed an interesting strategy to support the use of abstraction in federally funded murals. Diller picked his sites carefully, choosing buildings associated with new

²Perhaps following the trajectory Stuart Davis had posited almost twenty years earlier, many 1950s artists embraced abstraction to escape politics. Davis wrote that abstract painting is in "direct opposition to the destructive forces of totalitarianism and reaction. Abstract art has been and is now a direct progressive social force, not simply a theory about progress." "Abstract Painting Today," in O'Connor, 126.

³For a discussion and justification of the artist's inward turning, see Meyer Schapiro, "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art," *Art News* 56 (Summer 1957): 36-42, reprinted in Meyer Schapiro, *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: G. Braziller, 1978) as "Recent Abstract Painting," 226. Responding to the political climate, Schapiro writes, "In the absence of ideal values stimulating to his imagination, the artist must cultivate his own garden as the only secure field in the violence and uncertainties of our time." He equates abstraction with creativity and individualism, asserting "Painting by its impressive example of inner freedom and inventiveness and by its fidelity to artistic goals, which include the mastery of the formless and accidental, helps to maintain the critical spirit and the ideals of creativeness, sincerity and self-reliance, which are indispensable to the life of our culture."

⁴See example of Samuel G. Wiener, Jr.'s terra cotta mural for PS 142, Bronx, designed by Board of Education architect Radoslovich. This bold geometric pattern

technology, such as airports and radio stations, or lounges in hospitals and public housing where the spectator was supposed to relax or recuperate. In these instances abstract art would be “soothing” or would “stimulate relaxation,”⁵ thus fulfilling a social function without having to be didactic.

On the other hand, relatively few semi-abstract murals were painted in public schools, where the overriding purpose of art was to educate, but not necessarily about art. Exceptions included Lucienne Bloch’s *Evolution of Music* and Diller and Eric Mose’s *Power*, both of which combine a cubistic structure with recognizable elements and are based on themes which lend themselves to an abstract treatment--music and electricity. In fact, prior to the 1950s, only one totally nonobjective artwork made its way into a New York City public school. This singular WPA/FAP commission is Ilya Bolotowsky’s small fountain mosaic (c. 1936) for Theodore Roosevelt High School, Bronx. Bolotowsky created this piece around the time he was completing one of the first abstract murals in America--his 1936 commission for the Williamsburg Housing Project. Bolotowsky’s mural as well as the other nonobjective murals commissioned for Williamsburg were largely made possible by architect William Lescaze, who Bolotowsky noted was “one of the few modern architects of the day . . . sympathetic to abstract art. This was the beginning of something new.”⁶

looks more architectural than artistic.

⁵See Greta Berman, “Abstractions for Public Spaces, 1935-1943,” *Arts Magazine* 56 (June 1982): 81-86 and Burgoyne Diller, “Abstract Murals,” in O’Connor, *Art for the Millions*, 71.

⁶Ilya Bolotowsky, *Ilya Bolotowsky* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1974), 17.

In recalling his experience as an artist in the 1930s, Bolotowsky made an observation that holds true for public school artworks commissioned in the 1950s. Evidence indicates that a new modern architecture demanding new artistic solutions prompted the transformation of public art in school buildings. The Board of Education's building program supported modern architects and promoted modern architecture, and in almost every case, building designers played a decisive role in identifying the site for art and in choosing the artist.

However, the case studies we will examine demonstrate different artistic responses to modernist school architecture and the problem of designing abstract or semi-abstract public art for a school. In his untitled mosaic for the New York School of Printing, Hans Hofmann responded primarily to the scale and sculptural nature of the building. In contrast, Ben Shahn returned to an earlier theme, the moral imperative of education, in his mosaic affirming the importance of the humanities for a vocational high school. In her sculptural fence for an elementary school, Mary Callery transformed public sculpture into an interactive, playful element while recalling a traditional theme in public school art--literature. Lastly, in her stainless steel construction for Aviation High School, Gwen Lux responded to the windowless brick façade and challenge of creating an abstract allegory.

None of the art commissioned would have been possible without the massive post-war construction program undertaken by the New York City Board of Education. As we shall see, the internal restructuring of the Board's division of architecture helped make modern public art in schools possible.

The Post-War Building Program

The renewed interest in school art bore a direct correlation to the ambitious building program launched by the Board of Education in 1946. The baby boom following the war, during which time all school construction had halted, made the city desperate for additional seats. At that time, the backlog was so extreme that the Board devised a two tiered approach to addressing overcrowding: A Post-War Program (95 projects) to begin immediately and a Long-Range Program (329 Projects) to be launched in successive years. Many projects had been on the planning board since June 1942.

Unfortunately, due to the huge increases in construction costs between 1940 (the year construction estimates were based on) and 1946 when the Board of Education approved a large-scale capital plan, the number of projects was slashed in half. "These increased costs have necessitated changes in the school building program and have meant, in effect, that for every two schools that the Board had planned to build, capital funds available will be sufficient for only one."⁷ In the final budget for 1946, the Board of Estimate only approved construction funds for twenty-eight projects.

Shortly thereafter, in 1948 and 1949, the Board of Education undertook space surveys and concluded that in actuality \$100,000,000 per annum was needed to relieve overcrowding. Nevertheless, substantial money wasn't forthcoming until Mayor Robert Wagner took office in 1953, remaining Mayor until 1965. In 1954, in just a single session, the Board approved \$31,000,000 for capital construction contracts, making it "the largest expenditure for new school construction awarded at any one session of the

⁷New York City Board of Education, *All the Children: 47th Annual Report of the*

Board of Education in the history of the Board, or by any other Board of Education in the country.” In addition, Mayor Wagner and the Board of Estimate approved \$105,000,000 for school construction in the 1955 capital budget.⁸ The Board’s gratitude was so great that they adopted a resolution entitled, “Expression of Appreciation to his Honor, the Mayor, and Associates on the Board of Estimate for their Co-operation in the furtherance of the school building program.” By 1954, the Board had expended approximately \$350,000,000, including \$180,000,000 for the construction of 117 schools and additions, providing 114,000 additional seats.⁹

Despite the Herculean effort to stem the tide of overcrowding, Dr. David Moskowitz, head of the Division of Housing and Construction, had this to say in his 1959 annual report:

From the time of consolidation to the present day, the Board of Education has been exerting every effort to mold the public schools into a modern physical plant, but it has never been able to catch up with the building needs of a continuously expanding, changing, and aging school system. Depressions, wars, and post-war inflations have had their inevitable effect on capital budgets and school construction programs; increasing birth rates and shifting populations have had their impact on soaring school enrollments; time and use have exacted their toll in outworn school facilities; and new philosophies and objectives have had their influence on the changing design of the school's curriculum and its physical requirements.

Superintendent of Schools City of New York for School Year 1945-46, 89.

⁸Board of Education of the City of New York, *Journal of the Board of Education* 2 (1954), 3920.

⁹*Ibid.*, 3921. An article in the *New York Herald Tribune* reported that the City spent \$566,276,845 on school construction between 1950-58. See "Gerosa Says Schools Waste \$100,000,000 In 8 Years of Building," *New York Herald Tribune* 19 November 1958. Copy in Abramovitz (UN (Art)) clipping file, Avery, Columbia University, New York.

Moskowitz explained that the need for new schools was particularly acute in 1959 because of new large-scale housing developments, the desire for smaller class sizes, and the diversification of special services provided by schools, particularly in the area of vocational training.¹⁰

The enormous building program, despite its inadequacies, coupled with a reduced in-house architectural staff resulting from the war, prompted the Board of Education to reconsider who should design school buildings and how. Before long, private architectural firms were receiving half of the assignments for new schools. For the years 1951-1952, private firms received commissions for twenty-seven designs.¹¹ In the 1955 capital budget, private architects won bids for sixteen of twenty-seven new schools (or new additions) as well as six of eight modernizations.¹² In total, private architects won commissions for 72 of 127 new schools, designed and constructed between 1950-58.¹³ It is not clear on what basis these awards were made.

The bureaucratic changes which made the hiring of private architects possible began in 1951, when the Board of Education created a new Office of Housing and the New York City Housing Authority loaned John P. Riley to head it.¹⁴ Riley served as

¹⁰David H. Moskowitz, "Division of Housing," *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools 1958-1959* (New York: Board of Education of the City of New York, 1960), 98-99.

¹¹This according to article, "Banjo-Plan School," *Architectural Forum* 97 (November 1952), 124.

¹²See "The Big City School," *Architectural Forum* 102 (April 1955): 144. 138-145.

¹³"Gerosa Says Schools Waste \$100,000,000 In 8 Years of Building," *New York Herald Tribune*, 19 November 1958.

coordinator of construction until early 1953. *Architectural Forum* credits him with formally introducing the Board of Education's construction bureau to "20th century concepts and methods." In one and a half years he transformed the construction bureau "from a stagnant, chaotic zero into a topnotch, high-spirited agency at least as willing to break with the past as any on the municipal landscape."¹⁵ He began by splitting the bureau into design and engineering, and he hired employees from outside civil service lists to serve as division chiefs, setting the groundwork for bringing in outside firms as designers. For chief engineer, Riley hired William H. Correale, who eventually took Riley's job. For chief architect, he hired Michael L. Radoslovich, a Queens architect-builder, who had worked seven years for the Manhattan Borough president. Almost immediately, Riley offered private architectural firms the chance to design building components as well as entire schools, aiming to develop a set of prototypes and to establish a basis of comparison between old approaches and new solutions. This allowed Riley to "use jobs of staff and outsiders as mutual yardsticks," making it easier to see where modifications in school planning could be made.¹⁶

One of the first things Riley did was to revise the Bureau of Construction's standards. Changes included: substituting L-shaped plans for H and U's; replacing

¹⁴This in itself may have resulted from pressure exerted by architect B. Sumner Gruzen on his friend Charles H. Silver, Board of Education President and Manhattan Board representative, to allow outside firms to bid on projects. Gruzen wanted an opportunity for "creative architects in city to do schools." At this time there was "a lot of repetition in Board of Education's division Private architects wanted a chance to develop new layouts, plans, opportunity for organizing the schools." Jordan Gruzen, interview by author, 7 February 2001.

¹⁵ "The Big City School," 140.

horizontal air-duct system with a vertical air-duct system; reducing floor to floor heights; shrinking and simplifying all parapets, eliminating cornices, reducing ornamental facing materials; redesigning kindergarten rooms, reducing them from fifty to twenty-five seats, and introducing flexible storage in them; and redesigning playgrounds. These design changes reduced construction costs from \$1,665 to \$1,488 per pupil for elementary schools and \$1,511 to \$1,280 per pupil for junior highs.¹⁷ They also provided programmatic support for a shift in sensibility, paving the way for International Style schools.¹⁸ As a writer for *Architectural Forum* observed, “Thanks to the pioneering of its own startlingly reinvigorated bureau of construction, the Board has at long last been persuaded to shake hands, at least, with modern architecture, and to consign a goodly share--in fact, a lion’s share--of all recent projects to private architects; this, in itself, is a major revolution and is, of course, very good news.”¹⁹

A Percent for Art

Coupled with a new attitude toward the design of school buildings came a new attitude toward permanent art associated with them. Board of Education design professionals viewed art as a necessary extension of the architecture. Despite a growing

¹⁶ “Banjo-Plan School,” 124.

¹⁷ “The Big City School,” 141.

¹⁸ See Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *The International Style: architecture since 1922* (New York: W. W. Norton, c1932; reprint with a new foreword by Philip Johnson, New York: W. W. Norton, 1996) for the seminal text on International Style architecture.

¹⁹ “The Big City School,” 139.

post-war inflation,²⁰ in 1955, Radoslovich, a champion of modernist architecture and its artistic equivalent, recommended that a regular art allowance be established for all new schools, suggesting \$7,500 per elementary school, \$10,000 per junior high, and \$30,000 per high school--a formula based on less than 1/2 of 1% of typical construction costs. In comparison, at that time, the federal government permitted expenditure of one dollar in one hundred for art while the Board of Education was spending less than one cent in \$10.²¹ Ultimately, for the years 1946-1959, the Board expended approximately \$600,000 of the \$500 million used to finance the construction of 300 new schools for permanent art.²² This was roughly equivalent to 1/10 of 1%; still it was enough to prompt the ire of the City Comptroller who charged the Board with "waste and extravagance."²³

Apparently, throughout the period of the post-war building program, the Board's architectural division, with the tacit consent of the Board's committee on sites and

²⁰Moskowitz observed in 1959 that "A capital budget dollar in 1958-59 bought roughly sixty cents worth of school construction in the period around 1946. ... Consequently, the Board of Education has been confronted with the persistent and perplexing problem of how to build *more* schools and *better* classrooms for *less* money." David H. Moskowitz, "Division of Housing," *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools 1958-1959*, 99.

²¹See Conrad Brown, "Uproar Over New York's School Art," *Craft Horizons* 19 (January 1959): 8 and "The Big City School," 142.

²²The average Board of Education commissioned art project was \$10,000. Based on sixty projects, the Board of Education expended \$600,000 on permanent art associated with new buildings.

²³"Gerosa Says Schools Waste \$100,000,000 In 8 Years of Building," *New York Herald Tribune*, 19 November 1958.

buildings, had been quietly authorizing the expenditure of construction dollars on art.²⁴ It was not until 1959 that the City comptroller caught on. Unlike in earlier years, there are no references to artworks commissioned in the 1950s in the Board's detailed minutes. For example, there are columns of entries referring to trivial construction costs for the New York School of Printing, going so far as to itemize a \$27.64 extra to revise the text on a temporary project sign, but there is no mention of the \$20,000 paid to Hans Hofmann to design and fabricate the mosaic mural for the school.²⁵ This is because private architects and Radoslovich folded the cost into the original construction contract, so the Board and then the City unknowingly approved it as part of the whole project.²⁶

The schools designed by leading architectural firms, among them Harrison and Abramovitz, Kelly and Gruzen, are modernist structures bearing the imprint of European luminaries Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius. Not only did these architects redefine the materials and configuration of public schools, for example using glass blocks, introducing sweeping curves, and maximizing an open plan breaking out of rectilinear boxes, they reimagined the role of art in school buildings. No longer an adjunct of the curriculum as it was during the 1930s, in the 1950s school art was first and foremost

²⁴This was the chain of command: Charles J. Bensley, Chairman, Committee on Buildings and Sites for Board of Education; Dr. David H. Moskowitz, Associate Superintendent, Division of Housing for Superintendent of Schools; William H. Correale, Superintendent of School Buildings, Design and Construction; Michael L. Radoslovich, Director of Architecture.

²⁵Board of Education, *Journal* 2 (1957), 3556.

²⁶For example, in completing the section on the Art Commission submission form, "To be acquired by the city by" the Board of Education filled in, "as part of construction contract." Exhibition File 3007-G, Art Commission.

viewed as an extension of the architecture. The focus was more on aesthetics than content.²⁷ Evidence (or lack thereof) suggests that the design of all artworks only had to be approved by the architect of the building, then by Radoslovich, and finally by the Art Commission, but not by any of the Board's pedagogical staff or administrators. The architectural press noted, "Ever since its 'new deal' set in, the construction bureau has looked with a remarkably kindly eye on all private-architect suggestions to the effect that it would be nice if we could only get an allowance out of the School X appropriation for something to be worked up for the entranceway, say, by Sculptor Y or Painter Z. And many of these proposals have gone through--right on up and through the budget bureau, which, while it has struggled manfully to keep up with the recent enlightenment, still does not too much like gambits such as this one."²⁸ In some rare instances, the architect even paid for the commissioned artwork, as was the case with Wallace Harrison, who commissioned Léger's former student Bruce Gregory, to complete a semi-abstract pair of murals for the curved auditorium walls of P.S. 34, Manhattan.²⁹

And certainly neither the architect nor the Board's division of architecture consulted with the community on the appropriateness of proposed designs. In this age of highly trained specialists, the architect occupied an almost god-like position, and if he recommended a particular artist and approved a particular design, the Board's

²⁷Of course this is a generalization, and there were exceptions as we shall see in the discussion of the Ben Shahn mural below.

²⁸"The Big City School," 142. See also discussion in "Tokens of Art in City Schools," *Progressive Architecture* 40 (April 1959): 149-150.

²⁹Draft press release in Max Abramovitz papers (uncatalogued), Avery Library, Columbia University. Gregory was an employee of Harrison and Abramovitz, working in

architectural division followed suite. Symptomatic of this attitude, during the 1950s architects and art critics didn't even use the term "public art." Rather they referred to permanent art associated with the built environment, whether schools or otherwise, as "architectural art."³⁰ Its purpose was to complement its architectural host, "to enhance and enlarge the sensuous appeal of a competent work of architecture in such a way that the building is greater than it would have been without it."³¹ Public art was simpler then.

In explaining the purpose of architectural art in a public school, one writer observed, "These mosaics and sculptures contribute an element of vitality to their architectural and urban environment; they are tentative beginnings--tokens of art--which can lead to significant architectural enrichment."³² Furthermore, the writer for *Progressive Architecture* reasoned, permanent decoration incorporated in these new schools was probably the only original art children would experience (an argument still made today) and it is "included in the school buildings as part of the city's enlightened educational program as well as for esthetic and social reasons."³³ Along the same lines, the Board defended its decision to incorporate art, explaining it was used "to offset the

the interior design department.

³⁰See use of term "architectural art," in Conrad Brown, "Uproar Over New York's School Art," 9.

³¹Ada Louise Huxtable, "Art in Architecture 1959," *Craft Horizons* 19 (1959): 11. See also Eleanor Bittermann, *Art in Modern Architecture* (New York: Reinhold, 1952) and Conrad Brown, "Uproar over New York's School Art," in same issue of *Craft Horizons*.

³²"Tokens of Art in City Schools," 146.

³³*Ibid.*

severity of straight-forward, structural design,” and that it contributed to a “sense of ownership and pride.”³⁴

In a way it was natural that private architects took the lead in commissioning art for schools. Many of them had years of prior experience incorporating art in buildings designed for private clients, and they merely carried that practice over to the public sector. For example, Wallace K. Harrison had worked on Rockefeller Center when the firm was Corbett, Harrison and MacMurray. He had also been involved with the 1939 World’s Fair, where as a partner at Harrison & Foulhoux, he had designed the Masterpieces of Art Building, which featured a mural by Lyonel Feininger and a sculpture by Wilhelm Lehmbruck. Perhaps more relevant to school projects was Harrison’s role in the design of the United Nations General Assembly building. Although deemed a failure by some, and derided by the public as “fried eggs,”³⁵ Léger’s pair of murals was the model for the previously mentioned interior murals executed by his assistant Bruce Gregory for the auditorium for PS 34, Manhattan. Similarly Kelly and Gruzen were described as “warm friends of contemporary art . . . whose buildings of recent years have been designed to incorporate the works of some of our most talented sculptors and painters.”³⁶ Modernist school architecture of the 1950s encouraged a sympathetic form of modernist public art, carefully selected by architects for its

³⁴“Tokens of Art in City Schools,” 147.

³⁵Huxtable, “Art in Architecture 1959,” 15.

³⁶“Symbols of Modern Education,” *Progressive Architecture* (June 1955): 133.

compatibility with their own aesthetic. What did that mean for the time-honored tradition of collaboration?

Glass and steel architecture had mandated new locations for art and carved out a new role for the artist. During Snyder's tenure, lavish ornament gave distinction to building facades and art was reserved for interior spaces where it was carefully worked into the total design.³⁷ In the 1950s, we see the first widespread use of exterior mosaic murals and sculptures. Stripped down functional architecture required a new approach to weaving art into a building or more aptly next to a building.³⁸ Frequently, designers didn't strive for seamless integration but practiced what architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable described as "apposition," best demonstrated in Kelly & Gruzen's General George Wingate High School in Brooklyn (also known as the "banjo school") where Gwen Lux's needle-like *Aspiration* soars skyward as a counterpoint to the low, circular wing and Max Spivak's mosaic, *Tools of Education* adds color and texture to an austere façade.³⁹

³⁷See discussion of Faulkner and Turner murals in Chapter 3.

³⁸Certainly Mies van der Rohe's 1929 Barcelona Pavilion with the sculpture in the reflecting pool by Georg Kolbe entitled *Sunrise* (1925) defined the modernist relationship of art and architecture.

³⁹For one of the best critical appraisals of the relationship of modern art to modern architecture, see Ada Louise Huxtable, "Art in Architecture 1959," *Craft Horizons* 19 (1959): 10-15, previously cited. She writes, "*The basis of this relationship is apposition, not integration. Architecturally, it means enrichment by juxtaposition, completion by contrast. It is the skillful, perceptive use of the right kind of painting, the suitable piece of sculpture, the correct craft, to enhance and enlarge the sensuous appeal of a competent work of architecture in such a way that the building is greater than it would have been without it.*" Huxtable, "Art in Architecture 1959," 11. See also the Museum of Modern Art symposium entitled, "The Relation of Painting and Sculpture to

Architects and artists recognized that a new architecture demanded new art forms, but few architect/artist/patron teams emerged to support a successful collaboration. In most cases, artists were brought in fairly late in a project, making it difficult for them to suggest architectural changes. Architects planned the location for art and the type of art they wanted.⁴⁰ Though we assume today that successful public art cannot be created without collaboration, the process typical of the 1950s nevertheless produced some distinguished works as we shall see in the following case studies.

**Hans Hofmann, *Untitled* (1955-58)
New York School of Printing, Manhattan**

Efforts to create a new school of printing began in 1943 but the building, heralded by Board President Charles H. Silver, as “the finest school of its kind in the world,”⁴¹

Architecture,” on 19 March 1951. Chaired by Philip Johnson, participants included James Johnson Sweeney, Ben Shahn, Jose Luis Sert, Frederick Kiesler and Henry-Russell Hitchcock. Typescript is available in the archives of the Museum of Modern Art. See also “The Next Fifty Years,” *Architectural Forum* 95 (June 1951): 165-170, which includes a brief discussion on art and architecture. Of the architects interviewed, there is an overall negative attitude about the prospects of integrating art and architecture. For a summary of the problem of collaboration see John Wetenhall, “The Ascendancy of Modern Public Sculpture in America,” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1988) and Harriet Senie, “Studies in the Development of Urban Sculpture: 1950-1975” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1981) and especially her chapter 2 “Sculpture and Architecture: A Changing Relationship” in *Contemporary Public Sculpture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Jordan Gruzen presented a contemporary view on collaboration: “When you have control over it you tend to be more aggressive about where you place it . . . as you're designing you already have the work of art's location... maybe working with an artist in a collaborative way you develop things together.” “Best thing is if the artist comes on early.” Interview by author.

⁴⁰ There were exceptions. For example, Max Spivak designed mural and floor pattern for J.H.S. 189-Q.

⁴¹“Address by Charles H. Silver, Pres. Board of Education, at the Dedication of the New York School of Printing, Thursday, 15 January 1959, Charles Silver Papers, Box

didn't open until the fall of 1958.⁴² It took ten years to acquire the site and then five years to design and construct the school. The endeavor was a great experiment in cooperation, bringing together union representatives from all the printing trades as well as a committee of high powered sponsors including heads of publishing companies, the president of Columbia University and the Mayor himself. The existing school of printing had been established in 1925 but was dispersed in separate buildings, with its shop program renting space in a commercial building. The new building was intended to be a state of the art facility equipped with the most technologically advanced machinery to be provided by the printing industry. It was designed to accommodate 2,700 pupils, 1,500 of which were to be enrolled in the regular 4-year vocational program and the remainder to be comprised of apprentices, journeymen, and war veterans. The impetus for the school came from a need for more skilled workers for the printing industry, the second largest manufacturing industry in New York. The industry provided some of the steadiest employment at the highest salaries for industrial workers.

In June of 1953 the Board of Education authorized Kelly and Gruzen to begin preparation of plans and specifications. By March of 1954 Kelly and Gruzen presented a preliminary design, approved by the Art Commission on 12 April 1954. From the beginning, B. Sumner Gruzen, the lead designer on the project, envisioned the New York

#5, Folder: Printing H.S., Teachers College.

⁴²Some of the Board of Education's most important modernist buildings were the new generation of vocational high schools. Three, in fact, received some of the most distinguished school art of the period. In addition to the Hans Hofmann mural commissioned for the New York School of Printing, Ben Shahn created the mural, *Science and the Humanities* (1957) for William Grady High School and Gwen Lux executed a sculptural symbol of the aircraft industry for Aviation High School, Queens.

School of Printing as a seamless union of new construction technologies and modern design. The school is compact, with a long two-story academic wing placed above a five-story shop unit. Toward the Tenth Avenue end of the building, a separate auditorium and gymnasium unit faced in brick projects at a right angle from the main body of the building and marks the property line along the sidewalk. The three most distinctive features of the building are the curtain walls made of solid glass block without masonry back-up enclosing the shops and academic wing, the pair of crisscrossing escalators at the school's center, and the sunken playground in the school's foreground. The biomorphic curves of the auditorium and gym unit give it a sculptural presence, set against the sleek glass rectangle of the primary wing. Visible in a model of the school and completing the composition, is a Pollack-like abstraction stretching across the recessed wall fronting the gymnasium.⁴³ From the clearly articulated model, it is evident that Gruzen envisioned an abstract mural as part of the overall building composition, something that would provide a contrast in color and texture to the austere sculptural components of the building. This approach was typical of how many modern architects viewed architectural art.⁴⁴ Gruzen wanted something that would "complement most

See case studies below.

⁴³See photograph in Exhibition File, 3007-B on submission dated 12 April 1954, Art Commission.

⁴⁴Henry-Russell Hitchcock observed that "it is still abstract art, considered in a broad sense, which speaks the visual language most intelligible to architects." Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *The Miller Company Collection of Abstract Art: Painting Toward Architecture* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1948), 45.

effectively the geometrical and spatial character of the architecture itself.”⁴⁵ He also wanted to provide an element that would directly engage passers-by and would mediate between the structure and the sidewalk. The solution was what Hofmann referred to as a “bowtie on the building.”⁴⁶

How was the seventy-seven-year-old Hofmann (1880-1996), one of America's preeminent painters and teachers of abstract art, selected for this commission?⁴⁷

Hofmann's influence was enormous, shaping two generations of painters--geometric abstractionists of the 1930s and younger painters of the New York School--and for many years his teaching eclipsed his own work as a painter. He made the theories of European modernists understandable to a generation of American painters and critics. Hofmann is best known for his theories on “push and pull” and the relationship of color to form,⁴⁸ contending, like most modern painters, that form and color were interrelated. He was both a prolific writer and painter. Given Hofmann's stature, why did he agree to undertake a project for a New York City public school?

⁴⁵Ibid., 50.

⁴⁶From account by Hofmann assistant, Max Spoerri, in raw footage from documentary, “Hans Hofmann: Artist and Teacher,” by Madeline Amgott, August 2000, produced under the auspices of the Hofmann Educational Foundation and MUSE Film and T.V.

⁴⁷There is an extensive bibliography on Hofmann. See Hofmann web site, accessed June 15, 2001, hanshofmann.org, for chronology, bibliography, exhibition history, and images.

⁴⁸Hofmann explains, “Push and Pull is a colloquial expression applied for movement experienced in nature or created on the picture surface to detect the counterplay of movement in and out of the depth. Depth perception in nature and depth creation on the picture-surface is the crucial problem in pictorial creation.” See “A Painter and His Problems: A Manual Dedicated to Painting,” 1963, excerpted in

It was a "Sam Kootz result."⁴⁹ Sam Kootz was the prominent New York dealer who represented Hofmann and other Abstract Expressionist artists. Jordan Gruzen recalled: "Kootz had such tremendous influence on his artists that if Sam said it was a good thing to do let's do it . . . I don't remember doing any arm twisting."⁵⁰ In a period before professional public art consultants existed, it was logical that Gruzen would ask the advice of an art expert he knew. Gruzen had long been interested in modern art and was already familiar with the work of Hofmann: "My father really loved art. He collected it. Our house was sort of like a museum--Dubuffet, couple of Hofmanns." Kootz apparently acted as the intermediary, both suggesting Hofmann and arranging the commission with the artist.⁵¹

It is noteworthy that a prominent member of the New York art scene played a pivotal role in the commissioning of the first totally abstract mural for a New York City school. Kootz opened his gallery in 1945 and it remained open until 1966. In addition to being the sole representative of Picasso in the United States, Kootz showed leading European modernists as well as American abstract painters, such as William Baziotes, Romare Bearden, Adolf Gottlieb, Byron Browne, Robert Motherwell, and Carl Holty. He was the first to show the Abstract Expressionist painters as a school and included Hofmann in his 1949 show, "The Intrsubjectives," also featuring work of de Kooning,

Goodman, 177.

⁴⁹Jordan Gruzen of New York, interview by author, 7 February 2001.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹See entry on this mural in Municipal Art Society and the Art Commission of the City of New York, *Adopt-a-Mural* (New York : The Society, 1991), 32-33.

Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, Ad Reinhardt, and Robert Motherwell. Kootz wielded tremendous influence and was a member of MOMA's advisory board.⁵²

The resourceful entrepreneur, Kootz was always looking for new markets for his stable of Abstract Expressionist painters, and in October of 1950 he organized an exhibition to promote architectural art. He believed the large scale and boldness of much Abstract Expressionist work made it suitable for an architectural context. Kootz later remarked,

we presented an exhibition of 'The Muralist and the Modern Architect,' a collaboration of the artists of this gallery with leading modern architects, to demonstrate the creative and appropriate contribution the modern artist can bring to modern buildings. The exhibition stemmed from the artist's continual reaching for a wall, from his desire to work on large surfaces which permitted ample scope for the energy and ideas current in contemporary painting and sculpture.⁵³

⁵²For discussion of Kootz, see Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983) 121-124; Grace Glueck, "Samuel M. Kootz Dead at 83; An Activist for American Art," *NYT* 9 August 1982, D8, copy in MOMA clipping file, and Grace Glueck, "Kootz Is closing Art Gallery; Will Write About His Career," *NYT*, 8 April 1966, Subject File, Museum of Modern Art, New York. See also Kootz's own book on modern art, *New Frontiers in American Painting* (New York: Hastings House, 1943).

⁵³Sam, Kootz, "Art for a Synagogue," pamphlet for exhibition, October 3-20, 1951, Subject File, Museum of Modern Art, New York. For "The Muralist and the Modern Architect," Kootz invited five modern architects to provide plans or models of completed buildings or buildings in design, and then playing matchmaker, approached five of his artists to create artworks for them. Commenting on Kootz's choice of painters William Baziotis, Hans Hofmann, Robert Motherwell, and Adolf Gottlieb, and sculptor David Hare, one reviewer commented, "Since these artists have eschewed representation and concentrated upon form, color, and the emotions they evoke, their work is best when it is large in scale." Doris Brian, "Dealers Help Artists Help Themselves," *The Art Digest* 25 (1 October 1959): 11.

Hofmann was included in this show.⁵⁴ About five years later, architect William Lescaze selected Hofmann to create a mosaic to envelop the elevator shaft at the new William Kaufman Building at 711 3rd Avenue. This was completed in 1956.

Kootz did a follow-up show in October 1951, "Art for a Synagogue," in which he exhibited works commissioned for Congregation B'nai Israel in Millburn, N.J. in a building designed by Percival Goodman.⁵⁵ Kootz, first and foremost an advocate for the artist, encouraged greater artistic freedom for the sculptor or painter doing a public commission and undoubtedly influenced Gruzen to allow Hofmann as much artistic freedom as possible.

It's not clear just when Gruzen approached Hofmann, but the earliest known study for the New York School of Printing mural is dated 1955, at the time Hofmann was working on the 711 mural. By then, the building was fully designed, and in the process of being redesigned.⁵⁶ Despite the huge cost overruns, in the new model, the architects

⁵⁴Hofmann designed a mosaic skin for a 50-foot high camponile marking the market place of a new city, Chimbote, designed by architects Paul Weiner and Jose Sert for the Peruvian government. Although never executed, one reviewer described Hofmann's proposal as "titanic mosaic abstractions, tossing a riot of hot color against the bright blue Peruvian sky." Doris Brian, "Dealers Help Artists Help Themselves," 11.

⁵⁵Adolph Gottlieb designed a curtain for the Ark, incorporating applique and embroidery by members of the congregation. Robert Motherwell did a mural and Herbert Ferber created an exterior sculpture. Kootz guided the congregation and the architect in the selection of the artists and also encouraged a certain amount of artistic freedom for them, explaining, "within certain areas the artists were free to employ their own imaginative powers and their own ideas in the work commissioned." Sam, Kootz, "Art for a Synagogue," pamphlet for exhibition, October 3-20, 1951.

⁵⁶Because the lowest bid was over \$1,000,000 more than the construction dollars allocated, Gruzen had to redesign the school by joining the two-story academic unit on the top to the mass of the shops below. In this way, the architect reduced construction

still showed an abstract mural on the front of the gymnasium-auditorium wing, although the second mural design is a more angular, cubistic arrangement than the Pollock-like composition on the first model.

Given that the building was so far along, it doesn't appear that Hofmann had much latitude in the size, location, or medium of the final artwork. Project manager for the job, Lloyd Fleishman, corroborates this. He recalls that the architects approached Hofmann in the later stages of design with a clear idea of size and location of the artwork. According to Fleishman, Hofmann was "very satisfied with size and location."⁵⁷ The design was left to Hofmann. This course of events conforms to the approach that Kelly & Gruzen had taken on their earlier George W. Wingate school and also typifies architectural practice of the period.

Hofmann successfully conceived the mural for translation into mosaic as well as incorporated aspects of his easel paintings into the finished product. For him, painting was a sensory experience, "forming with color,"⁵⁸ and his method of applying thick

costs by \$700,000. See "Request to Board of Estimate for Modification of Contract with Kelly and Gruzen, Private Architects, in Connection with Preparation of Plans, etc. for New York School of Printing, Manhattan, submitted by the Committee on Buildings and Sites, 1 June 1955, Charles Silver Papers, Box #5, folder: Printing H.S, Teachers College.

⁵⁷Lloyd Fleishman of Southbury, Connecticut, telephone interview by author, 19 February 2001. Jordan Gruzen's recollection is a little different. "We went to Hofmann's studio in Provincetown. We met with him, started to discuss things . . . When we designed the school we said we want a work of art, let's use Hofmann and Hofmann collaborated on it . . . We were thinking about this when we were designing the building. We were pretty much interacting." Jordan Gruzen, interview by author, 7 February 2001. and in subsequent conversation with author, 19 February 2001.

⁵⁸ Hans Hofmann, *Hans Hofmann: A Retrospective* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1976), 58 with essay by Walter Darby Bannard.

layers of paint lent itself to the tactile nature of mosaic. In fact, Clement Greenberg credited Hofmann with introducing the physicality of the painted surface. "It was he [Hofmann] - not Pollock or Dubuffet - who launched the 'heavy' surface in abstract art, that fat, heavy, and eloquent surface which so many younger painters, both in America and in Europe, are now mechanically driving into the ground."⁵⁹ Greenberg even likened patches of pigment to mosaic pieces in Hofmann's work of 1954 and later.⁶⁰ At the time Hofmann created the mosaic, he had abandoned extrapolating abstractions from nature and primarily was working from his inner reserve of imagery. The mural also coincides with Hofmann's use of rectangles⁶¹ that began with the use of hand painted pieces of colored paper placed on a painting's surface and soon evolved into a collage technique which informed the conception of the New York School of Printing mural as it had the earlier 711 mosaic.

Untitled is a rambling 64 feet long by 11-1/2 feet high, protected on the top by an overhang and on the bottom by a row of bricks which rise into a wedge on one end to compensate for the grade change. (Fig. 48) The bricks are also a discreet protective barrier, preventing people or things from scraping against the mural. Hofmann divides the wall surface architectonically into vertical and horizontal planes of yellow, blue, red

⁵⁹Quoted from Clement Greenberg, "Hofmann," in Cynthia Goodman, et.al. *Hans Hofmann* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990), 134; reprinted from Clement Greenberg, *Hans Hofmann* (Paris: Editions Georges Fall, 1961).

⁶⁰"A number of paintings of that year show, against larger, brushed-in forms, little knifed-on oblongs of thicker pigment that resemble mosaic pieces." Ibid, 136.

⁶¹"By 1956, the full-bodied rectangle had emerged as a major compositional element in H's work." Irving Sandler, "Hans Hofmann: The Dialectical Master," in Cynthia Goodman, et al, 62.

and black. Smaller rectangles reflect the shape of windows piercing the gymnasium wall above. Overlaid on this cubistic structure are bold calligraphic marks in black and red coupled with bright Miro-like biomorphic spots of red and blue. Toward the mural's center a vertical plane in shades of blue convincingly recreates broad, paint laden brush strokes and divides the mural into sections – on the right there are small, delicate forms contrasted with the broader, more graphic treatment on the left. Max Spoerri, a former Hofmann student and one of the assistants on the project recalls, “On one hand he worked with broad colors... and he shifted around and at same time tried to suggest spontaneity of the paint brush.”⁶²

In approaching this commission, it appears that Hofmann saw it as an extension of his current work and didn't make a distinction between a public and private context. He didn't set out to symbolize the New York School of Printing; instead he responded to the site's architectural and urban character using his familiar vocabulary of form and color.⁶³ Significantly, Hofmann never formalized a title for the mural, which might have given it symbolic content. Many of his paintings do have suggestive titles, such as *In the Wake of the Hurricane* (1960) or *To JFK: A Thousand Roots Did Die with Thee* (1963),⁶⁴ but he was content to leave the mosaic untitled.

⁶²Max Spoerri, in raw footage from documentary, “Hans Hofmann: Artist and Teacher,” by Madeline Amgott, August 2000, produced under the auspices of the Hofmann Educational Foundation and MUSE Film and T.V.

⁶³Writer for “Tokens of Art for City Schools,” erroneously refers to calligraphic markings as printer's marks: “Though the bold arrangement of forms-printer's symbols-is enlarged,” 147.

⁶⁴See discussion of Hofmann's titles in Helmut Friedel, *Hans Hofmann*

The formal connection between the mural and Hofmann's studio work is evidenced in an early study called "Study for mosaic" dated 1955. Described by Hofmann as a "collage on cardboard," it suggests a composite of individual paintings, each on a separate piece of cardboard, cut and pasted into an overall composition in a horizontal format.⁶⁵ This study, like the finished mural, is an arrangement of components, which if separated, could also function independently.⁶⁶ Another former Hofmann student and an assistant for this project, Jim Gahagan, recalled how the mural in fact evolved from a collage: "There suddenly he becomes much more lyrical and you can almost see the collage technique in the final mural. Even though it's mosaic, if you're an artist you can see it didn't come from a gouache painting. Because shapes were cut out and moved and shifted, it became a collage painting. We finished that one in '58."⁶⁷

After making numerous sketches over several years, Hofmann finally settled on a composition and created a painting, or rather a collage, to scale, which was the cartoon for the final mosaic. Max Spoerri recalls that he saw Hofmann in the process of

(Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn, 1979), 13.

⁶⁵Sketch is 7-1/2" by 29" numbered by Hans Hofmann estate at M-0879. Estate of Hans Hofmann, represented by Ameringer/Howard Gallery, New York.

⁶⁶There are records of three other sketches for the mosaic in the Hofmann estate, one from 1956 and two from 1957. These, too, are oil sketches on cardboard, and two of them are collages. The only link between the sketches and finished mosaic is the horizontal format that they all share.

⁶⁷Jim Gahagan, interview by Tina Dickey, 27 April 1991, Woodbury, Vt. The author thanks Ms. Dickey who is currently working on a catalogue raisonne of Hofmann's work for so generously sharing this and other information.

translating the painting into mosaic. He gave Hofmann his opinion: "I began to talk to him about how the painting was relating to what he was doing. . . . What I really did is looked at what he was painting and looked at what he was translating and combined the two."⁶⁸ Presumably this collaged full-scale painting (no longer extant) closely resembled the finished mosaic.

From all accounts and as evidenced in the mural itself, Hofmann collaborated closely with the mosaic fabricator, V. Foscatto, Inc.⁶⁹ According to Max Spoerri, he was concerned about detail and "spent a great deal of time deciding what directions stone should go in and what pattern." He was concerned with the "flow of color and form and considered small details with a great deal of time. I remember how much time he spent insisting on putting reds in black and blues in black, time he spent with the fabricator."⁷⁰

Hofmann's engagement with the technical aspect of the mosaic is evident in subtleties of the finished artwork. There are areas where color seems to dissolve on the edge of a gestural brushstroke or small details where a "bite" is taken out of a circular form, disrupting a clear division between background and foreground. There are no uniform areas of color. Everything is broken into color fragments, a natural extension of the mosaic medium. There is also the atypical use of contrasting colors, for example, red

⁶⁸Max Spoerri, interview by Tina Dickey, 27 May 1998, New York City.

⁶⁹Foscatto, a New York firm, had fabricated Hofmann's earlier mural at 711 3rd Ave., Lee Krasner's mural for 2 Broadway, completed in 1959 and also Ben Shahn's mosaic for William Grady High School. See discussion below.

⁷⁰Max Spoerri, in raw footage from documentary, "Hans Hofmann: Artist and Teacher," by Madeline Amgott, August 2000, produced under the auspices of the Hofmann Educational Foundation and MUSE Film and T.V.

or blue specks in fields of black. Hofmann recognized the challenge and potential of enlarging a study to mural size and substituting glass fragments for paint: "This constituted a metamorphosis from the state of the sketches into the proportions of the actual mosaic, not only in regard to form and shape and composition, but in regard to color development to produce finally the same overall effect as in the sketches without copying them..."⁷¹

The printing school mural is a culmination of Hofmann's experience with mosaics, thoughts on murals, and a lifetime exploration of color and form. The mosaic brings together many elements of Hofmann's style-- it is graphic, exuberant, yet structured and contained. It has aspects of the violent *The Prey* (1956) coupled with the painterly lushness of *Fragrance* (1956). It maximizes the effects of light and color in mosaics. It also mirrors Hofmann's thoughts on mural making. In 1941 he had praised Léger and Mondrian as the "greatest mural painters of our time," because their work combined, "the technical effect of flatness with a final psychological effect of restfulness and majesty."⁷² A decade later, in conjunction with an exhibition at Kootz Gallery, Hofmann wrote, "In a mural, color should be handled flat over huge expanded areas in a simultaneous way by which the picture surface will be kept in a constant pictorial balance . . ."⁷³

⁷¹Hans Hofmann, "A New Concept for Mosaic," Hofmann Papers, Archives of American Art, quoted from Municipal Art Society, *Adopt-A-Mural*, 33.

⁷² Excerpted from an address given on 16 February 1941 at the Riverside Museum at a symposium on abstract art held during the 1941 American Abstract Artists exhibition, reproduced in Goodman, 167.

⁷³From statement in Hans Hofman, exhibition catalogue, Kootz Gallery, 1952,

Despite Hofmann's stature in the art world, not everyone applauded his mural.

Amazingly enough, it won approval from the Board of Education (at least from Radoslovich) who presented it to the Art Commission for official sanction. The Art Commission, however, rejected it.⁷⁴

Kelly and Gruzen, not the artist as was customary, presented a mosaic maquette along with an extensive statement to the Art Commission on 8 April 1957 when it was flatly disapproved. In promoting Hofmann's mural design, the architects focused on Hofmann's prestige and included only a minimal explanation of the art itself:

This mosaic . . . has been designed by Mr. Hans Hofmann. Mr. Hofmann is perhaps the most famous teacher in America today, since his school was established in New York in 1936. In addition, Mr. Hofmann, is at 77 years of age, the dean of the contemporary painting movement in New York. His work is in every important museum in America, including such local museums as the Metropolitan, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

The next paragraph talks about Hofmann's forthcoming retrospective at the Whitney and mentions his mosaic at 711 "which has received enormous and favorable publicity." They continue:

It is the belief of Kelly & Gruzen that Mr. Hofmann's desire to create a mosaic

reprinted in Goodman, 175.

⁷⁴The Art Commission also rejected a sculpture by David Hare (14 October 1957) and then in a second try, a sculpture by Ibram Lassow, (14 April 1958) both Kootz artists whose work was also being proposed for the New York School of Printing. See Exhibition File 3007 K,M, Art Commission. As a writer for *Progressive Architecture* noted, Commission members were not known for their radicalism. "The professional members serving on the Commission--sculptor, painter, landscape architect, architect--are established, successful practitioners in their individual fields; trained in the traditional methods and academic concepts embodied in their own work, they are not always sympathetic-to state it mildly--to the creative, experimental efforts of younger artists, exploring the possibilities of a new language of forms in new mediums." Quoted from "Tokens of Art," 149.

for this specific school, that would provide great optical pleasure to the young students of the school, as well as to passers-by, has been wonderfully achieved in the mosaic which we are presenting to the Art Commission for its approval. The stones in the sample have been cut down to approx. one fourth of their size, so that a complete sketch could be encompassed in an area sufficiently small to present the Commission.

We are pleased, indeed, to be able to present the cooperation of so famous an artist in a design, which we believe will afford great pleasure and fine educational value to our community.⁷⁵

Presumably, the architects included the last sentence to justify placing the mosaic in a school building.

Five months later, on 9 September 1957, the architects resubmitted the same maquette and the same statement and won Art Commission approval.⁷⁶ Although there are no extant letters, it's not hard to imagine an irate Gruzen blasting the president of the Art Commission for rejecting an artwork by an internationally renowned painter and teacher and pressuring the Commission to reconsider. The Art Commission's action reveals that abstraction in public art was not always well received, even by those who were sympathetic to the idea of public art. Hofmann's school mural was a case of the avant-garde colliding with institutional values.⁷⁷

⁷⁵Exhibition File 3007-G, Art Commission.

⁷⁶See Exhibition File, 3007-I, Art Commission. At the time of the first submission, the Art Commission appointed a committee consisting of conservative figurative painter Allyn Cox, L. Boyd Hatch and August Heckscher to make recommendation to the full Commission. Cox, himself, subsequently created a mosaic entitled, *Education* (1961) for P.S. 155, Manhattan. Presumably, they advised against acceptance. The committee appointed to review the project upon the second submission was almost identical, with Cox and Heckscher and Edward R. Finch, Jr substituted for Hatch. None of the committee members were present when the Art Commission did an about face and approved Hofmann's design, probably because they still opposed it.

⁷⁷By the late 1950s, Abstract Expressionism was the official avant-garde. The

What's even more intriguing about this commission, is that apparently not a single member of the New York School of Printing's advisory committee ever made any public remarks about the mural; nor did they criticize it. Presented as part of the architectural model and budgeted as part of the construction contract, they didn't have an opportunity to question this abstract mosaic and it's likely they wouldn't have known what to say about it if they did. Board President Charlie Silver had to be aware of the art component, considering his friendship with B. Sumner Gruzen, and it seems that he, like Radoslovich, merely accepted Gruzen's recommendation.

On the other hand, or perhaps in hindsight, one could argue that the very nature of Abstract Expressionist painting, its celebration of individual freedom predicated on democracy, is the most appropriate icon for a school dedicated to the free press. At the cornerstone setting ceremony of school on 17 January 1957, Mayor Wagner eloquently stated, "Today, in a continuing international struggle for men's minds between two ideologies, the importance of the printed word is paramount in the American concept of liberty and equality for all men and the essential unity of the free peoples of this world."⁷⁸ Likewise, Hofmann, himself, equated modern art with democracy. "Modern art is the symbol of our democracy. It is the privilege of a democracy like ours to expect the artist, through his art, to be the personification of its fundamental principal by giving the

term Abstract Expressionist (capital A, E) was itself coined in response to Hofmann's paintings. Critic Robert Coates used it in his 1946 review of Hofmann's show at the Mortimer Brandt Gallery in New York. Critics had previously used it to describe Kandinsky's work.

⁷⁸"Remarks by Mayor Robert F. Wagner at the Cornerstone Setting Ceremony of the New York School of Printing" 17 January 1957, Charles Silver Papers, Box #5, Folder: Printing H.S., Teachers College.

highest example of spiritual freedom in the performance of "*unconditioned, unrestricted creativeness.*"⁷⁹

**Ben Shahn, *Science and the Humanities* (1957)
William E. Grady High School, Brooklyn.**

Compared to Hofmann's mural, Ben Shahn's conception for William E. Grady Vocational High School is a study in contrasts. (Fig. 49) Both murals were created during the same years for vocational high schools by a master in full stride, although from opposing artistic camps. Neither artist aimed to pictorialize education or the specific purpose of the school in a literal way, yet both provided profound lessons--Hofmann on the art of seeing and Shahn on the importance of the humanities in the post-nuclear age. Like Hofmann, Shahn synthesized opposites, but his dialectical process derives from balancing political realities with spirituality and is driven by content not form. Unlike Hofmann, Shahn had dedicated his life to making art with a socially relevant message and had already completed an important body of murals when he was invited to create this exterior mosaic for a new vocational high school.⁸⁰

Similar to other modernist school buildings of the period, William Grady High

⁷⁹Excerpted from "What Is An Artist?" address given at Forum '49, 3 July 1949, Provincetown, MA, reprinted in Goodman, 169.

⁸⁰For Shahn's New Deal murals, see Diana Linden, "The New Deal Murals of Ben Shahn: the intersection of Jewish identity, social reform, and government patronage" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1997) and for general studies see Ben Shahn and Bernarda Bryson Shahn, *Ben Shahn* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1972) and Susan Chevlowe, et. al., *Common Man: Mythic Vision: the Paintings of Ben Shahn* (New York: The Jewish Museum and Princeton University Press, 1998).

School, designed to teach 2,400 students the automotive trades, machinery, metalwork, carpentry, boat building, and electronics, has easily identifiable building components. It is primarily glass and steel with brick cladding for the auditorium, rises only three stories and spreads over its site to maximize natural light and air. Shahn's mural, located above the ramp leading to the gyms and auditorium on the side of the school rather than on the front, has the distinction of being visible from the Belt Parkway. Scaled to a smaller segment of the building joining the two halves, pictorial detail is not overwhelmed by bold architectural geometries, and positioned over the school's community entrance, the mural takes on additional symbolic import.

Shahn accepted the commission for William Grady High School during an extremely busy period in his life, when he was at the apex of his career, so it appears that he agreed to undertake the mural because of its intended audience and public context.⁸¹ Having just visited Ravenna, perhaps he took on the project because he wanted an opportunity to do a mosaic. While he was developing the design, Shahn was also at Harvard as the Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry, a residency that culminated in his book, *The Shape of Content*. No doubt each project informed the other. In a 1956 radio interview Shahn explained that in thinking about an appropriate image for a trade high school, he wanted to warn students about the danger of technology divorced from humanism. "I want to emphasize that we are living in a technological society and are beginning to believe that technology will solve all problems that we are faced with (I personally don't think so, I think that technology without an awareness of the humanities

⁸¹Shahn experienced tremendous critical and popular success during the 1950s. He lectured widely and represented the United States along with William de Kooning in

will lead to endless Hiroshimas.) So in this particular mural, I stressed both the good and evil of technology, and stressed the importance of the humanities in our society....”⁸²

In conceiving the mosaic, Shahn had little opportunity to collaborate with the architect, since the location and medium were already specified, but within those parameters he was given total artistic freedom. As did many other artists of the period, in the aftermath of the war Shahn expanded his repertoire of images to include allegory and myth to grapple with the horrors of the Holocaust and the atomic bomb.⁸³ Shahn felt very strongly about the need for content in mural art associated with modern architecture, asserting that art and decoration are incompatible: “Art cannot exist without idea and feeling--content of some sort.” Shahn continued, “If the artist, then, is called upon merely to decorate a building, to keep his work subservient to the architecture, to create something that is ornamental but nothing more, he is in effect being asked to take leave of himself for a certain period of time, to depart from his role, to create art without the stuff of art.”⁸⁴ In his mural for Grady, Shahn, true to his beliefs, created a mural laden

the 1954 Venice Biennale.

⁸²Quoted from an interview on WGBH-FM, Boston from the series “The Creative Mind and Method” (1957) excerpted in The Municipal Art Society, *Adopt-A-Mural*, 17.

⁸³Stephen Polcari asserts that during and after World War II, shared concerns unified American artists associated with diverse styles, ranging from Social Realism to Expressionism to Abstract Expressionism. Polcari writes, “most American artists engaged the principal crisis [sic] of their time: the survival of the nation and of humane civilization. This crisis was global and thus universal. As a result, most art of the 1940s and 1950s moved toward a consideration of the universal and humanist, that is, of the fate of man.” See Stephen Polcari, “Ben Shahn and Postwar American Art,” 68 in Chevlowe, et. al., *Common Man: Mythic Vision: the Paintings of Ben Shahn*.

⁸⁴“The Relation of Painting and Sculpture to Architecture,” symposium transcript, 19.

with meaning.

The mural is divided into four primary segments leading the viewer on an epic journey from destruction to redemption. Broad vertical bands of geometric patterns frame each segment. The sequence begins on the left with twisted steel, a reference to massive destruction wrought by the atomic bomb, crushing a supine figure below. Next is the Phoenix, rising from the ashes and shrouded in stylized flames, a metaphor for rebirth.⁸⁵ Balancing the negative view of technology expressed in the first panel, to the right of the Phoenix Shahn presents a quotation from Einstein's unified field theory overlaid on an ancient view of the constellations, suggesting humanity's ceaseless quest for scientific answers. The mural ends on a hopeful note with images of the artist/architect, musician, and Jewish philosopher Maimonides. He holds an open book inscribed with the phrase, "Teach thy tongue to say I do not know and thou shalt progress," both a warning and exhortation to students.

A 1956 watercolor study for the mural is entitled *Apotheosis*.⁸⁶ In this preparatory work which closely resembles the finished mural, Shahn combines several images from earlier works, including *Epoch* (1950) and *Maimonides* (1954).⁸⁷ Since the mural was destined for a secular high school, Shahn renamed it *Science and the*

⁸⁵Shahn explained the Phoenix as "symbolizing man's power to self-regeneration." See Polcari, "Ben Shahn and Postwar American Art," 106.

⁸⁶See discussion of *Apotheosis* in Polcari, "Ben Shahn and Postwar American Art," 105 in Chevlowe, et. al., *Common Man: Mythic Vision: the Paintings of Ben Shahn*.

⁸⁷These sources are identified in Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery, *The Mural Art of Ben Shahn*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1977), n.p. For a detailed list of all related

Humanities. Stylistically, the mural draws on Shahn's early training as a lithographer, his work as an illustrator, his fondness for Paul Klee and the organizing principles of cubism. Without a deep perspective and modeled forms, elements in the mural are recognizable, if not realistic.

Unlike Hofmann's mosaic and the other abstract sculptures proposed for the New York School of Printing, Shahn's mural received Art Commission approval.⁸⁸ In selecting Shahn for this mural, the architect, Katz Waisman Blumenkranz Stein Weber Architects Associated, clearly wanted a symbolic artwork that would transcend its time and place. In Shahn they found a complementary intellect, an artist who aimed to create public art with a universal message.⁸⁹

Other School Mosaics

works, see catalogue entry 9 in above cited publication.

⁸⁸That's not to say that Shahn never experienced the Commission's rejection. They rejected his New Deal mural for Riker's Island. See Linden's discussion of the Riker's Island PWAP mural in Diana Linden, "The New Deal Murals of Ben Shahn."

⁸⁹Shahn always considered his audience. Frances K. Pohl writes, "But a central element in Shahn's concept of a humanist aesthetics was also the ability of a work of art to communicate with, or be meaningful to, individuals outside of the art world, and he subsequently channeled much of his energy in this direction." See Frances K. Pohl. *Ben Shahn: New Deal Artist in a Cold War Climate, 1947-1954* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1989), 107. See also Ben Shahn's own remarks on the subject in Ben Shahn, *The Shape of Content* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957). Shahn writes, "I was not the only artist who had been entranced by the social dream, and who could no longer reconcile that view with the private and inner objectives of art. As during the thirties art had been swept by mass ideas, so during the forties there took place a mass movement toward abstraction. Not only was the social dream rejected, but any dream at all....Part of that work was-and is-beautiful and meaningful; part of it does indeed constitute private experience" (Shahn, *The Shape of Content*, 40).

The Hofmann and Shahn mosaics are the most notable of the school mosaics of the period, but several others deserve mention. For P.S. 28, Manhattan, Jack Stewart (b.1926) designed two mosaics, aiming to translate action painting into a mosaic form.⁹⁰ Stewart attended Yale University on the G.I. bill and studied with William de Kooning, a major influence.

At P.S. 28, once again the architect picked the artist and assigned him locations in the building. The original plan called for the two murals that were executed, a frieze on the kindergarten corridor, and a stained glass window, but these last two elements were eliminated due to lack of funds. Unlike Hofmann, Stewart's starting point was the children themselves. Taking an approach similar to Daniel Celentano's in his WPA/FAP mural, Stewart wanted to show children in various activities, but not in a literal way. "What I was really after is the movement that you get with children in the playground, running and jumping and chasing around."⁹¹ Stewart wanted to capture their energy and motion; similarly, the composition portraying children studying is more static, although both are abstract. Stewart also had the distinction of fabricating the mosaic himself. He learned the craft in Italy and with the help of an assistant installed the mosaic before the eyes of the children themselves.

There are also 1950s mosaics by artists who had become muralists as employees of the federal government during the 1930s. In the post-war period and into the 1960s,

⁹⁰Stewart observed that these were the only two murals he ever made, where he "tried to, in a sense, create action painting in mosaic." Jack Stewart of New York, interview by author, 28 March 2001. For biographical information on Stewart, see Regina Stewart, *Jack Stewart: Drawings Looking Into the 21st Century* (New York: 2000).

Max Spivak (1906-1981) received the most school commissions, completing a total of seven projects for the Board.⁹² Like Stewart, Spivak was also a mosaic craftsman. He apparently made the transition from painted canvas to glass tesserae after the war, when he completed decorations for America's new fleet of plush ocean liners.⁹³ In most of his school murals, Spivak combines abstract forms with emblematic imagery reflecting activities and subjects associated with school, although his mural for JHS 189, Queens is totally nonobjective. Commissioned by Board architect Radoslovich, for that project he also developed a more inclusive design, encompassing two murals and a floor pattern. In a project for a Staten Island school completed in 1960, Spivak did a series of mosaics dispersed throughout the corridor on the theme of sea and bird life. Spivak was satisfied with creating artworks that were secondary to their architectural context, explaining, "The artist, in relation to architects and architecture, should consider his work as something which belongs to the architecture. He must learn to utilize his skill and aspirations for art within the functions of architecture. The artist wants a work of art, of course, but he should not consider his work as an independent piece of art."⁹⁴

Sculpture

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²During the 1950s and 60s, Max Spivak did a total of seven murals, executing one approximately every three years. Two other artists also received multiple commissions during this time. Jack Lubin did five mosaic murals and Lumen Winter completed four.

⁹³See Bitterman, *Art in Modern Architecture*, for a discussion and photos of Spivak's mosaics for the SS Independence, 56-57.

In the 1950s, the Board of Education commissioned an almost equal number of sculptures and murals. This was a departure from the past, when public sculpture was more closely associated with parks, plazas, and grand government buildings, not schoolhouses. The change occurred when architects, faced with blank, windowless brick facades, sought a way to liven them up. The solution they favored was the placement of one large or several small reliefs in bronze, steel, or concrete on barren walls near building entrances. Architects preferred an artwork that would be an extension of the building itself, and a favorite choice was the cast concrete sculptures of Costantino Nivola (1911-1987).⁹⁵

Nivola bridged the craft of the mason with the art of the sculptor. His works bear allusions to the human form, sometimes in family units, although pieces can also appear totally abstract. They are bumpy, modeled, irregular--a human touch on a machined surface. Nivola's high reliefs never dominate a building or even compete with it. Durable and subtle, the works appealed to architects looking for sculpture that would be an architectural complement.

In addition to Nivola, two other sculptors produced several artworks for school buildings during the post-war period: Gwen Lux (1908-2001) and Mary Callery (1903-1977). Lux did a total of three pieces and Callery did two. In fact, both completed some of their best work for the New York City public schools.

⁹⁴Bittermann, 57.

⁹⁵Between 1945 and 1965, the Board of Education commissioned Nivola to create ten sculptures. For an excellent description of Nivola's working method, See Dore Ashton, "Costantino Nivola," *Craft Horizons* 19 (1959): 38-40. For a recent exhibition featuring Nivola's work, see Salender-O'Reilly Galleries, *Costantino Nivola (1911-*

**Mary Callery, *The Fables of La Fontaine* (1954)
P.S. 34, Manhattan**

P.S. 34, Manhattan, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt school, is the only elementary school Wallace K. Harrison ever designed and it is an exemplary model of International Style principles applied to public school architecture. It won the American Association of School Administrators and A.I.A. Award of Merit (13 February 1954). It was an unusual undertaking for the architect associated with skyscraper design.⁹⁶ For Harrison, P.S. 34 was a relatively small project, wedged as it was between the U.N. General Assembly building completed in 1952, the Alcoa building completed in 1953 in Pittsburgh, and the earliest designs of 1955-56 for the Metropolitan Opera House, eventually completed in 1966.

Harrison had long been interested in school architecture, having co-authored the book *School Buildings of Today and Tomorrow*, published in 1939 as well as several articles.⁹⁷ He had even briefly worked for the Board of Education in 1926. The

1988): *Sculpture* (New York: Salender-O'Reilly Galleries, 1999).

⁹⁶Harrison was then at the height of his career. By the 1950s the firm of Harrison & Abramovitz employed fifty to sixty people, with Harrison still maintaining control over all designs. For the best study of Harrison, see Victoria Newhouse, *Wallace K. Harrison, Architect* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989).

⁹⁷ See Wallace K. Harrison and C. E. Dobbin, *School Buildings of Today and Tomorrow* (New York, 1931) and W.K.H., "The Functional Concept of School Architecture," *American School Board Journal* 93 (August 1936): 31-32; W.K.H., "Movable Unite-Type Partitions," *The School Executive* 56 (June 1937): 393-412 and transcript for lecture, "Modern Aspects of School Building Design and Materials," given for National Convention Public School Building Officials, Baltimore, Oct. 12, 1937, W.K.H. papers, 3:1, Avery Library, Columbia University. Newhouse argues that Harrison's interest in school architecture converted him to modernism. See Newhouse,

Franklin Delano Roosevelt school was an opportunity for Harrison to put his ideas articulated twenty years earlier into practice.

Harrison, heeding the directives of William Lescaze, believed the architect had to begin a design from within, expressing the program, rather than fitting it all into a box, and he drew distinctions between the open and closed school plan. Harrison's description of the purpose of a school very much informed his design for P.S. 34: "First it is a shelter, next a machine to transmit the experience of the human race to the pupil, and lastly a permanent cultural example and lesson to the community."⁹⁸ In his 1936 article, Harrison defended the use of modern style in school architecture, saying modern is not synonymous with "ugly." Beauty can be found in proportions. "I don't discount the immense value of beauty in a school building. I take it for granted that we all consider that our school buildings should set standards of splendid architecture so that all may see what American thinks of her youth and how she would influence them."⁹⁹ Touching all bases, Harrison even invoked John Dewey, saying modern architectural design was inspired by doing: "Modern architecture is the direct outgrowth of the philosophy of John Dewey. It clearly is based on the idea that one learns by doing and one gets real enjoyment by being a vital part of a community."¹⁰⁰ Harrison also

fn 23, page, 293 in which she cites work of Charles C. Savage, who argued that *School Buildings* was a turning point for Harrison, orienting him toward modernism.

⁹⁸Harrison, "Functional Concept of School Architecture," 32.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Wallace K. Harrison, lecture transcript, "Modern Aspects of School Building Design and Materials," p. 2 given for National Convention Public School Building Officials, Baltimore, 12 October 12, 1937, W.K.H. papers, 3:1, Avery Library, Columbia

recognized that a curriculum in flux required a more flexible plan, saying, "it is apparent that, if we recognize the curriculum moving toward the broader aspects of life, we must also recognize the need for flexible building design to meet this movement."¹⁰¹

Designed by Harrison in early 1953, P.S. 34 was intended "to give children light and space for both work and play."¹⁰² The three-story structure with distinct components expressed on the exterior of the building, was planned for 900 children, kindergarten through grade 6. As were most schools built during this period, it was also intended as a community center. Architects used basic architectural forms and inexpensive materials with the exception of more costly glazed blue brick which is self-cleaning and intended to "provide color for a drab neighborhood."¹⁰³ An unusual feature of the school is the sheltered play area under the classroom wing, perched on piloti in the style of Le Corbusier. The intimate auditorium is a tour de force, combining unrealized features from Harrison's recent experiments for the General Assembly building. This communal space retains the shadow of the hourglass form proposed in the original design for United Nation's meeting hall. Here, too, Harrison expressed the building's structure, revealing and painting the interior structural concrete beams blue. The auditorium ceiling is covered with coffers that are acoustically treated and illuminated by custom incandescent lights set within the oblong bays. Harrison was so concerned about the

University. Many ideas Harrison outlined actually go back to Snyder, who also conceived of auditoriums as community centers, considered how to use flexible spaces with partitions, and maximized natural light. Of course, Snyder did not introduce open plan schools.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 7.

overall effect of the space that he directed Bruce Gregory, an artist on the firm's payroll, to execute the bio-morphic mural.¹⁰⁴

Throughout his architectural career, Harrison influenced the selection of art for the various buildings he designed and this held true for P.S. 34.¹⁰⁵ He had a long association with sculptor Mary Callery (1903-1977)¹⁰⁶ who was a childhood friend of his wife, Ellen Milton.¹⁰⁷ In addition to *The Fables of La Fontaine*, Harrison invited Callery to create a suspended, painted aluminum, *Three Birds in Flight* (1953) for the glass atrium of the headquarters of the Aluminum Company of America in Pittsburgh, *Constellation I* and *Constellation II* also for Alcoa, and the monumental relief installed

¹⁰²Draft press release in Max Abramovitz papers (uncatalogued), Avery Library, Columbia University.

¹⁰³It is apparently extra money required for glazed brick that set off controversy regarding excessive school expenditures. See Gerosa, "Gerosa Says Schools Waste \$100,000,000 In 8 Years of Building," *New York Herald Tribune*, 19 November 1958.

¹⁰⁴Abramovitz papers (uncatalogued), Avery Library, Columbia University. In an interview with the author, July 2001, Gregory recalled how Harrison directed him away from a palette of primary colors and encouraged him to heighten the sculptural effect of the forms.

¹⁰⁵Harrison convinced Nelson Rockefeller to pay the \$5,000 design fee for Léger for murals in the General Assembly building, which had to be executed by Bruce Gregory because as a Communist, Léger was barred from entering the United States. Harrison was also responsible for selecting Joseph Albers to execute a mural for his Corning Glass Building (NYC, 1959) "Harrison felt so strongly about having the painting in the ground-floor area that he offered to pay for it himself should there be a funding problem." Newhouse, 154.

¹⁰⁶For the best biographical information on Callery, see "Mary Callery," in *Current Biography* (July 1955): 19-21 and the extensive bibliography in Philip R. Adams and Christian Zervos, *Mary Callery Sculpture* (New York: Wittenborn and Co., 1961).

¹⁰⁷Harrison first met Callery in Paris in 1927.

over the proscenium in the Metropolitan Opera House. Harrison had a tremendous respect for Callery, ranking her among the great artists he knew, among them Diego Rivera, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Constantin Brancusi, Alexander Archipenko, Naum Gabo, Fernand Léger, and Alexander Calder.¹⁰⁸ Clearly Callery had a mutual respect for Harrison. It comes across in the noble granite portrait bust she completed of the architect in 1954, the year she began work on *The Fables of La Fontaine*.

Having studied with Edward McCartan at the Art Students League in New York, by 1930 Callery was in Paris in the atelier of the Russian-French sculptor, Jacques Loutchansky. During her Parisian stay, Callery befriended artistic luminaries of the day, including Picasso, Matisse, and Léger. After the fall of France, in 1940 Callery returned to New York City and began exhibiting at the Buchholz Gallery (later Curt Valentin Gallery) in 1944, 1947, 1950, 1952, and 1955. During this period she attained critical and commercial success, with sculptures selling for top prices.¹⁰⁹ Callery was a regular participant in the Whitney Museum of American Art's sculpture annuals and was included in the 1951 American Sculpture show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art as well as in the Museum of Modern Art's 1953 "Sculpture of the 20th Century." As of July of 1955, Callery had works in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, Addison Gallery of American Art, Wadsworth Atheneum, Toledo Museum and the San Francisco

¹⁰⁸From notes dated 27 April 1977 for unpublished autobiography, Wallace K. Harrison papers 1:7, Avery Library, Columbia University.

¹⁰⁹Pieces sold for between \$400-\$3,000. See "Stretched Statues," *Life* 33 (17 November 1952): 143. Callery received many favorable reviews. Some writers noted humorous quality and others remarked on "lyrical line interplay."

In conceiving the *Fables of La Fontaine*, Callery carefully considered appropriate imagery for an elementary school, took the unprecedented step in school art by making it physically interactive (although no longer encouraged because of safety and security issues) and responded to the architectural context.¹¹¹ (Fig. 50) The whimsical sculptural grille installed in the window-like opening near the auditorium entrance of P.S. 34 can be described as accessible modernism. Using I-beams and other architectural references, it combines abstracted forms with recognizable imagery derived from an archetypal children's story. (Fig. 51)

The sculpture measures twenty feet long and is divided into three segments: "The Fox and the Crow," the "Frog and the Bull," and "Three Thieves and the Donkey." For each story, Callery picks the most dramatic moment to illustrate and also uses repetition to create a narrative, best seen in the "Fox and the Crow." In this panel at the far left, she shows the pair at two different points in the story. First, the cunning fox flatters the crow, telling him what a lovely voice he has so he will open his mouth to sing and drop the cheese, shown again as it is about to happen. In the third panel three thieves steel a donkey and then as the two argue about whether to keep it or sell it, the third leads the donkey away.

Callery took advantage of the window-like opening to extend forms, swinging

¹¹⁰The San Francisco Museum of Art opened in 1935, becoming the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1975.

¹¹¹Other interactive sculptures aimed at children include Hugo Robus' PWAP playground sculptures and the most famous example being Noguchi's unrealized *Play Mountain* of 1933.

them out and suspending them in space, artfully placing the frog so it appears to be leaping at the viewer. Most of the metal pieces resemble industrial C-channels, ingeniously cut and welded into organic shapes. Callery also employed the textured steel elements used for truck treads, visible for example in the body of the frog, as well as nuts and bolts used for details like eyes, which enrich the fabric of the sculpture. Apparently, Callery worked out her ideas in wax or clay, then atypically cast the sketch in bronze before translating it into steel or iron as the final step. Presumably, like Picasso, she found a collaborator to assist with fabrication, probably an ironworker near her Huntington studio. By translating pieces from bronze to iron, Callery further abstracted them, sharpening edges, flattening planes, making in most cases a more eloquent statement. There are several versions of the *Fables of La Fontaine*--a bronze model, 20" long; a painted steel version, 2'5" x 5'; and the final version, 9'7" x 20'.

Callery was interested in breaking down barriers between painting and sculpture, as were other sculptors of the period, including Herbert Ferber, Alexander Calder, and David Smith.¹¹² In keeping with this interest, she introduced color accents on the finished piece, adding a playful note to the elegant black planes of the industrial construction forms. The bright yellows and white highlighting sculptural details like eyes and the crow's cheese, provide an interesting contrast to the glazed blue brick and further the architect's aim of brightening the neighborhood.

¹¹²Callery had begun experimenting with color in 1943 when she embarked on a series of collaborative works with Léger. Léger did mural backdrops for Callery's attenuated plaster and bronze reliefs. Examples are "Mural Composition," 1949 and "Standing Woman 1949" reproduced in Adams and Zervos, *Mary Callery: Sculpture*. See also "Mary Callery: Polychrome Sculpture," (New York: Washburn Gallery, 1978).

French art critic Christian Zervos explained Callery's blend of realism and abstraction: "Thus in each of her works she brings her imagination and her model into play conjointly, insisting on preserving the model's appearance, simplified by synthesis, and its distinctive character."¹¹³ One model for Callery's approach was Picasso's welded iron constructions of the 1920s and 1930s, described as "drawing in space" by his collaborator Julio Gonzalez.¹¹⁴ Callery herself acknowledged the impact Picasso had on her artistic development, saying, "I find myself even now often repeating the things I became aware of through him."¹¹⁵

The setting for the sculpture simulates the space frame device seen in the work of many of Callery's contemporaries, for example David Smith, Ibram Lassaw, Richard Lippold, Alexander Calder, Isamu Noguchi, Seymour Lipton, and Herbert Ferber.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, the grille is an inventive solution, a way of integrating sculpture into the building by giving the piece a functional role. Critics had frequently remarked on the architectural possibilities of Callery's sculpture. For example, in *Painting Toward Architecture*, one of the contributing writers places her work in an architectural context, saying *Water Ballet*, which incorporates metal and glass, would be an excellent

¹¹³Philip R. Adams and Christian Zervos, *Mary Callery: Sculpture*: (New York: Wittenborn and Co., 1961) in French and in English in "Mary Callery: Symbols," (New York: Knoedler & Co., Inc. 1961) , n.p.

¹¹⁴Julio Gonzalez, "Picasso Sculpteur," *Cahiers d'Art* 11 (1936) 189-191.

¹¹⁵Mary Callery, "The Last Time I Saw Picasso." *Art News* 41 (March 1942): 23

¹¹⁶Of Ferber's work, Agee perceptively notes, "This format tacitly acknowledged the framing edges of a painting and approximated them for the three dimensions of sculpture." See William Agee, *Herbert Ferber : sculpture, painting, drawing, 1945-1980*.

transparent partition or could be placed above a door. Furthermore, "Although cast in a heavy metal, the Callery sculptures seem almost as weightless and as full of motion as Calder's mobiles. Yet they have the strength and stability appropriate to a physical adjunct to a building."¹¹⁷ Callery, in turn, thought about architectural applications for her work, designing a gate and park bench, although never executed.

For some time, Callery had been working in a linear, multi-figure format and she often depicted animals, so the *Fables of La Fontaine* was a natural extension of her work of the period. However, she rarely did themes based on literature. The only other example in her oeuvre is the *Bremen Town Musicians*, possibly a rejected study for P.S. 34. She preferred dancers and acrobats,¹¹⁸ as well as developing her own sort of modern genre sculpture. She avoided the angst-ridden themes and the dramatic mythologies favored by many of her contemporaries.

The *Fables* is one of Callery's most distinguished and ambitious sculptures. She successfully worked within the architectural context, expanded on her own artistic vocabulary without sacrificing aesthetic content, and proposed a radically different way of approaching public sculpture associated with a school. Her work forecasts the design solutions we associate with public art of the 1980s and 90s.

(Houston, Tex. : Museum of Fine Arts, 1983), 19.

¹¹⁷Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *The Miller Company Collection of Abstract Art: Painting Toward Architecture*, 114.

¹¹⁸Callery did a piece entitled, *Acrobats*, painted steel, 1958, for George H. Wingate High School in Brooklyn.

**Gwen Lux, *Vapor Trails* (1955-1958)
Aviation High School, Queens**

With her sculpture for Aviation Trades High School, Gwen Lux (1908-2001) introduced a new theme in public school art--aviation. For the monumental brick façade marking this new vocational high school, she devised a modern constructivist allegory, *Vapor Trails*. (Fig. 52)

The high school, established in 1936, finally got a new building near LaGuardia airport in Queens, complete with an airplane hangar in 1958. The school, designed by Chapman, Evans & Delehanty at a cost of \$5,300,000 was intended to serve 2,500 students and was one of the first schools of its kind in the country.

Lux didn't always work in an abstract way.¹¹⁹ She had many architectural sculptures to her credit, including figurative pieces for Rockefeller Center and for the façade of Chicago's McGraw Hill Building. Her other commissions for the Board of Education, *Education* (1954) for George W. Wingate High School and *Sun, Birds and Light* (1959) for P.S. 19, Manhattan, combine recognizable imagery in an angular abstract matrix. Lux also worked in a variety of materials, searching for sculptural media "appropriate to the job being done."¹²⁰

In approaching this commission, Lux was clearly influenced by the work of Constructivist sculptor, Naum Gabo, who emigrated to the United States in 1946.¹²¹ Lux

¹¹⁹There is not an extensive literature on Lux. See her biography in *American Biographies* and entry on her on web site called askart.com, accessed 15 June 2001. Lux was born in Chicago. She studied at the Maryland Institute of Art and the Boston Museum School of Fine Arts as well as in Paris and with Ivan Mestrovic in Yugoslavia.

¹²⁰Bittermann, 105

apparently had some time to think about the commission and work at fabrication details, and she undoubtedly consulted with an engineer. A letter dated 27 December 1955 from the school's architect, H. O. Chapman, to Radoslovich confirmed selection of Lux but she didn't complete the preliminary design until late 1957.¹²²

The sculpture rises forty-six feet across the windowless brick façade marking the school's entrance. Made from stainless steel, it consists of numerous hollow steel tubes and prism and diamond shaped plates. It projects outwards as it rises, cantilevering approximately eight feet from the building façade. It creates a sense of soaring and captures the motion of a flight trajectory. Anchored to the building at twenty-two points, the tubes give the impression of cables pulled taut as they weave a series of patterns. The sculpture expresses tension and a delicate tensile strength. Lux also considered the effect of sunlight and positioned the piece toward the left side of the wall to take advantage of the afternoon sun, which casts a complex web of shadows across the façade.

The Board of Education was nervous about submitting Lux's proposal to the Art Commission, and although this was the preferred design, Radoslovich in fact submitted two versions. The submission form provides a rationale for the use of abstraction. In a

¹²¹Shortly before Lux received her commission, in 1949 Gabo submitted a remarkable model for a constructivist sculpture never executed for the lobby of the Esso building in Rockefeller Center. The model is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. For background information on major public sculptures of the period, see Wetenhall,

¹²²In a photograph of the model of the building dated 8 September 1955, architects show what resembles an upside down menorah. Lux received preliminary approval on 7 February 1957 and on 14 July 1958, the Art Commission issued final approval.

rather convoluted manner, the description reads:

A design control recommended by aeronautical industry representatives consulted which was considered in the creation of this commission was the factor that abstract form was the most valid consideration in dealing with constantly and quickly changing forms most expressive of the industry.¹²³

Both Lux and the Board took a risk in proposing this monumental sculpture because in the post-war period, academic artists, some of who did receive school commissions, such as Donald De Lue and Joseph Kiselewski, dominated public sculpture. It is a dramatic departure from the majority of artworks being commissioned for public buildings nationwide and as such should be seen in context of the history of modern public sculpture in America.¹²⁴ In an article summarizing the state of sculpture in 1951, Ernest W. Watson doubted the patron's receptiveness toward modern sculpture: "It is doubtful if people--outside esoteric cults--will ever accept sculptured figures which look more like enlarged insects than human beings."¹²⁵ He felt abstract sculpture was totally incompatible with public art. Lux proved him wrong.

Apparently, for the Board of Education in the 1950s, modern architecture and modern art came to symbolize progressive education. Complementing the use of modern art to enhance school buildings, the art curriculum itself underwent a noticeable change during this period. Bauhaus teachings and the model of Abstract Expressionism liberated

¹²³Exhibition File, 3030-G, Art Commission.

¹²⁴See Wetenhall, 135.

¹²⁵Ernest W. Watson, "Commissioned Sculpture Today," *American Artist*, Jan. 1951, 35-37.), 64.

teachers and children, encouraging experimentation and individual creativity¹²⁶ and in many classrooms abstraction became synonymous with American democracy and freedom. Sculpture became very popular in the 1950s and teachers moved beyond clay and wood and introduced new materials such as solid and liquid plastics, rubber molds, copper, aluminum, alabaster, wire, reed, string, paraffin, cinder block, cardboard, pumice stone, cellophane, fire brick, plaster and salt blocks, scrap metal, tin cans, glass, and found objects of every type.¹²⁷ Students learned about the work of the constructivists and emulated their work in metal in string. There was a big craze for Calderesque mobiles. Education historian, Foster Wygant, convincingly summarizes, "The style of school art changed in the fifties, following the success of Abstract Expressionist painters, abstract sculptors, and Bauhaus theories—a clear instance of unanimity among society, education, art, and art education."¹²⁸

In both the context of a new approach to the design of school buildings and a new attitude about teaching art, it shouldn't come as a surprise that the Board of Education became a patron of modern art. In fact, the Board of Education was only slightly behind the corporate world. In 1948 Skidmore, Owings and Merrill commissioned Joan Miró and Saul Steinberg to execute murals and Alexander Calder to create a mobile for the Terrace Plaza Hotel in Cincinnati, and in 1954 SOM commissioned a metal sculptural screen by Harry Bertoia for the Manufacturer's Hanover Trust Building in Manhattan. There was also the recent precedent of Gropius's Graduate Center (1949-50) at Harvard,

¹²⁶Wygant, *School Art in American Culture*, 122.

¹²⁷Wygant, *School Art in American Culture, 182-1970*, 125.

in which Gropius sought to demonstrate Bauhaus ideals of the integration of art and architecture.¹²⁹ The building incorporates a variety of artworks in various media in interior and exterior locations. Joseph Albers designed brickwork for the chimney, Herbert Bayer created a colorful tile wall, Jean Arp sculpted wood reliefs, Miro executed a mural, and Richard Lippold fashioned a tubular steel construction for the courtyard.¹³⁰

In the context of public art nationwide, school commissions attest to the fact that the New York City Board of Education was remarkably adventurous in advancing modern art in a decade characterized by reactionary attitudes toward art by other public agencies, such as the federal government. Spurred on by high-profile private architects, Radoslovich, already a convert to public art in public schools, was easily persuaded to back the selections made by the architects he helped choose. He proudly asserted, “Aesthetic values have a place in this roaring city,”¹³¹ and fostered a climate of tolerance to advance that ideal.

As these case studies illustrate, there was no single artistic response to modernist school architecture and artists used varying degrees of abstraction with varying degrees of success. For some, such as Hans Hofmann, the primary problems were aesthetic:

¹²⁸Ibid., 135.

¹²⁹See discussion of these projects in Wetenhall, 159.

¹³⁰I agree with Wetenhall who says, “While the cooperation between artists and architects at the Harvard Graduate Center does not appear to have immediately inspired followers, Gropius’ professional stature, his influence as a teacher, and the publicity that the center received in the architectural literature may have latently encouraged future collaborative projects.” See Wetenhall, 159.

¹³¹Michael L. Radoslovich to Art Commission President Allen Evarts Foster, 5 August 1955, Correspondence File 313/1703 a, Art Commission.

scale, location, color, form, and medium. Hofmann did not approach the art of painting differently to make public art but succeeded in bringing abstract art to the public realm. Hofmann speaks a formal language that engages viewers with saturated color and a rhythmic play of form that offers a visual counterpoint to the building. There is a comfortable union between the mosaic and its architectural context. In contrast, Shahn, who had always been concerned with audience response and the accessibility of his work to the general public, believed that effective public art could not be totally nonobjective. He used abstract elements to structure the composition but for him content was paramount. He created his mural around a specific message for a particular public--the students.

Sculptors Callery and Lux also demonstrated different solutions. Callery emphasized whimsy and added a novel participatory component. She used or simulated the lexicon of a modern steel infrastructure and married these architectural references to a universal literary theme. Lux took on the traditional mantle of the public sculptor, designing a symbolic piece for a particular building. Using abstract forms and an expressive material, she captured the essence of flight without being literal. The innovations of the fifties continued into the sixties and seventies, but the subtleties that marked good architectural and artistic designs faded and gave way to more massive, undifferentiated buildings and obtrusive, nonobjective sculptures marking school plazas. Many of these pieces bear little relationship to the building and have even less relevance for the users of these facilities. However, by the late sixties, we see a new thread emerging: the community and the audience for a specific artwork become the defining factors for artists' commissions in the New York City public schools.

CHAPTER 7

1960s AND 70s: PUBLIC ART IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

If the 1950s signaled the rise of modernism in school architecture and an increased role for the architect in the commissioning of public art, by the mid-sixties other issues took center stage in the public art drama. What can be termed the politics of identity,¹ or the acknowledgment of “community,”² began to exert the greatest influence in shaping art commissioned for the New York City public schools and continues to be a decisive factor. Propelled by the civil rights movement, during this period we see more commissions going to African-American artists and artworks that address racial issues or honor African-American or Latino figures.³ This admission of ethnic diversity is the

¹See Christopher Reed, “Postmodernism and the Art of Identity,” in *Concepts of Modern Art*, 3rd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993).

²Community is a mercurial term. I found Diane Ravitch’s usage provocative vis a vis the events that transpired at Boys’ and Girls’ High School. She writes, “The public school operates on behalf of the community, but how ‘community’ is defined is the source of political and ideological controversy. A child lives simultaneously in many communities: his neighborhood, city, state, and nation; his ethnic group, race, and/or religion...” Ravitch, 402. Finkelpearl also investigates the meaning of community, writing, “while community literally means a group of people who live in the same locale or share a common interest, it too has class overtones . . . So, when one refers to community-oriented public art, the terms are loaded, but the usage is fairly clear: it is art that includes people from the lower classes in its creation, consumption, or both.” Tom Finkelpearl, *Dialogues in Public Art* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), xi.

³Commissioned artworks in schools include a bas-relief by José Buscaglia “depicting the marriage of Afro-American, Puerto Rican and North American cultures,” designed in 1972 for I.S. 84, Bronx; a mural by Romare Bearden, featuring enormous portraits of African-American and Latino leaders, rejected by the Art Commission and redesigned as a more schematic composition showing a map projection of Puerto Rico and Africa at either end with profile views of a Puerto-Rican and African-American student over a cityscape in the center, also for I. S. 84 (See Exhibition File 3780 E-L, Art Commission); Hugo Gellert’s mural, *We Can See Far For We Are Standing on the Shoulders of Giants* (1970) for Hillcrest High School, Queens, and the *Martin Luther*

foundation of multiculturalism, and I would argue that the roots of multiculturalism⁴ in public school art of the 90s can be traced to the black art movement of the 60s and 70s.⁵ In the New York City public schools, this is best demonstrated in the collection of artworks by African-American artists commissioned for Brooklyn's Boys' and Girls' High School.

Planning of the New Boys' and Girls' High School coincided with the fight by New York City minority groups for local school control. This battle was part of the larger

King Memorial, by William Tarr, completed in 1973 for the Martin Luther King, Jr. High School, Manhattan. Charles Alston, then on the Art Commission, who was ambivalent about rejecting Bearden's original design, also created two public artworks for schools. The first was a mosaic entitled, *Man on the Threshold of the Space Age*, in 1963 for P.S. 154, Manhattan and a decade later in 1973, Alston designed an exterior sculpture for I.S. 158, Bronx. Following that, in 1975 Bearden designed a second, less controversial mural about daily school life for P.S. 346, Brooklyn.

⁴For a thoughtful discussion of the meaning of the terms "politically correct" and "multiculturalism," see *Whose Art is It*, introduction by Catharine R. Stimpson and essay by Jane Kramer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994). See also David Craven who offers a new context for exploring the meaning of multiculturalism by reminding us of Harold Rosenberg's concept of the "Contemporary Man." Craven writes, "the post-1945 theory of Contemporary Man, with its multicultural practices, multilateral sense of time, and multilingual articulation of place..." See David Craven, "Norman Lewis as Political Activist and Post-Colonial Artist," in *Norman Lewis: Black Paintings 1946-1977* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1998), 58. See also discussion of pluralism in regard to Lucienne Bloch's mural and other New Deal artworks in Chapter 5.

⁵In her study of the black art exhibition, Amalia K. Amaki arrives at a similar conclusion regarding exhibitions of the 1980s. She writes, "One could establish a strong argument to support the idea that the civil rights movement, and the specific actions of the African-American visual arts community, not only motivated other ethnic and racial groups to similarly seek an improved presence in America, but that the era also provided the basis for yet another highly significant national phenomenon – the multicultural exhibition which became a prominent part of the art scene in the United States during the 1980s." See Amalia K. Amaki, "The All Black Exhibition in America, 1963-1976: its history, perception, and the critical response," (Ph.D. diss, Emory University, 1994), 286. For a discussion of the black art movement, see Richard J. Powell, *Black Art and Culture*

civil rights struggle gripping the nation and school segregation was a central issue.

Although it was not the New York City Board of Education's policy to create segregated schools, neighborhood schools reflected neighborhoods, and few in New York City were racially mixed. Sensitive to this reality, following the Supreme Court's 1954 historic decision, *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education*, which declared the unconstitutionality of school segregation *de jure*, the New York City Board of Education passed a resolution reaffirming their commitment to integrated schools. This policy stated in part:

We . . . interpret the May 17th decision of the United States Supreme Court as a legal and moral reaffirmation of our fundamental educational principles. We recognize it as a decision which applies not only to those cases in litigation, but also as a challenge to Boards throughout the nation, in Northern as well as Southern communities, to re-examine the racial composition of the schools within their respective systems in order to determine whether they conform to the standards stated clearly by that Court.⁶

Despite the New York City Board of Education's stated aims to integrate the school system, this was hard to achieve without forced busing. Facing this obstacle, residents of inner city neighborhoods who had long been agitating for better schools shifted their efforts towards local school control. In its most extreme form, local school control would empower community-based boards to oversee staffing, site selection, the naming of schools, the expenditure of funds, and design and construction within a given

in the 20th Century (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd. 1997), chapter five, "Black is a Color."

⁶*New York Times*, 24 December 1954, reprinted in Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 252. See Ravitch, Chapter 23, "The Discovery of Segregation and Scandals," and Chapter 24, "Boycotts and Demonstrations."

district.⁷ The city's inability to desegregate the school system or quickly provide better facilities within minority neighborhoods ultimately resulted in the decentralization of the system in 1970, the first step toward local school control.

In the years leading up to decentralization, the Board of Education established three experimental districts to test community control, the most famous of them being Ocean-Hill Brownsville, next door to Bedford-Stuyvesant. By spring of 1968, the situation there had become explosive. With the order of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville board to transfer thirteen teachers, five assistant principals, and one principal out of their district, the neighborhood's schools were in turmoil. In May of 1968, the United Federation of Teachers struck, pitting the largely white, Jewish teacher's union against the African-American Ocean Hill-Brownsville board. Things only worsened with picket lines, threats, inflammatory pamphlets, and school boycotts, leading to the placement of the district under state trusteeship. Despite the failed experiment in Ocean-Hill Brownsville, the city and state still favored decentralization, and on 30 April 1969 Governor Rockefeller signed the decentralization bill authorizing the creation of thirty to thirty-three school districts in New York City. By the fall of 1970, the entire school system, excluding high schools, was decentralized.⁸ Now in addition to the central board, the city was divided into approximately thirty school districts, each with their own

⁷For a discussion of community control, see Preston Wilcox, "The Meaning of Community Control," *Foresight* (1969): 1:v, quoted in J. S. Coleman, et al. *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 20.

⁸There is an extensive bibliography on the Ocean-Hill Brownsville crisis and disagreements to this day about what actually took place. I have found, *Confrontation at*

elected Community Board and District Superintendent empowered to make educational decisions affecting schools zoned for that district.

Given the political climate, it's not surprising that the project to construct a replacement school for the Old Boys' High school started with a fight to keep the school in Bedford-Stuyvesant.⁹ The location of Boys' and Girls' High School was a highly politicized issue. At odds, were two opposing views on how to best promote integration on the high school level, seen as the last resort to breaking down racial barriers within the city's public schools. As the *New York Times* reported "of all the divisions in the city system the high schools, more than the elementary or junior high schools, seem to offer as a state advisory committee noted in 1964, the best chance of achieving a 'maximum degree of integration.'"¹⁰

Ocean Hill-Brownsville, edited by Maurice R. Berube and Marilyn Gittell (NY: Prager Publishing, 1969) to be an objective account, offering many primary source documents.

⁹The old school was located at 832 Marcy Avenue. It is still used by the Board of Education for a variety of programs and received landmark designation in 1975. The name of the school was also changed in 1975 from Boys' High School to Boys' and Girls' High School.

¹⁰*New York Times*, "High Schools Here Still Present a Study in Contrasts," 29 June 1975, p. 28:2. This article is referring to the 1964 Allen Report, which advised the Board of Education to "introduce a large scale program of construction and development of *four year comprehensive high schools*" and to build them in largely white neighborhoods in Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. The comprehensive high school would eliminate the stigmatized minority-dominated vocational high schools, merging them with the predominantly white academic high schools. The Allen report, named for State Commissioner of Education James Allen Jr., entitled "Desegregating the Public Schools of New York City," was released in May 1964. See Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, chapter 25.

It soon became clear that there was a conflict between the Board's Office of School Planning and the Bedford-Stuyvesant community about what was best for the high school students in Bedford-Stuyvesant'. In 1966, City policy, in keeping with the recommendations of the Allen Report, encouraged integration by placing new high schools in white neighborhoods, on the assumption that black students would travel if white students wouldn't.

An internal memorandum within the Board of Education's School Planning and Research Division makes this abundantly clear:

The question of the Boys' High School location was discussed. Mr. Williams (Assist. Superintendent) and I indicated that the School Planning and Research Division has been considering, over a period of time, the location of the Boys' High School replacement in the vicinity of Park Circle. The Bedford-Stuyvesant community has, in recent months, insisted that the replacement be constructed in Bedford-Stuyvesant. I indicated that our Division was studying the possibility of locating one high school in Bedford-Stuyvesant and another at the Park Circle site. Consideration was being given to the possibility of providing special educational programs for the school to be located in the minority group area. This plan would afford parents the opportunity of sending their children to their local high school or to one which would be integrated. Commissioner Booth asked whether the Committee should take a position on the location of high schools in general. Mr. Williams thought they should and asked that a policy statement of the Committee be sent to the Board of Education enunciating their strong belief that high schools should be constructed in white areas in an attempt to achieve maximum ethnic integration.¹¹

Countering this opinion was the belief that Boys' and Girls' should stay in Bedford-Stuyvesant and that it could be integrated if it had programs to attract students from around the city. The old Boys' and Girls' high school was also unzoned, meaning

¹¹Seymour Levine, Senior Planner, School Planning and Research Division of the Board of Education, in internal memorandum to Dr. Morris N. Sachs, Director, School Planning and Research, 25 October 1966, reporting on a meeting of the Mayor's Interdepartmental Committee on Integration. Real Estate Unit Files, Division of School Facilities, New York City Board of Education.

that students could come from any area. Stanley Leyden, Chairman of the Education Committee of Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, made the argument that “the Bedford-Stuyvesant community . . . wants and needs more high schools. Convenient to rapid transit and surface transit, the area could provide high school facilities to serve youngsters throughout the city.” Furthermore, he asserted, “We are clear in our desire to have an integrated school at Boys’ High, one of the few unzoned high schools in New York. It can be integrated if there is sincere, official will to do so.”¹²

Ten years later, just about the time the school was to open, the Board of Education implemented a new policy to create magnet high schools to achieve exactly what Leyden had been proposing in 1965. The magnet schools were developed around a particular theme, so that in teaching regular academic subjects, the school’s theme would be referenced. As of July 1975, the city had four magnet schools: August Martin (aerospace) Queens; Beach Channel (oceanography) Queens; Clara Barton (health professions); Brooklyn, and Edward R. Murrow (communication arts and other options), Manhattan. The Board of Education planned to open two additional magnet schools in the fall of 1975: the Murry Bergtraum High School for Business Careers, named in memory of a former president of the Board of Education, in downtown Manhattan and Boys’ and Girls’ High School in Brooklyn, conceived with an architecture and urban planning focus.¹³ Although the Board of Education was moving forward with magnet

¹²Letter from Stanley Leyden, Chairman Education Committee of Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council to Adrian Blumenfeld, Administrator of School Planning and Research, 29 April 1965, Real Estate Files, Division of School Facilities, New York City Board of Education.

schools, based on evidence from other cities, magnet schools enriched the curriculum but did not foster integration. That appears to be the case with Boys' and Girls, which in 1974 had a population of 89.5 percent African-American and 7.5 percent Puerto Rican, and these ratios did not dramatically change when the new building opened.¹⁴

Eventually the Board and the Bedford-Stuyvesant community agreed on a site bordered by Fulton Street, Utica Avenue, Atlantic Avenue and Schenectady Avenue, part of the Fulton Park Urban Renewal Area. The school required a large area to accommodate athletic fields.¹⁵ On 20 December 1967 the Board of Education adopted a resolution authorizing the site selection for Boys High School and on 22 April 1968 the Site Selection Board adopted a resolution naming the specific site. Mayor Lindsay approved it on 1 July 1968.¹⁶ Finally, in December of 1968, the Board of Education hired Max O. Urbahn Associates to begin designing the project with an estimated

¹³See Leonard Buder, "Magnet High Schools in City are Pulling," *New York Times* 3 July 1975, p. 13:1.

¹⁴Board of Education School Profile, Office of Special Collections, Teacher's College, Columbia University.

¹⁵Business leaders in Bedford-Stuyvesant opposed this site because it necessitated the relocation of about thirty businesses.

¹⁶Although the effort to build a new school began in 1960, it wasn't until 1965 that a resolution appeared on the Board of Education's calendar to begin the process. That resolution of 24 September 1965 requested funds for site acquisition and construction in the 65-66 capital budget, estimating the total cost at \$11,136,458. Mayor Lindsay signed authorization to proceed with property acquisition on 14 June 1966 but as of September 1966, the Board was still researching possible sites. See "Tentative Minutes, Working Committee on School Sites of the Site Selection Board," 27 September 1966. Comment for Boys High School read: "The Board of Education is studying the possibilities and effects of locating this high school in a de-facto segregated neighborhood or in a fringe area. Laid over."

building cost of \$12,743,000 which eventually escalated to double that amount two years later.¹⁷

The school was to provide 4,500 seats, extensive athletic fields, auditorium, and be fully equipped for training in academic and vocational subjects. Finally, by February 1971 the final drawings were 60% complete and by May 1971 they were 100% complete.

Underscoring the interest of the community in linking the school to the Bedford-Stuyvesant' neighborhood, in March of 1969 Local School Board 16 and the District Superintendent recommended that the name of Boys' High School be changed to Dr. Charles Richard Drew High School. Drew was a black surgeon who pioneered the development of a process to convert blood into plasma. The request for the name change was declined because the name was already assigned to I.S. 148, Bronx. No other formal efforts were made to rename the school.

Boys' and Girls' High School Art Program

The fact that all the art commissioned for Boys' and Girls' High School is by African-American artists resulted from community pressure and the project architect's own impulse. In light of the thorny history of the site selection, the community's desire for the school to have an African-American identity, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville conflict next door, and the nationwide struggle for civil rights, both school users and school designer shared a mutual goal. Painter Ernest Crichlow, who did the prominent exterior

¹⁷Real Estate Unite Files, Division of School Facilities. The total cost of the school rose to \$24,764,100, based on bid of \$18,316,952. The approved school cost as of December 1969 was \$15,565,000.

mural and helped identify the other artists, recalls “I think when the whole program came out, the community board asked, “Well, had anybody talked to these guys out here? Ernie’s been out here fifty years and maybe we ought to talk to him.”¹⁸ In a recent interview, Crichlow recollected, “I got involved . . . myself and Jacob Lawrence were the people involved with the community when they first decided there would be a school there.”¹⁹ Concurrently, Marty Stein, the young architect from Urban Associates in charge of the project, was on a parallel trajectory. He carefully considered the implications of the art program, recognizing that the public art for this school had to be closely tied to the community. He remembers you would “go to the site, it was the middle of black power . . . (the) whole environment was permeated. There was the sense that Boys’ and Girls’ High School was part of the whole thing.”²⁰ As this project pre-dated the creation of the City’s Percent-for-Art program in 1982, public art was still in the hands of the architect. Either because of discussions with the community or independently, Stein decided that the best use of the approximately \$120,000 art allocation would be to commission “a community of artists, not just one artist,” and that it should be “work by African-American artists for this new Bedford-Stuyvesant high school.” Stein reasoned that art by African-American artists would be more relevant to the students, explaining, “My theory had been, what I was really selling, was if art related to the kids, they wouldn’t

¹⁸Ernest Crichlow, “Interview with Ernie Crichlow, Painter,” interview by Camille Billops (New York, 10 February 1985), *Artist and Influence* 4 (New York: Hatch-Billops Collection, Inc, 1986): 41.

¹⁹Ernest Crichlow, interview by author, 8 January 2002, Brooklyn, NY.

²⁰Martie Stein, interview by author, 5 November 2001, New York, NY.

destroy it. Artists could do whatever subject they wanted.” On the other hand, Stein did not want abstract art that “would not say anything to anyone.”²¹ In the end, he got a mixture.

To facilitate the selection of artists and assist in the coordination of the project, Crichlow became the art consultant and lead artist. A lifelong resident of Brooklyn, well known painter and book illustrator, educator and community activist, Crichlow was the perfect choice. Victor H. Knight, Director of Fulton Park Urban Renewal, outlined Crichlow’s role in a letter to Arthur Paletta, the Board’s Director of Architecture. Knight explained:

It is the communities [sic] wish and I concur that Ernest Chrichlow [sic] (resume attached) coordinate the communities [sic] input for the selection of minority artists for the art work on the Boys High School Replacement. A preliminary meeting was held March 23, 1971 with Max Urbahn Associates to familiarize Mr. Chrichlow [sic] with the layout of the school and the architects [sic] thoughts on the best locations for said works. Once a concept of what type of art work would be best for each location and a list of artists, who should be considered is developed, I will request a meeting with your office so that the Board of Education may respond to our initial idea.²²

Both Crichlow and Stein recollect meeting and working out art locations and establishing budgets together. “I guess a lot of the deciding of the project was done by Marty and me.”²³

The footprint of Boys’ and Girls’ was huge, occupying four giant, square blocks. Only four stories, the school was sprawling, more typical of suburban high schools than

²¹Ibid.

²²Undated letter, Files of Public Art for Public Schools, New York City Board of Education.

city schools. (Fig. 53) The school provided an extensive frontage along Fulton Street, a major commercial strip. To punctuate the long multi-level brick entry plaza, Stein and Crichlow identified three locations for exterior freestanding sculptures. (Fig. 54) To the right of the entrance, they identified a long frieze-like panel for an exterior mural, semi-protected under a portico and high enough to escape vandalism, yet visible to passers-by. For the interior, Stein and Crichlow identified multiple sites for serialized artworks. All the works are by the artist's own hand and nothing is translated into mosaic or ceramic, but to make them more architectural, Stein created recesses to bring the painted panels into plane with the glazed block walls of the school. In addition, the Board of Education requested that the paintings be protected under plexi-glass, and a unified system of metal frames borders each image.

The interior artworks are dispersed throughout the central corridor, the most public artery in the building. Visitors and students pass by artworks, stretching to the right and the left of the main entrance, as they make their way to the main office, guidance suite, and auditorium on one side and the PTA room, medical suite and gymnasiums on the other. Stein conceived and initiated the plan with Crichlow, and as a collaborator he was willing to make architectural accommodations for the artwork. In fact, Stein recalls getting reprimanded by his boss, Max Urbahn, for making design changes even though the firm was well into construction documents. He made major alterations in the front curtain wall and overhang to better situate the exterior mural. This impacted on the interior, affecting the arrangement of second floor classrooms. Stein also angled the walls in the corridor to the left of the main entrance to receive

²³Crichlow interview by author, 8 January 2002.

Vincent Smith's four panels, creating a sequential view of the four images while also allowing each panel to be viewed individually.²⁴ (Fig. 55) Crichlow recognized Stein's unusual commitment, observing it was the "first time we got an architect working with us and he was doing everything he could."²⁵

With the locations and scope of the commissions determined, Crichlow approached individual artists with their proposed assignments. He assembled an impressive group of artists, most of whom he knew personally. Crichlow recalled, "This was my chance to prove that we had good competent artists right in the neighborhood. All they needed was a little recognition and cash."²⁶ Crichlow did more than prove this. He formed a committee of artists bridging generations and aesthetic philosophies. They included sculptors and painters practicing a range of figuration and abstraction, artists new to public art and public art veterans, artists engaged in the dialogue about "black art," and artists engaged in the debates of modern art. The final product is a stunning display of some of the best work being produced by African-American artists at that time.²⁷ The total commission was \$122,000. It was divided among nine artists as follows: Painter Ernest Crichlow (b. 1914) \$36,000; Sculptor Todd Williams (b. 1939) \$20,000; Sculptor Edward N. Wilson (1925-1996) \$20,000; Painter Norman Lewis (1909-1979) \$12,000; Painter Fern Stanford (b. 1943) \$8,000; Painter Eldzier Cortor (b.

²⁴Stein interview by author, 5 November 2001.

²⁵Crichlow, interview by author, 8 January 2002.

²⁶Ibid.

1915) \$8,000; Painter Vincent Smith (b. 1929) \$7,000; Sculptor Chris Shelton (b. 1933) \$7,000; and ceramist Camille Billops (b. 1933) \$4,000.²⁸

When the final group was assembled in 1972, the senior members were Norman Lewis, age sixty-two, Eldzier Cortor, age fifty-six, and Ernest Crichlow, age fifty-seven. Crichlow and Lewis were lifelong friends, having met in 1933 in Augusta Savage's studio, and they were in close communication when the Boys' and Girls' High School project came up. All of them had had experience on the WPA, Lewis and Crichlow in New York as teachers and Cortor on the WPA painting division in Chicago.²⁹ All were well recognized, having received numerous honors and shown extensively.³⁰

²⁷This was not an accident. Crichlow confirmed, "naturally I kept adding on names. I tried to have a variety of people." Hatch-Billops, 41.

²⁸The size of the budgets are somewhat in proportion to the scope of the commissions but there are imbalances, where younger, inexperienced artists received comparable amounts to older, established artists. According to Camille Billops in a conversation with the author, Malcolm Bailey was originally included in the group but dropped out. Crichlow recalls that Jacob Lawrence declined the offer to participate from the beginning but did not explain why.

²⁹For Lewis's recollections of this time, see Norman Lewis, "Norman Lewis: Visual Artist," interview by Vivian Browne (NY: 29 August 1974), *Artist and Influence* 18 (1999): 73-75. See chapter on African-American artists and the WPA, "Emergence of African-American Artists During the Depression," in Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson, *A History of African-American Artists from 1792 to the Present* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993): 227-241.

³⁰For biographical information on Crichlow and Lewis, see discussions below. For Cortor, see Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson, *A History of African-American Artists from 1792 to the Present*, 272-279; Eldzier Cortor papers, Archives of American Art; Elton C. Fax, *Seventeen Black Artists* (NY: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1971), 79-94 and for additional bibliography, see *250 Years of Afro-American Art*.

Of the younger group of painters, Crichtlow invited Vincent Smith, age forty-two; Fern Stanford, age twenty-eight, the youngest of the group, and Camille Billops, age thirty-eight. Stanford and Billops were the only women of the nine artists selected.³¹

The sculptors were also at various stages in their careers. The most experienced member of that group was Edward N. Wilson, age forty-six, professor in the art department at SUNY/Binghamton; Chris Shelton, age thirty-eight, was Director of Cinque Gallery, and Todd Williams, age thirty-two, was the youngest of the group.³²

In undertaking the project, the artists formed a corporation under the name Fulton Concepts, Inc., following a then current trend of black artists uniting around various concerns. Between 1963 and 1971 several groups emerged, including Spiral Group, Africobra, Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC), Women Students and Artists for Black Liberation (WSABAL), and Where We At Black Women Artists.³³ For the commissions at Boys' and Girls' High School, there were practical benefits. By forming a group, the nine artists were able to pool the costs of legal fees and insurance and coordinate a unified look in the installation. It also made it easier for the Board of

³¹Camille Billops has also developed a reputation as a filmmaker, and she is the co-founder of the Hatch-Billops Collection. For an extensive bibliography on Billops, see *250 Years of Afro-American Art*, 491-492. For a brief bibliography on Stanford, see *250 Years of Afro-American Art*, 1120.

³²For information on Wilson see discussion below. For information on Shelton, see Fine, *The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity*, 226 and *250 Years of Afro-American Art*, 1092. For bibliography on Williams, see *250 Years of Afro-American Art*, 1225-26. Urbahn had already commissioned Williams to create a piece for another school, a painted steel sculpture completed in 1973 for PS 214, Bronx.

³³For a discussion of these groups, see Amaki, "The All Black Exhibition in America, 1963-1976," 3.

Education and the architect to administer the project. In December of 1972, the Board of Education, Fulton Concepts, Inc., representing the artists, and the general contractor signed a three-way contract formalizing the arrangement. Payments, already specified as “Decorative Treatment” in the approved plans and specifications, would go from the contractor to Fulton Concepts, Inc., who in turn would issue individual payments to the artists. The Executive Director of the Office of School Buildings and the Art Commission had veto power over the design of artworks. As it turns out, Marty Stein, not the Board of Education, made the aesthetic decisions, regularly visiting the artist’s studios and approving the work as it progressed, while the Art Commission granted formal preliminary and final approvals. The group association gave the artists strength in numbers. They were no longer lone individuals battling a hostile contractor.³⁴ Also, since only a few of the artists had had previous public art experience, they were able to assist the others, making the commission process more manageable. Crichlow recalls, “I was feeling I was just about in the same condition they were in that time. I didn’t really know the ins and outs or how you got an assignment like this or how to proceed. We had a number of discussions groupwise.”³⁵ Vincent Smith similarly recalled, “How I remember it, was that we had a meeting once all the artists were selected. Our focus was

³⁴The contract process is very different today. Since the creation of the New York City School Construction Authority in 1989, a three-way agreement is signed by the artist, Board of Education, and School Construction Authority. The artist is no longer a sub-contractor of the general contractor or the architect, but is a direct consultant to the Board of Education and School Construction Authority.

³⁵Crichlow, interview by author, 8 January 2002.

to do this as a package. We all used the same lawyer. The idea was that we wouldn't run into any difficulty if we all stood together on this."³⁶

The art program at Boys' and Girls' sprang from the shared belief of architect and painter that there should be a panoply of permanent artwork associated with the building, and at first glance, the stylistic variety of commissioned artworks seems strangely eclectic. Few subject restrictions were placed on the artists, and apparently the artists worked independently of each other. At the very beginning of the project, Smith recalls, "I think we had a meeting before we started, and he (Marty Stein) said it was a school, so he didn't want anything sexy and he also said that somebody (Ed Wilson) was doing something on slavery," so that subject shouldn't be repeated. After that, the "artists worked separately. Didn't look at each other's designs . . . [The] architect was the only one who knew what the subject and imagery of each one was."³⁷ It was as if the artists were producing studio work for an exhibition, not a permanent installation.

In fact, one way in which to view the collection of artworks at Boys' and Girls', the only school in the system that can boast an assortment of artworks of this depth and range, is to put it in the context of the all black art exhibition. Seen in that light, this collection becomes a snapshot of a phenomenon--a temporary display made permanent. It's not incidental that many of the artists who undertook commissions for Boys' and Girls' were frequent contributors to the all black exhibitions that were so popular in the

³⁶Vincent Smith, interview by author, 29 November 2001, New York, NY.

³⁷Ibid.

60s and 70s,³⁸ and in fact four artists of the group--Eldzier Cortor, Ernest Crichlow, Norman Lewis and Vincent Smith--were included in the largest of them, the 1970 show, *Afro-American Artists: New York and Boston*, held at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the National Center of Afro-American Artists. This show featured 158 works by 70 artists, including all styles and media. Marty Stein recollects seeing the show and Crichlow recalls, "Then the architect called me the same year we did the Jubilee show in Boston. He saw some of my works and he thought, 'we'd like to use you.'"³⁹

The all black exhibition started in black college campuses, churches, and community centers and moved to white venues, starting with colleges and eventually shifting to prominent museums and major galleries as the 1960s progressed.⁴⁰ It was either organized by white, establishment curators or by black artists or curators. These exhibitions tended to be historical surveys or general overviews of contemporary art. Of the second category, the majority were eclectic, demonstrating different stylistic and philosophical views. Amaki explains, "Most black organizers of contemporary shows emphasized a broad range of interests and styles among African-American artists in order to enlighten the general public about the true intra-cultural expressive diversity present and to combat stereotyping."⁴¹

³⁸ Amaki, "The All Black Exhibition in America, 1963-1976," See the Appendix for a listing of all exhibitions and participants.

³⁹ Hatch-Billops Collection, 41.

⁴⁰ Bearden and Henderson credit birth of the movement to Elizabeth Catlett. See Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson, *A History of African-American Artists from 1792 to the Present*, 424-425.

In the case of Boys' and Girls' High School, the architect helped initiate the basic plan, but in keeping with the practice typical of many all black exhibitions, an artist representative of the black community acted as the curator and selected the artists. Undoubtedly both the architect and the Board wanted to avoid controversy over the selection of the artists and were pleased to hand the responsibility over to a black artist who was also a respected community member. From Crichlow's point of view, he certainly wanted to make a statement about the quality of work by African-American artists living in New York City and provide lasting enrichment for the school. Perhaps, unconsciously, Crichlow also wanted to refute some general misconceptions resulting from exhibitions that were not selective enough about the quality of work by black artists. African-American critic Henri Ghent, one of the few black writers publishing in mainstream periodicals, noted that the tendency in the all-black show, was to include too much. Ghent says that these large group shows did not represent "discriminating concern for *individual* excellence." Furthermore, "if the highly gifted black artists continue to be lumped with those of dubious merit, they will surely decline to the point of losing their creative drive to compete as *American* artists."⁴² Undoubtedly, Crichlow wanted the work at Boys' and Girls' to rise above this type of criticism.

Viewed twenty-five years later, the art at Boys' and Girls' comes into focus as a cross-section of work being done by African-American artists at a seminal moment, and as such, it reverberates with that moment's artistic debates. Artists and critics, both

⁴¹Amaki, 274-275

⁴²Henri Ghent, "Why, in 1973, a 'Black Art' Show?" *New York Times*, 14 October 1973, sec. 2, p. 25; also quoted in Amaki, 191.

black and white, grappled with these questions: is there a black art and what does it mean to be a black artist?⁴³ These very questions took on the character of a public debate in response to the Afro-American Boston show curated by Edmund B. Gaither.

In his catalogue, Gaither outlined the basic premise of his argument about the nature of black art and art by black artists. He distinguished between the “black show” and “black art,” arguing that the black show is nothing more than a gathering of work by artists who happen to be black. However, “not every artist who is black can be called a black artist if that term is to be meaningful.” He continued, “By contrast, there are artists who knowingly and intentionally base their art on peculiarly black experiences, on the history of blacks and on a view of Africa.” Finally, he concluded, “black art is a didactic art form arising from a strong nationalistic base.” Stylistically, Gaither asserted, “the black artist is basically a realist. Black art is a social art and it must be communicative.”⁴⁴ Elsa Honig Fine takes up this idea in her book, coining the terms “blackstream” and “mainstream,” which correspond to figurative and abstract.⁴⁵ The

⁴³See Elsa Honig Fine, *The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1973). Fine’s book includes the most comprehensive bibliography listing articles from the early 70s; Samella Lewis and Ruth G. Wassy, *Black Artists on Art* (Los Angeles: Contemporary Crafts Publishers, 1969); “Black Artists in America: A Symposium,” *Metropolitan Museum Bulletin*, XXVII (January 1969): 245-61; and Barbara Rose, “Black Art in America,” *58 Art in America* (September-October 1970): 54-67.

⁴⁴All quotations from Gaither’s Introduction, to *Afro-American Artists New York and Boston* (Boston: The Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists and Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 1970) n.p.

⁴⁵Lowery Sims, as do many subsequent writers, summarizes this viewpoint in “The African-American Artist and Abstraction,” in *Norman Lewis Black Paintings*, 42. See also discussion in Bearden and Henderson, 310.

discussion about what is black art has evolved from this point and has become increasingly complex, linking the expression of black identity to post-modernism.⁴⁶

Set against the backdrop, then, of the civil rights movement and the all black show and its attendant discussions, public art by African-American artists for a new high school in Bedford-Stuyvesant posed a unique opportunity. Each of the nine artists responded to their challenge differently. Free to choose their own subject, some viewed this as the ultimate opportunity to educate students and the community about African-American history and to promote the value of education. Others saw it as a vehicle for bringing modern art without an ethnic tag to a community that rarely went to galleries or museums. Yet, despite the stylistic range and divergent purposes, all the artists were searching for positive self-imagery, conscious of the fact that they were African-American artists producing art for an African-American audience.⁴⁷

Ed Wilson's piece about slavery, entitled *Middle Passage*, is a scathing political statement and makes the viewer the most uncomfortable. Crichlow's exterior mural, an overview of the African-American experience, is panoramic in its content and execution; Smith's four panels celebrate the neighborhood; Cortor's symbolic images invent new

⁴⁶See especially Ann Gibson's essay, "The African-American Aesthetic and Postmodernism," in David C. Driskell, ed, *African-American Visual Aesthetics: A Postmodernist View* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

⁴⁷Lowery Sims makes a very perceptive comment about the dilemma of the artist's relationship to his or her audience. Sims writes, "In the context of the political and social turmoil of these years, the issue now was not merely the relationship of African-American artists to their African heritage but also included a notion of blackness gauged on a scale referencing relevance and accessibility to the African-American community." See Lowery Sims, "The African-American Artist and Abstraction," in *Norman Lewis Black Paintings*, 46.

allegories for art, music and dance derived from African and African-American sources.

(Fig. 56) On the other side of the coin, Lewis in his obdurate way, insisted on the freedom of a black artist to be an artist first, producing a bold triptych based on abstract geometric forms. Todd Williams explored the possibility of kinetic art and Chris Sheldon created one of his characteristic painted steel sculptures, entitling it *Air Afrique* #4 in dedication to Martin Luther King, Jr. Lastly, Camille Billops, always an individualist, created her own form of fanciful ceramic narrative that falls outside the debate of “blackstream” or “mainstream.”⁴⁸

For the purposes of this discussion, I will focus on four representative artworks, each of which illuminates a different aspect of the debates of the time.

**Ernest Crichlow, *Untitled* (1972-76)
Boys' and Girls' High School, Brooklyn**

Ernest Crichlow's exterior mural depicting the past and the future of African-Americans is the culmination of a life-long dedication to examining and presenting the full spectrum of the African-American experience without sentimentality or sensationalism. Though commissioned during the period of black nationalism, that was not its impetus, because as he explained in a 1968 interview, “this has been my story from long before.”⁴⁹ His mural, his magnum opus, is a visual history of that experience,

⁴⁸Billops explained that her piece, entitled *War of the Fives*, was a response to the Vietnam War, describing it as a “parody of nationalism.” Billops received another commission for a school project in 1992, creating two ceramic reliefs for P.S. 4, Manhattan. Although intended for the auditorium, because of wall obstructions, they were installed in the cafeteria.

emphasizing the importance and almost redemptive value of education. With this commission Crichlow could fulfill his self-professed responsibility of being the artist/educator.⁵⁰

When Crichlow embarked on the project at Boys' and Girls', he was already an accomplished artist and a central figure in the African-American artistic community.⁵¹ Born in 1914, one of nine children of West Indian immigrants, he has lived in Brooklyn all his life. He remembers growing up in an integrated community and attending integrated schools. Though Crichlow's family was poor, his parents still allowed him to pursue art, and he received vital encouragement from some of his teachers. He attended a Manhattan high school that offered a work study program for art students and won a scholarship to the School of Commercial Illustration and Advertising in Manhattan.⁵²

⁴⁹Ernest Crichlow, "Ernest Crichlow Interview," interview by Henri Ghent (New York, 20 July 1968), Transcribed, Archives of American Art, p. 31.

⁵⁰"... I feel that an artist has certain kinds of responsibilities. I still see him as basically a teacher, an educator and the thing that makes him somewhat special is that he has these sensitivities more developed than others have." Crichlow interview by Ghent, Ernest Crichlow Papers, Reel N70-12, Archives of American Art.

Crichlow not only taught art, but as early as 1963, was advising New York City public school teachers on materials available on notable African-Americans to incorporate into the curriculum. See clipping from *The New York Courier* 9 February 1963, reproduced in Ernest Crichlow Papers, Reel N70-12, Archives of American Art.

⁵¹For the two best published sources on Crichlow, see Lynn Igoe, *250 Years of Afro-American Art: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Bowker, 1981), 585-589 and *Ernest Crichlow: A Life in Art* (Bedford-Stuyvesant' Restoration Corporation, The Skylight Gallery: 2000).

⁵²Apparently, his high school principal barred Crichlow from receiving the scholarship when he discovered he was black, but teachers raised funds on their own. See Julia Hotton, "A Brooklyn Treasure: Ernest Crichlow, Artist, Teacher, Native Son," in *Ernest Crichlow: A Life in Art* (Bedford-Stuyvesant' Restoration Corporation, The Skylight Gallery: 2000) for most detailed account of Crichlow's art school experience.

While still in high school, he made the adventurous trip up to Harlem, finding his way to Augusta Savage's studio, where he met his life-long friend, Norman Lewis. Eventually he joined the circle of artists and writers around Charles Alston and his famed 306, although as he recalls, "I was very young and like an outcast. I was from Brooklyn and these guys were from Harlem. Seriously, I was lucky to be in the room. I didn't open my mouth. I didn't know what they were talking about anyway."⁵³

Crichlow found it was impossible to make a living as a black commercial artist, but as a result of his experience on the WPA/FAP, he decided to become a painter. The Harlem Art Center, established by the WPA/FAP, was the perfect training ground for him.⁵⁴ At that time he shifted his focus to black subjects, something he never studied in art school. "So when I decided that I wanted to be a painter, I had to go back and really study to see what is unique about us."⁵⁵ With the gradual dissolution of the projects, in 1941 Crichlow applied to the Rosenfeld Foundation for an artist's grant. Unfortunately, he didn't get it but art critic Elizabeth McCausland wrote an enthusiastic letter of support, including this perceptive comment which demonstrates that Crichlow found his voice early on:

His approach to painting is not however a mechanically polemical one: he does not preach. Rather, he observes, expresses, seeks to pack his painting with emotion and meaning implicit in the esthetic statement itself. There is tenderness

⁵³Hatch-Billops Collection, 39.

⁵⁴While on the WPA, Crichlow taught in the New York City schools and was sent to Raleigh, N. Carolina to set up a community art center.

⁵⁵Hatch-Billops Collection, 42.

in the work, which extends beyond the boundaries of the canvas to the race for which he hopes to speak.⁵⁶

With perseverance, Crichlow's paintings were included in an increasing number of exhibitions. His big break came in 1953, with his first one-man show at ACA Gallery, with Lena Horna as his self-appointed spokeswoman.⁵⁷ During this period, Crichlow supplemented his income by doing children's book illustrations and teaching art.

Crichlow has always practiced some form of realism. "I've not been a partisan in the great art movements."⁵⁸ On his style, Crichlow explains:

Most of my work has been my attempt to articulate my experiences as a black person for all to see and understand. It was important to me to communicate the dignity and depth of expression of the community in which I lived, in language that most people would understand—streets that looked like our neighborhoods, faces that were brothers and sisters, and kitchens that looked like kitchens.⁵⁹

For him, realism connoted honesty.⁶⁰

⁵⁶Ernest Crichlow Papers, AAA, roll N/70-12, frames 707-730.

⁵⁷She wrote in the exhibition pamphlet, "I admire Mr. Crichlow's craft and his humanity and I am proud to number myself among his collectors." "Ernest Crichlow," January 25-February 13, 1960, ACA Gallery, New York. In her review of the show, Dore Ashton remarked, "Negro children of the city--their small joys and great wistfulness--are painted with dignity by this young artist." Dora Ashton, *Art Digest* 27 (September 1953): 20, Crichlow papers, roll N/70-12, AAA.

⁵⁸Crichlow, interview by author.

⁵⁹*Ernest Crichlow: A Life in Art*, 38.

⁶⁰"I decided to go back and just try to draw and paint as honestly as I knew how, and I felt when I was doing it as honestly as I knew how I had to resort to some form of realism." Crichlow, interview by Ghent, 26, Archives of American Art. Gaither reaches same conclusion, asserting "In his visual language the black artist is basically a realist. Black art is a social art and it must be communicative." Gaither, n.p.

Given his own body of work and familiarity with black artists in New York, Crichlow was a natural choice as the “curator” for Boys’ and Girls’ High School. He has always been supportive of other African-American artists, founding with Bearden and Lewis the Cinque Gallery in 1969 to provide exhibition opportunities for younger black artists. He was also rooted in the neighborhood, with a long-time association with the Fulton Art Fair which started in 1956 and has taken place annually in Fulton Park, across from the school. Lastly, Crichlow’s own educational experiences, personality and artistic philosophy gave him the ability to bridge potential conflicts that might arise between the more militant members of the Bedford-Stuyvesant community and the white representatives of the bureaucracy commissioning the school and the art associated with it.

The untitled mural, painted in epoxy paint on cement panels, extends 110 feet, the length of the portico, and is 7 feet high. Crichlow did not conceive it as a linear narrative but as a series of juxtapositions, contrasting the past with the present. Vacillating between hope and oppression, the mural makes the case for the power and importance of education, particularly for the African-American community. In planning the mural, Crichlow viewed the students as his primary audience, “and then it was what else you had to say to the community, and what I hoped the community would get from just walking by. And the good thing I felt you had a distance, a lot of space to first think about it and it could still stay with you until you got to the end.”⁶¹

⁶¹Crichlow, interview by author.

Bracketed between an image of the student and an image of the future, the story unfolds. Reading from left to right, the mural begins with a bold, sculptural head, a meditative portrait of “the student.” (Fig. 57) This establishes the present. In the next panel, the mural returns to the past, to the brutal history of slavery--the slave auction and slave labor--but evolves into figures reaching forward, transformed into basketball players, transmuted into leaping figures throwing spears.⁶² Next comes the African landscape, peopled with a stencil-like chain of slaves. (Fig. 58) The viewer is then jolted back to the present with a sequence of images depicting the contemporary student--reading, thinking, and participating with raised hand. (Fig. 59) Next come references to the south, the place of origin for some residents of Bedford-Stuyvesant. (Fig. 60) In these panels Crichlow signifies the south by depicting cotton, with all its associations, coupled with the figure of a woman wearing a kerchief. Juxtaposed next to the panel showing agricultural labor, a student bends over a paper and another performs science experiments. (Fig. 61) This sequence segues into a world map, featuring a projection showing a more accurately sized North America in relation to Africa and the other continents, framed by three sets of hands--white, black and brown--reaching across to suggest world unity. Next, Africa presented as a hybrid African sculpture⁶³ stands in front

⁶²During the period Crichlow was designing the mural, he was also creating illustrations for a children’s collection of African tales. Many illustrations from that book resemble images in the mural. See Jessie Alford Nunn, illustrations by Ernest Crichlow, *African Folk Tales* (NY: Funk & Wagnall, 1969).

⁶³ “I wanted to have some African sculpture in there because I feel that it’s very important to understand where you come from.” (interview with the author). Cortor also used African sculpture to symbolize the artist at work, carving an African sculpture from the tree trunk. The typical emblem is a classically inspired figure. Both Crichlow and

of simplified Egyptian pyramids, the angular architectural forms becoming legs, arms and torsos in the next set of panels. (Fig. 62) This group of stick-like figures in brown, black and white, linked together in solidarity, conjures up visions of civil rights marchers. Racing to the mural's conclusion, out of this village of protestors rises a black infant clasped in strong black hands, symbolizing hope for the future. As Mel Edwards commented:

In Crichlow's mural at Boys' and Girls' High School in Brooklyn, faith in progress through struggle is depicted: on the farm or in the inner-city; cutting cane, playing cricket or basketball; plastering decorative molding, or writing novels. Education, experience, labor, and perseverance create progress, and the mural is a reminder, a statement of hope.⁶⁴

In developing this complex design, Crichlow made many changes and refinements from the preliminary sketch of 1972 to the installation of the mural four years later. In the process he clarified the message and distilled the forms, decreasing the level of realism in favor of more sweeping symbolic gestures, perhaps in response to Art Commissioner Charles Alston's comment that "the entire series needs resolution, either toward the representational or the abstract."⁶⁵ (Fig. 63) Alston also questioned the scale and meaning of the first panel. In the study, this is a pair of enormous eyes gazing at the viewer, but in the finished mural Crichlow replaces this with the sculptural head of a

Cortor use African sculpture in their murals, not just as a reference or reminder, but as a reappropriation, a taking back.

⁶⁴*Ernest Crichlow: A Life in Art*, 24.

⁶⁵Exhibition File 400-AS, Art Commission. Despite Alston's criticism, Crichlow recalls that "Charles Alston was very sympathetic." Mayor Lindsay appointed Alston as the Painter Member to the Art Commission in 1969. Crichlow himself served on the Art Commission from 1979-1981.

contemplative student, which instead of confronting the viewer provides a comfortable point of entrance.

The mural's organization was a challenge that Crichlow solved admirably by using painted architectural elements, shifts in scale, cubistic forms and a curtain-like landscape that flows into and behind various compositional elements throughout the length of the mural. To keep the image sequence dynamic, Crichlow combines forms that are simplified and flatly painted with more mottled, painterly areas. The whole mural is washed in soft tones of pale lemon, blue, green, and brown, a pleasing contrast with the red brick of the building. Despite the enormous size of the piece, Crichlow painted it himself in his Manhattan studio with almost no assistance. He explained that it would have been difficult to have an assistant, because he "conceived it like a large painting."⁶⁶

The mural was a tremendous achievement for Crichlow, who hoped it would lead to future commissions.⁶⁷ Perhaps its qualities are best summed up in novelist Paule Marshall's tribute to Crichlow:

Ernest Crichlow is the consummate diaspora painter. For well over six decades he had dedicated his art to celebrating our lives from Brooklyn to Barbados and beyond. Each image he creates insists upon our humanity, on the worth, beauty and validity of us as a people. Moreover, he has made of our experience a sacred text, and I, for one, will always be grateful for the enduring gift of his art. [*Ernest Crichlow, His Life in Art*, 11].

⁶⁶Crichlow, interview by author.

⁶⁷Unfortunately, this did not occur, largely because of the fiscal crisis of the 70s and 80s, when excess school buildings were auctioned off and almost none were built.

**Norman Lewis, *Untitled* (1972-76)
Boys' and Girls' High School, Brooklyn**

Of all the artists associated with Boys' and Girls', Lewis is the most difficult to situate in a discussion of public art and African-American identity. It's not just that he was an abstract painter, but it has to do with the paradoxical position he assumed: on one hand, a political activist campaigning for artists' rights, the black artist's rights, workers' rights and civil rights, yet on the other hand believing that just because he was black, his art didn't have to be about being black. He believed that art should express universal truths in a universal language of form, color and line. He first stated this view in his "Thesis, 1946"⁶⁸ and repeated it in subsequent interviews, saying:

protest paintings that I was trying to do never solved any situation. I found the only way that solved anything was to go out and take some kind of physical action. And that painting, like music, had something inherent in itself which I had to discover and which has nothing to do with what exists, it has another kind of reality . . . "⁶⁹

Lewis saw modernist painting as a weapon to combat racial stereotypes and was committed to "constructing an international abstract language."⁷⁰

⁶⁸Reproduced in Kenkeleba Gallery, *Norman Lewis*, 1989, 63.

⁶⁹Norman Lewis, "Norman Lewis Interview," interview by Henri Ghent (New York, 14 July 1968), Transcribed, Archives of American Art, p. 25. Lewis also expressed this opinion in later interviews. See also, Hatch-Billops Collection. Of all the artists associated with Boys' and Girls' High School, the bibliography on Lewis is the most extensive. Several excellent exhibition catalogues provide detailed discussions of his life and work and provide excellent bibliographies. See Thomas Lawson, *Norman Lewis: A Retrospective* (New York: Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York, 1976); Kenkeleba Gallery, *Norman Lewis: From the Harlem Renaissance to Abstraction* (New York: Kenkeleba Gallery, 1989) and most recently, The Studio Museum, *Norman Lewis Black Paintings 1946-1977* (New York: The Studio Museum, 1998)

Despite Lewis's own assertions, in recent years there has been a wave of scholarship focused on locating "black" content in his abstract paintings, particularly the paintings employing dark tonalities and those he did in connection with the Spiral exhibition in 1965.⁷¹ Some of these paintings have obvious abstract figurative elements that refer to civil rights marchers, Ku Klux Klan members, or race relations in New York City. These arguments are less persuasive in regard to the murals he did for Boys' and Girls', which are a distinct part of his oeuvre and stand apart from the main body of his work.

Norman Lewis (1909-1979) was born in New York City of Bermudan parents.⁷² He grew up in Harlem, attending predominantly white P.S. 5, and graduated from New York Vocational High School, where he studied drawing and commercial design. He worked in Augusta Savage's studio, but didn't study with her, eventually studying at Columbia University and briefly with Raphael Soyer at the John Reed Club Art School.

⁷⁰David Craven, "Norman Lewis as Political Activist and Post-Colonial Artist," in *Norman Lewis Black Paintings 1946-1977*, 58.

⁷¹See Jorge Daniel Veneciano, "The Quality of Absence in the Black Paintings of Norman Lewis," in *Norman Lewis Black Paintings 1946-1977*, who writes, "This discussion proposes that in their interplay of presence and absence, Lewis's black paintings sustain both the paradox and answers to the questions they raise about their relation to politics and meaning," 32 and Ann Eden Gibson who makes the argument that Lewis's abstract expressionism was not purely about aesthetics. In her carefully constructed essay, "Black is a Color: Norman Lewis and Modernism in New York," in *Norman Lewis Black Paintings 1946-1977*, she cites many examples of how seemingly nonobjective paintings evolve from a core of political content. "Lewis's insistence that his Civil Rights subject matter could be represented abstractly is a demonstration of his refusal to understand his blackness as a limitation." Gibson, 23.

⁷² For most complete chronology see Kellie Jones, "Norman Lewis Chronology," in *Norman Lewis: From the Harlem Renaissance to Abstraction*, 58-62. There is also

The WPA provided invaluable experience and artistic training for Lewis who was on the projects from 1935-37. Lewis recalls, "I took a job teaching, because I thought that this was something that I could best do. I taught for a considerable length of time at a junior high and achieved quite a lot of success with the kids there."⁷³ While at P.S. 139, Manhattan he did two collaborative murals with students chronicling the emancipation of the slaves and their continued progress as a result of education.⁷⁴ Lewis also learned many practical skills such as grinding colors and gilding frames, but perhaps he benefited most by observing other artists and participating in their discussions. Lewis was active in the Harlem Artists Guild and the Artists Union, where he befriended Ad Reinhardt and David Smith.

When he began painting in the 1930s, Lewis was a social realist, but in the mid-40s, he turned to abstraction. It wasn't an easy transition, and Lewis struggled with the change, looking to models like Claude Monet and Joseph William Mallord Turner for artistic guidance. Lewis, however, didn't only face aesthetic challenges but the approbation of other black painters who felt that by abandoning figuration, he had abandoned the civil rights struggle.⁷⁵ But Lewis soon found his stride, beginning a fifteen year association with Marian Willard's gallery in 1949, and eventually having eight solo shows there. He participated in the legendary Artists' Sessions moderated by

good biographical information in Norman Lewis interview with Henri Ghent, AAA, and in the interview with Vivian Browne, Hatch-Billops Collection.

⁷³Hatch-Billops, 73.

⁷⁴Lawson, n.p.

⁷⁵See Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson , 322.

Alfred Barr at Studio 35, a series of talks organized to define Abstract Expressionism.

His works were shown in major exhibitions, including *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America* at MOMA, 1951; *Nature in Abstraction*, Whitney, 1958, and in the U.S.

Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1956. In 1955 Lewis won a prize at the Carnegie International Exhibition for *Migrating Birds*. By the close of the fifties, Lewis had all the credentials of a full-fledged Abstract Expressionist.

Concurrent with his embrace of abstraction, Lewis remained active in the civil rights struggle. The two primary streams in his life merged in the Spiral Group, formed in 1963, an association of black artists desiring to make a collective statement about the black artist's role in the fight for civil rights. The group mounted one show in 1965 where all participants were allowed only to use black and white. During the early sixties, Lewis created some of his most striking abstract but pointed political canvases, such as *Alabama* (1960) and *Processional* (1964). In 1969 he helped organize Cinque Gallery (see discussion above) and also taught in Haryou-Act (a Harlem youth group).

Just before Lewis began the mural commission for Boys' and Girls', in 1970-71 he received awards from the American Academy and National Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1971 he began teaching at the Art Students League and in 1976 had his first retrospective.⁷⁶

Some writers have classified Lewis's work into categories, dividing the body of abstract paintings into "Traces," "Geometrics," "Entities," "Citscapes," and

⁷⁶See Lawson, *Norman Lewis: A Retrospective*.

“Structures.”⁷⁷ The identifying hallmark of his style, however, are the clusters of “glyphic shapes,” suggesting figures, a consistent motif in many of his paintings from the 1950s to the end of his life. Ann Gibson argues that these works, produced over many decades with varying styles, are united by a common motive, referring to them as Lewis’s “Ritual series.”⁷⁸ They represent ideographic figures performing symbolic actions. In numerous interviews Lewis recounted his interest in the individual and conformity and how his glyphic notations represented the idea of “how people followed each other . . . and it was always the individual that was against the mass.”⁷⁹ This interest tied into Lewis’s attraction to Marxist philosophy and Freudian psychoanalysis (via Carl Jung.)⁸⁰ The “Ritual” paintings, with their clusters of geometric figures, bear the closest stylistic affinity to the murals at Boys’ and Girls’.

Variations on a theme, Lewis conceived the murals as a triptych, described in the Art Commission submission form as “a series of three recessed wall panels showing abstract figures, colors and shapes.”⁸¹ (Fig. 64) The panels are painted with epoxy on masonite backed canvas and measure 78 inches high by varying widths. From left to right the widths are 144 inches, 58 inches, and 138 inches. Panels are located on an angled wall forming part of the auditorium vestibule and are visible from the school’s

⁷⁷See Gibson, in *Norman Lewis Black Paintings*.

⁷⁸See Gibson’s discussion of the “Rituals,” in *Norman Lewis Black Paintings*, 18-24.

⁷⁹Norman Lewis, interview by Ghent.

⁸⁰See discussion in Veneciano, “The Quality of Absence in the Black Paintings of Norman Lewis,” 33.

main entrance. Architectural features in the school, specifically the doors to the restrooms, dictated the arrangement and dimensions of the panels.

Lewis used a bright, though limited palette, applied in a bold, poster-like style. In the two side panels, there are white and black angular, geometric forms against a sky blue background. In contrast, the central narrow panel has a yellow background, overlaid with white, black, and deep red forms, organized around a central oval, the epicenter of the whole ensemble. There are no visible brush strokes. What is visible, however, are faint pencil lines outlining the geometric forms, indicating that Lewis wanted to preserve pristine edges.

Based on a comparison with Lewis's preliminary design, it is clear that he carefully orchestrated the compositions of the three sections. (Fig. 65) Lewis was fairly close to final conception in his preliminary design, about which Alston had no criticisms, but he did make some adjustments. In general, Lewis reduced the number of geometric elements in each of the panels but retained their general organization and size of the individual components. Evidently, Lewis reduced the width of the central panel, possibly to accommodate the restroom entrances. In the preliminary design, the panels appear as a grouping without taking into account building realities. Although the murals lack the spontaneous quality associated with many of Lewis's Abstract Expressionist paintings, the compositions are dynamic. The angular shapes suggest figures dancing over the canvas, or fragmenting jewels. Some of the forms seem to trail off, as they are gradually reduced to simpler components. Undoubtedly, Lewis wanted to provide the school with

⁸¹ Exhibition File, 400 AW, Art Commission.

assertive, colorful, cheerful images that would carry across the visual chaos characteristic of a high school corridor.

The paintings are a bit of puzzle in terms of Lewis's oeuvre. They represent his only major public commission. Stylistically, they combine elements characteristic of the "Ritual" series--featuring Lewis's abstract shorthand for figures, here seeming to emphasize collective power--with his experiments with bold color in paintings such as *Triumphal*, 1972 (Plate 21 in *Norman Lewis Black Paintings*) or *Exodus*, 1972 (Plate 22 in *Norman Lewis Black Paintings*). In responding to this commission, Lewis created works that could compete with the architectural space but did not deviate from his abstract principles. Unlike Crichtlow's mural, there is nothing in Lewis's work that points to the racial identity of the painter.

**Vincent Smith, *Untitled* (1972-1976)
Boys' and Girls' High School, Brooklyn**

Vincent Smith is a prolific artist, having participated in over 30 solo and 200 group exhibitions.⁸² His work combines elements of figuration with abstraction and consistently probes aspects of modern black life and culture. Stylistically, the work

⁸²For overviews of Smith's life and work, see Nancy E. Green, *Dreams, Myths, and Realities: A Vincent Smith Retrospective* (Cornell University: Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 2001); Sharon F. Patton, "Vincent Smith: Images and Evocations," *Black American Literature Forum*, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana 19 (Spring 1985): 26-27, also on-line at jstor.org; Sharon Fitzgerald 1999): 22-27; Lynn Igoe, *250 Years of Afro-American Art: An Annotated Bibliography*, 1114-5; "Vincent Smith: Sage, Bohemian, Prince," *American Visions* 14 (June/July 1999): 22-7; "Vincent Smith: Painter," interview by Sharon Patton (New York: 16 October 1988) *Artist and Influence* 9 (Hatch Billops Collection, In. 1990): 143-154.

draws on many sources from modern European art, African-American art and African art, producing from this amalgam an original vision.

Like Crichtlow and Lewis, Vincent Smith was born in New York City and attended the New York City public schools.⁸³ Like his older peers, his parents were also immigrants from the West Indies, with family ties to Barbados. Unlike Crichtlow and Lewis, Smith came of age with the Beat generation, experiencing the Depression as a child living in Bedford-Stuyvesant rather than as an artist on the WPA/FAP, finding his artistic voice as a bohemian artist in the Village during the 1950s.

As a child growing up in Brooklyn's West Indian community, Smith regularly attended the African Orthodox Church, where he was exposed to the philosophy of Marcus Garvey. In a way, Vincent Smith came to art by way of social action. He dropped out of high school, working on the railroad at the age of sixteen and joining the army the following year. During this period he experienced the racism of the South firsthand, explaining, "Growing up with that kind of philosophy, I saw things that awakened my social conscience and I began to look for a way to express myself."⁸⁴

Although Smith rejected formal education, nonetheless, he was a voracious reader and avid museum-goer. He explained that the Brooklyn Museum, where he discovered African sculpture, "and the library were my college."⁸⁵ Smith's entrée into the art world came through a fellow painter he befriended while working in the post office. With him, Smith saw the 1952 Cézanne show at MoMA, an epiphany for Smith, followed by visits

⁸³ Smith attended JHS 109.

⁸⁴ Hatch-Billops, 143

to Hans Hofmann's school and the Whitney Museum. In 1953 Smith studied with Reginald Marsh at the Arts Students League. In 1955-56 he attended the Brooklyn Museum School of Art on fellowship, where he met fellow artist Walter Williams, with whom he eventually shared a studio in Manhattan. In the summer of 1955 he won a scholarship to study at Maine's Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.

Smith became part of 50s group of Greenwich Village black artists and writers, including Richard Mayhe, Cliff Jackson, Harvey Cropper, Sam Middleton, Earl Miller, Al Hicks and Amiri Baraka. He was a regular at the Five Spot Café where they played jazz all night.⁸⁶ Smith recalls, "The art scene was in transition. There were the social expressionists and the up and coming abstract expressionists. We were influenced by everything. The French painters, Picasso, Brancusi, Klee, the Dutch painters, the Flemish school, Zen Buddhism, the Mexican painters, the German expressionists, the Japanese woodcut and African sculpture. Within the styles and forms and techniques of these schools we painted and experimented and attempted to find our way."⁸⁷

Other artists helped Smith get a foothold. Jacob Lawrence, whom Smith befriended after a chance meeting on the subway, arranged use of a printing press at the

⁸⁵ "An Interview with Vincent Smith" in Smith catalogue, 17.

⁸⁶ For discussion of bohemian period in Smith's life, see Sharon Fitzgerald, "Vincent Smith: Sage, Bohemian, Prince," vol. 14 *American Visions* (June/July 1999): 22-27.

⁸⁷ Vincent Smith, "The Painter Looks Back," *National Scene*, Supplement, 11/10 (1980), 12, quoted in Patton, *African-American Art*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 176.

Brooklyn Museum School and Ben Shahn assisted Smith with finding a gallery, resulting in a twelve-year affiliation with Larcada Gallery.

As the civil rights movement gained momentum, in the late 1960s Smith's work grew more politicized. He embraced the beliefs espoused by Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and the Black Arts movement, promoting the image of a more assertive "Blackness" over the more complacent "Negro," in the visual arts, dance, poetry, and theatre.⁸⁸ He left the Village and went up to Harlem as a teaching artist, a move that was more "cultural" than "political."⁸⁹ Also during this period, Smith made the first of five trips to African countries and a more direct African influence entered his work.

By the 1970s, Smith was showing annually. Concurrently, he taught in the Whitney Art Resources Center until 1976. Always interested in researching African-American artists, in the 1980s Smith co-curated two extensive surveys: *An Ocean Apart: American Artists Abroad* (1982) at the Studio Museum in Harlem and he collaborated with David Driskell on *Unbroken Circle: Exhibition of African-American Artists of the 1930s and 1940s* (1986) at Kenkeleba House.

Throughout his long career, Smith has focused on consistent subject matter, first linked to the urban black community and then to Africa. Stylistically, his art borrows from many sources. We see the compositional devices of Jacob Lawrence, the jarring colors and Africanized mask-like faces of Picasso, the social messages of Orozco and Shahn, threaded with strands of African patterns and materials. His style, characterized

⁸⁸See discussion in Powell, *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century* 121.

⁸⁹For a more extensive discussion of friendship with Baraka and work with the Black Arts Repertory Theatre, see Hatch-Billops, 148-149.

by a brazen directness and bright unnaturalistic palette, approximates the temperament of German Expressionism.

Smith is quite accomplished in various media, producing a prodigious number of monoprints, etchings, and drawings. He also crosses media boundaries, introducing materials to increase the multivalent quality of the work. In 1967 he began working with variously textured and colored sand and in 1978 started incorporating cut ropes. He has frequently used pieces of fabric. His working method is spontaneous, akin to jazz improvisations. Jazz, he explains “was always there. When I paint, I’m always listening to jazz . . . So jazz stimulated me to get some power into what I was painting but not actually to put the jazz experience itself on the canvas.”⁹⁰

In developing designs for the Boys’ and Girls’ High School project, Smith was a little nervous about doing a piece of public art, his first. He remembers feeling the “weight of the public on [his]our shoulders cause there are so many people you have to satisfy.”⁹¹ Personally, there was a lot going on in his life. “I had just gotten married and I was going to West Africa for my honeymoon, and I had just gotten this thing . . . As I remember I did it in crayon. When I came back, Charlie Alston, who was on the Art Commission, said to me “they can’t quite understand what it is going to look like, so can you do it over?”⁹² What Alston wrote in his comments was:

Crayon rendering inadequate in showing how artist intends to execute his work in paint. Execution and subject matter might be more appropriate for an elementary

⁹⁰Hatch-Billops, 146.

⁹¹Vincent Smith interview by author, 29 November 2001.

⁹²Ibid.

school than for a high school. Sketch should show clearer understanding of mural and architectural problems. Sketch looks more like a drawing with color, than a mural. Suggest resubmission of a more detailed sketch and a full scale detail, approximating final treatment.⁹³

Returning from his honeymoon, Smith prepared a new set of sketches in acrylic and the Art Commission granted preliminary approval on 14 May 1973. (Fig. 55). The submission form described them as depicting, “the character and life of the community in which the school is set. Their vibrant but slightly primitive quality contrast [s with] the styles of most of the other artists in this art program.”⁹⁴ He remembers feeling very rushed and being forced to do it in acrylic even though he prefers oils. The end product is actually mixed media, incorporating numerous pieces of fabric. Neither the Board of Education nor the Art Commission was aware of this and Smith “didn’t tell them that at the time,” recalling that “When I started drawing I just put it on.”⁹⁵ The dimensions of the panels necessitated that Smith adjust his format, changing from a horizontal to vertical emphasis which was a big change for Smith, who had been accustomed to working on small, horizontal canvases.

Thematically, the series of four paintings, which can be seen individually or as a group, are typical of Smith’s work. They celebrate the neighborhood, but more from a child’s perspective, so they feature family imagery, including several pairs of mothers and children, and grandmothers. Themes are basketball, a street scene showing kids

⁹³ Alston to Art Commission, 1 October 1972, Exhibition File, 400-AS, Art Commission.

⁹⁴ Exhibition File, 400-BI, Art Commission.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

playing while a parent observes from the window (Fig. 66); home interior featuring a three-generation family-- mother with children and grandmother (Fig. 67); and the fourth panel is the fruit market. (Fig. 68) “Basically, what I was trying to do was I saw students as being fourteen years old. And I was trying to do something that related to the community--family, marketplace, grandma in the window, playing ball.”⁹⁶ Smith employs a flattened perspective, abstracting the surface of the picture plane into geometric zones.

The murals at Boys’ and Girls’ mark a transitional period for Smith, synthesizing his urban and African motifs. He explains, “Let’s put it this way. This was sort of at the end of what I was doing. I’ve had like two different eras, approaches to art. One was an urban and one was an African motif. First twenty years, urban, and second twenty years, African.”⁹⁷ Smith maintained the basic concept and compositional organization from the studies to the finished pieces, but transformed several of the faces into African masks and added actual pieces of African style cloth, perhaps because of his trips to Africa and illustrations for books of African tales. These changes were quite dramatic, adding a visual tension and iconic quality to individual figures. Because the murals are brightly painted and collaged, they retain the directness and power of the artist’s hand and their subject is representative of many of Smith’s other works. In style and content they mark a smooth transition from the studio to the public sphere.

⁹⁶Vincent Smith interview by author, 29 November 2001. Smith explained that although some figures in the fourth panel look Japanese, that was not his intent.

⁹⁷Ibid.

In creating work for Boys' and Girls', Smith continued to explore the things of interest to him without consciously trying to make a statement about black art or being a black artist. "I don't subscribe to such a thing as Black art. I think that within the Afro-American tradition there are certain things that Black sensibility would bring to the medium. But to stylistically categorize it as Black art is not valid. Art is defined in stylistic terms, not in racial terms. There is no such thing as White art."⁹⁸

**Ed Wilson, *Middle Passage* (1972-1978)
Boys' and Girls' High School, Brooklyn**

In the three exterior sculptures at Boys' and Girls' the artists explore different sculptural problems: Todd Williams focuses on kineticism; (Fig. 69); Chris Sheldon experiments with color and structure; and Ed Wilson creates sculpture as a maker of memory. (Fig. 70) The artworks occupy separate zones in front of the building and don't function as an ensemble, but rather as entities in a sculpture garden. A small linear landscaped area visually links Todd Williams' piece with Shelton's and Wilson's. In the original plan, the sculptures appear to be placed at different distances from the building façade, but as a result of the Art Commission review, possibly to enhance their visibility

⁹⁸Hatch-Billops, 154. It's interesting that Smith has this perspective. Gibson puts Smith squarely in the context of Black Power movement. She writes, "Men and women like James Brown, Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver Angela Davis, and Malcolm X use the term to refer to people of African descent, transforming its pejorative implications into a set of revolutionary political, psychological, and aesthetic concepts 'Black Power,' 'Black is Beautiful.' Artists such as Romare Bearden, Kay Browne, David Hammons, Alvin Hollingsworth, Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar, Vincent Smith and many others endorsed this transformation in their art and visually inserted it back into the body politic with a charge that is still changing the course of American history." Gibson, 21, *Norman Lewis Black Paintings*.

from the street, they were grouped in a more linear way, with only one piece occupying a lower level, the piece by Todd Williams at the easternmost part of the plaza. The Art Commission also requested that Wilson's sculpture be moved from the sunken plaza in the middle to the most prominent position near the school's main entrance. This was an excellent suggestion because the sculpture requires the viewer's physical interaction, the viewer's ability to move through it, and it is more accessible in its current location.

Though all three are major works, for the purposes of this discussion of public art and African-American identity, and how they intersect in this particular high school, I will focus on Ed Wilson's penetrating *Middle Passage*. Of all the artists commissioned for Boys' and Girls', Wilson and Williams were the only artists with prior public art experience (as distinguished from the WPA experience of Lewis, Crichtlow and Cortor) but Wilson, the university professor, was the most seasoned.⁹⁹ Before he received the Boys' and Girls' project, he had completed two major projects: a memorial to John F. Kennedy in Binghamton, New York and a piece at a high school in Baltimore.

In all his work, Wilson wanted to provoke thought and he addressed a range of subjects having to do with society's need for greater humanity.¹⁰⁰ Wilson was the product of a segregated society. He grew up in Baltimore and suffered further

⁹⁹For information on Wilson, including good reproductions of several works, see Bearden and Henderson, 454-461. For Wilson's own views, see his statement in *Arts in Society* 5 (Fall/Winter 1968): 412 and "A Conversation with Ed Wilson," interview by Fadhili Mshana, n.d. *Ijele: Art eJournal of the African World*: 1,1. [www.ijele.com].

¹⁰⁰Wilson explained, "I want people to think. Today most contemporary art doesn't encourage thinking... But I want people to think about other things like wasted lives, inhumanity as a way of life, brutality of this society." Quoted from "A

discrimination in the army. Scarred for life by these experiences, he used his platform as a teacher and sculptor to promote awareness of brutality in all its forms and to impel people to social action. Like Crichtlow, he also felt the artist had a responsibility, but he didn't describe this so much as teaching but as providing "memory." Wilson elaborated, "I would like to feel . . . that I am their memory. A lot of people don't have memories about the collective experience of being Black, American, or being in a technocracy."¹⁰¹ He also perceived a broader role for the black artist. "I don't think that the Negro artist has to commit his work to the fight for equality per se – I would prefer if he would commit himself to seeking humanistic values and all those universal human values in world art . . ."¹⁰² Ultimately, Wilson mused, "Perhaps it might be possible for the Negro artist of the future to make a profound contribution to American art if he is able to bring humanistic values back into American urban life. The health of this nation, in many respects, is tied up with the meaningful survival of the urban masses. Maybe through the 'memory' of his not-so-human existence he might be in a better position to understand the bleak future of the anti-human pattern and inject a bit of humanism (soul). After all, isn't this what 'Bird' Miles, Ray Charles, Malcolm X, Wright, Ellison, Baldwin and others are about?"¹⁰³

Conversation with Ed Wilson," interview by Fadhili Mshana, n.d. *Ijele: Art eJournal of the African World*: 1,1. [www.ijele.com].

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰² Ed Wilson, "A Statement," *Arts in Society* 5 (Fall/Winter 1968): 412.

¹⁰³Ibid. 416.

Ed Wilson was born in Baltimore into a middle class family. Though nurtured and encouraged by his parents, he attended segregated schools and experienced racial prejudice endemic to life for African-Americans living south of the Mason-Dixon line. He excelled in high school and in 1943 was accepted to University of Iowa to study civil engineering and architecture. Before he could enroll, he was drafted into the U.S. Air Force.

After the war, in 1946 he enrolled at the University of Iowa under the G.I. bill and decided to pursue art, his real love, initially studying painting before turning to sculpture. In 1953 he obtained master's degree and got a job teaching art at North Carolina College (now North Carolina Central College), a black liberal arts college. Wilson stayed for a decade and became chairman of the art department. While there he formed a friendship with William Zorach, who was working on a commission. Wilson recalled, "Having the opportunity to talk with him periodically until 1965 . . . was one of the significant turning points of my career."¹⁰⁴ Like Zorach, Wilson did direct carving at this time.

In Durham Wilson threw himself into the Civil Rights movement, participating in marches and non-violent protests. He felt consumed, sacrificing his art for his political activities. Eventually, he decided he could be more effective in the struggle for equality as an artist and pursued exhibition opportunities in the north.

In the early 60's along with his new attitude, Wilson gave up direct carving for welded steel and cast metal.¹⁰⁵ Though his style changed, his philosophical mentors

¹⁰⁴Bearden and Henderson, 455.

continued to be Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. In 1964 he made a major life change, relocating to Binghamton, New York to set up the studio art program for Harpur College, part of the State University of New York at Binghamton. Eventually, he became chairman of the art department.

His 1966 exhibition at the University of Binghamton led to his first commissioned public work: *JFK Memorial Park* in downtown Binghamton, commissioned by the Binghamton Sun Bulletin newspaper and completed in 1969. This environmental sculpture combines architectural design with the monolithic forms of minimalism, punctuated with modeled bronze reliefs. Wilson was drawn to public sculpture because of its architectural nature. Starting in the 70s, he began to work exclusively in public commissions. He never wanted to participate in the commercial gallery system, reflecting, "I have, by personal choice, avoided the gallery system, as I wish to determine how I will be exploited . . ." ¹⁰⁶

Wilson--who can be described as a modeler, space shaper, memory catcher--conceived of *Middle Passage* in a flash of brilliance en route to New York to meet with the architect. ¹⁰⁷ Three brutalist concrete monoliths, ten feet tall, gently curved to recreate the hull of a ship, constitute the body of the piece. Inset into them are six

¹⁰⁵ Wilson says, "By 1960 I was welding and it gave whole new possibilities for construction and using space." See "Conversation with Ed Wilson," 8.

¹⁰⁶ Bearden and Henderson, 460.

¹⁰⁷ "It just came literally on the way to New York to talk to this architecture firm that was doing the building and I was exploding. The model of that was a little crude cardboard thing that I would work later into concrete, something bigger done in full scale in wood." Quoted from "Conversation with Ed Wilson."

loosely modeled bronze reliefs, almost thumbnail sketches, which narrate the inhumanity and brutality of the slave trade. The series begins with the capture, showing figures in a forced march struggling against their oppressors. In the next sequence, the viewer is surrounded on either side by a curved concrete wall punctuated by bronze reliefs that start at about five feet off the ground. In these plaques, humans are reduced to a series of protruding heads, arranged over three tiers. In the next set, Wilson shows figures from a different angle, suggesting bodies laid out like corpses. On the end panels, torsos and heads are crowded together, with open mouths screaming silent pain. Every head is shackled. Some bodies are missing: those slaves are already dead. In the last panel, the slaves surviving the three-month ordeal arrive, are shackled together, and marched off the boat in a line. Underscoring the historical impetus of the work, Wilson included a descriptive plaque providing information on the Middle Passage.¹⁰⁸ Part of the effectiveness of the piece is its participatory quality, recreating a sense of claustrophobia and confronting the viewer with visceral images of cruelty and inhumanity.

Wilson had thought about this subject for a long time, inspired by a poem by the black poet, Palmer Hayden, which he had read as a young man.

It is one of the three facets to Africans coming to the west. The kidnapping, "Middle Passage" is the actual voyage to the Caribbean and the third is slavery . . . I wanted the students to experience what it was like to be compressed into a hollow of a boat like Africans were. I went to Nigeria, to place where "Middle Passage" started. I have been to Charleston, South Carolina where they had a slave market. Now how can I work in three measured forms to convey this idea? How can these three forms get inside of two shapes like the hollow of a boat? When I had students get inside a full-scale model, they all complained the same thing. Even kids who write me from high school in Brooklyn, they feel claustrophobic.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ See description of *Middle Passage* in Bearden and Henderson, 459.

Ultimately, Wilson's intent was to prompt students to remember and confront the realities of a horrific chapter in American history.

Wilson's conception makes an interesting comparison to pieces exhibited in a 1971 show organized by Larry Rivers called "Some American History," at the Institute for the Arts, Rice University. In that show, there was an installation by Frank Bowling, a Guyanese artist, also entitled *The Middle Passage*. In his two-dimensional version, the map forms of Africa, America and Guyana merge into an autobiographical frame, overlayed with stenciled images. Rivers also did a piece on same theme, called *Slave Ship*. Constructed from wood, it was a cross section of a ship with a transparent hull, showing shackled figures arranged in three levels from top to bottom.¹¹⁰

Originally, *Middle Passage* had a fourth concrete element, a podium/altar inviting the viewer to step up to the piece. (Fig. 71) The podium bore the plaque describing the Middle Passage that was eventually mounted on the central pylon. The original idea was more effective, endowing the installation with a sacred quality. Of all the artworks at Boys' and Girls', *Middle Passage* took the longest from conception to completion. The Art Commission approved the preliminary design in 1972 but the completed work wasn't installed until late 1978.

This abstract/figurative sculpture is a powerful reminder of the grave injustices that are the historical roots of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Its message and presence are unavoidable. But it is also seems ironic. Throughout his life Wilson fought for equal opportunities for black Americans and believed in the benefits of an integrated

¹⁰⁹"Conversation with Ed Wilson."

society; yet his strongest indictment of slavery marks the entrance to an all-black high school in one of New York's most identifiable African-American communities. One wonders if Wilson would have proposed the same piece for a high school in a white neighborhood.

Regardless of which side of the debate about the nature of black art they fell on, and how they defined themselves, the fact that nine African-American artists received commissions for a single high school makes a point. The artwork reinforces the sense of victory that the residents of Bedford-Stuyvesant felt in retaining the high school in their neighborhood. Its very presence makes a statement about the breadth and professionalism of black artists in New York in the early 1970s. Surprisingly, Charles Alston, the mentor of some of these artists and one of the few black artists at that time who had a national reputation in the black and white art worlds, was skeptical about awarding these commissions. Conflicted about the nature of the proposition, he wrote:

First, let me state that, as a black American artist myself, I am very much in favor of giving competent black artists every opportunity to create murals and sculptures for city projects. I suggested this early in my tenure as painter member of the Commission, to both Mr. Paletta and Commissioner Morris. I gave them the names of some of the artists I thought should be considered. However, to make a wholesale package of these artists in one project, as has been done at Boys High is, in my opinion, an unfortunate and dangerous precedent, and amounts to a kind of segregation to which I object. I sincerely hope that this will not happen again in future projects.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ See "Some American History" (Houston: Rice University, 1971.)

¹¹¹ Charles Alston to Donald J. Gormley, 1 October 1972, Exhibition File 400, Art Commission.

Though Alston objected to the ghettoization of these artists at a black school in a black community, because they do constitute a group, they are able to make a powerful collective statement. The gesture is a push for equity for the black artist in the world of public art. The commissions at Boys' and Girls' High School can be seen as a response to demands coming out of the 60s black art movement: they provided exposure for black artists, resulted from a careful selection, and in a grand way validated the African-American experience as a source of subject matter for public art in a New York City high school.¹¹²

The works are also effective as individual artworks. Several factors contributed to their success. Part of the power of the art comes from the directness of the artist's own hand, the fact that the artist's touch is preserved. All of the artists were able to successfully wed their studio work to a public context and did not sacrifice aesthetic integrity. In terms of subject matter, few restrictions were placed on the artists. It appears that once a consensus regarding the art component as a whole was reached at the project's start, the community and architect had confidence in Crichlow and the other artists he selected and gave them plenty of mental and artistic space to develop their designs. In addition, the architect worked hard to support the contributions of the artists, facilitating their role as much as possible. There is a balance between the artworks standing alone as individual elements, clearly recognizable as art, and their compatibility with their architectural surroundings. There is a comfortable equilibrium.

¹¹²References to African music appear in Bloch's WPA/FAP mural at George Washington High School and in Fogel's mural at Lincoln High School. See discussion in Chapter 5. For a discussion of the demands emerging out of the black art movement, see Amaki, 95.

In the decades since Boys' and Girls' High School, the Board of Education has commissioned close to two hundred artworks from a diverse group of male and female artists representing many ethnicities. The first steps taken at Boys' and Girls' to acknowledge "community" and honor diversity have been echoed in myriad ways by successive artists whose sensibilities and attitudes towards public art have been shaped by coming of age in a multicultural world.

CONCLUSION

The mission to educate unites eighty years of public art in the New York City schools. This is, perhaps, an obvious conclusion given that art in schools is an extension of the school and all that it stands for. After all, the purpose of public art in schools is special, distinct from public art's use in other arenas.

What has changed since the consolidation of the school system, are educational philosophies and the definition of art itself; yet despite these shifts, several consistent themes and goals characterize eighty years of school art. Reflecting the multiple uses of schools buildings themselves, public art has been used as an architectural enhancement, community symbol, educational tool, or a combination of all three. Permanent art affixed to school buildings can symbolize learning, teach history, heighten visual awareness, promote tolerance, or just provide a playful note in an institutional setting.

Over the years we have seen the relationships of art to architecture change. There is the beaux-arts model of the total interior, where murals are programmed into the flow of the space, the apposition of art and architecture of the 1950s, and the move toward a more integrated approach in the 1970s. Still, the reality of school buildings mandates a certain approach to the use of space and establishes certain kinds of spaces for public art. Communal areas, a prerequisite for public art, can always be found in entrances, auditoriums, cafeterias, libraries and corridors. On the exterior, there is the building façade, and in some cases, exterior plazas that are not programmed for playgrounds or athletic fields. Of the case studies I have selected, in the first half of the century the majority of permanent artworks placed in public schools are interior murals or stained

glass windows adorning auditoriums. With modernist architecture and more durable materials, we see exterior mosaics and concrete and metal sculptures, both freestanding and affixed to buildings. The widespread use of glazed block in corridors created different sorts of opportunities for two-dimensional art, illustrated at Boys and Girls High School. The availability of new materials like large sheets of plexi-glass also made that scheme viable. We have also seen that the most ambitious forms of public art are traditionally associated with high schools, in the past, distinctly larger, more expensive buildings: academic high schools like De Witt Clinton, Morris, Erasmus and Evander as well as vocational high school like William Grady, New York School of Printing, and Aviation High School, and then a combination of these school types in the comprehensive Boys and Girls High School.

By reviewing various school building campaigns, it has also become clear that frequently the commissioning of public art is linked to the ebb and flow of construction dollars. And, inevitably, as in all public art projects associated with the built environment, the architect has played an important role, making exciting public art possible or preventing it from occurring. In C. B. J. Snyder, the Board of Education benefited from the remarkable vision and organizational skills of a single individual. He himself was knowledgeable about art and aware of the public art debates of his time. His membership in organizations such as the Municipal Art Society put him in touch with other like-minded professionals and artists. He was open to discussion and collaboration, and understood that to make an art project successful, the whole building, meaning its design and construction, had to embrace it. Snyder's long tenure over the course of three

decades also provided continuity. Snyder was able to develop a school building design responsive to changing community and educational goals as well as to new building technologies. Throughout, he maintained a consistent standard promoting the use of natural light and ventilation, stylistic richness, high quality finishes, and a commitment to permanency. To his credit, his legacy has endured in buildings that still operate as schools, many of which are beloved community landmarks.

After Snyder, architect Michael Radislovitch fulfilled a key function. Though not himself the designer of many of the schools built in the 1950s, in his role at the Board of Education, he opened the door for private architects and supported their efforts in commissioning public art. As the spokesman for the Board of Education, he was receptive to non-traditional art forms and supported the use of abstraction. Under his watch, private architects brought in Hans Hofmann and Gwen Lux, Ben Shahn and Mary Callery. Not all abstract art was widely embraced by educators. Many educators want art to complement the curriculum, inspire, and instruct and are often more comfortable with a literal interpretation of those aims. In contrast, in situations where an architect views the entire building as expressive of educational goals, such as the case with the New York School of Printing or Aviation High School, abstraction has often been the solution. In both those instances there is little evidence that the architects ever consulted with anyone from the Board's pedagogical staff, so few obstacles from educators were encountered.

In the following period, the architect continued to exercise a persuasive voice. In the case of Boys and Girls High School, Marty Stein used his position to respond to

the community to foster the creation of permanent art that would be relevant and sensitive to the political complexities of that situation.

Along with architects, over the years an assortment of public art advocates have come to the forefront, influencing the course that public art in schools has taken. In the 1890s and into the 1910s, the Public Education Association (PEA) was integral to the success of the art in schools movement. They provided the funds and organizational expertise necessary to do large-scale distributions and installations of art reproductions. For them, art was part of a larger agenda to improve the New York City public schools. Following the PEA, other organizations with a more specialized interest in public art became a catalyst in the commissioning of public art for schools. The Municipal Art Society, with its Committee on School Decoration, was essential. Because of their efforts, Washington Irving High School houses one of the most notable collections of American Renaissance murals and sculptures in school buildings. The Society continues to influence public art in schools, more recently in the realm of conservation. And alumni groups have always contributed to school decorations, generally those that bear a commemorative function, such as the artworks discussed in Chapter 4. For most of these years, the Art Commission of the City of New York has evaluated the merits of proposed designs, sometimes making egregious errors like their initial rejection of the Hans Hofmann mural, and at other times offering constructive guidance, evidenced by changes made to artworks commissioned for Boys and Girls High School.

The 1930s is a distinct period, when first the state and then the federal governments formed a partnership with New York City's educational bureaucracy. It is

remarkable how these two giant cogwheels fit together to supply artists with walls and a guaranteed audience with art. The New Deal brought the most comprehensive art program of its kind to schools, providing art instruction as well as building decorations. The federal government's own educational agenda, promoting hard work, industry, and pride in America's past, was the impetus behind the history of civilization murals that distinguish the mural output in the New York City public schools.

In fact, history has always been a favorite subject for school art, beginning with John Ruskin's art in schools movement, followed by American Renaissance murals, continuing through the New Deal projects, and continuing to this day. It establishes a common past, is obviously educational, and often provides colorful material. But history requires interpretation, and what might appear to be an objective presentation as in the case of Newell's mural at Evander Childs, can be perceived as a biased view. Forty years later at Boys and Girls High School, concurrent with the debate swirling around Newell's mural, Crichlow and Wilson narrated a very different sort of history, provoking students to think critically about America's past and the role of African American students in the country's future.

Art in schools often takes its cue from a school's special identity, starting with its name. I believe this helps artists get a handle on a creative approach to particularizing public art for a site. School names guided the work created for DeWitt Clinton, Morris, Washington Irving, Erasmus, Martin Luther King, Jr. High, to name a few. The immediate locale, from perspectives of past and present, has also been a favorite subject,

a natural way for an artist to connect a school to the community it serves. Public art in schools often enforces community ownership of a place of learning.

Literature and literacy are recurrent themes. An artwork could illustrate or at the least be inspired by a piece of literature, evidenced by Faulkner's murals at Washington Irving High School or Mary Callery's *Fables of La Fontaine* at P.S. 34. In other instances, art symbolizes literacy, the essence of education, demonstrated in Stoddard's allegory, *Birth of the Alphabet*, and in parts of Newell's mural.

School art also reflects its primary audience, and children at play or studying are commonly depicted. There's a kind of assumption in public art that it should mirror the user of a space, so it's natural that images of children would be a popular motif in school buildings.

In examining public art in schools, there are also connections between the commissioning of permanent public art in school buildings and practices in arts education. Funding for the two has always been separate, so at their point of origin they are on separate trajectories. However, what can be said is that there is some stylistic affinity between art commissioned and the type of art being taught, seen in the reproductions and picture study movement in the early part of the century, interest in mural making in the 1930s, the willingness to experiment with new materials and abstract design principles in the 1950s, and a growing interest in art and culture outside the white Eurocentric tradition in the 1970s.

The public art traditions established in the New York City public schools before the implementation of the 1982 Percent for Art Law have continued to inform artworks

commissioned since and are evident in numerous new projects. Mead's clarion call to "give beauty its rights in the schools," has been taken up and redefined by successive generations of artists. The possibilities of art have been flung wide open, but regardless of the medium or style they choose, artists consistently gravitate to the essential function of school buildings.

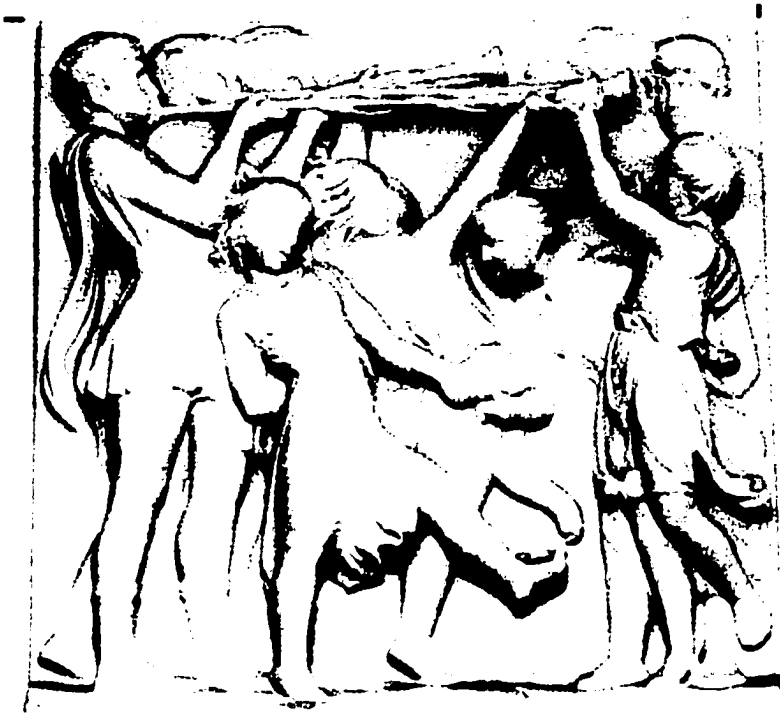


Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

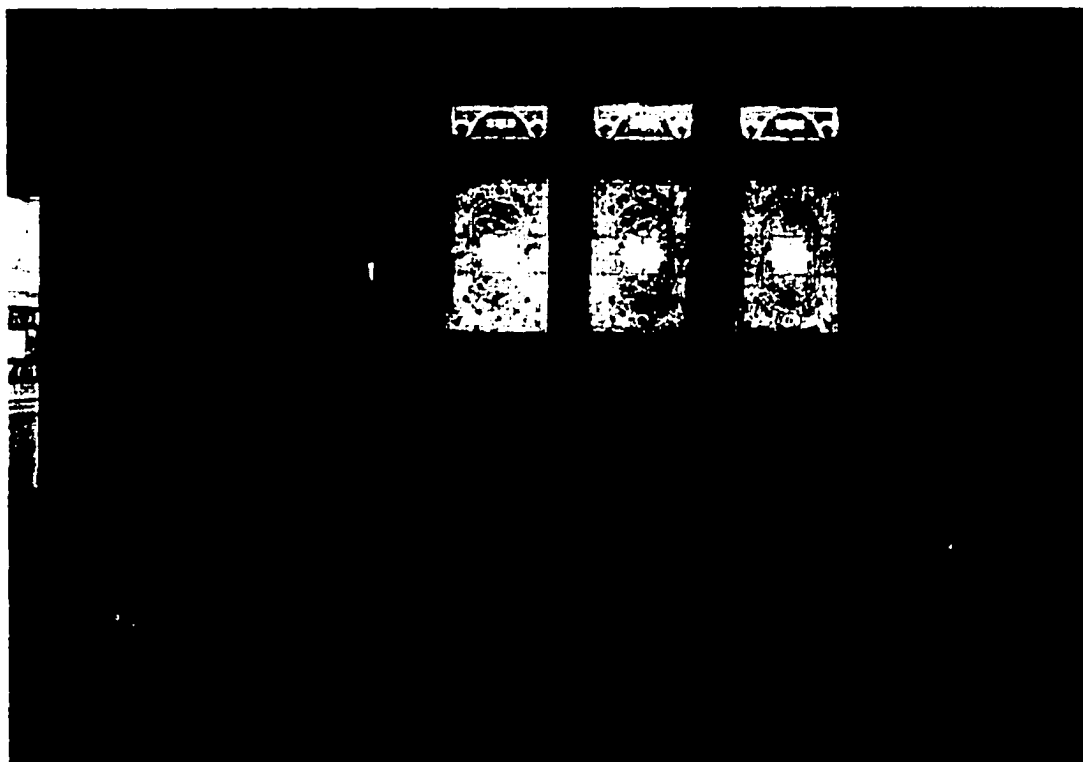


Figure 4

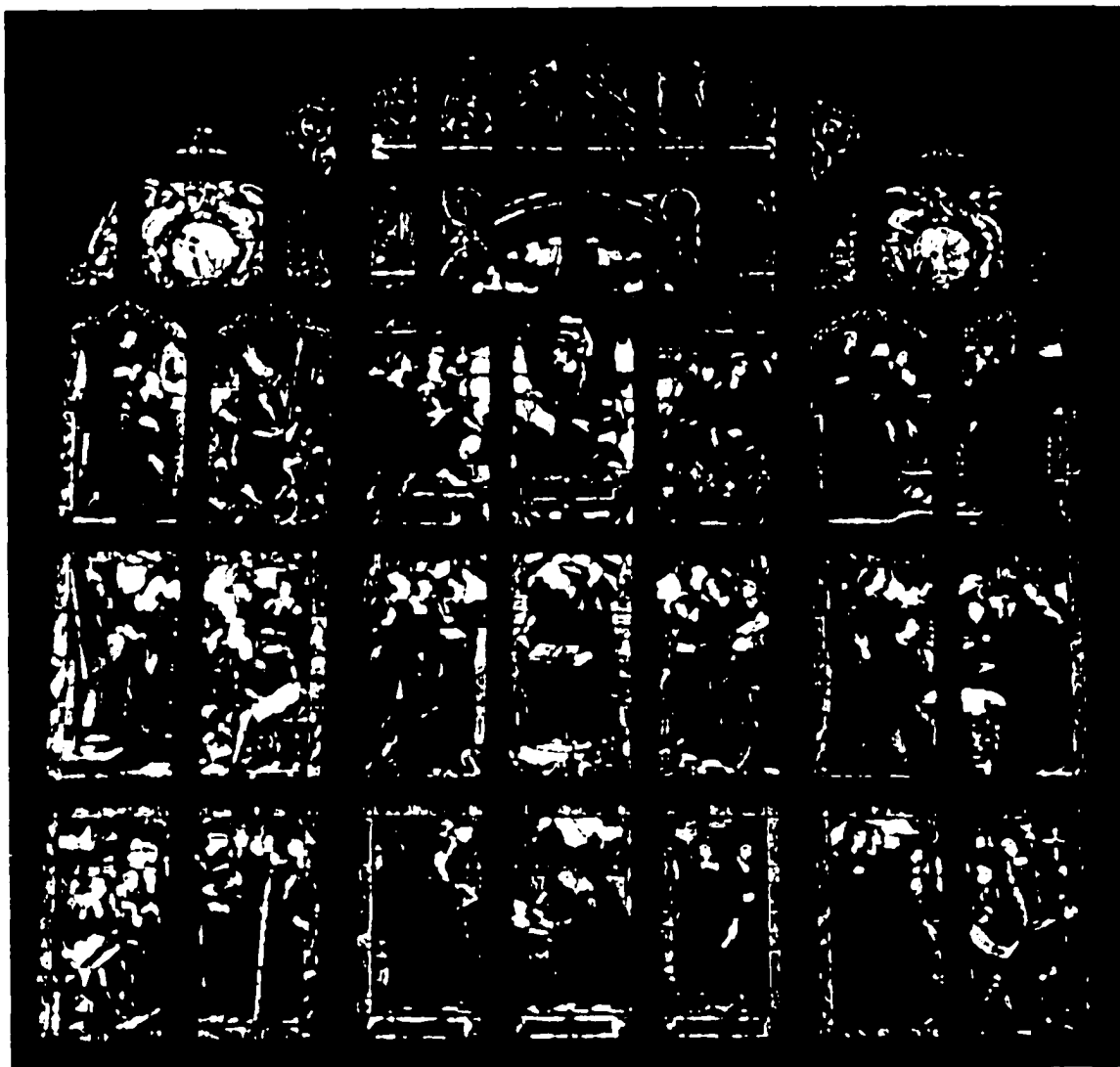


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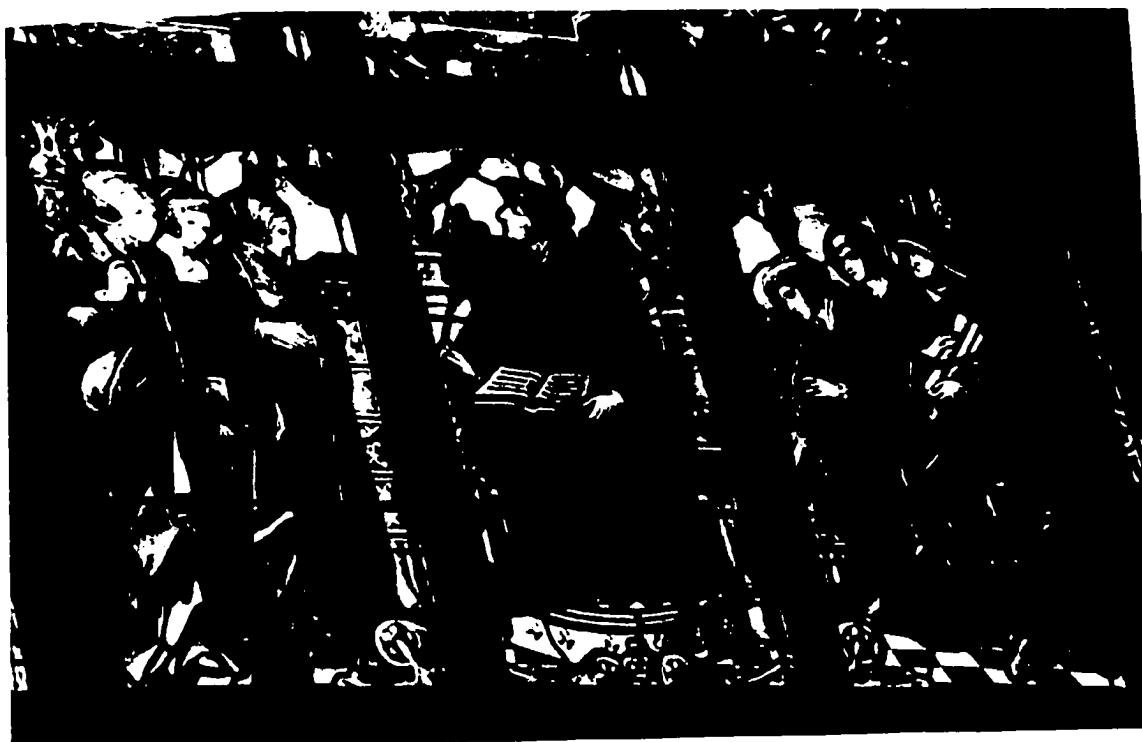


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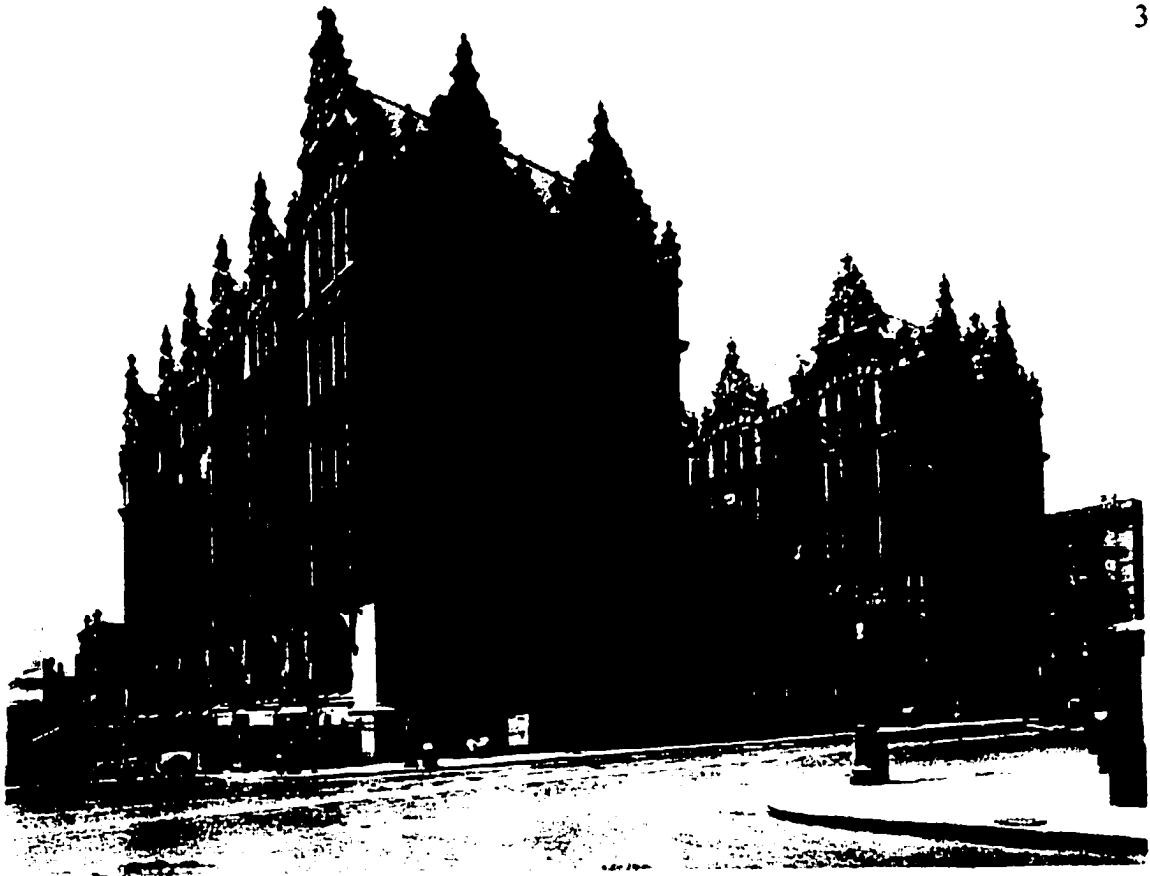


Figure 7



333

Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



a



b

337

Figure 13



a



b

Figure 14

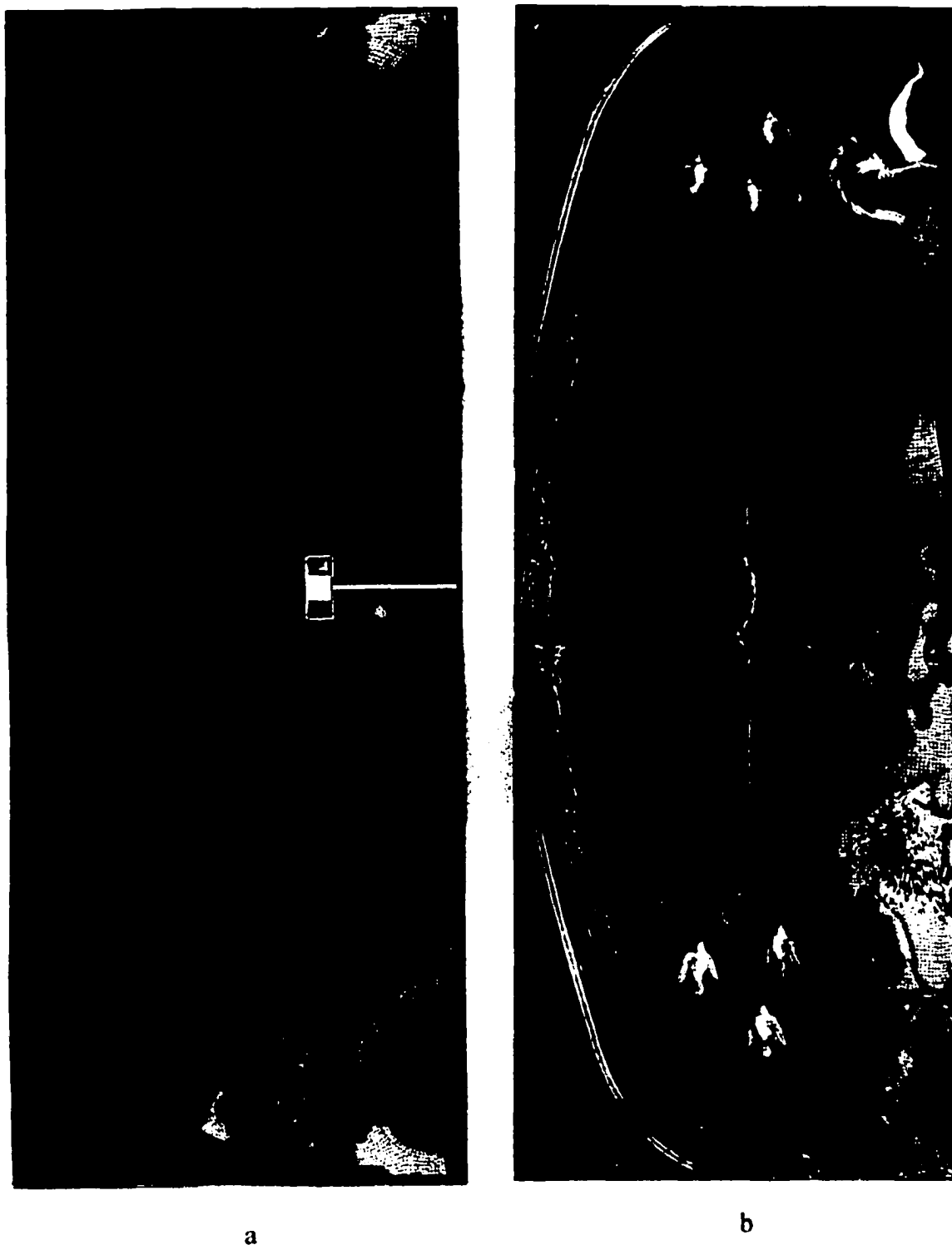


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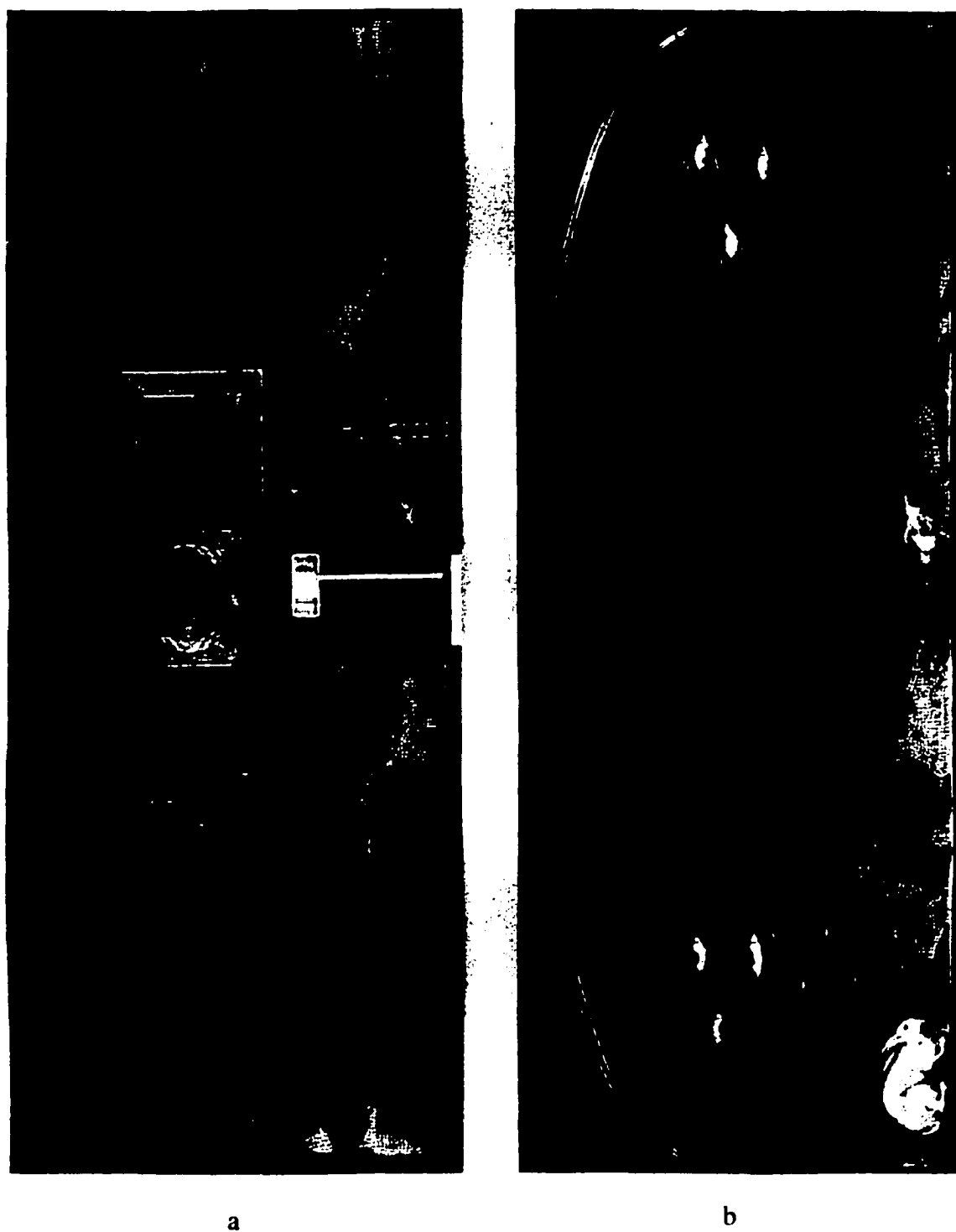


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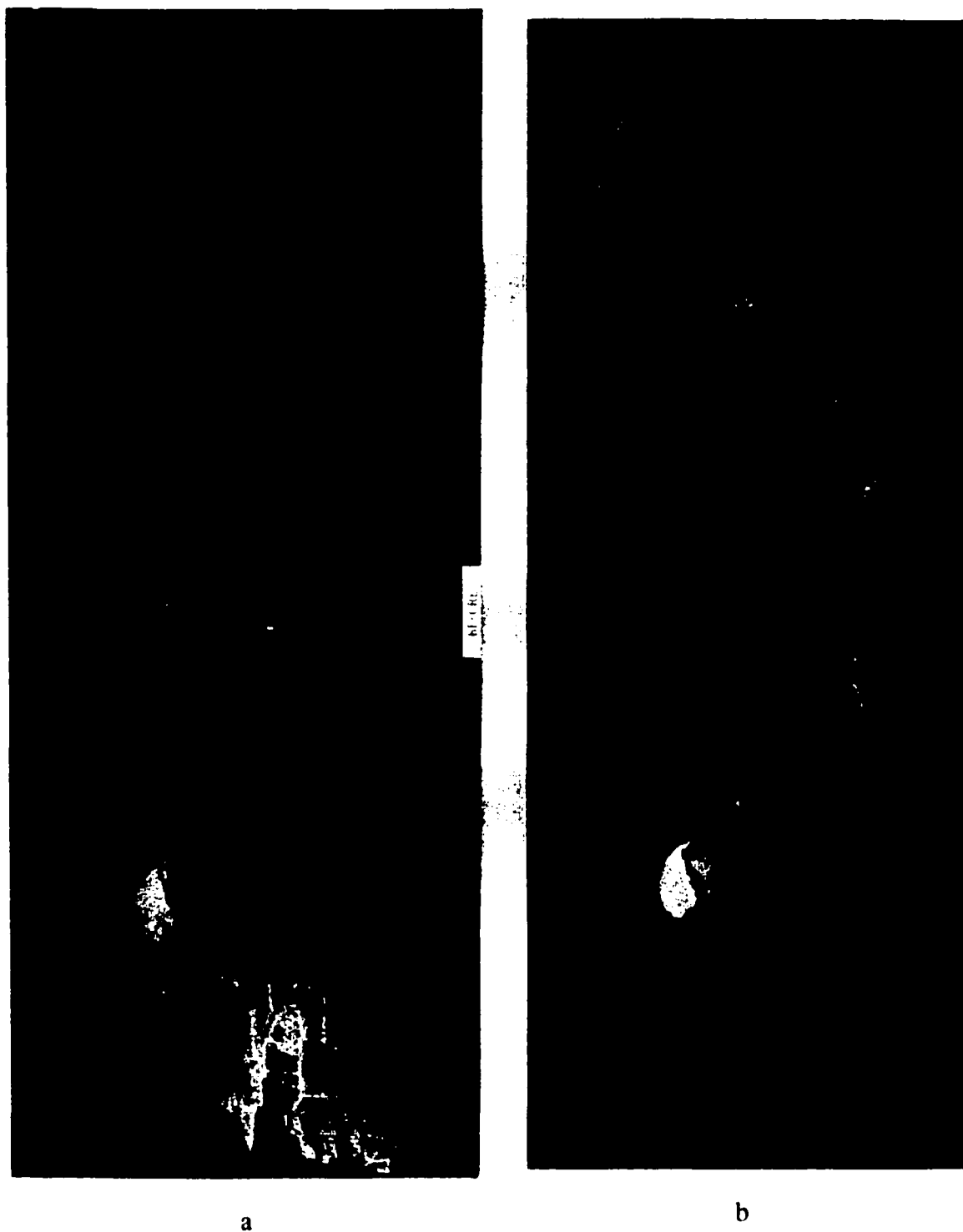
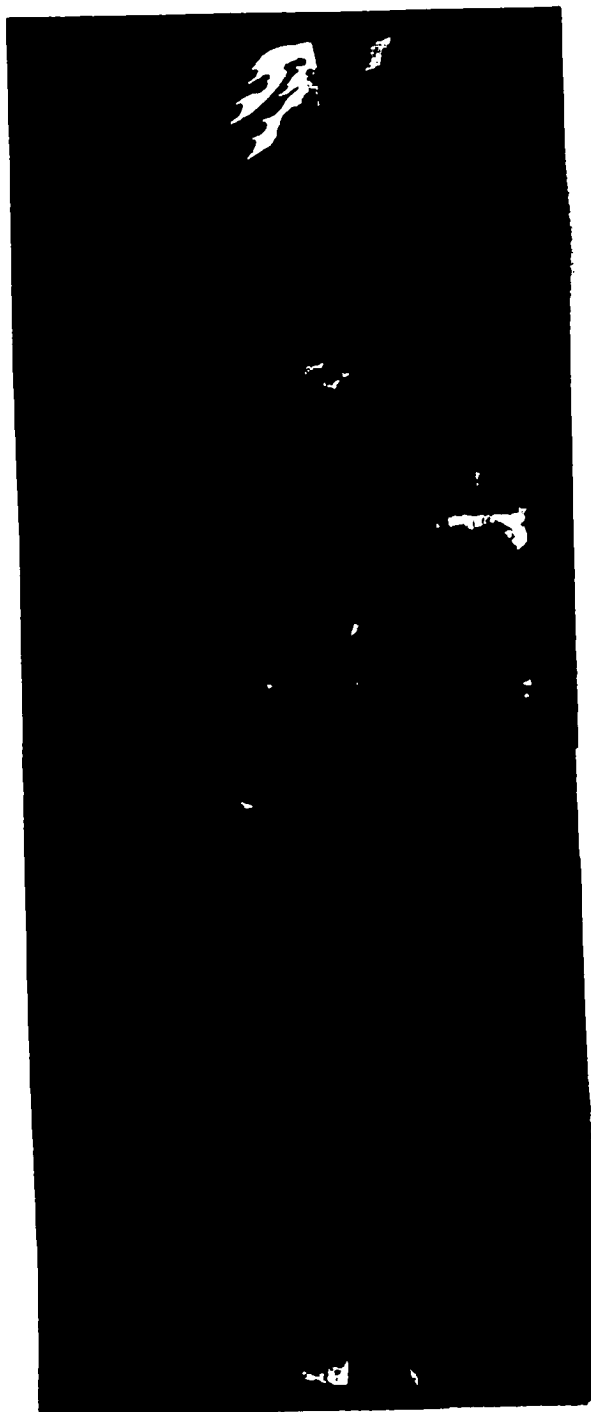


Figure 17



a



b

Figure 18



Figure 19

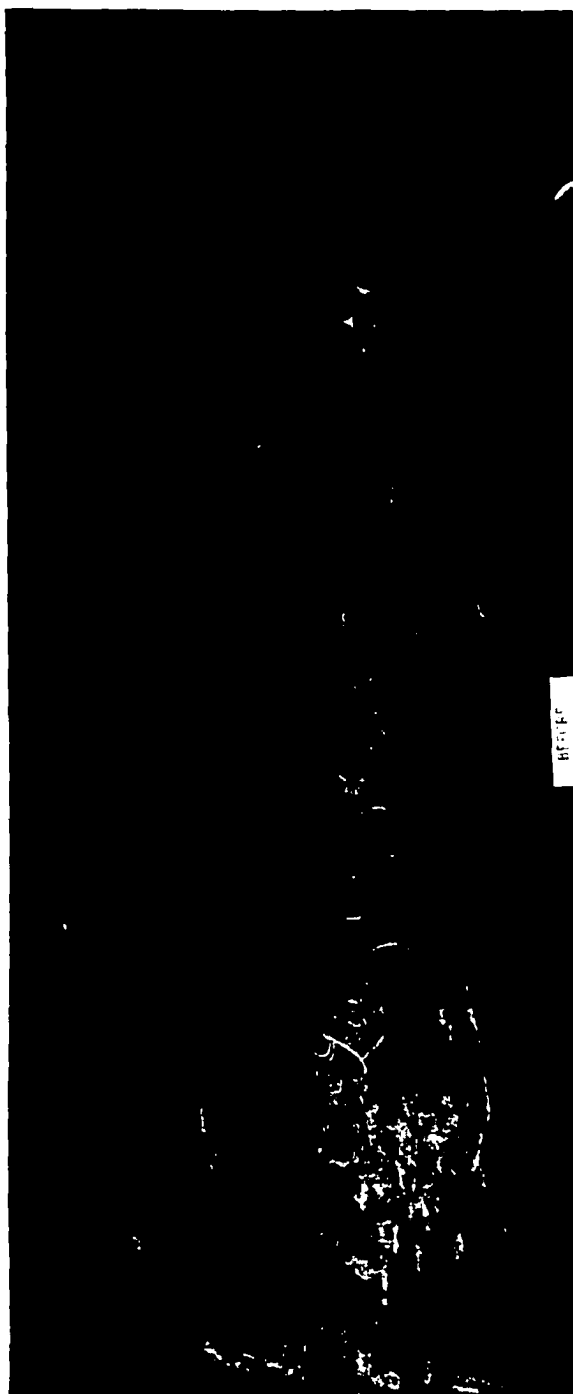


a



b

Figure 20



a



b

Figure 2



a



b

Figure 22

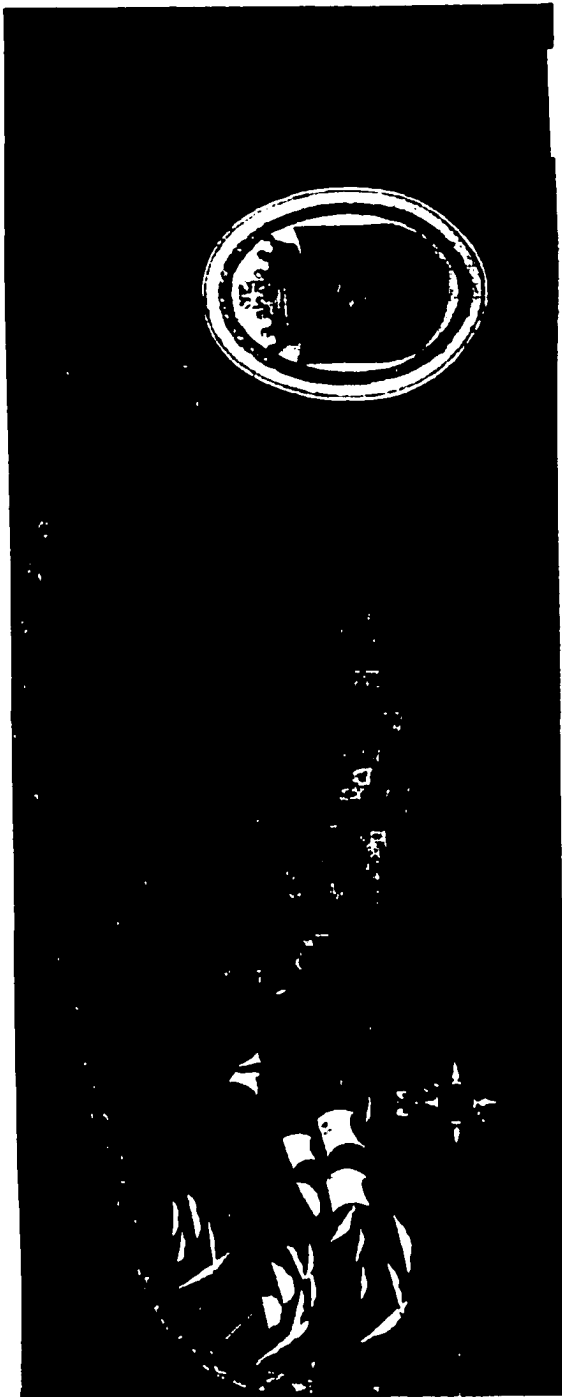


a



b

Figure 23



a



b

Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30

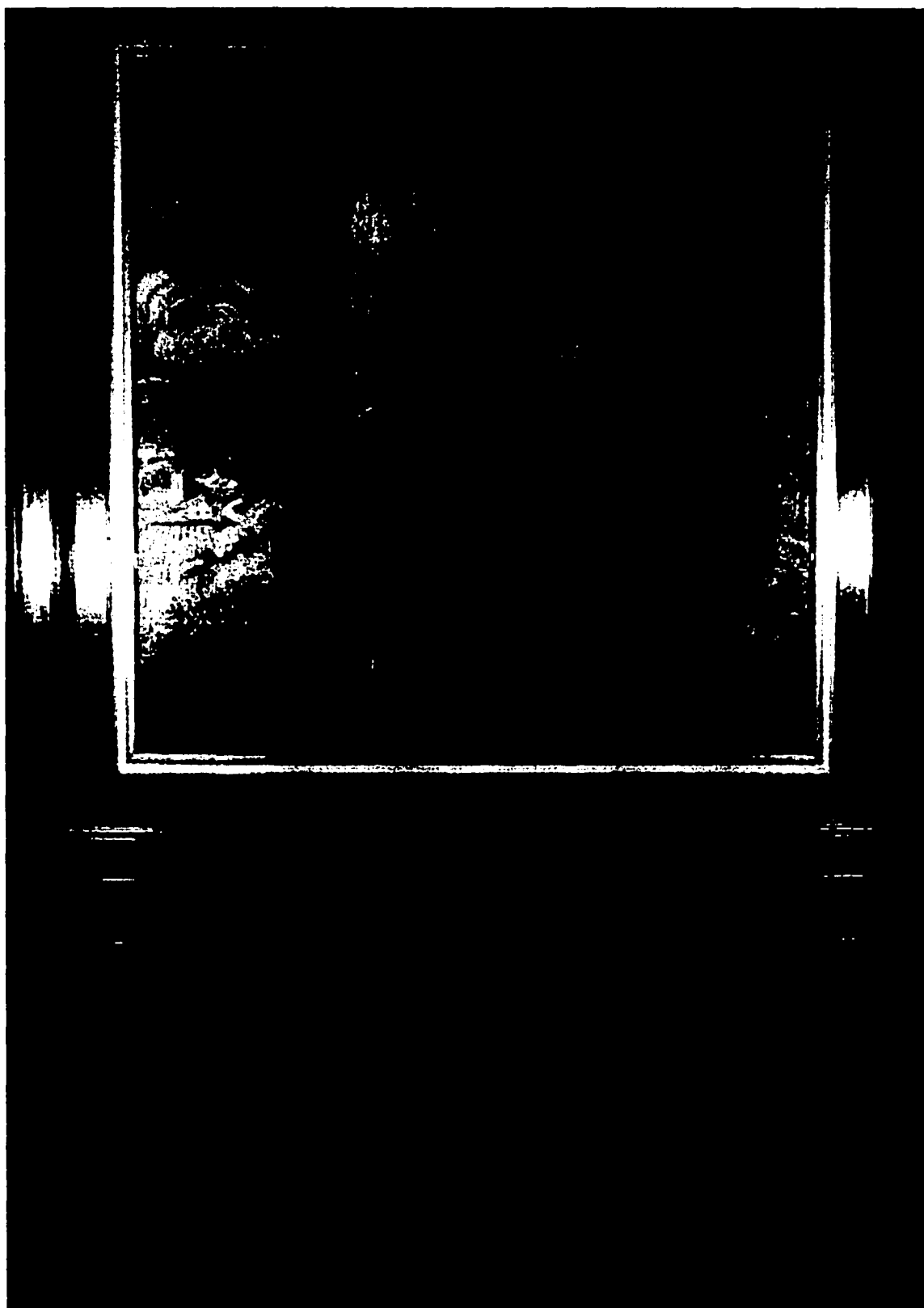


Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 35



Figure 34



Figure 35



Figure 36



Figure 37



Figure 28



Fig. 30



Figure 4

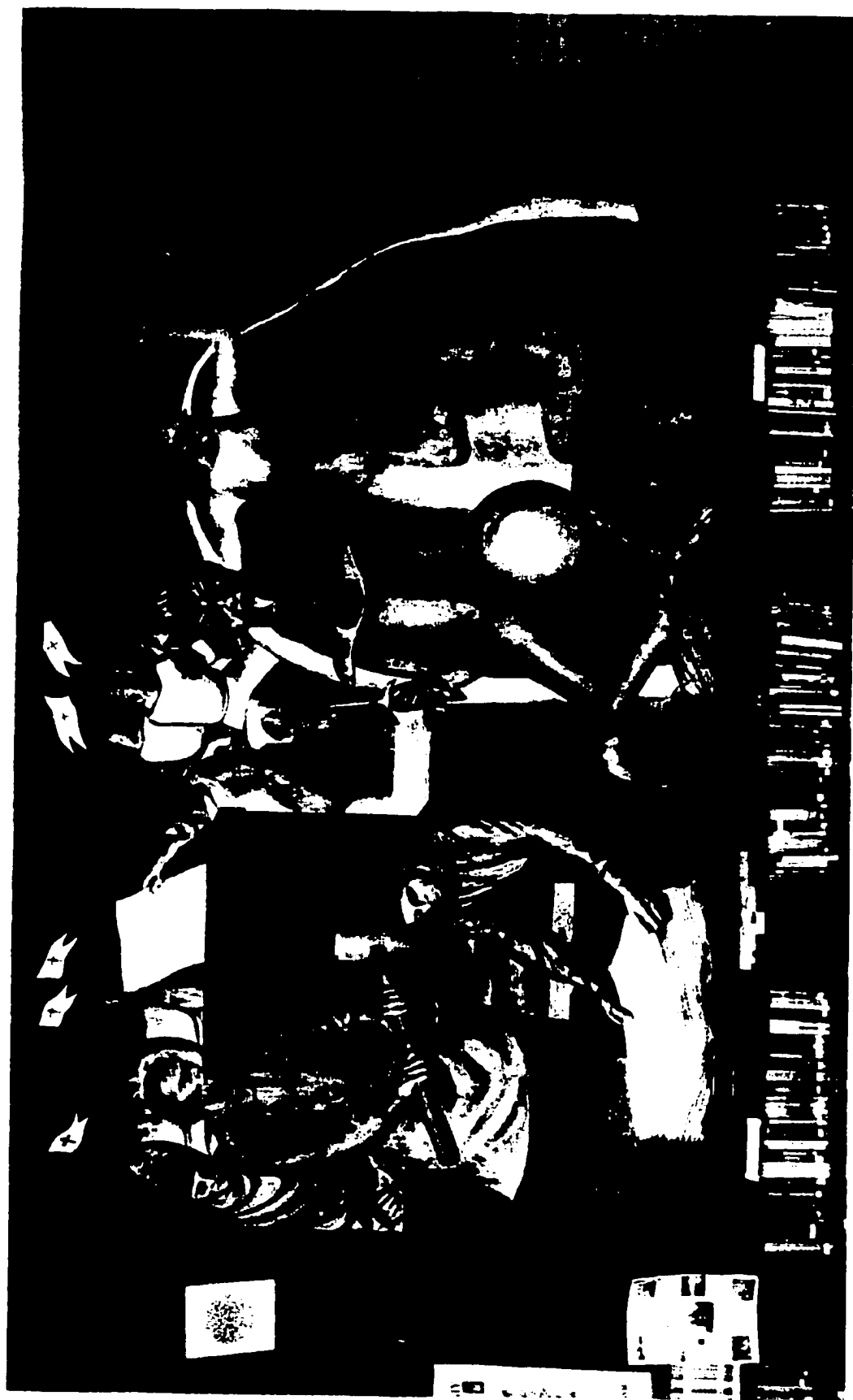


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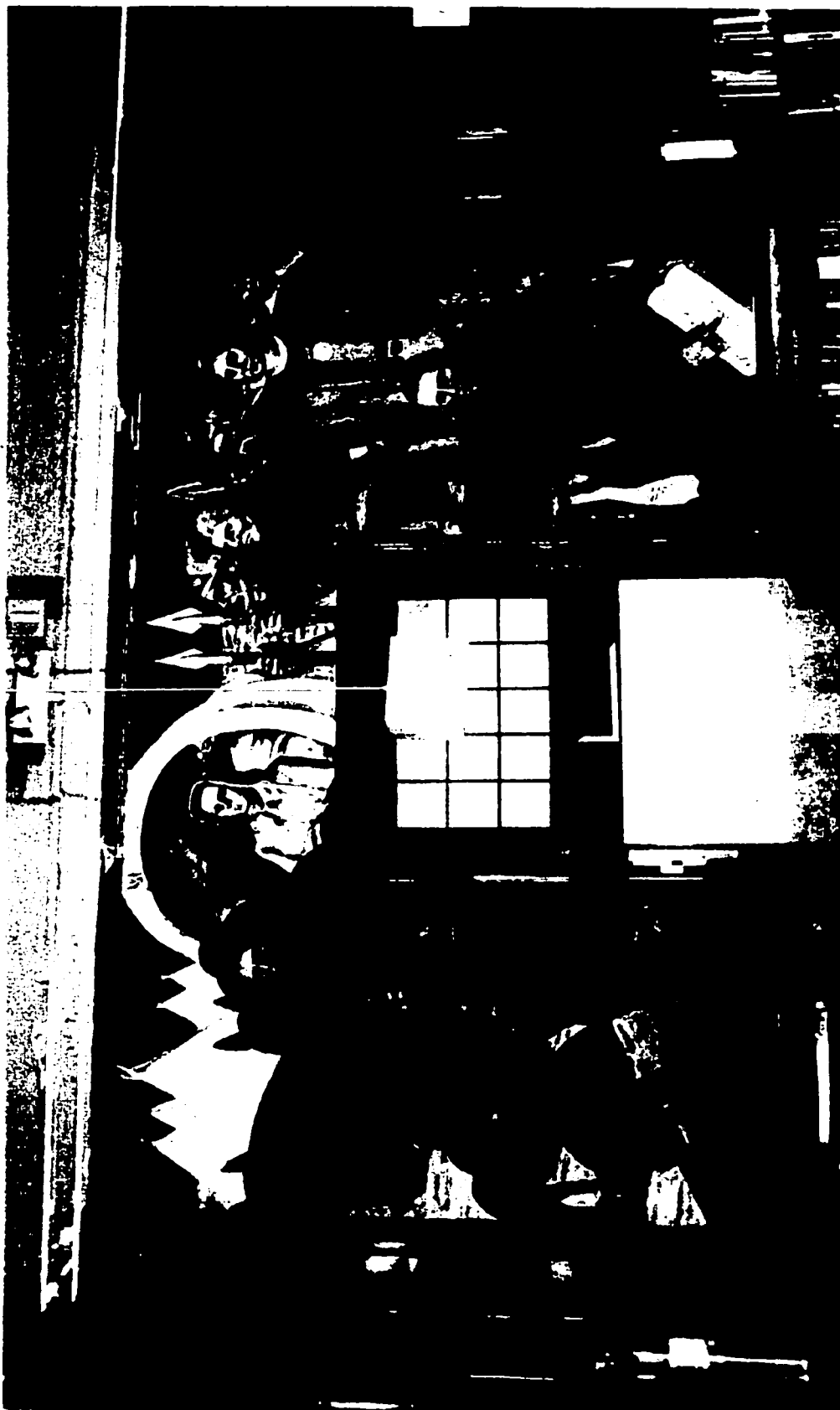


Figure 42



Figure 45



Figure 44



Figure 45



Figure 46

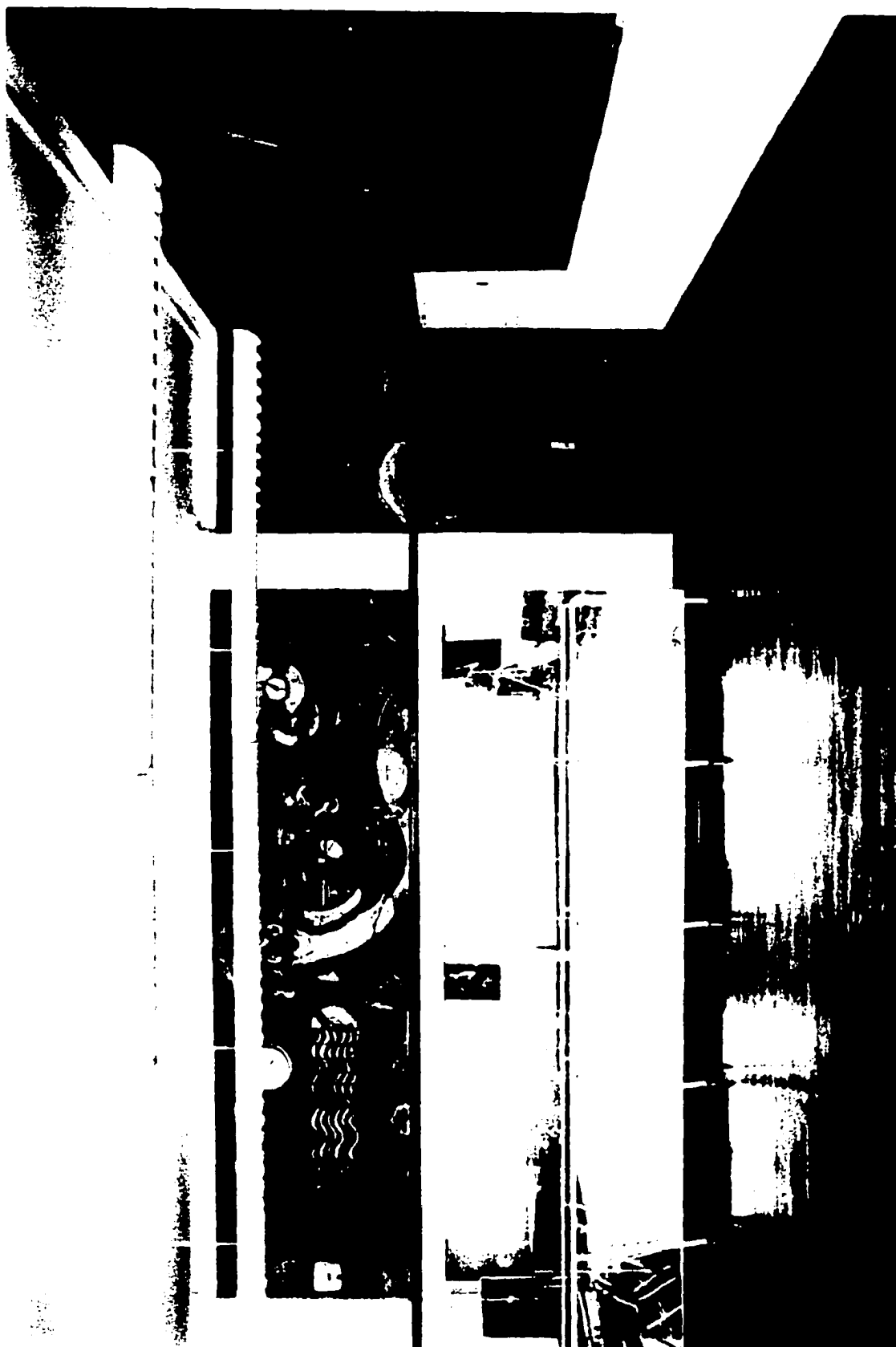


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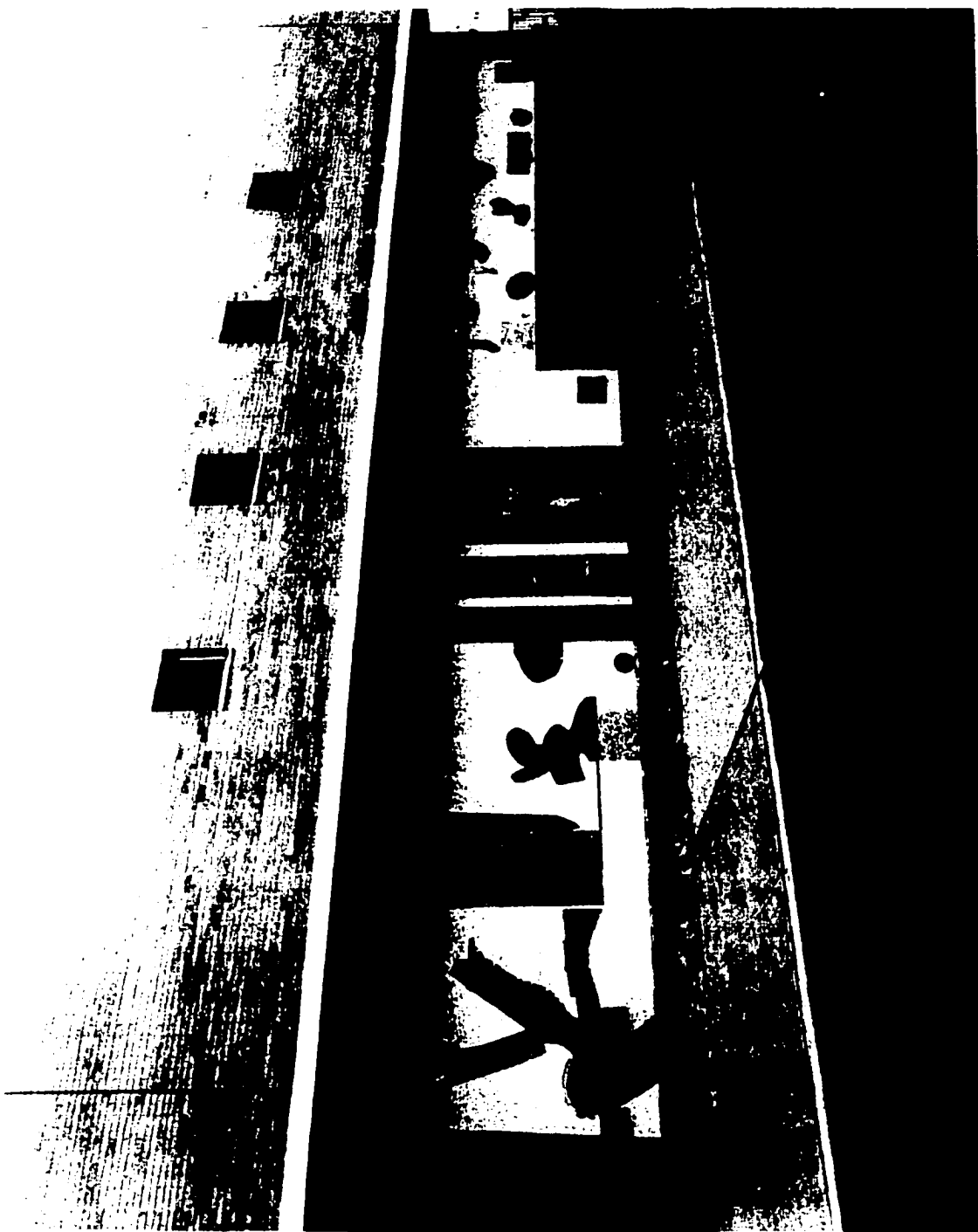


Figure 48



Figure 4a

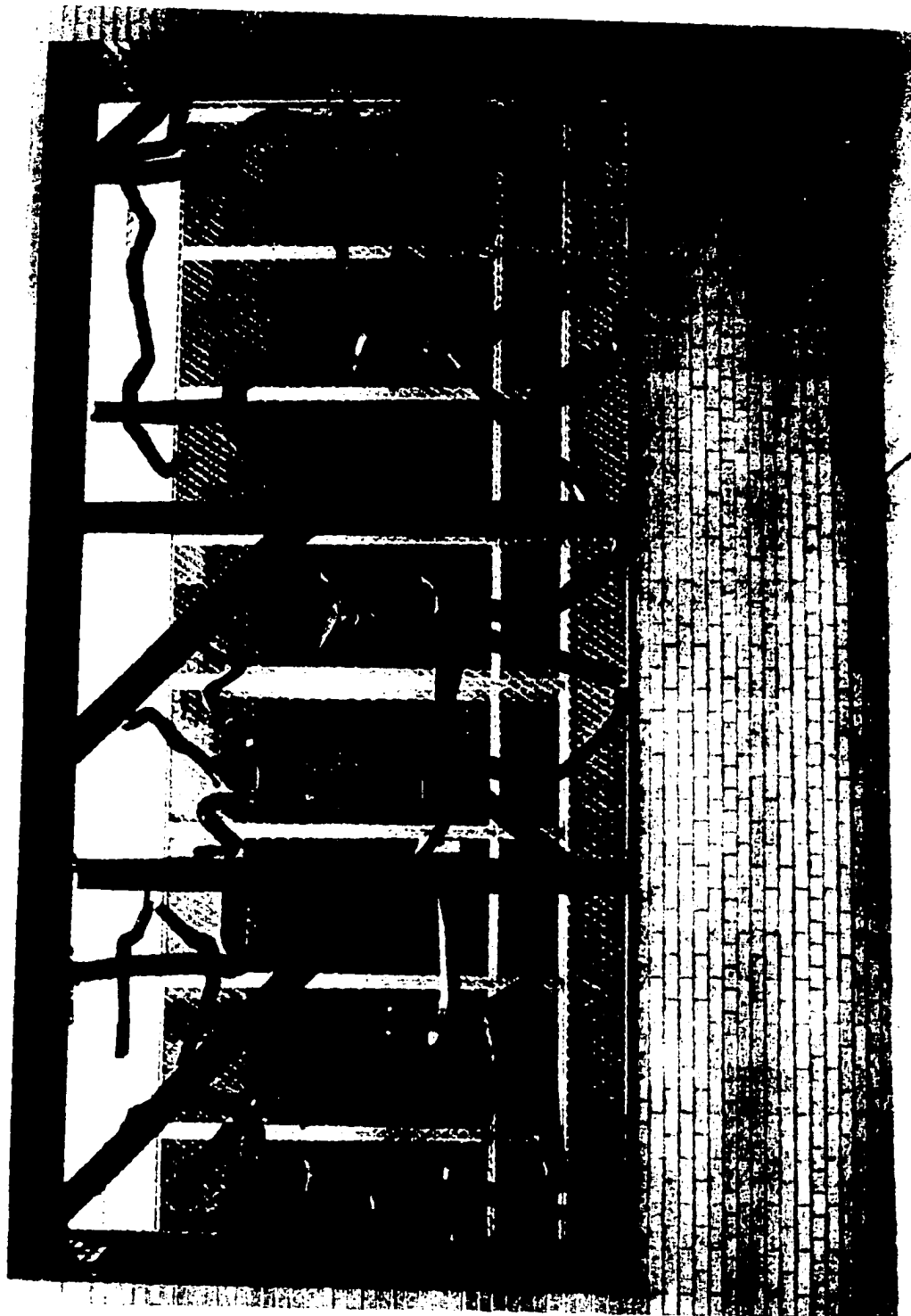
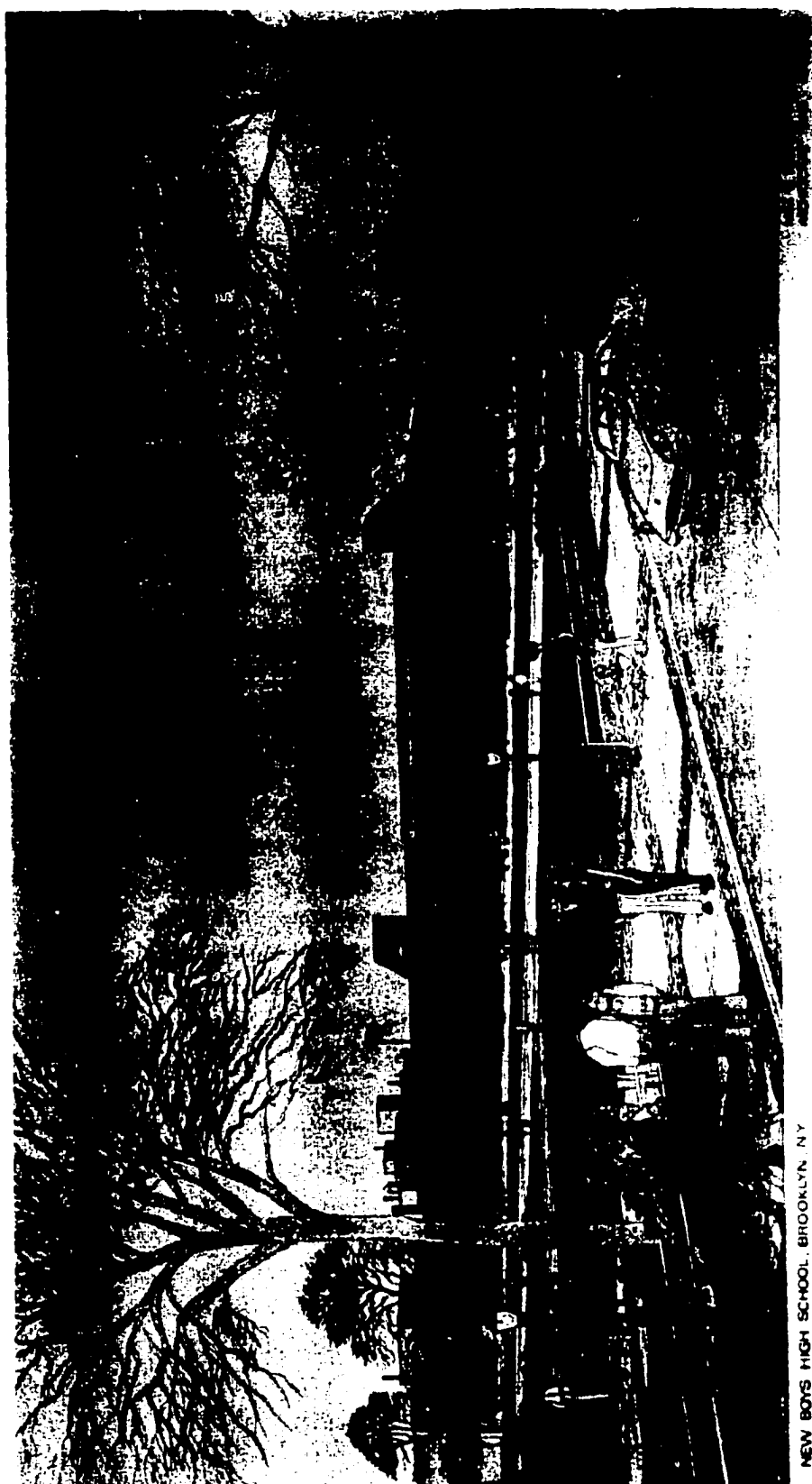


Figure 51



Figure 52



NEW BOYS HIGH SCHOOL, BROOKLYN, N.Y.

Figure 53



Figure 5



Figure 55

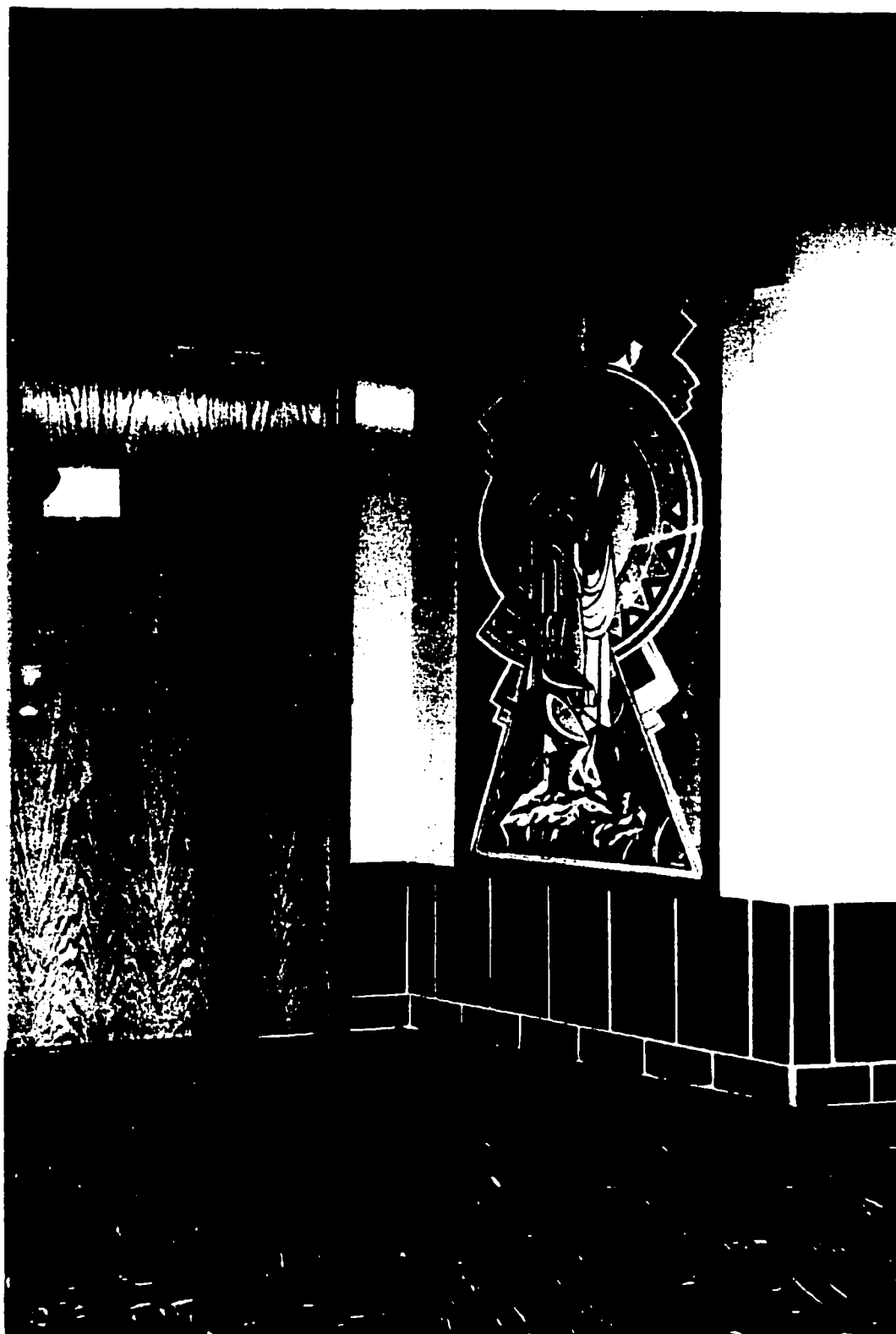


Figure 56



Fig. 12.57

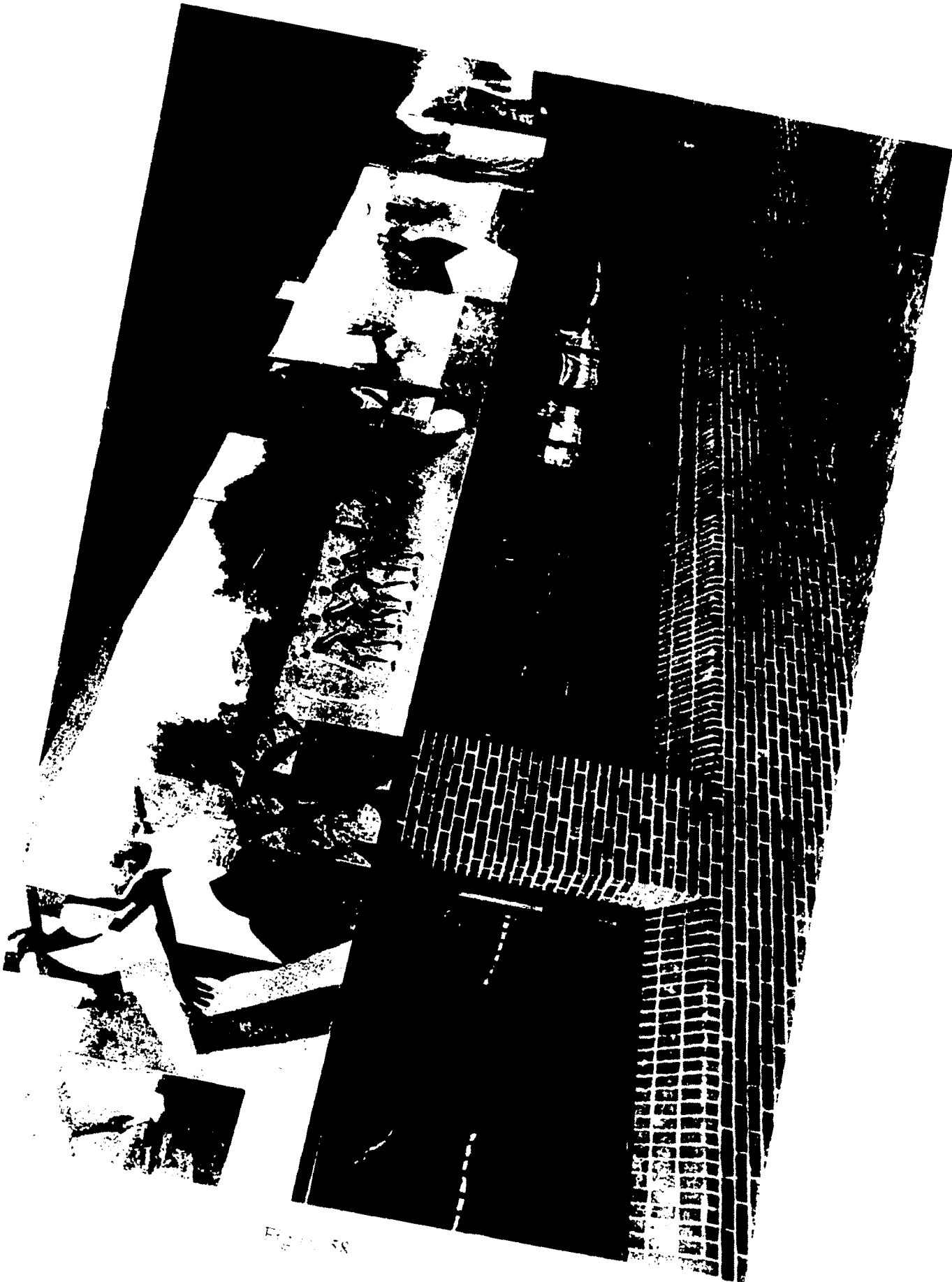


Fig. 58

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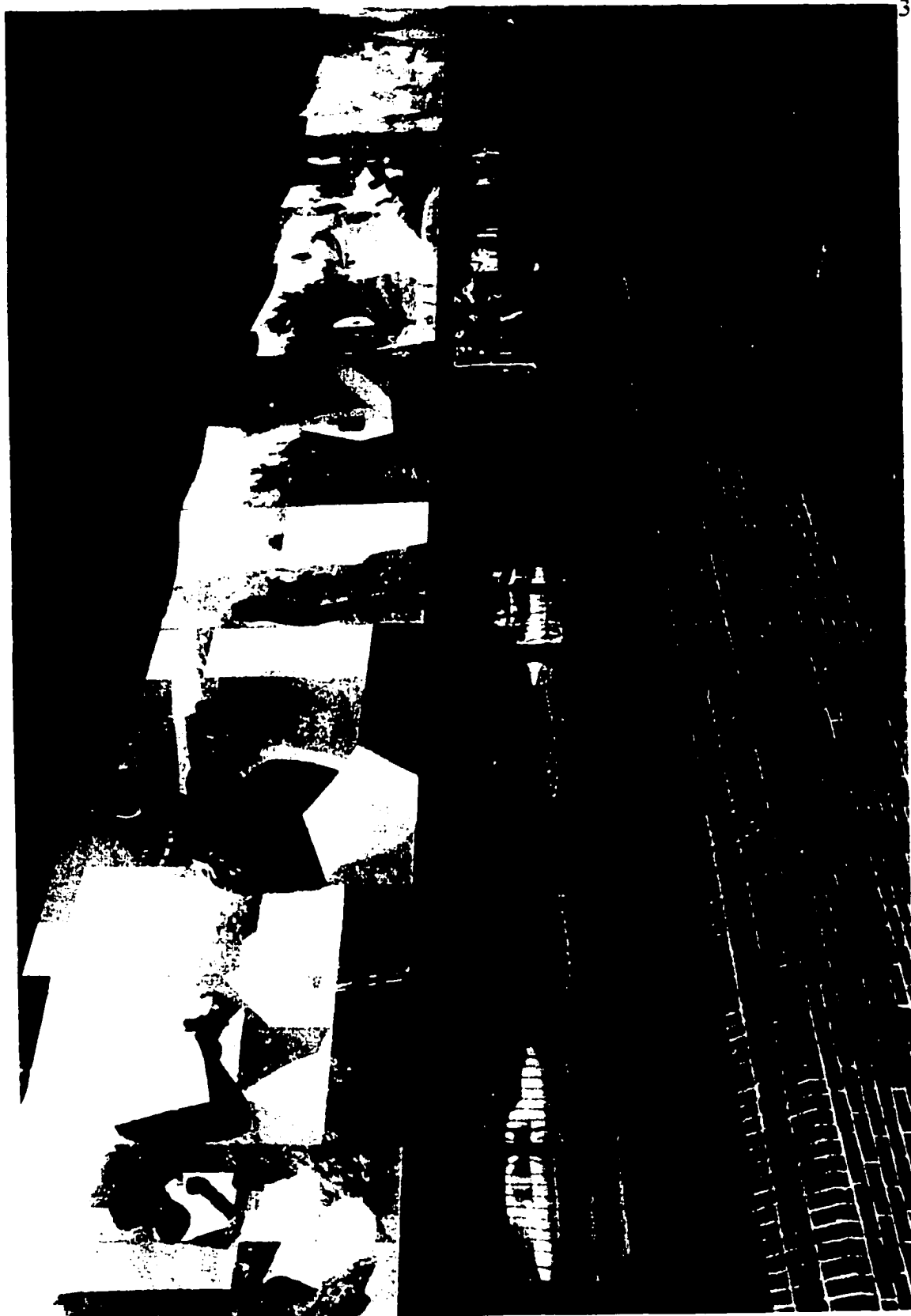


Figure 50



Figure 60



Figure 61



Figure 62

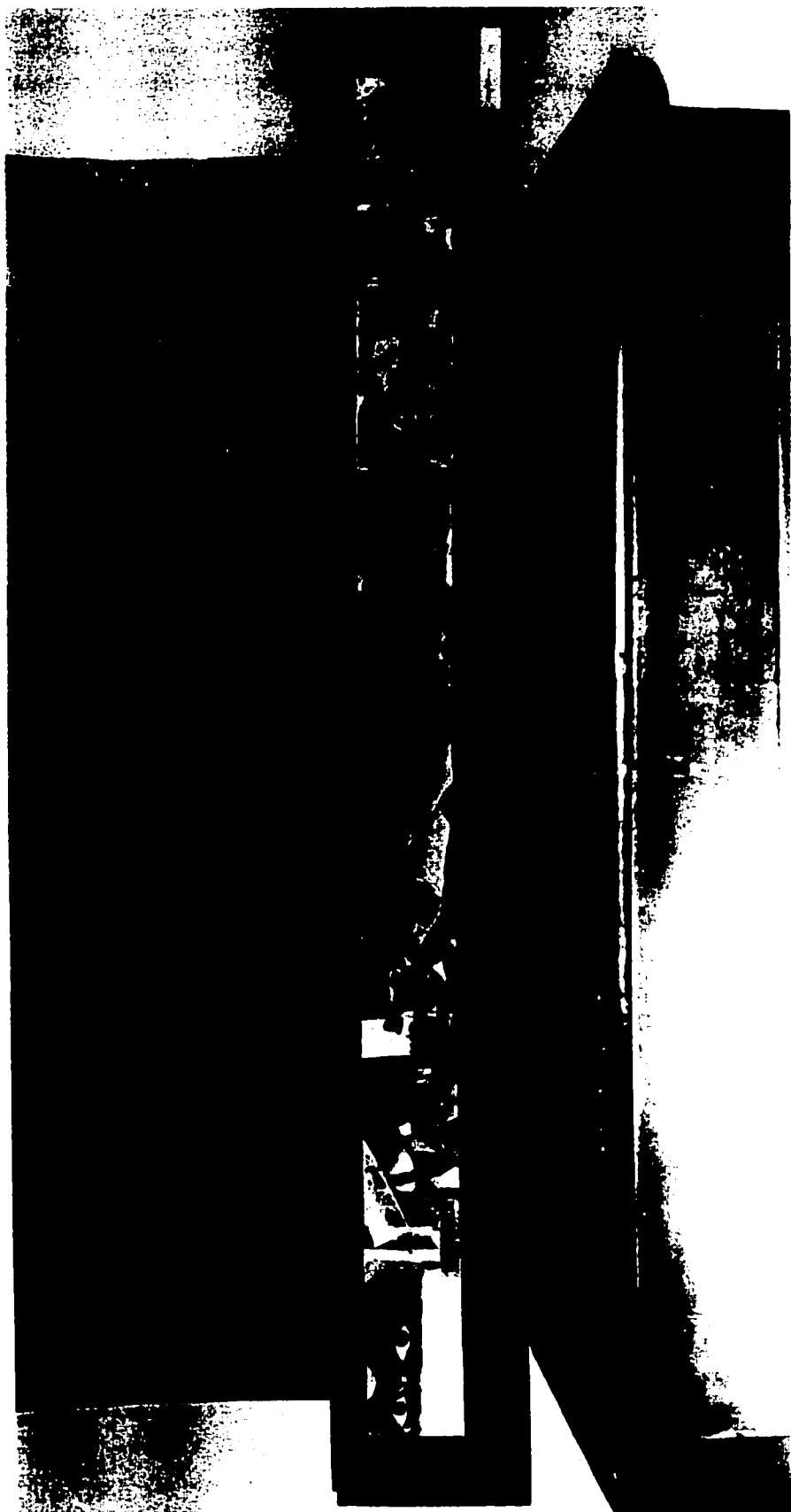


Figure 63



Figure 64



Figure 65



Figure 66



Figure 67



Figure 68



Figure 69



Figure 70



Figure 71

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