

# American Art Review

The artwork is a full-page painting featuring a woman as the central figure. She is depicted from the chest up, wearing a large, dark, wide-brimmed hat adorned with a colorful, multi-strand rainbow band. Her face is painted with soft, blended colors, showing a slight smile. She is wearing a bright red shawl or poncho over a light-colored garment. In her right hand, she holds a lit cigarette. The background is composed of thick, expressive blue brushstrokes that create a sense of movement and texture. The overall style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century American expressionism.

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NEW PALTZ, NEW YORK

## *The Historic Woodstock Art Colony*

by Karen Quinn

**L**ong before the famous music festival in 1969, Woodstock, New York, was home to what is considered America's first intentionally created, year-round arts colony—founded in 1902 and still thriving over 100 years later. Collecting the remarkable range of work produced there has been Arthur A. Anderson's focus for three decades, resulting in the largest comprehensive assemblage of its type. The

artists represented in it reflect the diversity of those who came to Woodstock, including Birge Harrison, Konrad Cramer, George Bellows, Eugene Speicher, Peggy Bacon, Rolph Scarlett, and Yasuo Kuniyoshi, among many others. Anderson recently donated his entire collection—some 1,500 objects by almost 200 artists—to the New York State Museum. This exhibition introduces to the public for the first time just a sample of the highlights of this extraordinary collection, which represents a

*The Historic Woodstock Art Colony: The Arthur A. Anderson Collection* is on view through July 23, 2023, at the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, State University of New York at New Paltz, 1 Hawk Drive, New Paltz, New York, 12561, 845-257-3844, [www.newpaltz.edu](http://www.newpaltz.edu). A brochure accompanies the exhibition.

body of work that together shaped art and culture in New York and forms a history of national and international significance.





All images are from the New York State Museum, Historic Woodstock Art Colony: Arthur A. Anderson Collection.

RIGHT: George Ault, *Autumn Hillside*, 1940, gouache on paper, 29 3/4 x 23 3/4.

BELOW RIGHT: George Bellows, *Appeal to the People*, 1923, lithograph, 15 x 19.

LEFT: Henry Billings, *Backyard Garden Path*, o/c, 28 x 33 1/8.

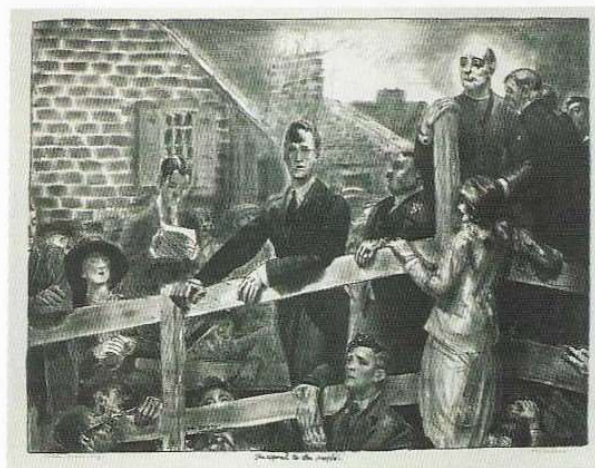
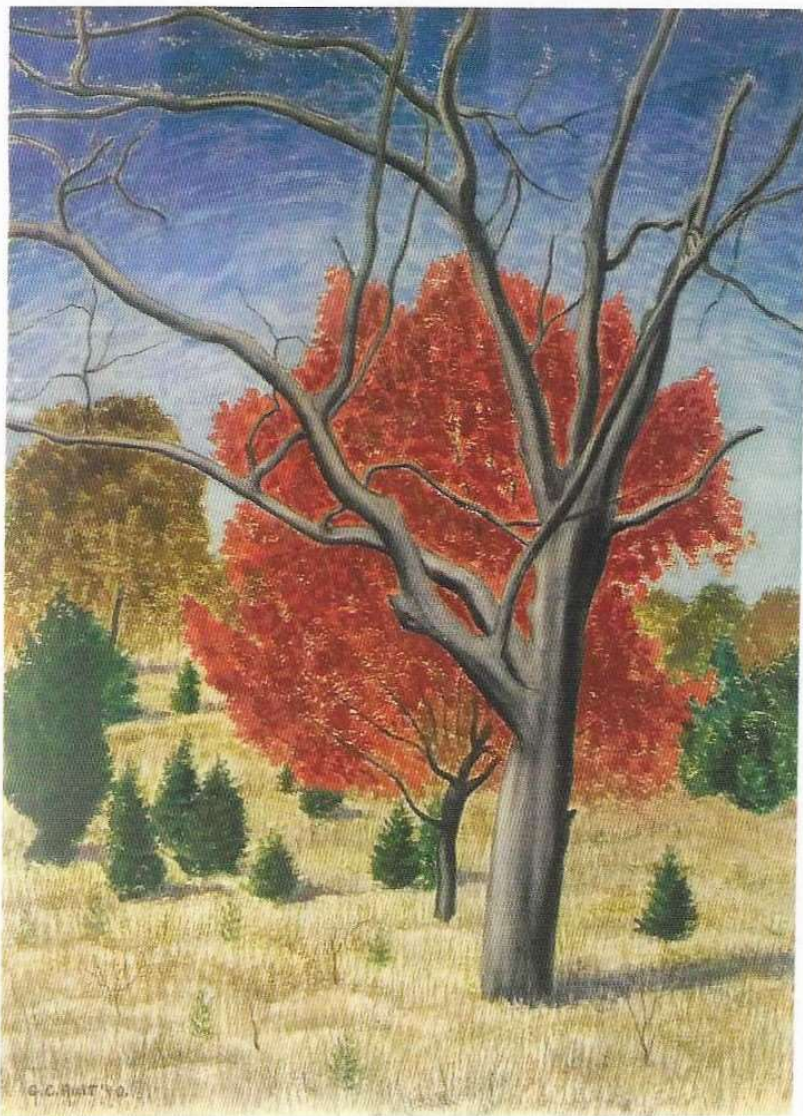
In 1902 the Byrdcliffe Arts Colony was established in Woodstock. The year-round utopian community promoted the Arts and Crafts movement, which emphasized individual, hand-crafted work over mass production. Wealthy Englishman Ralph Radcliffe Whitehead and his wife, Jane Byrd McCall, along with writer Hervey White and artist Bolton Brown, founded the colony; its name was derived from the middle names of the Whiteheads, who financed the project.

Byrdcliffe drew artisans from across all media: furniture makers, painters, print-makers, photographers, metalworkers, weavers, ceramicists, and others, as well as writers and musicians. Classes were offered, and notable teachers included co-founder Bolton Brown, Hermann Dudley Murphy, Birge Harrison, and William Schumacher. Byrdcliffe continues to flourish today under the auspices of the Woodstock Byrdcliffe Guild.

Hervey White left Byrdcliffe in 1904 and purchased a nearby farm to establish what would become the Maverick Arts Colony, a community more bohemian than Byrdcliffe. Early on, the colony attracted mostly writers and musicians, though by the 1920s visual artists of wide-ranging approaches had a large presence too. In 1910 White launched the Maverick Press, which published original literary and artistic material. A theater and concert hall also graced the grounds.

In 1915 White staged the first Maverick Festival, which would provide the main economic support for the colony. Held annually on the night of the August full moon, the festival featured music, dancing, food and drink, and attendees dressed in creative costumes. It is often seen as the forerunner to the famous Woodstock Music and Art Fair that was held in Bethel, New York, in 1969.

In 1906 the Art Students League moved its summer school to Woodstock. The League had been founded in New York







ABOVE: Jenne Magafan, *Cornstalks*, 1942, lithograph, 197/8 x 161/2.

LEFT: Jenne Magafan, *Autumn Wind (Cornstalks)*, 1942, oil and tempera on board, 33 x 267/8.

BELOW LEFT: Albert Sterner, *African-American Couple Playing Cards*, 1920, lithograph, 20 x 24.

ABOVE RIGHT: Emil Ganso, *Spring*, color lithograph, 20 x 24.

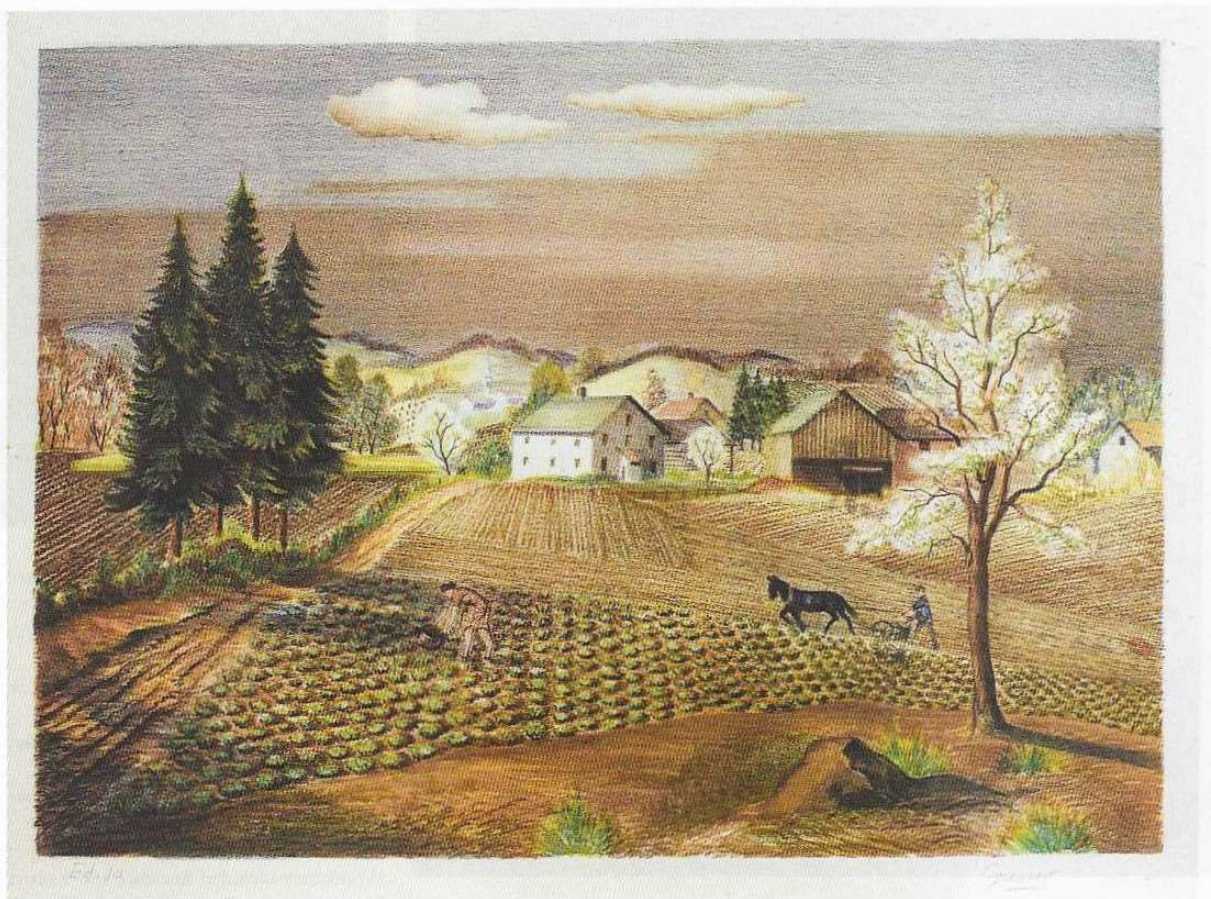
BELOW RIGHT: Florence Ballin Cramer, *Cramer Homestead in Winter*, 1926, oil on board, 20 x 24.



City in 1875 as an alternative to the mainstream National Academy of Design and had become one of the most important art schools in the country. From 1906 to 1922, and again from 1947 to 1979, the Art Students League brought as many as 200 students to the Woodstock area each year.

Birge Harrison taught at the summer school in Woodstock for its first five years. He had been the painting instructor at Byrdcliffe in 1904 and indeed there was much overlap of artists, both students and teachers, among the various organizations in Woodstock. Landscape was emphasized as much as the figurative tradition, and naturally, given the bucolic location, it became a focus for many artists working in Woodstock. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, Woodstock artists associated with the Art Students League and others worked in a variety of styles. Some favored Harrison's subtle Tonalist approach; others, the painterly brushstrokes and light of Impressionism; and still others the jewel-like tones of the Post-Impressionist palette.



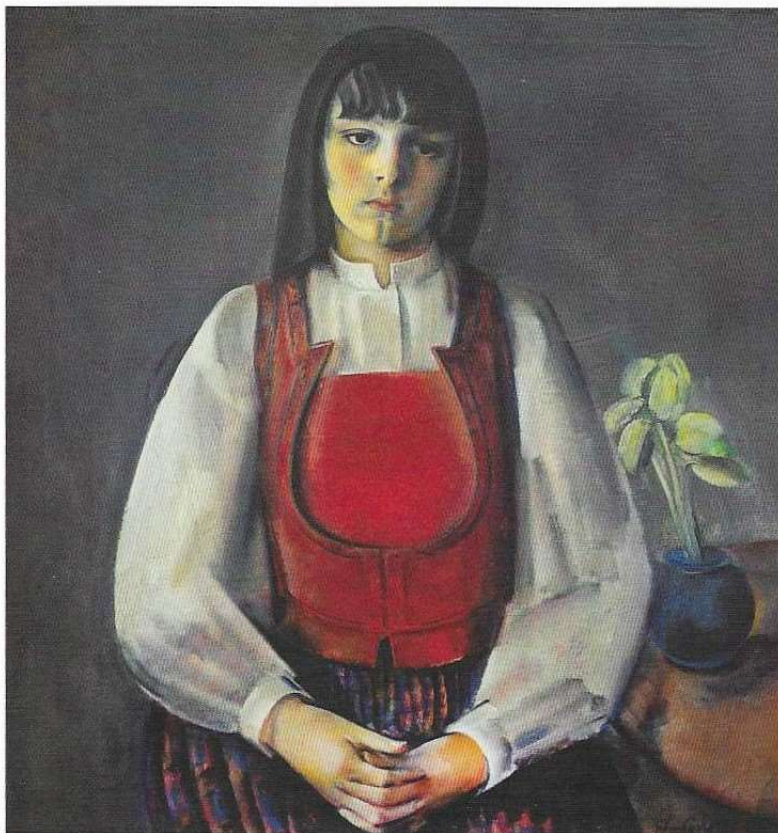


Works influenced by a number of European avant-garde movements also made their marks in Woodstock. Among those experimenting with varying degrees of abstraction were Konrad Cramer, Andrew Dasburg, and Henry Lee McFee, who were dubbed the Rock City Rebels after the part of Woodstock where they lived. Artists of all stylistic bents came together to establish the Woodstock Artists Association in 1919, a much-needed venue for exhibitions that remains active today as the Woodstock Artists Association and Museum.

In 1920, at the invitation of Eugene Speicher, George Bellows spent his first summer in Woodstock. Bellows belonged to the Ashcan School, a loosely associated group of early twentieth-century artists working in New York City who favored urban subjects, often gritty in nature. They painted in a realist style that was in contrast to the prevailing and popular academic approaches. Bellows' circle of artist friends in







ABOVE: Josef Presser, *String Bass Player (Abstraction)*, c. 1945, o/c, 51 1/8 x 39 1/4.

LEFT: John Carroll, *Lydia*, c. 1925, o/c, 41 1/4 x 39 1/8.

BELOW LEFT: Harry Gottlieb, *Autumn in Woodstock*, 1930, o/c, 26 7/8 x 31.

RIGHT: Eva Watson-Schütze, *Yellow Callas*, 1929, o/c, 34 1/8 x 34 1/4.

BELOW RIGHT: Eugene Speicher, *Last of the Sun*, 1913, o/board, 19 7/8 x 23 7/8.

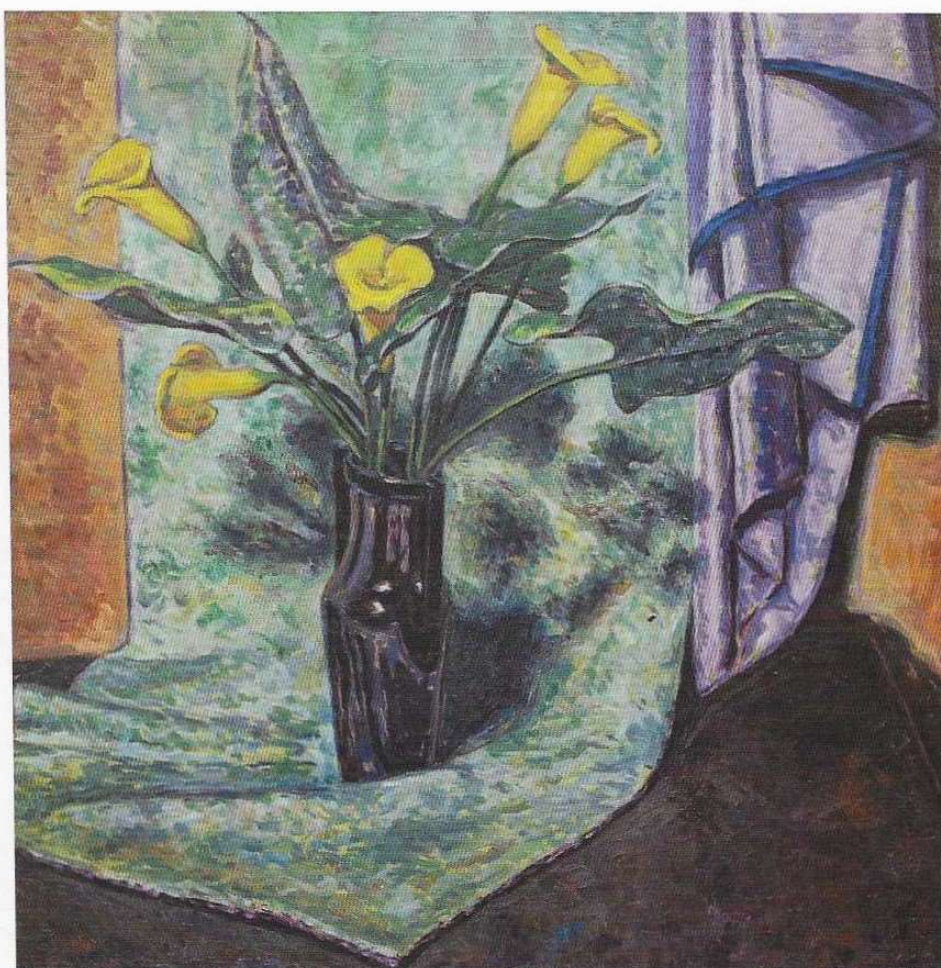


Woodstock included Speicher and Robert Henri, as well as Leon Kroll, John Carroll, and Charles Rosen, among others.

Bellows became in many respects the backbone of Arthur Anderson's collection and is richly represented by over 150 works, focusing mainly on his prints and drawings—everything from studies of hands, and figures, to compositional sketches, cartoons, and caricatures. They form the basis of a study collection which gives insight into Bellows' working process.

By 1915, Brown was immersed in lithography, a printmaking process using a stone plate. Although the process was invented at the end of the eighteenth century in Germany and used commercially and artistically throughout Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century, Brown is credited as the father of American lithography for his dedication to perfecting the medium scientifically and artistically. He experimented with and invented new processes, wrote on the subject, and printed for other artists. Brown's own work ranges in style and subject matter—from delicate, tonal landscapes to sharply delineated still lifes.



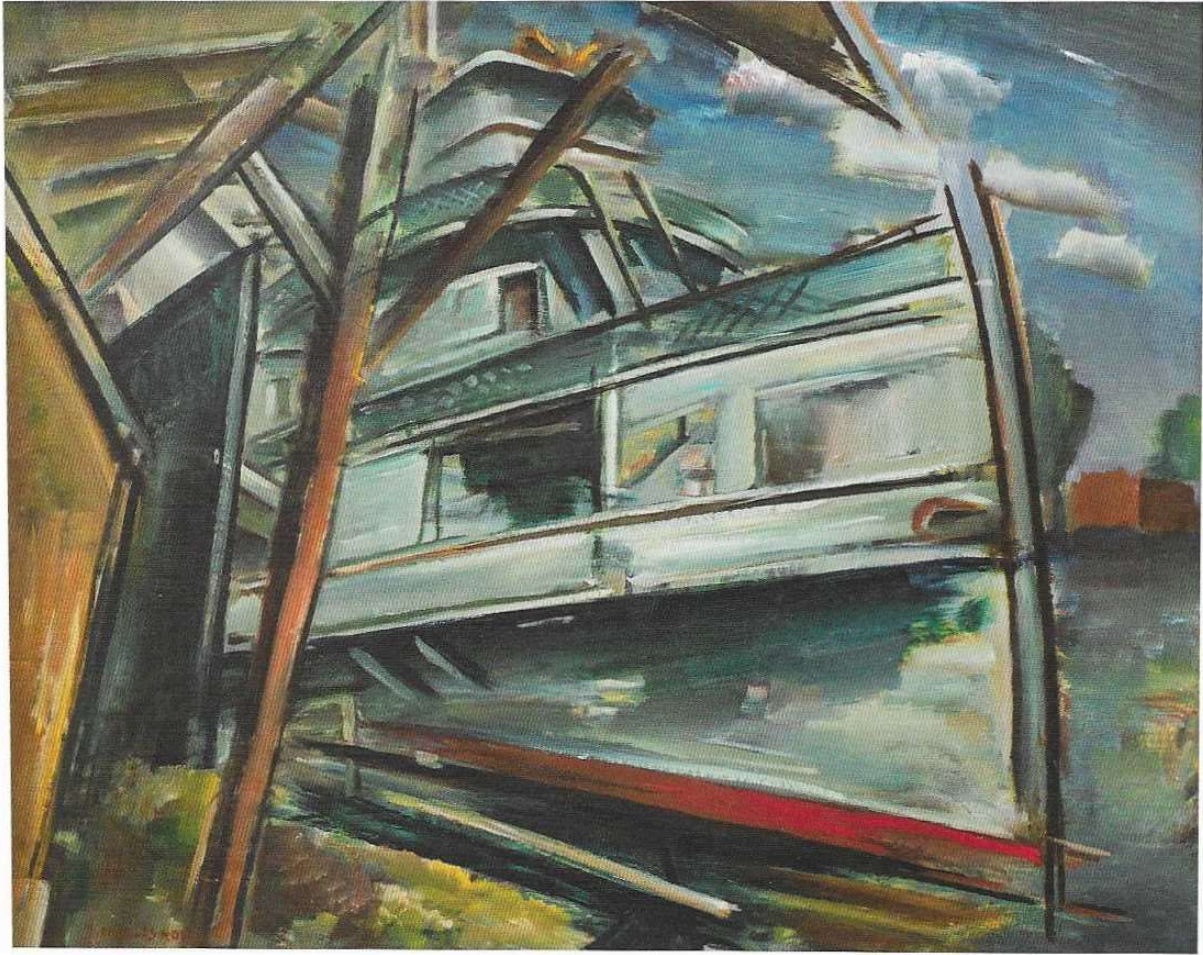


Although a wide range of artistic approaches in Woodstock continued in the 1930s, economic and social issues became more prevalent as subject matter with the onset of the Depression. Realism dominated much of the work, sometimes tinged with modernist elements, including abstraction. Various New Deal government programs—the Public Works of Art Project and the Federal Art Project under the Works Progress Administration—helped many Woodstock artists at this time. Some were commissioned to execute murals, others to produce prints, easel paintings, sculpture, posters, crafts, and more.

After World War II a new generation of artists arrived in Woodstock, joining those already established there. Along with the continued success of the earlier institutions, the return of the Art Students League Summer School (1947-1979) and







annual events such as the Woodstock Art Conference (1947-1952) ensured the enduring vitality of the colony into the late twentieth century to today.

Growing up in western Michigan, I was a collector of minerals, reptiles, and stamps, the last from old albums that belonged to my grandfather. My first interest in art can be traced to a small painting I discovered as a teenager in our cottage storeroom, and which my mother gave to me as a youngster. The painting is attributed to the seventeenth-century Italian artist Salvator Rosa, whose works inspired Thomas Cole, father of the Hudson River School. Later, as a young adult I was captivated by a painting of a beautiful woman with red lips by the Woodstock artist Norbert Heermann, a friend of George Bellows. Together, these two works sparked in me a passion for art and eventually the artists and art of the his-





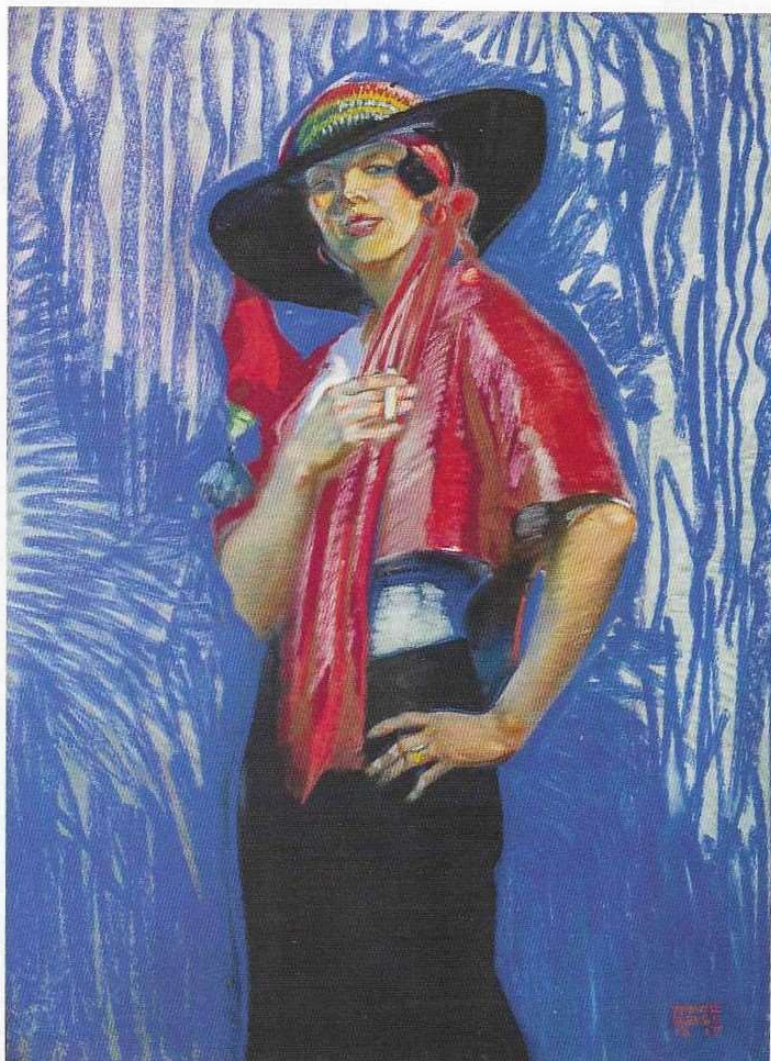
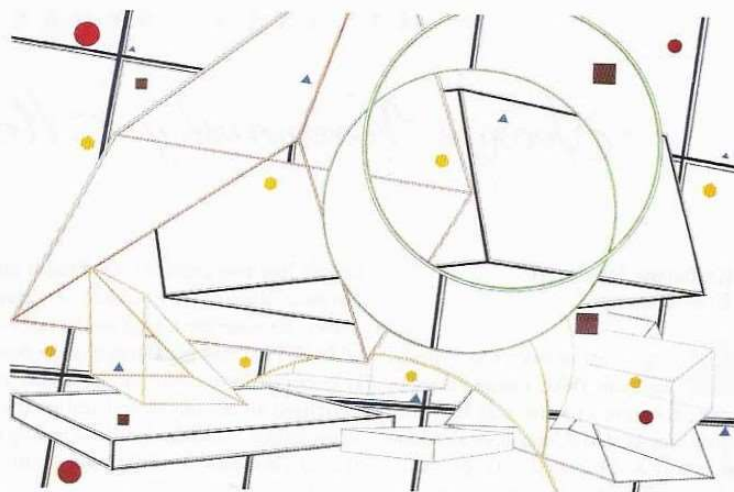
ABOVE: Paul Fiene, *Portrait Bust of the Artist (Paul Fiene)*, 1932, plaster, 17 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 56.

ABOVE RIGHT: Al Held, *Stone Ridge #6*, 1984, colored etching on paper, 33 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 46 $\frac{1}{4}$ .

RIGHT: Winold Reiss, *Woman in Black Hat with Cigarette*, 1917, pastel on paper, 48 x 35.

ABOVE LEFT: Charles Rosen, *River Boat No. 2, Hudson River*, 1939, o/c, 37 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 45 $\frac{1}{4}$ .

BELOW LEFT: Walter Koeniger, *Catskill Winter Stream*, c. 1925, o/c, 28 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 36.



toric Woodstock Art Colony.

I always enjoyed lending pieces to museums for exhibition and having them used. The question eventually became: "Where can my collection reside in perpetuity and be best cared for, used, and appreciated?" In due course, it became clear to me that the best place for it was the New York State Museum in Albany. The collection's new home reintroduces the historic Woodstock Art Colony into the American art canon. It also, I hope, will motivate others to donate their treasures for public appreciation and education. I am absolutely delighted to have my collection of the culture and art of the Woodstock Art Colony join the extraordinary New York State Museum.—Arthur A. Anderson



*Karen E. Quinn* is senior historian and curator, Art and Culture at the New York State Museum. *The Historic Woodstock Art Colony: The Arthur A. Anderson Collection* was organized by the New York State Museum and was on view there in 2018-19. It is available online with additional resources at: [www.nysm.nysed.gov/exhibitions/online/historic-woodstock-art-colony-arthur-anderson-collection](http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/exhibitions/online/historic-woodstock-art-colony-arthur-anderson-collection). A forthcoming book will be published by SUNY Press.