Fall 2015

Walt Kuhn: From Spotlight to Studio, the Art of Show Business

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.4eb2-tt9b>

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WALT KUHN:
FROM SPOTLIGHT TO STUDIO,
THE ART OF SHOW BUSINESS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Art History & Visual Studies

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Emily M. McEwan-Upright

December 2015

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

WALT KUHN: FROM SPOTLIGHT TO STUDIO,
THE ART OF SHOW BUSINESS

by

Emily M. McEwan-Upright

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY AND VISUAL STUDIES

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2015

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ABSTRACT

WALT KUHN: FROM SPOTLIGHT TO STUDIO, THE ART OF SHOW BUSINESS

by Emily M. McEwan-Upright

Walt Kuhn, an American artist born in New York, is often overlooked for his contribution to Modern American Art. Kuhn is typically recognized for his organizational and curatorial role in the 1913 Armory Show, but he was also internationally known in his time for his paintings of show people and as a creative director for several vaudeville and circus acts over his lifetime. During his career as a creative director, Kuhn's artwork evolved from superficial renderings of theatre scenes to psychologically intense tronies of performers. Kuhn and other American artists, including the Ashcan group and Edward Hopper, examined the relationship between popular entertainment and the urbanization of New York, expressing modernity in visual terms through scenes of popular entertainment. Kuhn set himself apart from his American counterparts by isolating the performer in a manner similar to that of Jean-Antoine Watteau's and Picasso's paintings of commedia dell'arte figures. Utilizing the performer as an alter ego, these artists represent the harsh realities of life, including social alienation. Sociological theories from Georg Simmel, Emile Durkheim, and Louis Wirth regarding modernity and the urbanization of large cities are used to further analyze the isolated performer in Kuhn's paintings. Ultimately, this thesis argues that Kuhn's tronies are not only symbols of modernity, but also act as metaphorical devices; they penetrate the veil of isolation created by modernity, and in turn establish an intimate connection with the viewer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This initiation and completion of this Master's thesis is owed to the dedication and the intellectual, emotional, and financial support of many. My graduate advisor, Dr. Beverly Grindstaff, donated her time and energies to this journey, and for that I cannot be more grateful. Additionally, she sparked my interest in both American art and the art of the early twentieth century, which led me down my current path of scholarship. Her dedication to improving the development of my writing and thesis was unfailing. I would also like to acknowledge the commitment of my other committee members. Dr. E. Bruce Robertson has not only been a mentor since my senior year as an undergraduate, but also a guiding hand in the field of American art scholarship; I am thankful for our longstanding relationship. Dr. Anne C. Junkerman has given my scholarship depth with her generous efforts in helping me form rich connections within my writing. Finally, I give my thanks to Professor Patricia Albers for quickly filling in and providing invaluable insight to my work.

The Smithsonian Institute's Archives of American Art provided the largest selection of primary source documents in my thesis. The ease in which I was able to access them digitally made this work not only possible to do from California but provided me with invaluable information. San Jose State University's library staff, specifically Rebecca Kohn, also facilitated the process of obtaining hard-to-find knowledge concerning popular entertainment and performers at the turn of the century. I am grateful to have Mrs. Kohn and all of her knowledge and experience as a resource. Additionally,

I appreciate all of the hard work that goes into running the Art History & Visual Studies department at SJSU. Thank you, Dr. Anne Simonson, Elizabeth Quintana, and Daphne Purisima.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the faithful and unmoving commitment of my family through this experience. My proofreader until the end, my husband, sat by my side, supporting me financially, intellectually, and emotionally through the entire process; I cannot fully express my gratitude in words for all of those late nights. Most of all, I would like to thank my parents in their undying faith in my abilities.

This thesis is dedicated to all of the young art historians who are intimidated by this step in their academic careers. It is worth far more than you imagine.

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Introduction

“So the twentieth century is that, it is a time when everything cracks, where everything is destroyed, everything isolates itself, it is a more splendid thing than a period where everything follows itself.”¹
– Gertrude Stein

In the United States, endowed by science and liberalism, the nineteenth century was characterized by the Victorian morals and standards of life, placing accepted decorum and cultural restrictions upon society, especially in growing urban areas.² By contrast, the twentieth century, termed the century of disillusionment by art historian Milton Brown, was, as Gertrude Stein said, a century “where everything cracks” no longer neatly held together by the carefully formed edicts of the Victorian era.³ Nowhere was this more prevalent than in the growing metropolises of the United States.

Urban centers such as Chicago and New York felt the surge of immigrants and hinterland migrants filling their tenements, fast-paced technology lighting up their streets, and department stores sprouting at every corner. The art historians Robert Snyder, and Patricia McDonnell briefly discuss the new American culture born from this rebellion through the lens of early sociological theories. They refer mainly to the German sociologist, Georg Simmel, and his primary text *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903), and the Chicago School of Sociology. McDonnell discusses Simmel’s interpretation of urbanization as “sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance” in the introduction to the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum exhibition catalog *On the Edge of Your Seat*:

¹ Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 49.

² Milton W. Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York: The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation, 1963), 6.

³ Stein, 49.

Popular Theatre and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art. Simmel describes the constant bombardment of sensations experienced by city dwellers on a day-to-day basis and the consistent changing and crowding of images, which eventually leads to social alienation and isolation of the common city dweller who then adopts a blasé attitude to cope with said effects of modernity.

However, urban centers quickly became havens for performers, artists, and writers, who embraced the changing times in America and who broke the confines of established aesthetic traditions and cultural trends. Snyder and McDonnell argue that vaudeville, a faced-paced, American-born entertainment, was not only a product of this modern era, but also an escape from it through its short but always entertaining stage acts linked together as a full-length revue that require no effort on the part of their audience. Patrons were relieved of having to follow a plot, or theme during the show due to the brevity of the acts, but they were guaranteed to laugh, and possibly cry throughout. Vaudeville critic Mary Cass Canfield recognized vaudeville as a melting pot of traditions, mirroring the nature of the United States' diverse society, and coined vaudeville the "Great American Thing" in her 1924 article for *The New Republic*.⁴

Another product of the era was the work of the Ashcan artists. The group tried to capture, as art historian Francis Pohl writes, "changes made by immigration, mass media, shifting gender roles, and the increasingly lavish public display of wealth."⁵ Attempting to present urban life, as it was altogether ignored by the National Academy of Design, the

⁴ Mary Cass Canfield, "The Great American Art," *The New Republic*, 32.416 (1922), 335.

⁵ Francis Pohl, *Framing America: A Social History of American Art* (New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., 2002), 324.

Ashcan artists depicted moments of everyday life on the street and fragmented scenes of popular entertainment, all were designated as characteristics of modernity studied by urban sociologists of that time. Their style was often referred to as Realism, and many other American artists who similarly depicted frames of urban life were also categorized as Realists.

One artist who commonly falls into the genre of Realism is Walt Kuhn. He is best known as the secretary of the Association of American Painters and Sculptors, and organizer of the famed New York Armory Show, formally known as the International Exhibition of Modern Art (1913). The Armory Show was the first organized exhibition to display contemporary European and American art in the United States. Departing from the strict academism of the National Academy of Design, the Armory Show placed modern art of Europe on the map for Americans, and also gave modern American art a chance outside of the Academy where it perished at the tyranny of tradition. Kuhn ultimately found himself in the middle of the biggest revolution of art America had ever seen, and formed the belief that America would soon become the center of the art world and be a leader in progressive aesthetic taste.

Kuhn held fast to his belief about American art, but he did not follow in the footsteps of Realism or the innovative styles that resulted from modern American art. Although he is now considered a Realist in some scholarship, and was often labeled one in his time, he consistently refuted the categorization. In a letter he wrote to Gordon Paxon, the curator of the Syracuse University Museum on March 5, 1948, Kuhn attempts to rectify this important point to Paxon:

...I notice in spite of the uniformly flattering and otherwise intelligent comments, that most of the writers relegate my work to some sort of "realism." The term "realism" has always puzzled me. To most people that means that the picture is more or less a copy of the subject. Insisting on thinking for myself, I have come to the conclusion that such a conception can only mean work which is not art at all...In other words, you cannot "Gild the Lily." But you can express the Lily in other terms. There you have the metaphor, without which you cannot have art. If all those who go to my show see nothing but the subject, then my whole endeavor as an artist is in vain.⁶

Kuhn was referring to his traveling show that visited nine art institutions between 1947 and 1948, and broke all attendance records for a living American artist.

The metaphor is the crux of Kuhn's oeuvre; even in the most mundane subjects, such as a loaf of bread, Kuhn brilliantly created a "kind of solidity and substance," making it "not just *a* bread, but the whole staff of life," as art critic Emily Genauer writes in praise in her November 16, 1946, review in the *World-Telegram* of Kuhn's Durand-Ruel exhibit.⁷ Genauer's encomiums were not alone. Henry McBride, an art critic from *The New York Sun*, applauds *Roberto* (1946, Figure 1) in the same exhibition, claiming the painting as "one of the most vital and arresting portraits that the artist has ever done. It is not only a live 'Roberto' but a symbol of what these chalk-faced artists mean to us."⁸ It wasn't until the end of Kuhn's career that critics acknowledged the true nature of Kuhn's works as metaphors for urban life.

⁶ Walt Kuhn, "Letter to Gordon Paxon," March 5, 1948. *General Correspondence 1948*. Box 8, Folder 17. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷ Emily Genauer, "Walt Kuhn Growing," *New York World-Telegram*, November 16, 1946. Box 10, Folder 26, File 58. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Durand-Ruel-Galleries--297899> 26 February 2015.

⁸ Henry McBride, "Attractions in the Galleries," *The New York Sun*, November 8, 1946. Box 10, Folder 26, File 56. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. http://www.aaa.si.edu/assets/images/collectionsonline/kuhnwalt/fullsize/AAA_kuhnwalt_1468328.jpg 26 February 2015.

Figure 1. Walt Kuhn, *Roberto*, 1946, oil painting on canvas. Source: Reprinted with the permission of the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Similar to the latent understanding of Kuhn's work during his lifetime, the contemporary scholarship and exposure of his work has also been slow to develop. Since Kuhn's death in 1949, there has been a sparse record of exhibitions, scholarship, and general acknowledgement of this American modern's work. In 2013, the DC Moore Gallery in New York did a retrospective on Kuhn in light of the centennial celebration of the Armory Show. In the exhibition catalog *Walt Kuhn: American Modern*, the director of the gallery, Bridget Moore, recognizes the dearth of scholarship on Kuhn and the need to fill the gaps of knowledge on the artist and his intensely psychological tronies of entertainers.⁹ Moore lists the most recent exhibitions: a memorial exhibit in 1960 at the Cincinnati Art Museum and a 1966 retrospective at the University of Arizona Art Gallery, Tucson.¹⁰ In terms of scholarship, Philip Rhys Adams has published the only monograph on the artist, *Walt Kuhn, Painter: His Life and Work*, which combines Adams' personal recollections of his friendship with the artist and Kuhn's family, along with primary sources, such as the Walt Kuhn Family Papers from the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art. The most contemporary piece of academic scholarship was completed in 1999, when Kathleen Spies published a dissertation titled,

⁹ The Dutch term *tronies* "refers to a depiction of a carefully studied single figure, often in dramatic, imaginary dress, and its usual format shows that figure at most in half length and sometimes just as a head," as outlined by Miriam Hall Kirch from the University of Alabama. Her review of the 2008 publication by Dagmar Hirschfelder, *Tronie und Porträt in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts*, discusses the term *tronie* and defines what it is, and is not. The concept of *tronie* presents an alternative perspective in which to view Kuhn's mature works, and will be considered in future scholarship. The review was published in the *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (Fall 2009), 944–945. <http://www.jstor.org.libaccess.sjlibrary.org/stable/10.1086/648183?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=tronie&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dtronie%26amp%3Bacc%3Don%26amp%3Bwc%3Don%26amp%3Bfc%3Doff%26amp%3Bgroup%3Dnone> accessed 8/5/2015.

¹⁰ Bridget Moore, "Introduction," *Walt Kuhn: American Modern* (New York, DC Moore Gallery, Inc. 2013), 7.

“Burlesque Queens and Circus Divas: Images of the Female Grotesque in the Art of Reginald Marsh and Walt Kuhn, 1915-1945.”

Although both publications are of the highest quality, neither discusses Kuhn’s career as a stage director on Broadway, or the intimate relationship he had with popular theatre throughout his career as an artist. Douglas Cooper executed a masterful example of this type of scholarship when he looked into Picasso and his decade-long partnership with Sergei Diaghilev, the ballet impresario, in *Picasso: Theatre* (1967). Cooper discusses Picasso’s role with the Russian ballet during the interwar period, and skillfully relates it back to Picasso’s journey with cubism and his alter-ego character, Harlequin. More than a decade later, in 1980, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., dedicated an exhibit to Picasso’s saltimbanques, or circus characters. This group was featured in the late part of his blue period, was present in all of his rose period paintings, and made appearances in his experiments with analytical cubism. The head curator, E.A. Carmean Jr., wrote the exhibition catalog for *Picasso: The Saltimbanques*, investigating why Picasso chose to use these characters, where they originated from, and what artistic influences led to the evolution of these characters from the stereotypical *commedia dell’arte* comedians to solemn, introspective symbols of Picasso’s emotions and ultimately of his life.

In Patricia McDonnell’s exhibition catalog *On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theatre and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art*, she and nine other art historians grapple with many of the same questions, but concerning early twentieth-century American artists and popular theatre. McDonnell also confronts the controversial

assumption that modern art in America did not exist until after World War II. Her argument against that assumption stems from the fact that the Ashcan artists of New York were depicting modern scenes of urban America in the first decade of the twentieth century, mirroring the characteristics of modernity described by urban sociologists. She argues that modern art should not be “seen as a monolithic entity,” and that it “found expression naturally... in the particular moment and place and upon the social, political, and economic realities of a given incubation.”¹¹ The catalog discusses why artists like Edward Hopper, Charles Demuth, Joseph Stella, and Kuhn were drawn to the bright lights and frantic pace of vaudeville and early film. To many of these artists, vaudeville was impersonal, a visual language to describe the cultural landscape and “conditions of modernity that permeated American society,” according to McDonnell.¹² Attracted to the “iridescence of the moment,” as Marsden Hartley described the seduction of vaudeville, American artists used conventions of popular entertainment to portray the city life surrounding them.¹³

Once again deviating from the status quo, Kuhn chose a more personal, psychological approach when it came to his portraits of performers, aligning, philosophically, more with Picasso’s saltimbanque images and not to his contemporaries in the U.S. Stylistically, Kuhn also remained a lone wolf, as his friend and protégé Louis Bouché would refer to him in his unpublished memoirs.¹⁴ Without the exposure to

¹¹ Patricia McDonnell, “Artists, Vaudeville, and Film,” *On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theater and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, n.d.), 28.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ McDonnell, 37.

¹⁴ Philip Rhys Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter: His Work and His Life* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1978), 69.

modern art he witnessed in 1912 and 1913, Kuhn's style might have remained static; instead, he slowly transformed, soaking up one influence after another, immersing himself in the underground world of popular entertainment before ultimately producing what he considered a truly American style.

This transformation has been investigated by Adams and other scholars within exhibition catalogues over the past sixty years; however, there has yet to be an in-depth analysis and exploration of why Kuhn chose his particular style, why entertainers grabbed his attention and held it for his entire career, and lastly what Kuhn's intentions were for these salt-of-the-earth characters he cherished so much. Kuhn states in his 1948 letter to Paxon:

[S]ubject matter comes first, something attracts [the artist], he must subconsciously feel possibilities in the subject for the purpose of creating a new thing... The artists in every case takes the subject apart and then builds something completely new.¹⁵

In her introduction to the DC Moore Gallery exhibition catalogue, Moore comments, "A comprehensive museum reappraisal of his work accompanied by new scholarship is long overdue."¹⁶ This thesis presents an comprehensive look at his early years and organizational duties for the Armory Show, his career as a creative director, a discussion of the relationship between the popular entertainment and contemporary art of Kuhn's time, a historical conversation on the utilization and evolution of the theatre performer in art, and conclusively, the application of sociological theories to Kuhn's mature period from 1919 to 1948. Through these methodologies, this paper will demonstrate that

¹⁵ Walt Kuhn, "Letter to Gordon Paxon," March 5, 1948. *General Correspondence, 1948*. Box 8, Folder 17. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁶ Moore, 7.

Kuhn's troupes of clowns, acrobats, and show girls are not only symbols of modernity but also act as metaphorical devices that penetrate the veil of isolation surrounding the common city dweller and, in turn, establish an intimate connection between the viewer and the subject.

Chapter One

New York: Birthplace of Walt Kuhn and the Armory Show

“Oceans are crucibles, smelting machines for art. Only the best survives their perilous passage.”¹

– Mary Cass Canfield, 1922

Walt Kuhn was born on October 27, 1877, to an immigrant couple from Bavaria, Francis Kuhn and Amalia Barbas. Francis came to Brooklyn from Bavaria at sixteen, and returned there to marry Amalia Barbas.² Amalia’s father was part of the consul of Spain that resided in Bavaria for a short time.³ Of nine children, Walt and his sister were the only ones to survive into adulthood. The family was small but embraced a life filled with culture provided by the efforts of Amalia. Kuhn had an upbringing that exposed him to unfamiliar people and foreign cultures at a very young age. This led him to be adventurous as he matured, resulting in an ambition to travel and explore not only his own country, but also the majority of Europe by the time he was thirty-six. His early travels imparted a traditional foundation of fine arts when he attended the Académie Colarossi in Paris and the Royal Academy in Munich in the early 1900s. Kuhn would embrace academism for a time, but soon after his return to New York, Kuhn turned to progressive art movements and became acquainted with non-traditional artists. As a result, Kuhn’s artistic ideologies turned radical. He joined like-minded artists and formed the Association of American Painters and Sculptors, and ultimately organized the 1913 International Exhibition of

¹ Canfield, 335.

² It is unclear from the Walt Kuhn Family Papers or Philip Adam’s biography, *Walt Kuhn: Painter*, when Kuhn’s parents were married or when his father went back to Bavaria to marry his mother.

³ Frank Getlein, *Walt Kuhn: 1877–1949* (New York: Kennedy Galleries Inc., October 10th to November 7th, 1967), 2.

Modern Art, better known as the Armory Show, with his fellow members. The following chapter outlines Kuhn's life until 1916, including the changes in his philosophy about art in academic and progressive terms.

Kuhn's parents operated the International Hotel, situated near the docks in the Red Hook district of Brooklyn. It was from these docks that Kuhn witnessed the unveiling of the Statue of Liberty on Bedloe's Island [now Liberty Island] in 1886.⁴ Frequented by sailors, merchants, and tourists at any given time of the year, the hotel not only provided lodging and ship supplies to the visitors, but also filled Kuhn's childhood with fantastical stories of adventures. At one point in 1888, an entire ship of navy sailors was marooned at the hotel; they regaled Kuhn and his family with their tales of military voyages.⁵ The hotel would often receive the same travelers over and over again, and the young Kuhn struck up a friendship with a sailor from the S.S. *South America*. This particular sailor would bring back gifts to Kuhn like baby alligators, dried fish, a shark's jaw, and live exotic birds—to his parents' chagrin.⁶

In a handwritten draft, presumably for a press release written in the winter between 1940 and 1941, Kuhn wrote of his budding interest in art as a young boy: "Walt Kuhn's development as an artist began early. His constant meeting with men of the seas with their stories of adventures abroad stimulated his imagination."⁷ From a personal interview with

⁴ Adams, 8.

⁵ Getlein, 2.

⁶ Adams, 8.

⁷ Walt Kuhn, "Miscellaneous Writings by Walt Kuhn, 1927–1948," Undated. *Notes and Writings, 1940–1941*. Box 19, Folder 34, File 12. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. *In Philip Adams' *Walt Kuhn: Painter*, Adams attributes this draft to a press release for 1927; however, on the document in Vera's handwriting it is dated for the winter of 1940–1941.

the artist, Philip Adams tells about Kuhn's early drawings; at the age of eight, "he began to illustrate some of the sailors' yarns in pen and ink. In the manner of mothers, Amalia kept a few; one was a battle with Eskimos, another a portrait of George Washington with a prophetic attention to the details of his uniform."⁸ Six years later, he sold his first drawing to the magazine *Truth*, initiating his career as a cartoonist and illustrator. Kuhn remarks in the press release draft of 1940, "[A]t the age of fifteen, [I] sold a drawing to a magazine for the enormous sum of fifteen dollars. That was one big moment that decided [my] career."⁹ The pride Kuhn felt was reflected in this quote, and is also demonstrated by a dollar bill he framed from the royalties from *Truth* in 1892, preserved in the Archives of American Art.¹⁰

Kuhn's mother, Amalia, had aspirations to become the next Eleonora Duse; however, as with many women in the 1800s, her dreams were waylaid by her duties as a wife, mother, and as a hostess and chef at the hotel.¹¹ Nonetheless, Amalia shared her love for the theatre with her son. By the age of fourteen, "he had seen Duse and every classic but also every act that played variety in New York," as Adams recalls in *Walt Kuhn: Painter*.¹² According to Frank Getlein and Adams, Kuhn's first job was at a sporting

⁸ Adams, 8. The author obtained this information through a personal interview with the artist, and mentions nothing more of the existence of these early sketches; they do not survive in the Archives of American Art, either.

⁹ Walt Kuhn, "Miscellaneous Writings by Walt Kuhn, 1927–1948," Undated. *Notes and Writings, 1940–1941*. Box 19, Folder 34, File 12. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Miscellaneous-Writings-by-Walt-Kuhn--228712> 2 May 2015.

¹⁰ "First Dollar Cashed from a \$15 Check," *Biographical Material: Artifacts, 1892*. Box 3, Folder 39, File 1. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Artifacts--228231> 25 February 2015.

¹¹ Getlein, 2.

¹² Adams, 8.

goods store that rented costumes to the local circuses and revues.¹³ He delivered and picked up costumes for the store, revealing the behind-the-scene magic and introducing him, for the first time, to the performers off stage.

Kuhn opened a bicycle shop in 1896 with the money earned from the costume shop. An odd choice for a young man, but Kuhn wanted to try his hand at bicycle racing and this venue provided him with income and supplies to race. Documented in a photograph from August 21, 1896, the shop window is embellished with gold lettering reading “W. F. Kuhn Bicycles.” While racing at local fairs and circuses, he met Pat Rooney Jr., a vaudevillian who performed in *Mother Goose* (1903) and *Guys and Dolls* (1950). Rooney taught the artist how to tap dance, which Kuhn often did to entertain his models while painting.¹³ Kuhn’s ambition in opening the bike shop and competing in local bicycle races foreshadows the entrepreneurial and self-marketing role he would assume later on in his career.

In 1899, Kuhn departed from the East Coast on a self-directed journey to the West. His photograph albums from his travels demonstrate the leisurely pace of his trip. He stopped when it suited him, and came across unique opportunities like assisting with the decorating of the Salt Palace in Salt Lake City, according to Adams.¹⁴ Kuhn settled briefly in San Francisco where he became an illustrator for *WASP*, a weekly publication of

¹³ “Photographs and Scrapbooks: Volume I: Illustrated Photograph Album, 1896–1901.” *Photographs and Scrapbooks*. Box 23, Folder 35, File 16. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Volume-1-Illustrated-Photograph-Album--228883>. 16 April 2015.

¹⁴ “Photographs and Scrapbooks: Volume II: Photograph Album, Duplicate Prints, and Glass Negatives, 1899–1900.” *Photographs and Scrapbooks*. Box 38, Folder 23. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Volume-2-Photograph-Album-Duplicate-Prints-from-Glass-Negatives--228889>. 16 April 2015.

political commentary and satire, literary criticism, and poetry. During his employment he made, as he would say, “the worst drawings ever made for any publication.”¹⁵ His self-critical nature would stay with him for the rest of his life, leading him to relentlessly destroy his own work.

During his short time in San Francisco, Kuhn made connections among the socialites of the West Coast. The Walt Kuhn Family Papers contain an undated article titled “Vineburg Events”, which details a party that he attended at the home of the Sondags, a prominent family in Vineburg, California. The article reads as if Kuhn was a paid performer: “Mr. Kuhn of Agua Caliente was the principle entertainer. Mr. Kuhn is a clever story-teller and musician.” However, the young artist was an invited guest who ended up entertaining the party with his many talents.¹⁶ Kuhn left *WASP* after a year and free-lanced up and down the coast of California, painting signs and interiors of hotels. There is a dearth of documentation of this period in the Archives of American Art, aside from undated photographs and sketches. The most notable source of information is the personal interviews conducted by Philip Adams and recorded in his monograph on Kuhn.

During his time in California, Kuhn became interested in cowboys and Native Americans, not in the Hollywood image or simply the idea of cowboys and Indians, but rather the real subjects he frequently photographed. His scrapbooks from 1899–1901 are filled with documentation of his exposure to the Wild West and the people he encountered.

¹⁵ Adams, 10.

¹⁶ “Photographs and Scrapbooks: Volume I: Illustrated Photograph Album, 1896–1901.” *Photographs and Scrapbooks*. Box 23, Folder 35, File 7. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Volume-1-Illustrated-Photograph-Album--228883>. 17 April 2015.

An undated photograph taken by Kuhn of a Native American is titled *Thunder Cloud* (Figure 2), both on the photograph itself written in ink, and under the photograph written in the scrapbook. The regal figure is mounted on horseback with a full-feathered headdress and a traditional form of Native American clothing. Adjacent to the photograph is another photograph of the same figure but “minus the clothing” (Figure 2), as Kuhn states in the caption below.¹⁷ *Thunder Cloud* is clad in a simple waistcloth, moccasins, and double feather headdress.

Twenty years later, in 1918, this trip to the West would provide inspiration for Kuhn. He painted a series titled *Imaginary History of the West* consisting of twenty-nine oil paintings; the series illustrated his memorable experience in the West. The press statement in the Archives of American Art, presumably written by Kuhn, provides a glimpse into how influential this early trip to the West was to Kuhn; it reads:

The IMAGINARY HISTORY group by Walt Kuhn was painted between 1918 and 1923. During those years he steeped himself in the lore of the early West. Coupled with this reading and talking with oldtimers were the memories of his own youthful experiences during two years of wandering in the West, finally centering in San Francisco in the years before the earthquake. This deep interest in the winning of the West gave birth to this group of paintings which Walt Kuhn loved dearly.¹⁸

One painting, *Medicine* (1919, Figure 3), shows two Native American figures painted in an

¹⁷ “Photographs and Scrapbook: Volume II: Photograph Album, Duplicate Prints and Glass Negatives, 1899–1900.” *Photographs and Scrapbooks*. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Box 38, Folder 23. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Volume-2-Photograph-Album-Duplicate-Prints-from-Glass-Negatives--228889>. 16 April 2015.

¹⁸ “Imaginary West: A Group of Paintings of the Winning of the West.” *Provenance Files: “Imaginary History” Series, 1918–1923*. Box 12, Folder 2, File 1. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/imaginary-history-series-228543> 17 April 2015

abstract style. The man on the left bears a striking resemblance to Thunder Cloud “minus the clothing,” whom Kuhn photographed during his first trip west. Kuhn’s biographer, Adams, describes Kuhn’s perspective of the West and the people he encountered: “the basic America, real, un-machined, tough and to the point of hardness.”¹⁹ Future family Christmas cards illustrated by Kuhn and colored in by his daughter, Brenda, reflect his ongoing interest with the subject of Native Americans.

Kuhn returned to the East Coast in 1901 after two active years in the West, wearing a Stetson and a full beard. The latter did not last long, but Kuhn continued to wear a wide-brimmed cowboy hat throughout his life, demonstrating his long-lasting interest in the rugged West. The documentation of Kuhn’s life during 1900 is spotty, and no letters or notes exist to substantiate his activity or thoughts during this time. However, Philip Adams provides a rough timeline of Kuhn’s return and goals for his future, but it is not cited. Adams wrote of the young artist upon his return home in 1900: “[Kuhn] then wanted to become no less than the ‘best damn cartoonist alive.’”²⁰ Adams continues to explain how Kuhn planned on achieving his objective; Kuhn spent time at home with his parents explaining his “plans for formal training and in persuading his father to finance at least a year’s study abroad, in Paris, of course, the goal of all budding artists at the turn of the century.”²¹ The formal training Kuhn pursued was at the

¹⁹ Adams, 11.

²⁰ Ibid. The quote is taken directly from *Walt Kuhn: Painter* by Adams, and there is no further citation information on the quote within, assumed to be said by Kuhn. There are no letters from Kuhn dated before 1901 in the archives. There is a possibility Adams received this quote from Brenda or Vera, possibly through some unpublished notes.

²¹ Ibid. There is no further information on why Kuhn thought about getting an education in painting, as opposed to an education directed toward cartoonists..

French art academy, the Académie Colarossi.²² The program concentrated on draftsmanship as a foundational skill, and progressed into painting, which many cartoonists of his time were studying.²³

Kuhn arrived in Paris in March of 1901, brimming with excitement and eager to start his training. Although Kuhn initially knew little French, the entertainment of the city and the language were quite agreeable to him, and he enjoyed Paris immensely. In a letter to his parents dated on March 13, 1901, Kuhn expresses his initial satisfaction with his situation: “I have already settled and everything is going to be to my full satisfaction.”²⁴ The day before, on March 12, Kuhn’s first leisure activity in Paris was to see a variety show, the European predecessor to vaudeville, with some of the other American students residing in the Grand Hotel de la Haute Loire where he was staying. On March 13, in a letter to his parents, Kuhn recalls:

Yesterday we spent walking about town and went to the theatre in the evening. It was a variety show. I didn’t expect much of a performance...I was well pleased with the show, however; the music was fine and the costumes were gorgeous.²⁵

It is unclear why Kuhn did not have high expectations for this show; perhaps it was the venue or his experience with the New York shows his mother took him to that raised the bar. Kuhn’s critical description of his initial exposure to French theatre presages the future

²² Adams, 10.

²³ The terms “illustrator” and “cartoonist” are used interchangeably in both Kuhn’s letters, and Adams’ monograph. Kuhn strives to be the “best damn cartoonist alive,” and in 1901 signs his letter back home as “Herr Kuhn, Illustrator.” Both quotes are documented within the chapter. This thesis will continue to use the word cartoonist, but in the early nineteenth century, artists who were illustrators often drew cartoons for a living.

²⁴ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1901,” March 13, 1901. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. Box 3, Folder 40, File 4. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-Letters-to-Family--228233> 26 February 2015.

²⁵ Ibid.

role he would play in American art and popular theatre.

According to Kuhn, the French language was quite easy to pick up, a skill that would benefit him later in life while organizing the Armory Show. Kuhn describes his progress in his March 13, 1901, letter to his parents: “By the way, I am agreeably surprised at my success with the French language. So far I have no trouble at all finding out everything I wanted to know and find myself improving every hour almost.”²⁶ Finding everything satisfactory thus far, Kuhn enrolled in a morning life class and an evening figure drawing class six days a week. The Académie Colarossi, however, turned out to be less than ideal for Kuhn, who found its structure to be slack and unregimented, as documented in his letters to home. On March 22, he wrote to his parents that “the morning class is not as good as [I] expected,” and his fellow students were “very poor draftsmen...[the class] is a very crazy crowd, about 24 to 30 in all.”²⁷ The instructor’s criticisms were swift and unrelentingly harsh to an amateur artist lacking the fundamental training the other students seemed to have.²⁸ Kuhn’s letters home complained about the exorbitant prices for food and leisure in Paris; on March 22 he wrote, “[T]he trouble here is that you can’t turn around without spending money. What shall I do with my spare time?”²⁹ Less than a month later, on April 5, the young artist states his quandary: “I am

²⁶ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1901,” March 13, 1901. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. Box 3, Folder 40, File 4. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-Letters-to-Family--228233> 26 February 2015.

²⁷ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1901,” March 22, 1901. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. Box 3, Folder 40, File 7. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-Letters-to-Family--228233> 17 April 2015.

²⁸ Adams, 11.

²⁹ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1901,” March 13, 1901. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. Box 3, Folder 40, File 8. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-Letters-to-Family--228233> 26 February 2015.

very much undecided whether to stay here or go to Munich.”³⁰

After two months of studying in France, Kuhn decided to leave Paris and travel to Munich in May of 1901, no doubt hoping the Royal Academy of Munich would provide him with the structure and fundamentals he felt he needed. His letter to his parents on May 15 shows Kuhn settled at the hotel Stuttgarter Hof, informing them of his move. Although there is no physical evidence of why Kuhn chose Munich from an educational perspective, it is clear that he found it a natural choice as he had family living in the surrounding areas who were also artists, including his cousin August Kühles. The Royal Academy of Munich was not in session until late summer, which gave Kuhn plenty of time to draw and paint on his own in order to build a portfolio. By the time he had written to his parents on May 15, Kuhn had already contacted his family in the area and quickly made plans to dine with his cousin. Through August, Kuhn met the remainder of his extended family, and settled comfortably in Munich over the summer. In the letter to his parents on June 19, 1901, Kuhn’s confidence and settled state in Germany is conveyed in the return address of his correspondence to his parents, he titled himself as “Herr Walt Kuhn, Illustrator.”³¹ This was a far cry from the unsure art student who wrote to them a few months before in Paris. Kuhn describes his duties over the summer months: “I worked pretty hard all

³⁰ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1901,” April 5, 1901. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. Box 3, Folder 40, File 10. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-Letters-to-Family--228233> 17 April 2015.

³¹ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1901,” April 5, 1901. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. Box 3, Folder 40, File 23. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-Letters-to-Family--228233> 19 April 2015.

summer, [and] made some pretty good things.”³² In a letter written on November 15, 1901, Kuhn exuberantly told his parents that he was accepted to the Royal Academy of Munich based on the merit of his portfolio, in spite of his lack of academic training and credentials. Kuhn’s German relatives were also surprised at his acceptance, as Kuhn was only in Germany for a short time before he was admitted into the Academy.³³

Kuhn was to study under the professor Heinrich von Zügel (1850–1941) during his time at the Royal Academy. In 1916, the German art historian Josef Stransky wrote that von Zügel was “one of the greatest animal painters” of his time in *Modern Paintings by German and Austrian Masters*.³⁴ Stransky further praises Zügel’s paintings as “pictures of exquisite softness and tenderness of tone.”³⁵ Von Zügel changed his style from that of the Munich Secession to Impressionism after his visit to Paris in 1890. Von Zügel became generous with his brush strokes and used a more impasto style of painting, which diffused his paintings with an intense light similar to those effects used by the Spanish painter Joaquín Sorolla (1863–1923).³⁶ Shortly after his acceptance, Kuhn ecstatically informed his parents that von Zügel was “the best painter in Europe,” and that he was thrilled to be admitted under von Zügel’s program as one of the four who were accepted out of twenty applicants.³⁷

³² Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1901,” November 15, 1901. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. Box 3, Folder 40, File 41. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-Letters-to-Family--228233> 27 April 2015

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Josef Stransky, *Modern Paintings by German and Austrian Masters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 179.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

Kuhn became very fond of his classmates and of Germany itself. He wrote to his parents frequently, commonly discussing the class, his friends, his health, and his improving German. On January 12, 1902, Kuhn describes how he entertained his classmates with his singing and music: “My voice has improved too and we never have an evening together but that I have to play mandolin and sing for them.”³⁸ He also tells his father that he will write him a letter in German next time, so Francis can see how his son is improving in the language. In the same letter, Kuhn wrote about his future plans to see all of Wagner’s operas in the coming winter, keeping true to his mother’s theatrical passion.³⁹ Von Zügel was fulfilling all of Kuhn’s expectations of structure, and Kuhn was learning the fundamentals of draftsmanship; the young student continued to deeply revere his professor during his duration at the Academy. Kuhn lauds von Zügel in his letter on March 2, and shares his own special position in the class:

Through the fact of my being ombudsman of my class I get many opportunities to call on the professor in his studio, which is very beneficial to me as I can talk to him about the business and get many pointers. The longer I know him the more I respect his greatness, I often feel happy over my good luck in having come to him.⁴⁰

For the first six months of von Zügel’s curriculum, students did not paint; instead, they drew animal anatomy repeatedly and were occasionally allowed to draw the animal in its entirety.⁴¹ This strict lesson plan allowed the students to focus on the mechanics of

³⁸ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1902,” January 12, 1902. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*, Box 3, Folder 41, File 2. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/walt-kuhn-letters-to-family-228243 3 May 2015.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1902,” March 2, 1902. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. Box 3, Folder 41, File 12. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/walt-kuhn-letters-to-family-228243 3 May 2015.

⁴¹ Adams, 11.

drawing, the practice of “seeing” instead of simply looking, and gave Kuhn the foundation he desperately wanted. In April of 1902, von Zügel took his students to Venice, Italy, for a spring break drawing trip to study and draw the historic buildings. Von Zügel mandated the students’ architectural drawings also be rendered in exactness.

After a summer session in Wörth, Germany, Kuhn wrote on July 25, 1902, “After investigating the railroad rates and everything I have found a cheap steamboat line down the Rhine to Holland.”⁴² Kuhn quickly discovered why landscape painting was so attractive to seventeenth-century Dutch painters. Adams quotes Kuhn as saying, “Everything is arranged for you, all the colors are in tone, and the clouds compose themselves in receding planes.”⁴³ In the same letter, Kuhn expresses his pleasure at being off von Zügel’s tight leash: “In Holland I can paint what I want.”⁴⁴ From Kuhn’s comments on the beauty of the Dutch landscape, and the quote from Adams’ monograph, we can assume Kuhn painted landscapes while in Holland. The paintings and sketches from this period, however, no longer exist. Kuhn returned to Munich to resume the fall semester at the Academy and showed Professor von Zügel his completed works from Holland. Kuhn wrote on October 29, 1902, “[H]e gave me such a good criticism and such

⁴² Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1902,” July 25, 1902 *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. Box 3, Folder 41, File 27. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/walt-kuhn-letters-to-family-228243 6 May 2015.

⁴³ This quote is not cited in Adams’ book, nor is the quote found in the letters home to Kuhn’s family. Adams, 14.

⁴⁴ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1902,” July 25, 1902. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. Box 3, Folder 41, File 27. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/walt-kuhn-letters-to-family-228243 6 May 2015.

a big future that I could hardly believe him, a thing he very seldom does.”⁴⁵ Kuhn was quite satisfied with his teacher’s encomiums and felt that he had achieved the level of training he went to Europe looking for. In May of 1903, after being at the Academy for two years, Kuhn returned to New York. His letters do not mention why, but it seems that he felt he learned enough from his experience and wanted to begin his career in the United States. On May 6, 1903, he wrote of his departure from Munich: “I left Munich with a heavy heart. I learned a lot there and I think it will stay in my memory as the pleasantest time of my life.”⁴⁶ There is no evidence in his records or in Adams’ monograph that Kuhn received a formal degree from the Royal Academy, but he left on his own volition, confident in the skills he learned.

Upon Kuhn’s arrival in New York in July of 1903, the letters to home stop until 1906; therefore, the majority of information comes from scrapbooks, provenance files, and Adams’ monograph. The timeline over the next several years, along with the motivation behind his movements, are vague and sometimes unclear. Adams notes that Kuhn’s main ambition was to be an entrepreneur. He found a studio at 119 East Twenty-Third Street in Manhattan where he kept painting, and he started making rounds to magazines and newspapers with his cartoons.⁴⁷ Business was initially slow in New York, so Kuhn went on the road in the fall of 1903 and traveled south to South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida,

⁴⁵ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1902,” October 29, 1902. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. Box 3, Folder 41, File 39. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/walt-kuhn-letters-to-family-228243 6 May 2015.

⁴⁶ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters To Family, 1903,” May 6, 1903. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. Box 3, Folder 42, File 9. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/walt-kuhn-letters-to-family-228281> 7 August 2015.

⁴⁷ Adams, 16.

painting souvenirs for tourists.

In the summer of 1904, in an effort to widen his circle of friends and business connections in New York, Kuhn joined the Kit Kat Club in New York. The club was founded in 1884 and was, as *The Art World* article in 1916 describes, “an organization for teaching and enjoying art together with social pleasures such as annual balls.”⁴⁸ The Kit Kat Club, among other things, put on an annual Artists and Models Ball that benefitted a scholarship fund for the National Academy of Design. The ball was considered the “oldest traditional costume ball” in the country and was very important to the organization for both fundraising and publicity purposes.⁴⁹ Kuhn volunteered his services by organizing the balls, producing amateur vaudeville acts, and painting decorations, a pastime he would enjoy for the remainder of his life. In the Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Kuhn kept several staged photographs of members in costume. *A Pirate Boy* (1910, Figure 4) shows an unnamed member, possibly Kuhn, in full dress as a pirate complete with dark face make-up and a wig. In the same file, Kuhn stands in a group photograph (1919, Figure 5) with one of his performers cheekily placing a pipe in the artist’s mouth; Kuhn’s suit and tie is broken up by this impromptu prop and the white bowler hat placed on his head. This early photograph shows Kuhn did not shy away from the limelight and enjoyed the humor of dressing up for entertainment.

One benefit of joining artists’ clubs, Kuhn discovered, was the exposure to other, more exclusive and well-connected clubs like the Salmagundi Club on lower Fifth Avenue.

⁴⁸ “Chris Kat and His Inn” in *The Art World* (New York, December 1916), 228.

⁴⁹ Adams, 17.

It is unclear the exact date Kuhn was invited to join, but he did exhibit there for the first time in 1905.⁵⁰ It was at this exhibition where Kuhn sold his first oil painting; the director of art education for the Brooklyn Public School district bought it.

At this point, in 1905, Kuhn's freelance illustration career became profitable, and he saw his drawings published in *Life*, *Puck*, *Judge*, and *New York World*. Three years later, in 1908, Life Publishing Co. published *A Little Bird Told Me!* (Figure 6), a compilation of seventy-four cartoons of birds in black and white. Thomas Craven, writing in *Cartoon Cavalcade* (1943), acknowledges Kuhn's work in both fine art painting, and in his career as a cartoonist: "And Walt Kuhn, now a modernist painter of all things, made charming little sketches of misbehaving animals, and naughty birds peering into ladies' bath houses."⁵¹ Craven's 1943 review speaks of Kuhn's career as a painter in the contemporary sense, in which Kuhn had achieved fame for his modern paintings, but also speaks of his cartoons during the apex of their fame. The two branches of artistry Kuhn mastered had little to do with one another, but acted as a bridge from the arts to performance. The cartoons had more in common with his skits for the artists' balls, with their satirical wit and outstanding costumes. For example, Kuhn's book *A Little Bird Told Me!* includes a dedication quote that reads, "Dedicated to a lot of people who take themselves too seriously," a quote that embodies the humor he incorporated into his skits, stage acts, and cartoons.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Thomas Craven, *Cartoon Cavalcade*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1943), 13. Craven's book *Cartoon Cavalcade* featured cartoons by American illustrators from 1883 to 1943.

⁵² Walt Kuhn, *A Little Bird Told Me!* (New York: New York Life Publishing Company, 1908), 2.

In order to keep his life drawing skills sharp for his illustrations, Kuhn joined the Artist's Sketch Class in New York where he and other artists pooled money to hire models. He used these sessions to strengthen his drawing and turned out over three thousand figure drawings. Sadly, only a handful escaped his destruction, as he was a self-proclaimed perfectionist and did not wish for anyone to see anything less than perfection come out of his studio.⁵³ According to Adams, Kuhn took this perfectionist attitude with him to the New York School of Art, founded by William Merritt Chase, where he joined the faculty in 1908 when they moved to Fort Lee, New Jersey. Kuhn adopted von Zügel's strict classroom demeanor, and quickly lost interest in teaching when the students refused to submit to the "Germanic discipline" that he thought was basic.⁵⁴ His disillusionment with teaching is evident in the lack of documentation in the Archives of American Art on his teaching career. However, based on a group photograph (Figure 7) in the Archives of American Art, it is evident that Kuhn taught at least one life drawing class to an all-male audience during the one semester he taught.⁵⁵ Based on personal interviews with the artist, Adams states that Kuhn decided the energy put forth to teaching would be better used for his own work, much of which he destroyed during this period.

In 1909, Kuhn married Vera Spier, a skilled jewelry designer whom he met at the artist colony in Woodstock, New York.⁵⁶ Vera's brother, LaSalle Spier, would become a close friend and collaborator with Kuhn through their mutual interest in music and theatre.

⁵³ Getlein, 3.

⁵⁴ Adams, 20.

⁵⁵ "Loose Items from Volume 5, circa 1900–1937," undated. *Photographs and Scrapbooks*. Box 24, Folder 4, File 11. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, American Art Archive, Smithsonian Institution.

<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/loose-items-volume-5-228904> 24 April 2015.

⁵⁶ Adams, 25.

Vera and LaSalle's parents, on the other hand, never met Kuhn in their lifetime but warmly exchanged missives with their son-in-law throughout the years. Kuhn's first letters to Vera's parents contained apologies for not first meeting them before Vera and he married; he wrote that he would "submit to any righteous wrath" Mr. and Mrs. Spier wished to let loose.⁵⁷ The Spiers responded soothingly, reassuring him that he was welcome into their home any time; why Kuhn and his in-laws never met after this point remains a mystery. Adams discusses the initial contact in his monograph in more detail but, still, there is no explanation; perhaps there is none to give. However, Kuhn made diligent efforts to keep in touch with his in-laws and create a relationship despite the distance. Kuhn sent his in-laws handmade birthday cards (undated, Figure 8) with endearing and humorous cartoons on the front, even while he was out of the country on business. Kuhn was notoriously private, and although Vera was his closest confidant and helped him over the years with designing and creating costumes and props, Kuhn rarely brought her on business trips, and kept her at arm's length when it came to onsite business ventures. The one place where Vera and Kuhn's career intersected was their annual summer trip to Nova Scotia, where they stayed in Blanford, at an artists' colony. Vera became familiar with the ever-changing crowd of artists and families, and she was often the subject of Kuhn's paintings such as *Vera Kuhn Reading by Seashore* (1912). Walt and Vera met William and Edith Glackens in Nova Scotia, and the couples became life-long friends.

In 1910, Kuhn began this annual summer ritual by traveling to Nova Scotia with his new bride, where he mixed business with pleasure and worked on oil paintings throughout

⁵⁷ Ibid.

the summer.⁵⁸ Up to this point in Kuhn's life, there is little evidence of his painting practice and nothing is present in the provenance files until 1910. Kuhn's palette noticeably brightened, and the academic rigidity in his draftsmanship started to loosen. *Summer Interlude* (1910, Figure 9) attests to this evolution from the muddy pallet of his Munich school seen in his 1908 *The Eye Opener* (Figure 10). *Summer Interlude* is also one of two entries he put in the Armory Show; one can assume he thought the brighter, more impressionist style was more progressive than his previous pieces. This stylistic change was possibly influenced by his time at the New York School of Art.⁵⁹

The illustrators known as The Eight, which included Robert Henri, John Sloan, and William Glackens, also made this transition in their painting practice from an academic tradition toward Édouard Manet's early figure impressionism.⁶⁰ Additionally, many of these artists, including Sloan, Henri, and Glackens, submitted their works to the National Academy of Design for the spring show of 1910. The academy rejected their submissions, but this seemed to only motivate them further to get their paintings some exposure. Sloan wrote to Henri, saying, "It looks as though they had cut me off from the exhibition game: must find some way to show the things."⁶¹ In response, Henri held a meeting in his studio two days before the Academy show, where he, Kuhn, Sloan, and others set forth a plan to

⁵⁸ Kuhn remained a cartoonist by trade at this time in 1910. He used his financial stability from the trade to experiment with different styles in oil painting. It was not until his start in show business when Kuhn dropped his trade as a commercial cartoonist.

⁵⁹ The only reproduction of *Eye Opener* is a black and white picture in *Art in America* (1961). There are three earlier paintings documented in Adams' *Catalogue Raisonné* of Walt Kuhn, but they have never been reproduced and are in private collections.

⁶⁰ Adams, 24.

⁶¹ Bennard B. Perlman, *Robert Henri: His Life and Art* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991), 93.

back an independent exhibition with two hundred dollars apiece.⁶² In consequence, The New York Exhibition of Independent Artists was organized as an “opportunity for individuality, an opportunity for experimenters,” as Robert Henri referred to it in his manifesto-like article featured in the May, 1910, edition of *The Craftsman*.⁶³ In the article, Henri championed the motivation behind the exhibition:

Freedom to study and experiment, and to present the result of such essay, not in any way being retarded by the standards which are the fashion of the time, and not to be exempted from public view because of such individuality or strangeness in the manner of expression.⁶⁴

The fashionable standards Henri refers to are more than likely the criteria set forth by the National Academy of Design, whose strict academism began to represent a conservative tyranny to the artists.

Henri’s proclamation also attempted to lay down a foundation for art in America that did not directly follow that of the European, mainly French, predecessors of avant-garde art:

As I see it, there is only one reason for the development of art in America, and that is that the people of America learn the means of expressing themselves in their own time and in their own land. In this country we have no need of art as a culture; no need of art as a refined and elegant performance; no need of art for poetry’s sake, or any of these things for their own sake. What we do need is art that expresses the *spirit* of people today.⁶⁵

Henri’s article commented on each of the artists featured in the show, emphasizing the unique characteristics of his or her own style. “Everett Shinn is there too, with his distinct

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Robert Henri, “The New York Exhibition of Independent Artists,” *The Craftsman* (May, 1910), 160.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

whimsical humor...He is full of enthusiastic interest in life,” and “Walt Kuhn’s work is full of rugged vigor.”⁶⁶ Kuhn’s painting *Tow Team* (1909, Figure 11) is one of four paintings reproduced in Henri’s article. Kuhn’s piece, along with *Road Breaking* (1909) by Rockwell Kent, *Flying Pigeons* (1910) by John Sloan, and *The Tenant’s Dog* (1909) by Hilda Ward, illustrate Henri’s principle arguments in the review by featuring banal, everyday life scenes that contradicted the principles and ideals of taste set out by the Academy. Although Kuhn’s work *Tow Team* represented a rebellion against tradition, its style bears a striking resemblance to his mentor von Zügel’s work. The main difference is, however, in the subject matter where Kuhn shows men doing manual labor, and not simply a pastoral scene. This can also be said for the similarly titled work of Rockwell Kent, *Road Breaking*, where the subject matter lays its weight in the daily activities of everyday people. Kuhn would hold strong to the proclamation Henri laid out for American art in this article, believing deeply in the character and quality of American art in its own right. Kuhn’s art was habitually characterized as ‘rugged’ by himself and critics; he felt that this quality is what made his art truly American.

The exhibition represented a turning point in Kuhn’s painting career; his loyalty to von Zügel’s academism and meticulous realism slowly transformed into a looser, brighter style once Kuhn was confronted with a notion of artistic freedom seen in the New York exhibition. In addition to the intellectual stimulation the exhibit provided, he also met Arthur B. Davies there, a painter and advocate of modern art in both the United States and abroad. Davies proved to be a great mentor and friend to Kuhn throughout his life. Davies

⁶⁶ Ibid, 170.

had a profound interest in and understanding of European art, both past and present. According to Adams, Davies further exposed Kuhn to Egyptian, Greek, pre-Columbian, and African art; Chinese scroll paintings; and the art of the Renaissance. Kuhn collected images of archaic Greek sculptures throughout his life, and covered the walls of his studio with them. This is evident in Toni Frissell's photograph for *Collier's* magazine, *Spaghetti Dinner in Kuhn's Studio*, and a photograph of his 18th Street studio (1943, Figures 12 & 13) in the Archives of American Art. Many of the portraits he painted of acrobats mimicked the geometry and chiseled features of these archaic busts as well, and will be discussed in depth at a later point.

In the fall of 1910 after his trip to Nova Scotia, Kuhn had his first one-man show at the Madison Gallery in New York. New York lawyer John Quinn, who maintained a substantial art collection, purchased *Salt Mists* (1910) for \$200, and *Frozen River* (1910) for \$300, a respectable number of sales for a premier one-man show.⁶⁷ After this initial meeting and purchases, Quinn proved to be one of Kuhn's staunchest supporters and collectors, and a life-long friend; in return, Kuhn advised Quinn on his art collection for many years. Quinn's affinity for Kuhn and his interest is shown in a group photograph (undated, Figure 14) at the Penguin Club's annual ball. Quinn and Kuhn stand side-by-side in matching Pierrot costumes designed by Kuhn, with William Bahr, Frederick James Gregg, and John Oattman in regular formal dress.⁶⁸ At Quinn's estate sale after his death

⁶⁷ Adams, 70. *Salt Mists* and *Frozen River* were never reproduced, and there are no pictures in the provenance file for viewing.

⁶⁸ "Photographs from Artists' Balls, circa 1908, 1918, 1919," undated. *Kit Kat Club and Penguin Club Records*. Box 3, Folder 11, File 13. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, American Art Archive, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Photographs-from-Artists-Balls--228194> 30 April 2015.

in 1924, it was recorded that he owned thirty-seven paintings and nineteen small sculptures by Kuhn, according to provenance records, many of which the artist bought back at the sale.

Kuhn's position in the art world had shifted and became more prominent during 1910 with The New York Exhibition of Independent Artists and his solo show at the Madison Gallery. The following year, Kuhn found himself in the forefront of the biggest art revolution of his time, while also welcoming his only child into the world. Brenda Kuhn was born on June 13, 1911 and Kuhn proudly announced in several letters, "I am a papa."⁶⁹ Like her father, Brenda had some health issues and Vera traveled to Washington, D.C., to stay with her parents while Kuhn worked on his oil paintings in Ogunquit, Maine, with LaSalle. The separation and sickly nature of their daughter during this time seemed to create tension. Kuhn wrote to Vera on August 17, 1911, "Got your woe-begone letter O.K. and hope by this time you are feeling a little brighter."⁷⁰ A month later, in September, Kuhn intimately wrote to Vera:

I have done a deal of very hard thinking since I left Fort Lee, and can say that matters have clarified themselves somewhat. A little use of logic and a better understanding of my own faults and weaknesses have, I trust, shown me the light if only to a small extent.⁷¹

After the mending of his and Vera's relationship, he and LaSalle continued for a short time in Maine, but returned home in late September of 1911. Vera returned again to

⁶⁹ Adams, 35.

⁷⁰ Walt Kuhn, "Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1911 August–September," August 17, 1911. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. Box 3, Folder 44, File 7. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-Letters-to-Family--297679> 11 August 2015.

⁷¹ Walt Kuhn, "Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1911 August–September," September, 1911 (date undefined on letter). *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. Box 3, Folder 44, File 7. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-Letters-to-Family--297679> 12 August 2015.

Washington, D.C., in December and his letters to her, from his studio in New York, start to mention the nascent idea of a new association of artists.

On December 9, 1911, while in New York for his show at the Madison Gallery, Kuhn wrote to Vera about the opening of the National Academy of Design show: “I hear it’s very rotten, worse than ever. It seems that all hands have been ‘fired’ again, and it only needs a match to set off the formation of a new society.”⁷² Kuhn’s letters to Vera over several days show much anticipation regarding the review of his Madison Gallery show, on the same day as the National Academy of Design show, December 11; Kuhn laments to Vera about his disappointment in the result. “The *Times* articles was spoiled by the opening of the Academy, so of course they crowded out my photo to make room for that ‘beautiful portrait group.’”⁷³ Additionally, he includes a clipping from the same day in the *New York American* of a review by the painter-critic Guy Pène Du Bois, titled “National Academy of Design Exhibit Opens. Superior to Former Ones, but Lacks Originality,” with the subtitle text, “Its Pictures Taken from Easels Worn Old in Service.”⁷⁴ The text mirrored Kuhn’s thoughts, and in the letter to Vera he wrote, “I think it’s about time for a revolt.”⁷⁵ The next day Kuhn contemplated on the nascent ideas and described the recent

⁷² Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1911 December,” December 9, 1911. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. File 29, Box 3, Folder 46. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-Letters-to-Family--297681>. 29 April 2015.

⁷³ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1911 December,” December 11, 1911. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. File 30, Box 3, Folder 46. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-Letters-to-Family--297681>. 12 August 2015.

⁷⁴ Guy Pène Du Bois, “National Academy of Design Exhibit Opens: Superior to Former Ones, But Lacks Originality.” *New York American*, 10 December, 1911. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. File 35, Box 3, Folder 46. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-Letters-to-Family--297681> 29 April 2015.

⁷⁵ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1911 December,” December 12, 1911 *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. File 33, Box 3, Folder 46. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

conversation with one of the Madison Gallery owners that piqued his interest in starting an association:

Sometime last week while talking to Mrs. [Davidge] & I made the remark that it was a shame that the illustrators could give an exhibition in the public library and why it wouldn't be possible for the ostracized painters to give a show there...what we need now is publicity. The stuff is there but everybody must see it. Beginning the first of Jan. I am going to organize a new society the plans are still in embryo state but clear enough in my minds [sic] eye to spell positive success. No one is in on it except Gregg, and he's "mumm," and the best advisor I could get.⁷⁶

Kuhn discussed a revolution that was going to take place, reflecting his definitive break with his past of academic tradition. Kuhn did not, in fact, wait until January. On December 19, 1911, the first meeting of the Association of American Painters and Sculptors took place at the Madison Gallery. At the first meeting, Henry Fitch Taylor, the painter and director of the Madison Gallery, acted as host and delivered an address to the painters and sculptors present, and some by proxy: Karl Anderson, Putnam Brinley, Gutzon Borglum, John Frederick Moorbray Clarke, Arthur B. Davies, Leon Dabo, James E. Fraser, William Glackens, Walt Kuhn, Ernest Lawson, Jonas Lie, Grover Luks, E. L. MacRae, Jerome Myers, Allen Tucker, and J. Alden Weir.⁷⁷ Taylor stated the intentions of the association in his address:

You have been asked to meet here this evening to take active steps towards the formation of a national association of painters and sculptors—an association of live and progressive men and women who shall lead the public taste in art rather than follow it.

The National Academy of Design is not expected to lead the public taste. It never did and it never will. And as no such organization as the one contemplated

⁷⁶ Walt Kuhn, "Walt Kuhn Letters to Family, 1911 December," December 12, 1911. *Walt Kuhn Letters to Family*. File 39, Box 3, Folder 46. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-Letters-to-Family--297681>. 29 April 2015.

⁷⁷ Walt Kuhn, "Association of American Painters and Sculptors (AAPS) Records: Minutes, 1911–1914." *Armory Show Records*. Box 3, Folder 5, File 2. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Minutes--228188> 25 February 2015.

exists in this country today, we must all, I think, admit the very positive need of forming one.

Recognizing, then, the need for such an organization, the only effective way of meeting that need is to set to work and form it.⁷⁸

Kuhn created a press release the following day stating the association's anti-Academy motives. Unofficially, Gregg served as a press agent for the association, and later for the Armory Show the organization would put on. Gregg fed notices to the press and published interviews regarding the group's goals through the media and the newspaper *The New York Sun*, where he worked.⁷⁹ The group met officially on July 31, 1912 to discuss the organization of a show, and elect their officials. Arthur B. Davies was nominated for president by Clarke and eventually elected to the office. Kuhn recollects in his pamphlet *The Story of the Armory Show* (1938):

Two things produced the Armory Show: A burning desire by everyone to be informed of the slightly known activities abroad and the need of breaking down the stifling and smug condition of local art affairs as applied to the ambition of American painters and sculptors. This was the one point. The other was the lucky discovery of a leader well equipped with the necessary knowledge of art and a self-sacrificing and almost unbelievable sporting attitude. This was the American painter Arthur B. Davies.

As put forth in his manifesto in the [Armory Show] catalogue, our purpose was solely to show the American people what was going on abroad, but this was only the half-truth; the real truth was that the Armory Show developed into a genuine, powerful, and judging from results, a most effective revolt, perhaps even more effective than the incident of the Salon des Refusés of Paris in 1864.

It is necessary to realize at this time most of the younger American artists, especially the progressive ones, had no place to show their wares.

⁷⁸ Walt Kuhn, "Association of American Painters and Sculptors (AAPS) Records: Minutes, 1911–1914." *Association of American Painters and Sculptors (AAPS) Records*. Box 3, Folder 5, File 3. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Minutes--228188> 25 February 2015.

⁷⁹ Dider Ottinger, "Off to the Armory Show!," *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution*, ed. and Casey Nelson Blake Marilyn Satin Kushner and Kimberly Orcutt (New York: New York Historical Society Museum & Library, 2013.), 185.

No dealer's gallery was open to them, the press in general was apathetic, maybe one in a thousand of our citizens had a slight idea of the meaning of the word 'art'.⁸⁰

Young, progressive artists like those who exhibited at The New York Exhibition of Independent Artists were typically rejected by the National Academy of Design, and therefore turned away from most commercial galleries. Kuhn credits two American gallery owners, Mrs. Gertrude V. Whitney and Mrs. Clara Potters Davidge, who provided exhibition opportunities at the Madison Gallery in New York, one of the few places progressive American artists could show.⁸¹

After the association's first meeting on July 31, 1912, Davies sent Kuhn the catalogue for the 1912 fall exhibit titled *Internationale Kunstausstellung des Sonderbundes Westdeutscher Kunstfreunde und Künstler* (International Art Exhibition of the Federation of West German Art-Lovers and Artists) in Cologne, Germany, while Kuhn was in Nova Scotia on his annual painting trip. Davies recognized the Cologne Sonderbund Show as a representation of contemporary European art. The show did not submit to the whims of the Royal Academy, making it the type of show they needed witness in order to fulfill the AAPS's objective. Art historian Kimberly Orcutt explains in her essay "Arthur B. Davies—Hero or Villain," "The most striking aspect of the Sonderbund exhibition was the dominance of van Gogh, with 130 paintings, and the major presence of Cézanne and Gauguin, with twenty-six and twenty-five works, respectively."⁸² Orcutt postulates that this exhibition is what convinced Davies to put the Post-Impressionists, particularly these

⁸⁰ Walt Kuhn, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York: Walt Kuhn, 1938). 4–5.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Kimberly Orcutt, "Arthur B. Davies – Hero or Villain," *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution*. (New York: New York Historical Society Museum & Library, 2013), 32.

three artists, at the heart of the Armory Show. The catalogue came with a note from Davies: “I wish we could have a show like this.”⁸³ Kuhn was just as excited to have received the catalogue as Davies was to send it. Kuhn decided it was mandatory, personally and professionally, for him to attend the show in Germany before it closed on September 30, 1912. In *The Story of the Armory Show* he recalls:

In a flash I was decided. I wired him to secure steamer reservations for me; there was just time to catch the boat, which would make it possible to reach Cologne before the close of the show. Davies saw me off at the dock. His parting words at the dock were, ‘Go ahead, you can do it!’⁸⁴

The impressionable Kuhn embarked on the most influential trip of his young career, and the beginning of an investigative and acquisition assignment, which would culminate in the Armory Show of 1913. Kuhn arrived in Cologne on the last day of the exhibition, September 30, and he successfully implored the organizers to allow him to continue visiting until the exhibition was taken down. He sent several postcards to Vera that day and excitedly wrote, “Sonderbund great show van Gogh & Gauguin great! Cézanne didn’t hit me so hard... I met Munch, the Norwegian this morning, fine fellow.”⁸⁵ Reflecting on the landmark exhibition, Kuhn describes the outcome of the Sonderbund show and what it meant to the organizers in his pamphlet:

The Cologne Exhibition, housed in a temporary building, had been well conceived and executed, in fact it became in a measure the model of what we finally did in New York. It contained a grand display of Cézannes and Van Goghs, including also a good representation of the leading living modernists of France. The show had languished through

⁸³ Brown, 47.

⁸⁴ Kuhn, 8.

⁸⁵ Walt Kuhn, “Organizer’s Letters: Walt Kuhn to Vera Kuhn, 1912–1913,” *Armory Show Records*, September 30, 1912. Box 1, Folder 3, File 11. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-to-Vera-Kuhn--228032>. 29 April 2015.

half the summer, much maligned by the citizens, but toward the end burst forth as a great success, with big attendance and many sales.⁸⁶

Kuhn visited the exhibition during the three days it was being taken down, and rigorously familiarized himself with as many of the artists and styles as he could. He was able to meet the sculptor Wilhelm Lehmbruck and secured several of Lehmbruck's sculptures for the show. Kuhn was able to get in touch with many artists, thanks to the staff at the exhibition.⁸⁷ During this time, he also went to see his old classmates from the Royal Academy of Munich who lived in Dusseldorf, near Cologne. On October 2, 1912, he wrote to Vera describing his visit with Younghaus, a classmate from art school:

It was very embarrassing for me when I left him, and I think he saw that I was disappointed when I asked him why he did not try this or that, his response was...being a professor is the whole cheer to him.⁸⁸

Kuhn's attitude towards his classmate's art reveals Kuhn's interest in progression, rather than pure academism and technical skill. Younghaus's role as a professor led his art in a more academic direction, avoiding the new styles Kuhn asked him about and keeping in line with von Zügel's aesthetic. Kuhn emphasizes this when he wrote, "You don't know how happy we should be that we have been doing honest art. It's worth a thousand professor titles and a billion dollars to boot."⁸⁹

Kuhn traveled from Cologne to Holland after having contacted several Dutch dealers while attending the Sonderbund exhibit. While visiting The Hague, Kuhn became

⁸⁶ Kuhn, 8.

⁸⁷ Kuhn, 9.

⁸⁸ Walt Kuhn, "Organizer's Letters: Walt Kuhn to Vera Kuhn, 1912-1913" *Armory Show Records*, October 2, 1912. Box 1, Folder 3, Files 14-18. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

acquainted with the French dealer, J. H. de Bois, who was preparing a solo show for the painter Odilon Redon at the time, and was able to secure a significant number of works for the show.⁹⁰ Kuhn recalls this first encounter with Redon's work: "I felt so secure of Redon's quality that I agreed on my own responsibility to have an entire room in our exhibition devoted to his work. This was fortunate, as Redon became a hit in New York."⁹¹ Kuhn flew from Amsterdam to Munich and while in Munich, he met a German picture dealer, Hans Goltz, who agreed to send works by Vasily Kandinsky and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner to the show.⁹²

Kuhn saw this trip straight from the beginning as a godsend; on October 8, he wrote to Vera: "I was so happy, I feel that this trip will act as a purgative and clarify things which would otherwise require years."⁹³ Throughout Kuhn's career, he refers to purging, expelling, and clarifying things as a means of new inspiration and gaining a better understanding of what true art is to him. At this point in his life, Kuhn purged the rules and principles taught to him by the Royal Academy in Munich, and seeing the freedom presented by Gauguin's arbitrary colors and van Gogh's expressive lines.

After Munich, Kuhn flew to Berlin and met Max Liebermann, a major player in the German Expressionist movement, through the art dealer Paul Cassirer. In his letter of October 2, Kuhn referred to Liebermann as "a peach," and he "was able to spend a whole

⁹⁰ Gail Stavitsky, "Walt Kuhn: Armory Showman," *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution*, (New York: New York Historical Society Museum & Library, 2013), 45.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Stavitsky, 45. Kuhn wrote in his pamphlet on the Armory Show that he took a "flying trip" to Munich and Berlin.

⁹³ Ibid.

morning with the old master.”⁹⁴ The encounter with the progressive Liebermann contrasted harshly with his rendezvous with Younghaus, whose work was a “pitiful shock.” Analogous to his feelings about Younghaus, he references von Zügel in the same letter. After passing by a gallery with several of his former professor’s paintings in the window, Kuhn expresses:

Well it’s just as I told you; this trip is going to do a lot toward cleaning my mind today. Zügel looks to me like a man with a lot of knowledge and hardly anything else. It was another shock. It showed that I hadn’t spent the last 10 years in vain anyway. Zügel’s color today looks to me like mud, and even the drawing is mechanical and simply clever. That settles the old man for me, all though he was the one to roughhouse me... I guess after all artists are not made, for if they were, Zügel would be a Christ. I’m sorry now that he was invited to our show.⁹⁵

Kuhn had invited von Zügel to participate, but much to his former student’s relief, von Zügel never did.

Kuhn left Germany for Paris and arrived on October 25, 1912, reinvigorated from his experiences in Cologne, Munich, and Berlin. He looked up Walter Pach, an American artist residing in Paris, whom Kuhn would later laud in his Armory Show pamphlet. Kuhn wrote about Pach’s invaluable service to the acquisition of European works for the Armory Show:

...Walter Pach, who later furnished inestimable service to our undertaking. To his wide acquaintanceship among French artists and

⁹⁴ Walt Kuhn, “Organizer’s Letters: Walt Kuhn to Vera Kuhn, 1912–1913,” October 2, 1912. *Armory Show Records*. Box 1, Folder 3, File 49. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-to-Vera-Kuhn--228032> 30 April 2015.

⁹⁵ Walt Kuhn, “Organizer’s Letters: Walt Kuhn to Vera Kuhn, 1912–1913,” October 8, 1912. *Armory Show Records*. Box 1, Folder 3, File 41. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Walt-Kuhn-to-Vera-Kuhn--228032> 30 April 2015

dealers, the advantages of his linguistic abilities and general knowledge of art, should be credited a large measure of our success.⁹⁶

Paris was a hotbed for avant garde styles, and international artists flocked there for both education and inspiration. It was the center of the cultural world, and had changed considerably from Kuhn's short three-month stay ten years before. Milton Brown, art historian and author of *The Story of the Armory Show*, describes Paris of 1912:

...a rich layer cake of cultural activity. There were many new sensations, insurgent movements in all the arts, a general ebullience of creativity, which would be difficult to miss if one were intellectually alive. One could see the Diaghilev ballet or hear the music of Stravinsky and Schoenberg. The world of the visual arts was in constant ferment and new eruptions were occurring almost daily.⁹⁷

Kuhn expresses the attraction of Paris in his letter to Vera on October 28, but adamantly states that Paris is "no place to stay for us. We've got a healthy American germ that is personal and the art of the future. America in spite of its newness is destined to be the coming centre."⁹⁸ Unlike many of the artists and the majority of art collectors at that time who were attracted to European modernism in Paris, Kuhn continued to maintain a steadfast personal loyalty to American art and, to a point, to the principles Henri promoted in his *The Craftsman* manifesto.

Kuhn's heart lay with American art; however, the professional objective of the exhibit was to show America what else was happening in the art world outside the National Academy of Design. Therefore, he requested additional support from Arthur B. Davies in the large task of surveying and collecting works in Paris. Kuhn recalls, "One night in my

⁹⁶ Kuhn, 10.

⁹⁷ Brown, 48.

⁹⁸ Walt Kuhn, "Organizer's Letters: Walt Kuhn to Vera Kuhn, 1912-1913," October 28, 1912. *Armory Show Records*. Box 1, Folder 4, File 7. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

hotel the magnitude and importance of the whole thing came over me. I suddenly realized that to attempt to handle it alone, without Davies, would be unfair to the project.”⁹⁹ Davies arrived in Paris on November 5, 1912, less than a week after Kuhn’s request, and the pair set to work.

Pach introduced them to the Duchamp Villon brothers, who showed them the scandalous *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) by Marcel Duchamp. In Kuhn’s later account, it “became the *succes de scandale* of our exhibition in all three cities.”¹⁰⁰ Davies and Kuhn also met William Glackens, who had recently aided in curating the Albert Barnes’ collection and, consequently, was intimately familiar with the Parisian art scene. Glackens, in turn, put Davies and Kuhn together with Alfred Henry Maurer, another American painter in Paris who was, as Gertrude Stein wrote, “an old habitué” at her Paris salon.¹⁰¹ Maurer was in sync with the art dealers in the French art scene, such as Ambroise Vollard, and the American expatriates who participated in it, such as Gertrude Stein, both of whom he put Kuhn and Davies in touch with.¹⁰² Kuhn and Davies were able to see Vollard’s collections, which would have contained an impressive number of Cézannes. Shortly after the conclusion of the Armory Show, Kuhn started to emulate Cézanne in his still lifes, and sustained a lifelong admiration for the artist, which he preserved in an article he wrote years later.¹⁰³ In his *The Story of the Armory Show*, Kuhn would describe Vollard

⁹⁹ Kuhn, 11.

¹⁰⁰ Kuhn, 11.

¹⁰¹ Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Penguin Random House, 1932), 57.

¹⁰² *The Armory Show at 100: Autumn* (New York: New York Historical Society Museum & Library). armory.nyhistory.org/autumn. 26 January 2015.

¹⁰³ *Sap Bucket and Apples*, 1947, *Apples in Wooden Bucket*, 1948. Walt Kuhn’s article was titled “Cezanne: Delayed Finale,” *Art News*, April, 1947, 19.

as “formidable” and “although willing to listen remained somewhat noncommittal.”¹⁰⁴

Vollard remained noncommittal to sending works to the Armory Show, but eventually the organizers were able to secure several Cézannes.

In an October 31, 1912, letter to Vera, Kuhn states he was scheduled for a visit to Picasso’s studio. While it is unclear who introduced Davies and Kuhn to Picasso or when the visit actually took place, it may be safe to assume that Gertrude Stein made the introduction, as she was consistently the American connection for French modernists. Kuhn had seen works by Picasso at the Sonderbund before this letter, and probably at other Parisian dealers, too; however, there was no experimentation with Cubism in what he saw. He wrote to Vera on October 31, “Picasso is the great man here. I have seen some really fine things by him but they were not cubistic...I expect to see Picasso; apparently he’s the woozy man of mystery.”¹⁰⁵ The only evidence, a very significant piece, of their meeting is the handwritten list (1912, Figure 15) that Picasso gave Kuhn and Davies of other artists that should be included in the show. After Kuhn visited Picasso and saw Cubism for the first time, it deepened his understanding of Cézanne, as illustrated in his letter to Vera on November 6, 1912:

I sum [Cubists] up as intensely interesting now that I have had a chance to study them — mostly literary, and lacking in that passion or sex evidence which is absolutely necessary for me. However they have helped me understand Cézanne. He’s growing every day with me...¹⁰⁶

Davies and Kuhn left Paris shortly after their visit with Picasso to attend Roger Fry’s

¹⁰⁴ Kuhn, 10.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn to Vera Kuhn, 1912–1913.” *Organizer’s Letters*. Box 1, Folder 4, File 22. Armory Show Records. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/walt-kuhn-to-vera-kuhn-228033>, 26 January 2015.

second Grafton Gallery Show in London, and for Davies to call on several wealthy patrons. “Many of the lenders to the Grafton Gallery exhibition transferred their items to our show,” Kuhn recalls.¹⁰⁷ Shortly thereafter, Kuhn and Davies set sail for home on November 21 aboard the S.S. *Celtic*. On the ship, they began the arduous process of translating some of van Gogh’s letters to his brother Theo; Kuhn dictated, and Davies transcribed. This was probably the first time they had ever been translated into English, but remained unpublished, as noted in the Archives of American Art.¹⁰⁸ Alternatively, their translation of several sections of Gauguin’s travel journal from Tahiti, *Noa-Noa*, were published in pamphlet form to sell at the Armory Show. These translations no doubt gave Kuhn a better grasp of European art in general.¹⁰⁹

Kuhn’s understanding of Picasso, Cubism, and European modernism would grow deeper in the years to come, but at this point he was still green in terms of understanding the contemporary art scene. This circumstance, however, did not hinder the procurement of progressive works of art. Kuhn wrote to Vera from Paris on November 6, 1912:

I have made tremendous progress in my sense of good things and will probably be jumped on for bringing over things which they will at first consider to be too wild but I have been inspired by the possibilities and am going to be a sport. We will show NY something they never dreamed of.¹¹⁰

Kuhn was accurate in his prediction; works such as *Nude Descending a Staircase*, Matisse’s *Blue Nude* (1907), and Brancusi’s *Mademoiselle Pogany* (1912) grabbed the

¹⁰⁷ Kuhn, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Walt Kuhn, “Letters of a Post Impressionist, by Vincent Van Gogh, Translated by Walt Kuhn, 1912” *Writings of Walt Kuhn*. Box 2, Folder 17, File 1. Walt Kuhn Family Papers. American Art Archive, Smithsonian Institute. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/-Letters-of-a-Post-Impressionist-by-Vincent-Van-Gogh-Translated-by-Walt-Kuhn--228139> 30 April 2015.

¹⁰⁹ Adams, 70.

¹¹⁰ Adams, 50.

attention of the American public and changed the face of the art market instantly.

The initial intention was not to flood the American public with the European avant-garde; it was to introduce the progressive art of America along with a few pieces of European modern art. The debate about modernism and the fate of progressive art in the United States was already a hotly debated topic among American artists, but the Armory Show brought the debate to the attention of the laymen.¹¹¹ It sparked the curiosity of thousands, while also creating a public platform for discussion. Kimberly Orcutt, an art historian and contributor to the exhibition catalog *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution*, examines the impact the Armory Show had on America's interpretation of modernism, and how the definition of that changed after being exposed to European modernism. She quotes an unattributed critic who wrote in *The Nation*: “[T]he battle of the critics may be fought within eyeshot of the hostile lines, and the discriminating minority of the public, the ultimate judge in these matters, may take its position for or against the new movements.”¹¹²

Due to Kuhn's and Davies' dedication in acquiring pieces in Europe, and the generosity of several dealers, the show ended up being heavy in European modernism. It was clear from the positive and negative critical attention the show received that the foreign artwork was at the center of attention. One anonymous critic considered the European artists “freaks,” and ridiculed New York in the journal *American Art News* for neglecting the numerous “sterling American painters” in the show, including Kuhn,

¹¹¹ Kimberly Orcutt, “Public Verdict: Debating Modernism at the Armory Show,” *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution*. (New York: New York Historical Society Museum & Library, 2013), 327.

¹¹² Ibid

Glackens, and Hassam; instead, the patrons ran “into the Armory ‘to see the freaks.’”¹¹³

Many shared this type of criticism, but it clearly did not prevent the financial success of the show.

In *The Story of the Armory Show* Milton Brown notes, “The sales...are a clear indication of the profound effect which the Exhibition had on collectors and on American taste.”¹¹⁴ At the end of his pamphlet on the Armory Show, Kuhn describes the impact he saw on American culture from the show:

Drabness, awkwardness began to disappear from American life and color and grace stepped in... The decorative elements of Matisse and the Cubists were immediately taken on as models for the creation of a brighter, more lively America. The decorative side of Brancusi went into everything from the milliner’s dummies to streamline trains.¹¹⁵

Color and grace also stepped into the art of America as well, transforming styles quickly and leaving movements like Realism behind in the dust. In *The Legacy of the Armory Show: Fiasco or Transformation* (2013), art historian Barbara Haskell describes this transformation about the aftermath of the Armory Show in the following years:

...Any artist whose work did not “show signs” of the latest European styles had “fallen behind,” it asserted. For realists, the verdict was devastating. As Ernest Lawson remarked to Henri soon after the show opened, “We are now old fogies, my dear man.”¹¹⁶

Haskell continues to explain that many American artists tried to “modernize” their style, some with success, like Davies and Kuhn, and some without what was perceived to be

¹¹³ “The Armory Exhibition,” *American Art News*, 11, no. 20. (March 1, 1913), 4. First seen in Stavitsky, 47.

¹¹⁴ Brown, 105.

¹¹⁵ Kuhn, 24.

¹¹⁶ Barbara Haskell, “The Legacy of the Armory Show 401. The first quote in Haskell’s essay is cited from Frederick James Gregg’s preface to *The International Exhibition of Modern Art* exhibition catalogue. The Lawson quote is cited from Ira Glackens, *William Glackens and the Ashcan Group* (New York, Crown Publishers, 1984).

success.¹¹⁷

The effects the Armory Show had on Kuhn's own art and creative thoughts were substantial. On November 11, 1913, on his last day in Paris, he wrote to Vera, "I feel great, and have mental material to last several years." The production of *Polo Game* (1914), *Bathers on a Beach* (1915), *Tragic Comedians* (1916), *Caucus* (1918, Figure 16), and *Harlequin* (1918) confirms this notion.¹¹⁸ Additionally, none of this would have been possible without exposure to Picasso, Derain, Matisse, and Cézanne.¹¹⁹ Kuhn's epiphanic descriptions of his ideas are underscored in the same November 6 letter in which he expressed his apathy toward Cubism to Vera. He wrote:

We have not been able to judge at home what this thing over here really means. The few imitators we knew could not do justice to it. I will try to sum it up for you in a few words. I have had the germ ever since that second summer in NS — it's nothing else but a development of what I was doing right along, 'The extraction out of nature of the most simple and expressive force' — Specifically varied according to temperament, in other words, no more picture painting which you know had been my watchword long before we heard of this. Today it simply means "absolutely no concession to any public other than the will of the artist."¹²⁰ [Artist underscored in original letter.]

The "summer in NS" Kuhn refers to in his letter is the same painting trip during which he painted his first fully impressionist piece, *Morning* (1912), one of two paintings he hung in the Armory Show, and also, incidentally, when he received the life-changing Cologne

¹¹⁷ Haskell, 401.

¹¹⁸ Walt Kuhn, "Walt Kuhn to Vera Kuhn, 1912–1913," November 11, 1911. *Organizers' Letters*. Box 1, Folder 4, 22. *Armory Show Records*. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/walt-kuhn-to-vera-kuhn-228033> 20 February 2015.

¹¹⁹ In Milton Brown's book *American Painting From the Armory Show to the Depression*, Kuhn's painting *Caucus* is dated 1916, but in Philip Adams' "Catalogue Raisonné" in *Walt Kuhn: Painter* it is dated 1918.

¹²⁰ Walt Kuhn, "Walt Kuhn to Vera Kuhn, 1912–1913," November 11, 1911. *Organizers' Letters*. Box 1, Folder 4, 22. *Armory Show Records*. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/walt-kuhn-to-vera-kuhn-228033> 20 February 2015.

Sonderbund Exhibition catalogue from Davies.

The years after the Armory Show showed great experimentation on Kuhn's part. He succeeded in adopting several styles he witnessed in Europe, and even played with abstraction in *Polo Game* and *Tragic Comedians*. However, like Davies, Kuhn became restless with abstraction after 1919 and returned to a more representational style, which reflected the major influence of the Armory Show. Kuhn would return to Europe several times during his lifetime, mainly to assist in curating personal collections, but this was by far the most profound international experience of Kuhn's life. He grew into his own during the acquisition trip for the Armory Show, accepting and rejecting what was true to the art he wanted to create. The first thirty-six years of Kuhn's life provided the young artist with a wide variety of opportunities not available to most during that time. Kuhn experienced the rugged Wild West, which inspired him to pursue his dream as a cartoonist, and alternatively immersed himself in the modern art world of Europe. Toward the end of his life, he would reject almost all of what he championed at this young age: the academism he learned from von Zügel and the progressive styles, including abstraction, that he encountered during the Armory Show. However, progression and modernism were fundamental in the evolution of his style throughout his life, and will be discussed in depth along with his place within American art and show business.

Figure 2: Walt Kuhn (Left) *Thunder Cloud*, (Right) *Ditto Minus Clothing*, 1899–1900, photograph.

Figure 3: Walt Kuhn, *Medicine*, 1919, watercolor.

Figure 4: Unknown Artist, *A Pirate Boy*, 1910, photograph.

Figure 5: *Group Photograph at the Kit Kat Club, 1919.*

Figure 6: Walt Kuhn, The Cover of *A Little Bird Told Me!*, 1908.

Figure 7: *New York School of Art Life Class, 1908.*

Figure 8: Walt Kuhn, *Handmade Birthday Card to Papa Spiers*, (undated).

Figure 9: Walt Kuhn, *Summer Interlude*, 1910, oil on canvas

Figure 10: Walt Kuhn, *The Eye Opener*, 1906, oil on canvas

Figure 11: Walt Kuhn, *Tow Team*, 1910, oil on canvas

Figure 12: Toni Frisell, *Spaghetti Dinner*, 1943, photograph.

Figure 13: *18th Street Studio*, undated, photograph.

Figure 14: Group Photograph at Penguin Club, undated.

Figure 15: Pablo Picasso, *Picasso's List*, 1912.

Figure 16: Walt Kuhn, *Caucus*, 1918, oil on canvas.

Chapter Two

Vaudeville and Popular Entertainment: The Great American Art

*“The revolving stage has a soul, it bounds forward to its task with a swagger, it prides itself on never making a mistake. It is American.”*¹
— Mary Cass Canfield, 1922.

The decade of the Armory Show led to much experimentation in Walt Kuhn’s work. Cubism and figurative abstraction made brief appearances in *Polo Game*, *Tragic Comedians*, and *Caucus*, and Kuhn started changing the subject matter of his works. Moving away from the typical seascape and still life, Kuhn began to take inspiration from popular entertainment, as seen in *Harlequin* (1918), *Burlesque* (1918), and *The City* (1919). Looking back on his involvement with the Kit Kat Club’s and Penguin Club’s annual artists’ balls, it should come as no surprise that Kuhn started to become inspired by the characters he was scripting and directing. In 1922, Kuhn decided to move this hobby to the big stage and began a second career as a creative director for shows on and off Broadway.² It was not unusual for artists of this time to become involved in some form of popular entertainment. In Europe, Pablo Picasso and André Derain designed sets for the Russian ballet; Picasso also frequented the Cirque Medrano in Montmartre where he found inspiration for his Rose Period paintings. American artists, such as the Ashcan group and Edward Hopper were frequent visitors to vaudeville theatres, and Everett Shinn and William Glackens formed their own theatre group in Greenwich Village.

¹ Canfield, 334.

² Kuhn directed several different types of theatre productions, including plays, variety shows, and vaudeville. The specifics of his involvement in each type will be addressed further on in the chapter. Additionally, Kuhn was also involved in the circus later on in his life, which will also be discussed.

Similar to his first job as a costume delivery boy, Kuhn's role as a creative director gave him the unusual perspective of stage life from behind the drop curtain. Kuhn's role allowed him to become familiar on a personal level with the performers, stagehands, and managers. This unique viewpoint is apparent in the shift of both composition and tone in his work from 1919 to 1929. In the beginning, he portrays his characters in the same manner as his American contemporaries, placing them within the background of the theatre. They are undefined within the composition, often blending into the props that surround them, as seen in *The City* and *Tragic Comedians*, mirroring how the subject would be viewed by an audience, or onlooker. In the works *The White Clown* (1929) and *The Man from Eden* (1929), created two years after his last gig on Broadway, Kuhn isolates his sitter through a neutral background. He focuses intimately on them and creates a composition that forces the viewer to concentrate solely on the performer. The direction of the performer's gaze is now outward, towards the viewer. These compositional devices not only encourage a direct connection between the viewer and the subject matter, but also reveal a perspective distinctive to those who are familiar with the trials and tribulations of the sitter's lifestyle. The viewer, a probable attendee of popular entertainment, is confronted with a psychologically intense tronie, reflecting the reality of show business instead of the joyful entertainer whose smile never fades on stage.

In order to fully understand this evolution in Kuhn's work, it is necessary to know the history of vaudeville and variety, the type of theatre Kuhn was involved in, as well as the lived experience of the performers he painted. Furthermore, Kuhn's place among his

contemporaries is important to understand, especially those in the United States who also found inspiration on stage. This chapter will outline Kuhn's career in the theatre industry, provide insight to the life of the performers Kuhn painted and directed, and situate Kuhn's work amongst American artists during his time.

In researching Kuhn's career as a creative director, it became clear that the categories of "lowbrow" popular entertainment at that time were commonly interchangeable, making it difficult to assign a specific category to the productions Kuhn worked on. The boundaries between the "lowbrow" forms of popular entertainment, like burlesque, variety shows, circus, and vaudeville, were fluid and almost non-existent. Each featured characteristics of the other and performers commonly performed their acts in one or all of these types of popular entertainment. Vaudeville, burlesque, and variety shows were performed in a theatre but were considered lowbrow because of their risqué or humorous characteristics. Highbrow theatre was relegated to plays, ballets, musicals and theatre productions that were singular and were not comprised of different troupes. The difference between the types of lowbrow theatre can be minor. Burlesque was typically more risqué and families did not attend those types of shows. Vaudeville and variety were more family friendly and featured humor and talent as their main attraction. The circus, not typically considered theatre because it was performed in temporary venues such as tents, drew audiences by playing on fantasies and exotic worlds. Although Kuhn consulted on several variety, burlesque, and circus acts over his lifetime, Kuhn worked mainly on vaudeville revues, which was deduced from the scripts, programs, and sketches in the Archives of American Art. Vaudeville generally featured

comedy, burlesque, circus, and variety acts performed by different troupes that collectively comprised a revue or show. Yet all of these types of popular entertainment featured clowns, showgirls, acrobats, and comedians. The fluidity of these categories of popular entertainment is obvious in Kuhn's paintings as they featured acrobats, showgirls, clowns, and comedians who often performed in the circus and vaudeville. Kuhn recognized the similarity and consistently referred to all of the above categories as 'show business,' and the people who worked in the industry as 'show people' in his texts and interviews.

Although vaudeville was born in the seedy Bowery district of New York as an offshoot from Parisian burlesque, it represented something uniquely American. Vaudeville was a more varied form of entertainment than its predecessors, yet it maintained an affordable reputation and offered itself to a wider range of audiences. Caroline Caffin's 1914 book *Vaudeville* describes vaudeville as "a very catholic and hospitable entertainment, embracing more forms of amusement than we could enumerate."³ Similar to the circus, vaudeville acts often traveled on a national circuit, which further exposed the performers to different regions as well as economically diverse audiences. America's distinctly unique past of popular entertainment provided a pool of inspiration for vaudeville. Many acts looked back to the blackface minstrels of the 1830s along with the melodramas, variety shows, and acts performed in the dime museums, such as P.T. Barnum in the 1840s.⁴ The resulting show was comprised of a string of unrelated acts aimed to fully engage and stimulate the audience. By mimicking the

³ Caroline Caffin, *Vaudeville* (New York: M. Kennerly, 1914), 13.

⁴ Snyder, 7.

fractured sense of modernity, discontinuity prevailed in vaudeville and variety shows.

This characteristic was further intensified by the captivating energy of the performers and quick-paced tempo of the music. Patricia McDonnell, author of the exhibition catalog *On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theatre and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art* (2002), gives a detailed description of what one might see in a vaudeville show:

Singers, “cooch” and jazz dancers, animal acts, bicycle stuntmen, monologists, magicians, acrobats, slapstick comics, dramatic skits, jugglers, puppeteers, rope skippers, lines of chorus girls, strongmen — all these and more took the stage.⁵

This description, however, seems to limit the scope of vaudeville. Caffin urges her readers not to put boundaries around vaudeville, and in her book “no attempt is made to cover the field of Vaudeville, for that field is as limitless as humanity itself.”⁶

The limitlessness of vaudeville is apparent in the wide breadth of works Kuhn directed from his amateur beginnings at the Kit Kat Club in 1909, to his last show on Broadway in 1949. This period of his life represented a marriage between his career as an illustrator, his passion for theatre, and his organizational and directorship talents. For many of the acts he directed, he also designed the costumes and drew out scenes for the actors to reference. The Archives of American Art provide programs from his days with the artists’ clubs that featured illustrations of his as decoration and points of humor. For his first show with the Kit Kat Club, Kuhn designed, choreographed, and produced Paul West’s stage act *King Herod’s Court*, otherwise known as *Salome’s Debut*, for the 3rd Annual Artists’ Masque Ball in 1909. In the program, Kuhn is listed as the chairman of the ball committee and the actor for Herod in the show. The next year the club put on

⁵ McDonnell, 13.

⁶ Caffin, 3.

Pirates of Panama, where Kuhn acted as the chairman of the ball once more, and his illustration *The Pirates' Lair* (1910, Figure 17) is featured in the program. *The Pirates' Lair* has a distinct similarity to many of the illustrations seen in *A Little Bird Told Me!*, as the act "Pirates of Panama" is represented in the program by six birds dressed in pirate costumes, smoking cigars. In 1916, Kuhn formed the Penguin Club and he carefully scripted the performances for the club's artists' balls. He designed elaborate costumes, backdrops, and props that took months to prepare. Guests who attended were required to wear costumes and were inspected at the door by a clown juror; later on in the evening, there were awards for the best costume. The Archives of American Art also store written notes on individual acts like "Tropical Night" and "Dance of the Wildmen," complete with stage directions, choreography, and costume ideas, but were not associated with any other the shows or programs. There is an unnamed typescript of a skit about a woman name Fatima, in it the announcer begins with:

Ladies and Gentlemen:

You are indeed fortunate to be present at this opportunity to witness the wondah of wondahs of the modern world.

The paa-formers which I am about to disclose to you has [sic] baffled the minds of our greatest scientists, philosophers, psychologists, ornithologists and obstetricists [sic].

You may have marveled at the pyramids of Egypt, the beauties of ancient Greece, at the magnificent history of Rome at its apex, but I am sure that at the conclusion of our entertainment you will agree with me that you have not lived in vain, and that you have enjoyed a show which has established a new standard of divertissement superior in beauty to anything hitherto exhibited to the great American public.⁷

⁷ Walt Kuhn, "Artists' Ball Scripts," undated, *Kit Kat Club and Penguin Club Records*. Box 3, Folder 12, File 3. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Artists-Ball-Scripts--228195> 26 February 2015.

In a monologue immediately recognizable as a standard introduction in show business, Kuhn captures his audience with novelty and canons of the intellectual realm, attesting to his long-standing position as an audience member to countless shows.

The program for the artists' ball in 1918 at the Penguin Club boasts the Japanese performer Michio Itow, featured in Kuhn's *A Night of a Thousand Pierrots*.⁸ At *A Night of a Thousand Pierrots*, Kuhn is photographed (Figure 18) with John Quinn, William Bahr, Frederick James Gregg, and John Oakman, the former two dressed in full costume and make-up as white-faced clowns. This photograph foreshadows one of Kuhn's most loved subject matters, the white-faced clown, which will win him much popularity in the future. Kuhn asked Itow to return to the ball the following year, in 1919, with the program boasting the "Battling Michio Itow and His Troupe Will Make the After Dinner Speeches."⁹

On July 11, 1922, Kuhn signed a contract to be creative director for Richard Herndon's *Pin Wheel*, where he would be working alongside the director of the show, Michio Itow. Kuhn worked on the entire show with Itow, but he also had the opportunity to design and produce an act in its entirety titled "Lilies of the Field," which made a splash in the press as a satirical ballet. In a 1922 review of *Pin Wheel*, theatre critic Ernest Brennecke applauds the "uproarious satire on futurist art and aesthetic dancing,"

⁸ Itow was a dancer at Greenwich Village Theatre. Michio Itow is also recorded as Itō and Ito in different sources. The programs and flyers in the Archives of American Art show the spelling Itow, which is what this thesis will utilize.

⁹ Walt Kuhn, "Dismantled Penguin Scrapbook, 1917–1919, 1926," undated. *Kit Kat Club and Penguin Club Records*. Box 3, Folder 16, File 7. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Dismantled-Penguin-Club-Scrapbook--228197> 26 February 2015.

in “Lilies of the Field.”¹⁰ The illustrator Charles Gordon Saxton sketched the act (Figure 21) while watching it at the Earl Carroll Theatre for the article, emphasizing the satirical nature of the act. In the press release for “Lilies of the Field,” Kuhn includes several quotes from the press as a marketing tactic for the act along with a photograph of the act (Figure 20):

Walt Kuhn’s delicious burlesque of classical dancing...— *New York Evening Telegram*

Six aesthetic tramps were ridiculously funny in a burlesque of pastoral dancing.
—*New York Evening World*

The exquisitely amusing bit of travesty, “Lilies of the Field,” brought forth roars of laughter. —*New York Evening Post*

By the shades of Manet, Diaghilev, and Isadora Duncan, these tramps are having glorious fun! So is the audience. The bacchanal exhausts itself finally. Wild abandon gives way to movements stately and sedate. The lilies are weary of their toil and prepare to retire, with expressions that denote consciousness of labor admirably performed. — *New York World*

“Lilies of the Field” turned out to be a huge financial and personal success for Kuhn. He was able to celebrate his debut with his friend, colleague, and model, George F. Fitzgerald, who starred in the act. Kuhn formed a friendship with the leading actor, Raymond Hitchcock, as well. He sold “Lilies of the Field” to other theatres, including the Adams Theatre in Newark on November 8, 1922, for five hundred dollars, to Roger Mills to be played at the Balaban and Katz Theatre in Chicago, and concurrently it played at the Mark Strand Theatre on Broadway in the show *The Man Who Played God* in October of 1922.

¹⁰ Ernest Brennecke, *Futurist Art Satirized on the Stage*. MWEZ + n.c. 1480. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, NY. 09 November 2013.

Philip Adams describes Kuhn's role as a "play-doctor," a position that sought to improve the quality of the overall show as to make it a hit on the big stage.¹¹ Kuhn's friendship with Hitchcock turned profitable when the actor asked him to doctor *Hitchy-Koo* in the fall of 1922. Hitchcock originally produced the play in 1919 but filed bankruptcy in 1921 due to its failings, according to his obituary in the *New York Times* in 1929.¹² Kuhn toured with the show starting in the Midwest and worked on it until it hit Broadway with success early the next year, in 1923. Simultaneously, he was contracted by George S. Kaufman to direct "The Music Ride" for *The 49ers*, which debuted in November of 1922 at the Punch and Judy Theatre. The critic for the *Evening Telegram* describes the actors and their horses riding around the stage in full gallop. The critic lauds "Music Ride" as the real hit of the show, and gives the reader a glimpse of the action:

...three men and three women galloping about the ring, varying their rides to suit the mood of the music. The stage picture is as broad and as bold as any number in the Chauve-Souris, and it has the requisite animal spirits.¹³

A colored drawing titled *Music Ride* showing caricatures of the actors in his act illustrates the fabricated horses the actors used to "gallop about the ring." Indulging in a bit of satire himself, Patterson James of *Billboard* refers to Kuhn's "Music Ride" in *The 49ers* as a "bit of good horseplay" in his review on November 6, 1922.¹⁴ The horses were box-

¹¹ Adams, 88.

¹² "Raymond Hitchcock Dies in California," *New York Times*, November 26, 1929.

¹³ "Miss Irwin Comes Back," *Evening Telegram*, November 7, 1922. Box 13, Folder 19, File 20. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/scapbook--228557. 28 February 2015

¹⁴ Patterson James, "New Plays," *Billboard*, November 6, 1923. Box 13, Folder 19, File 20. Walt Kuhn Kuhn Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/scapbook--228557 28 February 2015.

like in construction, visually similar to the props that Charles Ferrand, a member of the Penguin Club, is photographed making for *A Night of a Thousand Pierrots* at the Penguin Club in 1918 (Figure 21). “Music Ride” was essentially a reprise of the act “Morris Dance” in *A Night of a Thousand Pierrots*.¹⁵ George Kaufman and Kuhn stayed in touch after their success with *The 49ers*; Kaufman encouraged Kuhn to act as play-doctor to the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus in a letter in January of 1940:

I hear you might do some acts for the circus, and I certainly hope so, because they're great. Ideas, costuming, complete execution of the whole thing—no one can touch you at it. From what I've seen of both your acts and the circus acts, they can certainly use you.¹⁶

Kaufman's opinion of Kuhn's talents speaks to the success of Kuhn's work during the short period of time he had been in the business, and the high demand for his play-doctoring skills.

Kuhn was forced to bow out of full time show business when a duodenal ulcer almost killed him in the spring of 1925; however, in 1927, Kuhn agreed to direct and design the pantomimes and satirical ballets for another Richard Herndon show, *Merry-go-Round Review*. Using an act he wrote in 1923, “Petulant Petunias,” Kuhn once more invited George Fitzgerald to act in the show.¹⁷ Fitzgerald had an intuitive sense about the artist, and he appreciated the artistic atmosphere Kuhn created in “Petulant Petunias.” Kuhn's caption for his painting *The Man from Eden* (1930, Figure 22), which Fitzgerald is the model for, touches on these attractive qualities of the model and his history:

¹⁵ Sessions, 47.

¹⁶George S. Kaufman, “General Correspondence: 1940,” January 1940. *General Correspondence*. Box 7, Folder 20, File 2. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/general-correspondence-297802> 17 May 2015.

¹⁷ George Fitzgerald was the model for *Man from Eden* (1930), *The Camp Cook* (1931), and *Wisconsin* (1936).

Not from the Garden of Eden, but Eden Wisconsin where he grew up as a farm boy. He drifted with the show business to New York, and eventually to the artist's studio. He is a loyal admirer of art and artists and enjoys posing for such reflective pictures.¹⁸

This caption reveals Kuhn's interest in Fitzgerald as a person, not just as a performer in his acts. Kuhn reveals to the reader where the sitter is from, what he is interested in, and how they became acquainted. Someone unfamiliar with Kuhn's career in the theatre but familiar with his artwork would immediately recognize Fitzgerald in several other pieces of Kuhn's, such as *The Camp Cook* (1931) and *Wisconsin* (1936). Both of these works shed light on Fitzgerald's personal life, as opposed to his professional life where Kuhn had initially met him.

Though George Fitzgerald was a common name on vaudeville programs, there is little that exists today on his life other than a few letters to and from Walt Kuhn. Herein lies the paradox in reconstructing the history of vaudeville: gaining a complete understanding of the lives performers led and why they thrived on the roller coaster ride that careers in the theatre industry endured. Many of Kuhn's models were performers when he met them, like Ruth Johnson, who was a dancer at a nightclub, or Joe Pasco, who performed for the circus as a clown. However, the transient quality of the industry, along with economic swings or crashes like in 1929, caused many of these performers to switch professions, leaving their history in theatre behind. Ruth Johnson became a riveter at LaGuardia Airport (at the time Airfield), and Joe Pasco took a job as a gym teacher.¹⁹ Biographies are few and far between, focusing mainly on the lucky ones who

¹⁸ Bird, 10.

¹⁹ Mark Hanna, "Nude N. 3,000," *Collier's*, May 8, 1943.

became stars like Bert Lahr, Harpo Marx, and Alan Reed, and do not represent the majority. Benjamin McArthur, a cultural historian, discusses the inconsistencies when compiling a social and historical profile of actors and performers in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In his book *Actors and American Culture, 1880–1920*, he also brings up the issue of status within the ranks of theatre. McArthur writes, “Since drama had an established place among the arts, actors of the [high-brow theatre] outranked performers in vaudeville, burlesque, the circus, or the movies.”²⁰ This further complicates scholars’ attempts to understand how an emerging or veteran vaudevillian lived as a mediocre performer, and why they chose that life. Cultural historian Robert Snyder writes, “Psychological theories suggest that performers are motivated by one or more factors: desires for attention, approval and display, and needs for self-expression and a life of non-conformity.”²¹ In an attempt for accuracy and to fully grasp the life of a performer, this chapter includes accounts from performers who came from different socio-economic backgrounds and achieved different levels of success at different times in their careers, but who all performed in New York and on the road like Kuhn and his models.

Some performers started extremely young, traveling with troupes during summer break, like Frances Gershwin (1906-1999), the little sister to song writers George, Ira, and Arthur Gershwin. Frances started on the road at the age of eleven when she performed in “Daintyland,” becoming the first breadwinner among her siblings.²²

²⁰ Benjamin McArthur, *Actors & American Culture, 1880–1920* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1979), 30.

²¹ Snyder, 44–45.

²² Edward Jabionski, *Gershwin: With a New Critical Discography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988), 24.

Gershwin earned \$50 per week and traveled with a group of young performers.

Gershwin recalls a typical performance day: “After [the show] we go to the dressing room and wait for the next show. We play in this house four times a day that takes all my time. Then I go to the hotel and go to bed and that is the end of it...”²³ In an interview, Gershwin commented on her early success compared to her brother George: “George got \$15 a week playing on Tin Pan Alley, in those little square booths with an upright piano. But I was getting \$50. I was a hit.”²⁴ Gershwin was absent from the stage until 1927 when she performed in Kuhn’s last production, *Merry-Go-Round*, at the Klaw Theatre with Fitzgerald. She did not achieve long-term financial success on the vaudeville stage, nor did she search it out. However, due to her brothers’ compositional success, Frances’ recollections of her time on stage are recorded in history.

Theodore “Teddy” Bergman (1907-1977), like Frances Gershwin, started his career as an actor during his summer breaks from school at the young age of fourteen years old. Unlike Gershwin, Bergman did not hit it big initially but started at the bottom as an extra. Bergman found a booking agent who cast him with the French Opera Comique in New York for \$1 an hour, minus a ten percent booking fee. Bergman recalls a conversation he had with his mother, trying to convince her how much acting meant to him. In his biography, he writes,

You don’t know — you can’t know — what happens to me when I get on a stage before an audience. My whole body acts up. I — I tingle. Every time I’d do a

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ William Grimes, “A Gershwin's Album of Heady Family Memories,” July 5, 1993, *New York Times*.

play at school or at the temple I became a different person. I was so happy, I could bust.²⁵

Bergman experienced a number of disappointments in pursuing his dream of Broadway; he recalls, “I joined the gang of young out-of work actors at Walgreen’s Drug Store. I made the rounds of producers and agents. Chamberlain Brown sent me on one interview, nothing. It was a sad letdown to my dream of conquering Broadway.”²⁶ It was some time after this, in the winter of 1929, according to his biography, that the young actor was introduced to Walt Kuhn by Nellie Gray, a fellow actress.²⁷ Bergman writes:

During this period a young artist came...and volunteered to help design and paint scenery. He had been a seaman and had just returned from a seven-month journey around the world. Now he wanted to settle down and start painting. My remarkable physique led the artist to offer me \$1.75 an hour to pose for him. I was glad to get this, so three days a week I went to the artist’s one-room, sunlit studio, put on white face makeup, got into white tights and shirt and posed for what in time would become a world-famous painting. It now hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of New York.²⁸

Bergman modeled for *The White Clown*, which is considered one of Kuhn’s masterpieces, and will be discussed in the next chapter. He also modeled for *Athlete* (1929) and *Performer Resting* (1929). Unbeknownst to Kuhn, his model would also become world famous, but under the stage name of Alan Reed as the voice of Fred Flintstone.

Before Reed hit the silver screen, he was hired as the stage manager for Provincetown management at the weekly salary of \$40 in November of 1929 for the next

²⁵ Alan Reed Jr., *Yabba Dabba Doo! Or Never a Star: The Alan Reed Story* (Albany, GA: BearManor Media, 2009), 25.

²⁶ Reed, 41.

²⁷ Nellie Gray modeled for Walt Kuhn’s *Nell* in 1929.

²⁸ Reed, 44.

production of E. E. Cummings' *Him*. Although Reed was only cast for three of the nine scenes, two of the four actors neglected to show up and Reed and his co-star, George Bratt, had to do all nine scenes. Reed remembers, "It was bedlam! Such a putting on and taking off of crepe hair, wigs and makeup — with me having the additional task, as stage manager, of pulling curtains, setting up props, and making offstage sound effects."²⁹ This was the last time Reed would be on stage until after his career in radio took off. Although Reed came from a middle-class family with wealthy grandparents, he found himself penniless many times before he found stable financial success. Through his biography pieced together by his son, Alan Reed Jr., it is obvious that Reed was passionate about the industry and never thought twice about the course he set himself on at the young age of fourteen as an extra.

Unlike Reed and Kuhn, Bert Lahr (1895-1967), originally Irvine Lahrheim, was born into poverty. Although the family was hardworking, there was little money to spare on children's entertainment or gifts. As a child, he understood the family's economic troubles and did odd jobs to try to contribute. John Lahr, Bert's son, wrote in Bert's biography *Notes on a Cowardly Lion: The Biography of Bert Lahr*, "And he was often hungry. He began to steal. He remembers his thefts without emotion or guilt because there seemed to be no other choice."³⁰ Lahr became obsessed with the theatre at a young age, and the entrance fee was the only thing that held him back from attending daily. He would often travel down to Broadway to "[watch] a vaudeville show from the balcony."³¹

²⁹ Reed, 47.

³⁰ John Lahr, *Notes on a Cowardly Lion: The Biography of Bert Lahr* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 5.

³¹ Lahr, 6.

Even though Lahr was not an exceptional student, and rarely participated in school activities, he signed up to play a part in the school play when he was in eighth grade. Lahr writes of his father's experience: "He felt completely in control on stage, proud and curiously powerful. He enjoyed it all — the make-up, the clowning, the noisy laughter."³² His teacher also noticed his success on stage and commented, "Well, Mr. Lahrheim, if you don't go on the stage, you'll probably go to jail."³³ Bert's ascent to financial success was swift, and by twenty-two years old in 1917 he was cast into a professional circuit as the third comedian in *The Best Show in Town*.³⁴

Lahr recalls the hard work and long days required by this circuit, consisting of two shows a day, seven days a week, in towns west of Chicago while on tour with *The Best Show in Town* in 1917.³⁵ All his free time was spent coming up with new material; Lahr "thrived on the work."³⁶ When he and his co-worker Mercedes went on holiday during a break from the circuit, they pooled their meager savings and tried to economize on lodging and food. They only ate once a day and stayed at the dingiest of hotels. Lahr remembers complaining "about his legs aching, 'I didn't know it then, but I was suffering from malnutrition."³⁷ But looking back, Bert maintains, "I think those were the happiest days of my life."³⁸ Lahr had his greatest success in burlesque in 1921 when he starred in *Keep Smiling*, and was featured in his first movie, *Faint Heart*, in 1929. Lahr would

³² Lahr, 7.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Lahr, 15.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Lahr, 16.

³⁷ Lahr, 18.

³⁸ Ibid.

continue on stage and on film for the next thirty-five years, including his best-known role as the Cowardly Lion in the *Wizard of Oz* (1939).

In 1946, Bert Lahr was cast in the Broadway hit *Burlesque* to play Skip, a comical protagonist. Shortly after he was cast, Jean Dalrymple, the director of *Burlesque*, urged Kuhn to introduce himself to Lahr. She begins the letter with a recollection of their first meeting:

...it is such a long time since I was down in your fascinating studio...At that time we were talking about your doing some paintings of the circus, and it was Sport Ward, I believe, who suggested that I might be of help... In any case, right now I am producing "Burlesque" starring Bert Lahr, at the Belasco Theatre, and it just struck me that Bert, as one of the last of the American "clowns," might interest you as a subject.³⁹

Kuhn responded enthusiastically and praised the comic's virtues. "No one need try to sell Mr. Lahr to me. I consider him not just a clown, which he is par excellence, but a really great artist, a master workman at his profession."⁴⁰ Leonard Shir, Lahr's agent, also vouched for Kuhn as being "the best in his line."⁴¹

Kuhn's representation of Lahr in *Bert Lahr* (1947, Figure 23) epitomizes the passing of a bygone era, a time when clowns and comics embodied the lightheartedness that worn city dwellers craved. Lahr's face is full of expression, connoting that Kuhn intended this to be a formal portrait, not his typical tronie, where the model looks out at the viewer blank faced. Lahr's red lips are pursed, with the edges curled slightly in a playful gesture that is mirrored in his raised eyebrows. The off kilter hat plays along with

³⁹ Jean Dalrymple, "Portrait of Burt Lahr (1947), 1947–1952," *Provenance Files*. Box 12, Folder 5, File 18.

⁴⁰ Walt Kuhn, "Portrait of Burt (sic) Lahr (1947), 1947–1952," *Provenance Files*. Box 12, Folder 5, File 19. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Portrait-of-Burt-Lahr-1947--228546>

⁴¹ Walt Kuhn, "Portrait of Burt (sic) Lahr (1947), 1947–1952," *Provenance Files*. Box 12, Folder 5, File 1. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Portrait-of-Burt-Lahr-1947--228546>. 19 February 2015.

his nonchalant demeanor, emphasizing his role as a comic and as America's last great clown. The portrait was an instant success and was featured as the cover of the theatre program for *Burlesque*. The provenance file for *Bert Lahr* is filled with media photographs showing Lahr, Kuhn, Dalrymple, and several celebrities at the unveiling of the painting at a backstage party. Kuhn clearly hit it off with the *Burlesque* group and consequently painted a portrait of the comic Bobby Barry, who starred in the play with Lahr.

Kuhn's ability to fit seamlessly into the social atmosphere of *Burlesque* and create lifelong friendships with actors and performers is also captured in *Collier's* journalist Ted Shane's 1948 article for "The Week's Work." Shane quoted Kuhn as saying, "I love show people and would rather sit in a dingy dressing room with a 'hoke' comic than share caviar with Mrs. Vander Plush."⁴² George Karger captures this sentiment in one of the article's photographs (Figure 24) depicting Kuhn with Joe Bianco playing the trombone and Jan Dennis up on the model platform in Kuhn's studio.⁴³ Kuhn thoroughly enjoyed his models' company, and often tap danced for them in return for their services or performances, such as Bianco playing the trombone.

Kuhn wrote about his interest in show business and show people in an undated note titled "The Circus Is in Town." Kuhn writes of himself, "The direct contact with show business led to friendships with all kinds of show people, many of whom would

⁴² Ralph Sessions, "Walt Kuhn: Showman" in *Walt Kuhn: American Modern* (New York: DC Moore Gallery, 2013), 39.

⁴³ Joe Bianco and Jan Dennis are stated by Ted Shane to be models of Kuhn; however, Adams does not feature them in his "Catalog Raisonné." Additionally, the file folder handwritten by Vera Kuhn identifies Joe Bianco as Joe Jennings with Jan Dennis. Further research into the paintings they may have modeled for, and other possible connections to Kuhn, will be completed in the Archives of American Art.

later pose for his most serious pictures.”⁴⁴ The relationships Kuhn formed with his models and performers acted as a catalyst in the evolution of his artwork. He went from painting superficial images of common theatre characters to intimately portraying the psyche of performers. His personal knowledge of the lives they lived and the struggles they endured in order to entertain the general population lends his paintings a distinctive quality of individualism.

In addition to the emphasis of individuality in his works, Kuhn was also concerned with executing a purely American style of painting. During his travels for the Armory Show, he often wrote to Vera about the importance of America finding its own way in the art world, on November 11, 1912, Kuhn writes from Paris, “Davies agrees with me that America is the new soil and that the game is most interesting at home. Paris is a hot-house where they raise beautiful orchids and other wonderous plants but the rugged old pine grown best in arid climates.”⁴⁵ Kuhn’s metaphor of the ‘rugged old pine’ would come to symbolize modernism in America, and served as the icon for the Armory Show. Similarly, Kuhn liked to call his subjects “buck-eye,” ordinarily beautiful, real, and un-machined. On many of his trips to Europe during the 1920’s and 1930’s, Kuhn would refuse to visit European artists like Picasso, Braque and Leger with the Harrimans, an American couple he assisted in acquiring works for their gallery. He felt that their

⁴⁴ Walt Kuhn, “Re: The Circus is in Town,” undated. *Collier’s Articles about and by Walt Kuhn*. Box 19, Folder 33, File 45. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/-emph-render-italic-Collier-s-emph-Articles-by-and-about-Walt-Kuhn--228711>. 22 September 2015.

⁴⁵ Walt Kuhn, “Walt Kuhn to Vera Kuhn, 1912–1913.” *Organizer’s Letters*. Box 1, Folder 4, File 31. Armory Show Records. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/walt-kuhn-to-vera-kuhn-228033>, 26 January 2015

styles would taint his own, and he wanted to maintain that rugged American quality he lauded back in 1912.

In response to his need for uniquely American subject matter, Kuhn turned to vaudeville, the American born form of burlesque. In 1922, at the beginning of Kuhn's theatrical career, the vaudeville critic Mary Cass Canfield wrote an article in the *New Republic* magazine with the objective to define and examine what America's cultural contribution to the world was. "The Great American Art" would find its way into scholarship on cultural history and theatre over the next seventy-five years. The article begins with the artistic merits of other countries, such as the English being triumphant in the art of words, and the French excelling at architecture and paint; then she pauses to ask, "It is interesting to ask what, if any, is the great American art?"⁴⁶ In an answer to this question, Canfield identifies vaudeville as America's art form and artfully explores the American qualities and nuances of the vaudeville industry. Canfield declares that the perfection in vaudeville is what ultimately makes it American; the mind reels at the thought of how many rehearsals have brought this august production into existence. She writes:

Elaborate sets succeed each other, great masses of people parade across the stage and are gone, the orchestra melts from one tune to another, all with the bewildering ease of mastery. The pulchritude of the performers, the quality of the dancing, of the humor, of the costumes and scenic effects, cause our vaudeville to tower above the vaudeville of any other country, as the Woolworth Building would tower above the Invalides.⁴⁷

The perfection of vaudeville does not equate to grace or elegance, however; vaudeville can be filled with awkward movements, syncopated music, and choreography aimed to

⁴⁶ Canfield, 334.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

generate humor instead of impress. Canfield elaborates that the exaggeration of timed “physical buffoonery” is an art of form, an art form in comedy that is required to soothe the highly strung nerves of city dwellers. After all, “All art is an exaggeration.”⁴⁸ However, “in American exaggeration there is always a self-criticism, an undertone of humor.”⁴⁹ In this marriage of humor, grace and talent, Kuhn saw the spirit of America and the spirit of the American people in the vaudeville performers.

At this time, many of the Ashcan artists and Precisionists also saw these characteristics of vaudeville as alluring and specifically American. In the 2002 exhibition catalog *On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theatre and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art*, Patricia McDonnell and her contributors examine the connection these American artists, like Kuhn, had with vaudeville and film. They demonstrate how Charles Demuth, Joseph Stella, Everett Shinn, and Edward Hopper found ways to tap the complex onrush of urban modernity. In their rebellion against the traditional ways of the National Design Academy, these artists seized upon the animation of contemporary life, much like the Impressionists at the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁰

The Precisionists Charles Demuth and Joseph Stella were immediately attracted to the vibrant atmosphere of vaudeville. Demuth devoted several years, starting in 1910, to a series of vaudeville watercolors that celebrated this great American art. Dynamic energy fills works like *Two Acrobats* (1918, Figure 25) and *Acrobats* (1919), which depict the powerful, precise movements and poses of the acrobats during their

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ McDonnell, 27.

performance. In recognition of America's strength in vaudeville, Demuth wrote an undated play called "*You Must Come Over, 'A Painting: A Play*."⁵¹ Demuth was more receptive than his contemporaries to the "stimulating, yet still marginal, climate" of vaudeville, according to the scholar Laural Weintraub, and he captured the sights of the industry before it became increasingly popular to do so.

Joseph Stella's *The Voice of the City of New York Interpreted: The White Way* (1920, Figure 26) concentrates less on the performance and more on the atmosphere of vaudeville, which mimicked modernity. Historian William R. Taylor's observation of this atmosphere can also be seen in the fractured composition of Stella's painting:

...each new genre of commercial culture compressed a representation of city life into its format. These new genres had in common a seemingly random, potpourri organization that continued to dramatize the discontinuity, the kaleidoscopic variety, and the quick tempo of city life, as in the vaudeville revue.⁵²

Stella's use of fragmented planes and saturated colors echoes the fast-paced acts seen in vaudeville. The somewhat disjointed composition is dissected by highlighted diagonals and bisected by two parallel white lines. These divisions are a formal device to emulate the allure of the new electric light systems in the big vaudeville houses. Stella's painting acknowledges the effects urbanization had on society, the same ones that the German sociologist Georg Simmel theorized about in his work *The Metropolis and Mental Life*. McDonnell points out that Simmel blamed the constant bombardment of stimulation and discontinuity in city dwellers' lives for the blasé outlook common in modern societies. Aggressive marketing tactics used by popular entertainment tycoons and artists were a

⁵¹ Laural Weintraub, "Demuth's Vaudeville Watercolors," in *On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theatre and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 124.

⁵² McDonnell, 9.

result of desensitization of their target group. It was becoming progressively more difficult to grab the attention of their audience due to the heightened stimulation constantly surrounding city life. For example, the term “White Way” refers to the newly illuminated streets of the theatre district. Never before were people confronted with such a sight of modernity. Each theatre had its own sign designed to pull city dwellers off the street into their darkened theatre for a respite from daily life.

Electric lighting also played a large part in the works of Everett Shinn, who used it as a dramatic, formalistic device to portray the excitement and entertainment of vaudeville. Sylvia Yount, the author of “Shinn and the Intimate Spectacle of Vaudeville,” an essay in McDonnell’s exhibition catalog, examines Shinn’s interest in the theatre in relationship to his reputation as an urban realist.⁵³ According to Yount, Shinn employed dramatic and modern pictorial devices to emphasize the interchange between “performer” and “spectator.”⁵⁴ Shinn focused on the overall effect of vaudeville, as opposed to unique depictions or individual narratives; this was a common theme in the vaudeville industry as well, and it was successful in keeping the audience’s attention. These distinct choices in perspective are reflected in *The Monologist* (Figure 27) of 1910, one of Shinn’s New York vaudeville images. The artist places the viewer backstage, looking out from stage right onto the performance and the audience. Like Stella, Shinn utilizes light to capture the energy of the performance and a fragmented picture plane with a cropped composition to modernize the image. Shinn uses the same diagonal lines to mimic the newly installed electric lights in the vaudeville houses. Shinn also had a

⁵³ Yount, 158.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 159.

long history with theatre starting in his early student days at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he participated in the burlesque shows.⁵⁵ He then moved to New York where he established the Waverly Street Players with William Glackens, as well as the Little Theatre in Greenwich Village. Shinn maintained a long relationship with the impresario David Belasco, which then led to a large commission for Shinn to decorate Belasco's theatre with murals.⁵⁶

Turning away from the spectacle, Edward Hopper did not follow in the footsteps of the Ashcan school, but instead focused on the quieter moments of theatre. In *Le Soir Bleu* (1914, Figure 28,) audience members are exchanged for café customers, and a performer, a white-faced clown, is seated among them. Like Kuhn, Hopper takes a moment to examine the performer off stage in this painting, offering a look at what a show person might do after their performance. This early work shows several disparate café customers sitting on a terrace, with decorative paper lamps hanging from an unseen ceiling. Three figures, including the clown, are seated around the middle table with a waitress standing adjacent to them, presumably waiting for them to order. Hopper squeezes in a table on each side of the composition, one with an elegantly dressed couple drinking wine, and the other with a forward-facing man smoking a cigarette. Despite the number of figures in the painting, each person seems aloof and there is little personal interaction among the customers. The only exception is a possible conversation between the Van Gogh-esque figure with the hat and the man to his right with the epaulettes on his jacket. Hopper uses this compositional device to mimic the lack of intimate connections

⁵⁵ Ibid., 159.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 160.

in society as a result of modernity. He frequently champions the isolated city dweller set in an urban environment, but here he manages to create an atmosphere of isolation despite the crowded venue.

Singled out in the composition by color and form, the clown is the focal point of this piece. Hopper saturates the background with blue to form the sky and the smooth shadow of the mountains, which outlines the clown's pale visage and fluffy white costume. The costume functions as a uniform in this painting, identifying the clown as an entertainer, and therefore placing him in a specific social stratum and role in society. The clown's distinctive introspective demeanor, however, dispels the expectations that are aroused by his costume. Additionally, his downturned gaze conflicts with the wondering eyes around him, further removing him from the role as an entertainer. The juxtaposition of the clown and the nearby costumers reveals that all roles experience social alienation in modern society, even those whose function in society is to alleviate the burdens of modernity through entertainment. Hopper's paintings depict the individual consequences of urbanism that are not often represented pictorially or discussed at that time, but are experienced by city dwellers on a daily basis: isolation, inwardness, and ambivalence toward spectacle.⁵⁷

Hopper's *Le Soir Bleu* and many of Kuhn's portraits of performers recognize the stigma that surrounded performers at that time. Americans in the early decades of the twentieth century held strong beliefs that performers lacked religious, ethical, and social values, which in turn magnified the performers' feelings of alienation and isolation. In

⁵⁷ Robert Silberman, "Hopper and the Theatre of the Mind," in *On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theatre and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002) 153.

his autobiography *Harpo Speaks!*, Harpo Marx regales his readers with story upon story of his experiences on the road, growing up in vaudeville. Early in his career, he recalls the prejudices his family encountered on the road in the Midwest and the South:

We had to brazen our way into strange towns in the Midwest and down South, where we knew we had three strikes against us. One: we were stage folks, in a class with gypsies and other vagrants. Two: we were Jewish. Three: we had New York accents.⁵⁸

Many actors and troupes were on a circuit, where they traveled around the country to different states, performing up to three times a day and traveling by train to their next venue. The railroad industry took advantage of these transients and created a niche for them, which was a more affordable but far from comfortable option. Marx describes the “tourist” car they occupied as being treated poorly by the railroads, not even allowing them to get off at the station, often leaving his family “in freight yards, along with pig iron, sheep, and cattle.”⁵⁹ On top of the demeaning traveling conditions and people’s general distrust, performers frequently dealt with abuse from their audience, especially if their show did not entertain as expected. It was not uncommon for people to throw leftover food items at the act if they were dissatisfied. Marx gives his reader a glimpse into a typical evening when the audience wasn’t pleased: “We were pelted with sticks, bricks, spitballs, cigar butts, peach pits and chewed-out stalks of sugar cane. We took all this without flinching.”⁶⁰

Life on stage was never easy, even when stars like Marx made it big. When they became popular, every producer wanted to sign them up for a show, resulting in a

⁵⁸ Harpo Marx and Rowland Barber, *Harpo Speaks!* (Pompton Plains, NJ: Limelight Editions, 1962), 98.

⁵⁹ Marx, 131.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

constant bombardment of work. After the Marx Brothers' first big hit *I'll Say She Is* (1924), theatre impresario Florenz Ziegfeld, producer Charles Dillingham, and the Shuberts organization came after them. The Marxes were able to catch the interest of Sam Harris, who signed on George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, the same two directors Kuhn worked with in 1923 for *The 49ers*, and together they produced *The Cocoanuts*. The show ran for a full season on Broadway and took to the road for two years. In 1933, Marx did a grueling tour in Russia where he performed for six weeks in the dead of winter. Moscow required two weeks of him, then a week in Leningrad, a week of one-night stands in smaller cities, and another two weeks in Moscow.⁶¹ Eight years later, when World War II started, Marx, disqualified from duty, served as an entertainer for the troops. He writes, "For four years I toured the GI Circuit. I traveled two hundred thousand miles and played for half a million troops and defense workers."⁶² The devotion Marx made to the industry is clear, as is his commitment to entertaining masses of people. In this sense, Kuhn, more than the majority of painters, could relate to the grueling hours, long traveling times, and the sheer mental and physical excursion entertaining required. Marx, at the age of sixty-five, had his first of many heart attacks, and was prescribed early retirement by the doctors, as the strenuous work of performing was contributing to his high blood pressure. Kuhn is less clear on his own doctor's prescriptions after his near-death experience in 1925, but he was also forced into early retirement from show business. The question is raised: Why is an industry as stressful and cutthroat as popular entertainment so intriguing to actors and directors alike?

⁶¹ Marx, 318.

⁶² Ibid., 415.

In January 1948, Kuhn wrote an article for *Collier's* called "High Top – Little Top" to accompany his drawings of the circus. His draft to *Collier's* includes his reasons for why he and the world loved show business:

Where is there a man, woman or child who can resist [show business]? I never could—man and boy, I have followed show business in general. Why do we all feel that way about it? Because [show business] is a gorgeous mirror of all that is grand and beautiful in life. The rhythm of the aerialists, the nervous grace and fire of the horses, the ponderous feeling of weight and power imparted by the elephants.⁶³

The spectacle, the magic, the unrelenting drive to amaze and entertain drew city dwellers and performers alike. There was nowhere else in the world a performer could feel the way they did on stage, and nowhere else an urbanite could escape the reality they lived day-to-day. Kuhn, Hopper, and the Ashcan artists saw popular entertainment as a part of modern American society, one that was largely being ignored by American artists at the time. Furthermore, the experience of vaudeville and popular entertainment in general mimicked the urbanism of New York, while concurrently administering a relief from the desensitizing effects of over stimulation. Kuhn is set apart from his contemporaries because of his firsthand experience and compassionate perspective, which provided a unique and introspective vision in his work. Kuhn's role in the great American art of vaudeville establishes an intimate connection with his subject matter; in turn, he created sensitive and complex works, which simultaneously entertain the viewer aesthetically and intrigue them intellectually.

⁶³ Walt Kuhn, "High Top – Little Top," undated. *Collier's Articles about and by Walt Kuhn*, 1946, 1948. Box 19, Folder 33, File 37. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/-emph-render-italic-Collier-s-emph-Articles-by-and-about-Walt-Kuhn--228711>. 22 September 2015.

Figure 17: Walt Kuhn, *The Pirates' Lair*, 1909. Pen and ink drawing.

Figure 18: *Group Photograph at Penguin Club, 1918.* "Top W. K. John Quinn Wm Bahr. F.J Gregg – John Oattman as listed"

Figure 19: Charles Gordon Saxton, *Lilies of the Field* sketch, 1922, newspaper illustration.

WALT KUHN'S "LILIES OF THE FIELD"

THE FAMOUS
TRAVESTY ON CLASSICAL DANCING

WHAT THE PRESS HAS TO SAY ABOUT THIS ACT:

The exquisitely amusing bit of travesty, "Lilies of the Field," brought forth roars of laughter.—*N. Y. Evening Post.*

"Lilies of the Field," the broad burlesque by hoboes, is a hit.—*N. Y. Evening Journal.*

The delicious travesty of Walt Kuhn's hoboes at their so-called classical dancing.—*N. Y. Herald.*

Six aesthetic tramps were ridiculously funny in a burlesque of pastoral dancing.—*N. Y. Evening World.*

Walt Kuhn's delicious burlesque of classical dancing called "Lilies of the Field," and in it, to the strains of music usually associated with ambitious attempts at classical dances a group of six tramps in tatters prances about with all the mannerisms of Isadora Duncan and her many imitators. It goes like a breeze.—*N. Y. Evening Telegram.*

Walt Kuhn's uproarious satire on aesthetic dancing—"Lillies of the Field."

Lily No. 1 gracelessly clammers over the foreground—a white-clad lily, woefully be-whiskered; Lily No. 2 sports a battered silk top hat—crawls in on all fours from the left wing. Creeping, stumbling, sneaking on from every imaginable nook and corner of the stage appears the whole bevy.

In attitudes of mid-summer languor they drape themselves over the props—when suddenly the music shifts to Delibes's "Pizzicati."

The siesta is interrupted. Legs and arms start cavorting about the meadow in grotesque perversions of eighteenth-century ballet movements. One hand brandishes a bouquet of violets. Unshaven physiognomies leer and grin and ogle and grimace in weird attempts at ingratiation, while the tune changes to the perennially charming "Hearts and Flowers."

Bizarrie now reaches its height in a strange intermingling of the mannerisms of the seasoned hobo and of the experienced aesthete. Soul-thrilling are the rhythmic contortions that accompany the exciting lift of the unpronounceable Drida's "Savonir."

By the shades of Manet, Diaghilev and Isadora Duncan, these tramps are having glorious fun! So is the audience. The bacchanal exhausts itself finally. Wild abandon gives way to movements stately and sedate. The lilies are weary of their toil and prepare to retire, with expressions that denote consciousness of labor admirably performed.—*New York World.*

Admirably adapted to the audiences of first class motion picture houses and has met with great success in leading theatres of this kind.

This act is remarkable for its wide appeal in spite of the absence of slap-stick. It is not a vaudeville act.

Music consists of an arrangement selected from well known classics.

The dancers are clad entirely in white, with white clown-like make-up and are shown against a simple back-ground, producing a beautiful decorative effect of great carrying power.

Adaptable to large or small stages.

Running time — six and one half minutes.

With proper publicity, act will pay for itself.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
COMMUNICATE WITH THE
ORIGINATOR AND OWNER
WALT KUHN
11 EAST 13th STREET, N.Y.C.
TELEPHONES:
STUYVESANT 3684
CHELSEA 1184

Figure 20: *Lilies of the Field* press release, 1922.

Figure 21: Charles Ferrand with Morris Dance Horse for 'A Night of a Thousand Pierrots,' 1918, photograph.

Figure 22: Walt Kuhn, *The Man From Eden*, 1930, oil on canvas.

Figure 23: Walt Kuhn, *Bert Lahr*, 1947, oil on canvas.

Figure 24: George Karger, *Jan Dennis and Joe Bianco with Walt Kuhn in His Studio*, 1948, photograph.

Figure 45: Charles Demuth, *Two Acrobats*, 1918, watercolor.

Figure 26: Joseph Stella *The Voice of the City of New York Interpreted: The White Way*, 1920, oil on canvas.

Figure 27: Everett Shinn *The Monologist*, 1910, pastel on board

Figure 28: Edward Hopper *Le Soir Bleu*, 1914, oil on canvas.

Chapter Three

*"A vaudeville comedian in America is as close to the audience as Harlequin and Puncinello were to the Italian publics of the eighteenth century. He is, like them, an apparent, if not always an actual improviser."*¹
—Mary Cass Canfield, 1922

Walt Kuhn's years behind the drop curtain (1922–1927) set the stage and laid the foundation for his more well known works such as *White Clown* (1929), *Blue Clown* (1931), *Plumes* (1931), *Kansas* (1932), *Trio* (1937), *Veteran Acrobat* (1938), and *Roberto* (1948). Kuhn's exposure to Modern art during his organizational duties of the Armory Show encouraged the impasto brushwork and saturated palette of his mature style, which culminated after his time working side by side with dancers, comics, clowns, and acrobats. Working as a creative director led Kuhn to experienced first-hand the necessary dedication required and demanded of the performers by their audiences and their managers. Furthermore, Kuhn developed friendships within the industry and immersed himself in the lifestyle some considered low-brow, or not suitable for a middle-class gentleman such as Kuhn. Kuhn's identification with, and understanding of show business is reflected in Kuhn's intensely psychological portraits of acrobats, clowns, and showgirls. As previously discussed, American artists of the interwar period were deeply inspired by vaudeville and popular theatre in general, and used it as a platform to depict the flourishing modern society of the American metropolis. This trend falls into a longer, more established tradition starting with artists like Jean-Antoine Watteau in eighteenth-century France depicting *commedia dell'arte* figures and leading to Pablo Picasso in the

¹ Canfield, 334.

early twentieth century taking inspiration from the same *commedia dell'arte* characters and designing sets for the Russian ballet.

Artists have long found kindred spirits within the world of drama, discovering characters that they can identify with, or who act as a vehicle of representation for the harsh realities of life. The life behind the curtain, the sadness behind the smile, and the strain of an entertainer's life are the muses that speak so powerfully to artists like Walt Kuhn, Pablo Picasso, and Jean-Antoine Watteau, and consequently to the world through their work.

Kuhn, like Picasso, maintained close relationships with many of his models throughout his life, and the more intimate friendships are reflected in his greatest works. Many were performers who never saw stardom, while others found success in Hollywood during his lifetime. Regardless of their standings within show business, Kuhn painted all of his sitters with dignity and respect; they were his pathway to showing the world what he considered true American spirit. By painting their bodies' latent power and exacting gaze, Kuhn was able to depict the strength and solidarity he strove for, as these were some of the characteristics he found American.

The intimacy between Kuhn and his models is seen on canvas and in his records. Kuhn used his models for multiple paintings, and he kept detailed records of their appearances. He oftentimes nicknamed them and filed away newspaper clippings of their appearances on stage or other notable achievements; some great examples of this are the files he kept on the Italian acrobat, Mario Venendi. Venendi began modeling for Kuhn in 1937 when he posed for *Trio* with Ben Benson and Frank Landy, and continued until

1943 when Kuhn painted his portrait titled *Mario*.² Venendi visited and corresponded with Kuhn until the artist's final days in 1949. Kuhn describes Venendi as a "top flight performer and a veteran of both European and American stages."³ Also a war veteran from World War I, Venendi possessed all of the traits that Kuhn admired in his circus sitters: strength, confidence, ruggedness, and an arduous past. Kuhn's admiration for his model is demonstrated through the quality of painting, and resonates in the eyes of the model, whose piercing gaze penetrates the picture plane.

One of Kuhn's best oil paintings featuring Venendi is *Veteran Acrobat* (1938, Figure 27). The acrobat is suited in a vernal green uniform, stylishly complemented by the delicate gold embroidery. The embellishments gracefully curve around his neck, mirroring the strong highlights that create a heightened contrast on his chiseled physiognomy. Philip Adams observes, "Kuhn found poignant overtones in [Venendi's] taut, terra cotta features."⁴ Venendi's angular cheekbones and strong jaw line are reminiscent of the Archaic Greek sculptures Kuhn was introduced to by Arthur Davies. There were always images of Greek sculptures pinned on the walls of Kuhn's studio, a constant remembrance of the classical works he admired from the past. Despite the many merits of this piece, a senior member of the accessions committee for the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, a museum in Ohio, was vehemently opposed to the purchase of

² Walt Kuhn, *Trio* (1937). *Provenance Files*. Box 13, Folder 2, File 13. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

³ Adams, 187. Adams uses quotations for this but does not note who directly said it or where the quote comes from.

⁴ Adams, 187. There is very little information on *Veteran Acrobat* despite its virtues, aside from Philip Adams' book. The painting was bought four years after its creation by the Columbus Gallery of Fine Art (now known as the Columbus Museum of Fine Art), and has not been released since. The museum does not feature it as a part of the collection, so the location of the painting is unclear. Further research into the matter is being executed. There is also no provenance file on the work, an unusual circumstance considering the family's tireless documentation efforts.

Veteran Acrobat.⁵ The member was an amateur collector of old masters and objected to the public showing of sub-social subject matter, according to Adams' notes in *Walt Kuhn, Painter*.⁶ This objection was surprising to Kuhn, as his paintings of performers had been well received for over two decades in the museum world. Despite the member's efforts, the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts bought the piece anyway. Kuhn's choice of colors, along with the exquisitely executed jersey costume, transforms this low-brow performer into a dignified acrobat. Kuhn's choice of subject matter did contradict the social norms that followed what was considered high art. Vaudeville and circus performers were still placed on the lower rungs of the social ladder well into the 1930s unless they had made it big, and even then it was only a veneer of admiration they received from the middle and upper classes. Harpo Marx's brother, Groucho, reinforces this concept and recalls how a vaudevillian might be treated: "The townspeople regarded him with suspicion and contempt."⁷ This bias, or discrimination of sorts, is apparent in the description of his work from Kuhn's time until present day. The terms "tawdry," "meretricious," "gaudy," and even "grotesque" are commonly used to characterize the figures in Kuhn's work. Despite this, Kuhn successfully portrayed his performers in a way they appreciated, as Venendi recalled to journalist Mark Hanna: "Kuhn makes me look the way I really look instead of like a bad dream."⁸ Instead of depicting Venendi as the stereotypical 'vagrant'

⁵ The Columbus Gallery of Fine Art is now known as the Columbus Museum of Fine Art, located in Columbus, Ohio.

⁶ The term "sub-social" is a dated term that is used frequently in the scholarship of Kuhn, and also in the articles and reviews written about Kuhn during his time. Although there is no definition specifically lined out in any of these sources, "sub-social" refers to the way certain classes of society viewed entertainers, like vaudeville performers and even movie stars. These groups of performers were without class, dangerous characters of the night life and were rarely trusted. Harpo Marx goes into detail in his biography, much of which is outlined in Chapter Two of this thesis. Adams, 207.

⁷ Snyder, 57.

⁸ Hanna, 1.

or 'transient' society often saw circus performers as, Kuhn humanizes Venendi; the audience is faced with the person Venendi is, as opposed to just another face of entertainment his uniform denotes.

Kuhn was not partial to veteran performers, and often hired amateur actors as models as well. Alan Reed was unemployed and a bit disheartened when he modeled for *White Clown* (Figure 28), but Kuhn painted him as an imposing white-faced clown, without a trace of hopelessness. The importance of this piece is emphasized in Adams' book on Kuhn by the title of chapter six, "The White Clown 1929–1932." The work is often cited as a sign of the artist's maturity, the one fine painting he would be content to leave behind, despite his hyper self-criticism.⁹ Art historian and critic Frank Getlein wrote the introduction to the Kennedy Galleries' 1967 exhibition *Walt Kuhn 1877–1949*. In the catalogue he included *White Clown* opposite the title page, despite the fact that it was not included in the exhibition. It seems that Getlein recognized the significance of this piece to Kuhn's oeuvre and the inclusion of the piece deepened his analysis of Kuhn as an artist. Getlein comments that Kuhn combines the subject he has loved his whole life, a white-faced clown, with the "essence of painting that he knew when he first found out about Cézanne."¹⁰ The critic discusses the sad clown as an "ancient staple of art and literature," and how it has been passed down from Jean-Antoine Watteau to Picasso, now to Kuhn.¹¹ Similar to the way Cézanne abstracted the subject matter in his still lifes and landscapes, Kuhn reduced the body of the clown and abstracted it to its most fundamental shapes. Reed is hunched over, creating a "sense of inner pressure" that is generated by

⁹ Adams, 117

¹⁰ Getlein, 7.

¹¹ Ibid.

the picture, Getlein observes. Reed's expression is not necessarily tragic, but worn and fatigued. "Mostly, it is simply there: no longer crinkled into professional smiles, but now at ease in normal, introspective concern,"¹² Getlein writes. Herein lies the beauty and the exquisite nature of Kuhn's work: strength in vulnerability. No longer is this comic clown in his seat of power, on stage with all eyes upon him, but he still appears powerful enough to penetrate the boundaries of the picture plane. Kuhn awards him confidence in his most unguarded state, even if he, as a performer, is thought to be in a class among vagrants.¹³

Instead of the figure fitting into the canvas, it seems the canvas boundaries are fitted around the figure, leaving him little room to breathe, but also leaving the viewer little to look at other than the sitter. This was the first step in Kuhn's stylistic evolution from depicting typical theatre scenes, to intimate tronies of performers, and is noted by the critics of his time when considered the artwork. The *Citizen* in Columbus, Ohio, featured *White Clown* on April 18, 1935, with regard to Kuhn's fifteen-piece show at the Gallery of Fine Art in Columbus. The author, Benvenuto, praises Kuhn's ability to admire past masterpieces yet produce pictures of the present that are both lively and intelligent.¹⁴

There is a compelling power to Mr. Kuhn's work that is inescapable. You may ask why a painter should choose such tawdry, almost repulsive, types, and even as you look those types began to tell you their stories of human ambition or greed or resignation.¹⁵

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Marx, 98.

¹⁴ Benvenuto, "Walt Kuhn Show Is Impressive," Columbus, Ohio *Citizen*, April 18, 1935. Box 13, Folder 4, File 48. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/TRU-WHI--297934> . 18 February 2015.

¹⁵ Ibid.

The rhetorical question that Benvenuto poses is the same one proposed at the beginning of this essay: what qualities draw artists to choose their muse in the form of the performer? What does the theatre provide the artist that other subject matter lacks? Douglas Cooper attempts to answer this query in regards to Pablo Picasso with his book *Picasso Theatre* (1987) about Picasso's well-established relationship with theatre that lasted for decades. In Picasso's paintings and drawings of *commedia dell'arte* figures, Cooper recognizes the similarities in Picasso's interest to that of Lautrec or Daumier, but like Kuhn, Picasso ventures deeper; he became a man of the theatre.¹⁶ Picasso's first experience with theatre was in France, around the age of nineteen or twenty, when he began to show influences of Degas, Cézanne, and Lautrec in his early works. After his traveling companion, Carlos Casagemas, committed suicide over a love affair he started in Paris, Picasso began working with more introspective, darker subject matter that led into his Blue Period.¹⁷ Although he briefly used *commedia dell'arte* figures during his time in Spain, Picasso began to see these figures as prime characters for his brooding contemplation of his friend's death. *Harlequin and His Companion* (1901, Figure 29) came out of this mourning period. E. A. Carmean Jr. discusses the ensuing collection of images known as Picasso's saltimbanques in his essay for the exhibition catalog *Picasso: The Saltimbanques* (1980), shown at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. Carmean notes that *Harlequin and His Companion* display a clear influence of his exposure to nineteenth-century French art, both in color and theme, as they depict introspective café customers, a theme that was frequent in Lautrec's, Degas', and

¹⁶ Douglas Cooper, *Picasso Theatre* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1967), 13.

¹⁷ E.A. Carmean Jr., *Picasso: The Saltimbanques* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art Exhibition Catalog, 1980), 38.

Manet's work. Picasso deliberately chose these contemplative scenes with Harlequin in costume as opposed to a scene from his character's performance. Although French painters had previously depicted both *commedia dell'arte* characters and pensive café patrons, no artist had combined these themes.¹⁸ It wasn't long before Picasso moved into painting beggars and paupers, along with the sick and crippled—*Les Miserables*, as they are referred to.¹⁹

In 1904, Picasso, Braque, Fernande Olivier, Gertrude Stein, and several others within Picasso's circle frequented the Cirque Medrano. In her book *Picasso* (1959), Stein emphasizes the importance of color to Picasso, justifying the titles he gave to his period of artistic production. She recalls, "The first influence of his first short visits to Paris, 1900, gave him the color of Toulouse-Lautrec, the characteristic color of the paintings that period."²⁰ Stein recalls the interior of the Cirque Medrano was rose colored and "at this time they all met at least once a week... and there they felt very flattered because they could be intimate with the clowns, the jugglers, the horses and their riders."²¹ Picasso started a lifelong passion with the underbelly of society and the world of popular entertainment. The Cirque Medrano was at the base of Montmartre, which was close to Picasso's flat; this allowed Picasso to attend the circus three or four times a week. Picasso recollected, "I was really under the spell of [the] circus."²² Cooper asserts that Picasso, like Kuhn, was less interested in the performance and more concerned with the reality behind the show. The author writes, "[A]nd in his paintings he holds up a

¹⁸ Carmean, 26.

¹⁹ Carmean, 27.

²⁰ Stein, 44.

²¹ Stein, 15.

²² Carmean, 38.

mirror to the brilliant spectacle but shows us, by another light, those harsh truths and realities of everyday life in which we too easily suspend belief during the performance.”²³ This concept weighs heavily when considering the works of Kuhn and his belief that popular entertainment also acted as a mirror for reality.

During the First World War, many of Picasso’s friends left Paris because of the war and for various other reasons; as a result, his trips to the circus and other leisure activities dwindled. By 1916 he was ready for a new adventure, and he found it in the form of the Russian ballet when he agreed to design the sets and costumes for Jean Cocteau’s *Parade* (1917), a ballet Cocteau wanted the Russian ballet impresario Sergei Diaghilev to stage. Picasso was the element Cocteau was looking for to create a splash of French modernism in the world of ballet, and Picasso was also Cocteau’s ticket to getting Diaghilev to work with him. Picasso was in Rome for eight weeks while he worked on the ballet, incorporating his progression of Cubism into almost every aspect of the design process. This marriage of art and theatre proved fruitful; Diaghilev and Picasso formed a tight relationship for years to come. Picasso worked on Diaghilev’s *Le Tricorne* (1919), *La Pulcinella* (1920), *Cuadro Flamenco* (1921), *Antigone* (1922), and *Mercure* (1924). It is apparent through Cooper’s account that Picasso was committed to the trade and intimately involved with the company.

During the first years of his partnership with the Diaghilev ballet, Picasso continued to paint characters of the theatre. *Seated Harlequin* (1918, Figure 31) is an example of what Carmean describes as “metaphorically stripped.” He is referring to the humanization, if you will, of the ‘low-class’ characters of the theatre. The scene of a

²³ Cooper, 13.

costumed Harlequin, or Pierrot, sitting at a café table, deep in thought, contradicts the characteristics of a stereotypical performer. Picasso introduces a pensive quality to this character in the same way that Kuhn does with *White Clown*. Kuhn creates an understated composition and rendering of the figure that draws the viewer closer to the subject. Benvenuto comments, “He has penetrating knowledge of what subtleties of expression, pose or background may most strikingly illustrate the salient characteristics of his sitter.”²⁴ The economy of painting in both works is both striking and an effective way to focus the viewer on the sitter, providing a more intimate viewing relationship without distractions. The influence of early French Modern art is readily apparent in the composition of both pieces, with the major forms being reduced to their most minimal, abstract state, along with the flattening of the canvas, reminiscent of Cézanne and the Fauves. Both conventions leave little detail to distract the viewer’s eye from the main attraction of the painting. The intention of both Kuhn and Picasso is clear: to show a performer isolated from his usual carefree theatrical antics to reveal the introspective individual underneath the mask.²⁵

The metaphorical removal of the performers’ masks was a characterization introduced by Jean-Antoine Watteau’s *Gilles* (*Pierrot*, 1717–1718, Figure 30) and developed in the nineteenth century, according to Carmean.²⁶ *Gilles* represents an anomaly in the work of Watteau. His typical representations of *commedia dell’arte* symbolize the frivolities of love, the “amorous dalliance of the ‘beautiful people’

²⁴ Benvenuto, 1.

²⁵ Carmean, 27.

²⁶ Carmean, 27. *Gilles* has been recently renamed by the Louvre as *Pierrot*. However, during the research for this thesis, and in the resources consulted for this chapter, the painting is referred to as *Gilles*, and will be titled that henceforth in this thesis.

costumed as shepherdesses or Italian players and wandering in verdant parks before palaces or fountains,” as Helen Borowitz describes them in her article “Three Guitars: Reflections of Italian Comedy in Watteau, Daumier, and Picasso” (1984).²⁷ The theme is better known as *fêtes galante*, or elegant party, and was a popular niche in the Rococo period of eighteenth-century French art. Typically these works depicted the first stirrings of love or the surprise of an advance or embodied the ephemeral sense of love.²⁸ The unreality of these paintings was the main attraction; love was but a dream in the days of arranged marriage and strict social class decorum. *Commedia dell’arte* characters were, at this time, a symbol of fantasy that signaled the painting’s idealistic scenes of illusion. However, Watteau’s *Gilles* defines the tradition, as Sacheverell Sitwell comments in his book of 1925, *Masters of Painting: Antoine Watteau*: “[T]he *Gilles* has been the best, and it is interesting to think of that masterpiece compared with the *Harlequin* or the *Mardis Gras* of Cézanne, or with the innumerable and in no way inferior *Harlequinades* of Picasso.”²⁹ Starting with *Gilles*, the *commedia dell’arte* character of Pierrot or Harlequin began to acquire what Carmean describes as a dual identity. He demonstrates this in *Gilles*:

At once he is a performer—indeed, placed at the center of the work he is the focus of the comedy—while he is also isolated from the others, both spatially and emotionally, by his introspective expression. This detachment causes his private character to emerge.³⁰

Gilles’ pure white silk costume is ill-fitting and immediately separates him from the onlookers. The downward glance of Pierrot’s juxtaposed to his onlookers’ exaggerated

²⁷ Helen O. Borowitz, “Three Guitars: Reflections of Italian Comedy in Watteau, Daumier, and Picasso,” *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, 17.4 (1984), 116.

²⁸ Borowitz, 118.

²⁹ Sacheverell Sitwell, *Masters of Painting: Antoine Watteau* (London: The Studio Press, 1925), 5. First seen in Adams, 207.

³⁰ Carmean, 20.

facial expressions inclines the viewer to wonder if this lonely actor is an outcast among his group. In the background, the figures can be identified as stock comedy characters: the Doctor riding an ass, Léandre, Isabelle and the Captain. Pierrot's silken pumpkin laces softly lying across his shoes match the gentlemen's jacket and hat to the right of him. This is the only visual tie the artist makes between the bevy in the background and Pierrot in the foreground, aside from the ambiguous glances. The chimerical scenery and whimsical compositions typical in Watteau's works are absent here, leaving the viewer to ponder Pierrot's equivocal countenance and the possible machinations brewing behind him. The prominent place of Pierrot in the foreground of the work and the muted background, paired with the ambivalent body language of the crowd implies psychological tension between his character and those behind him.

In his most ambitious work, *Trio* (Figure 32), Kuhn also isolates his central figure through color and compositional conventions like Watteau does with *Gilles*. The work features three full-length acrobats; the two figures on the ends are swathed in full body suits of red, while the central figure wears a white costume disparate from the others. The two men stand on the outside of the colonnade, feature bare faces, no make-up, with little facial expression. The acrobats' costumes are austere and completely form fitting to their powerful, muscular bodies with very little embellishment aside from the ruching around their lower torso. Venendi, the model from *Veteran Acrobat*, plays the role of the white-faced acrobat in the middle. He stands a hair shorter than the two figures flanking him, and his white cap and dramatic collar contrast sharply with the men's dark hair and crew neck unitards. Similar to *Gilles*' costume, his costume is loose fitting, creating folds where there are none on the two other acrobats. His belt encourages bunches in his

pristine uniform, and his pantaloons obscure his powerful legs that are presumably mimicked on either side of him. The only corresponding similarity, outside of their assumed profession, is the succession of perfectly sculpted calves and uniformly shaped feet and slippers.

Kuhn does not shy away from the psychological intimacy he is known for in this work, despite *Trio*'s grand scale. The formal contrasts Kuhn employs in this work funnel the viewer's attention to Venendi, Kuhn's esteemed friend and colleague. As Benvenuto keenly observed, "Kuhn is a psychologist as well as a painter, and his psychology has a usefully dual nature. He knows to a brush-stroke how much the spectator's attention will grasp and hold."³¹ Venendi's downturned eyebrows and solemn eyes do not mirror the austere masculinity of his red counterparts. Although the three models were all veteran acrobats and frequent models of Kuhn's, they were not an organized group that regularly performed with one another. Kuhn took advantage of the autonomy within the group, and chose Venendi as the central figure with purpose. As Watteau's *Gilles* is baby-faced and youthful, Kuhn's white-faced acrobat is full faced, with soft, round features and a naturally smaller body frame than the other two. Kuhn does not outwardly convey any tenuous relations within the group, on purpose or for show, like *Gilles*; yet, he does lend a very real, emotional countenance to Venendi—a mere mortal, flanked by two pillars of strength. Like *Veteran Acrobat*, the metaphor is a reminder that even the most daring, death-defying performers are human and ultimately vulnerable too. Kuhn's metaphor of strength and weakness would have touched many of his viewers in the three years it was exhibited during the peak of the Great Depression. During *Trio*'s exhibition tour in New

³¹ Benvenuto, 1.

York, Columbus, and Kansas City, viewers submitted comment cards with complaints like, “This is real life; where’s the glamour?” and “This makes one feel uncomfortable, it’s so real.”³² The viewers’ comments relate back to Cooper’s analysis of Picasso’s saltimbanque images acting as a mirror reflecting the spectacle, but showing the viewer in a different light the harsh reality of the world.

The social void between the subjects and society in both Picasso’s saltimbanques and Kuhn’s solitary sitters can be described by Carmean’s observation of *Gilles*’ detachment as an “entertainer’s professional and social separation from the rest of the community, as in *Gilles*, and also his private existential loneliness.”³³ The isolation and detachment from other performers in their works also symbolize the artists’ own solitary feelings, which answers Benvenuto’s rhetorical question in the beginning of this chapter: “You may ask why a painter should choose such tawdry, almost repulsive, types...”³⁴

One needs only to read the works of Picasso, as Mary Mathews, author of *Picasso: Art as Autobiography* (1980), points out: “He emphasized the revelatory nature of his art, comparing his pictures to a painted autobiography which the future could read as if his canvases had been pages in his diary.” Picasso depicted his alter ego as Harlequin, just as Watteau did with Pierrot. Decades later, Kuhn’s self-identification with the white-faced clown was immortalized in *White Clown* and *Kansas (Self Portrait of the Artist)* (1932). The performers who represented these characters on stage, and in paintings thrived on self-expression and a life of non-conformity that the industry

³² Paul Bird, “Walt Kuhn’s Provocative Trio to be Exhibited.” Press Release, 2 October 1940. Box 13, Folder 2, File 83. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/-Trio-1937--297932> 21 February 2015.

³³ Carmean, 34.

³⁴ Benvenuto, 1.

offered, as did Kuhn, Picasso and Watteau. The artists identified with the performers in terms of ambition and life-style. Every artist endeavored to gain popularity through their specific brand of art, and often lived a life driven by creativity, as opposed to stable financial success. This personal connection, along with the professional and personal relationships he formed over the years with show people, led Kuhn to use theatrical performers as metaphors to express a deeply felt emotion about the human condition that could not otherwise be expressed with words.

Figure 27: Walt Kuhn *Veteran Acrobat*, 1938, oil on canvas

Figure 28: Walt Kuhn, *White Clown*, 1929, oil on canvas.

Figure 29: Pablo Picasso, *Harlequin and His Companion*, 1901, oil on canvas.

Figure 30: Jean- Antoine Watteau *Gilles (Pierrot)*, 1717–1718, oil on canvas.

Figure 31: Pablo Picasso, *Seated Harlequin*, 1918, oil on canvas.

Figure 32: Walt Kuhn, *Trio*, 1937, oil on canvas.

Chapter Four

Reflections of Reality: Sociology & Show People

*“But the only American art, the escape of everyman, discouraged by bleakness, worn by rush and machinery, into the blue of enchantment and rhythm, and laughter, the art with Dionysian frenzy in it, the valid, the great American art...”*¹ — Mary Cass Canfield, 1922

The City (1919, Figure 33) was a landmark work for Walt Kuhn in both subject matter and critical attention.² Kuhn portrays a showgirl in her dressing room as she prepares to go on stage, a scene that lacks energy but portrays real life. Heavy impasto paint flattens her solid limbs; the thick black curves of her eyes and sanguine cheeks form her gaudy make-up. *The City* made its public debut in 1927 in New York, but it sparked a critical outrage when first exhibited at the Arts Club in the Art Institute of Chicago in 1921, and again at the Pennsylvania Fine Arts Academy in 1923. Frederick James Gregg wrote an in-depth article on the initial repulsion and eventual respect he experienced with *The City*. Gregg asks the reader to imagine someone being confronted for the first time by a painting of a woman cutting her nails, or a fat laundress just getting out of the bath.³ He relates these banal, unattractive scenes to that of *The City*, revealing the general feeling of the public towards this dressing room scene and performers off stage. Gregg then implores the readers who felt this way about the painting to see that “it is the spirit that counts, and

¹ Mary Cass Canfield, “The Great American Art,” *The New Republic*, 32.416 (1922), 334.

² *The City* is not described as being purchased or gifted in Kuhn’s “Catalogue Raisonné,” nor are there notations in the Provenance file. However, it is currently hanging in the Ackland Art Museum, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. See Plate 1. Permission to reproduce via ARTSTOR. Frederick James Gregg, “A Spiritual Adventure with Walt Kuhn,” *Rainbow*, December 1920. Walt Kuhn Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/CAR-CLO--228523>. 21 February 2015.

not what is external; that it won't do to look at the canvas in a superficial way."⁴ Gregg's identification of the showgirl as a metaphor for the city parallels that of certain interpretations of the work by critics, as told by Adams: "an overblown backstage floozy" who is "vulgar, tawdry, sensual, but intensely alive."⁵ The concept of the city was a popular theme for American artists including Georgia O'Keefe, Charles Demuth, and Charles Sheeler, who interpreted it literally in their works of Precisionism. Artists such as Reginald Marsh, John Sloan, and Edward Hopper also chose to represent the city in their works, but they included the people who lived within the city. The notion of the metropolis and the society formed by the city was also a significant subject in many disciplines, including sociology, particularly in large metropolises like New York and Chicago.

Sociological theories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries construct a methodological framework in which to consider the psychological paintings of Walt Kuhn. In the scientific community, the end of the Victorian era and the development of the western metropolis kindled a fervent interest in communities' responses to the growth of cities, modernization, technology, and increasing population density. The study of human behavior and social interaction within urban spaces began with sociologists in Europe around 1890, such as Emile Durkheim and Georg Simmel. During the Second Industrial Revolution (1870-1914) in the United States, a school of sociology formed at the University of Chicago called the Chicago School (1915). Early publications on sociology,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Philip Rhys Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter: His Life and Work* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1978), 73.

such as Durkheim's book *Suicide* (1897) and Simmel's 1903 essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life," heavily influenced the foundation of the nascent group; this resulted in tangential investigations into urban life in Louis Wirth's "Urbanism as a Way of Life" (1938). The sociological principles presented here create a foundation upon which the argument of this thesis is based. Utilizing contemporary theories of sociology, the remaining scholarship in this chapter articulates how Kuhn's portraits of entertainers portray the effects of modernizing society on individuals and helps spectators recognize more about the world of reality in which they live, effectively piercing the veil of alienation created by modernity.⁶

All of the sociological principles in the following text fall under the field of urban sociology; within this study, there are terms and theories developed by these sociologists, which will be explained as thoroughly as possible to produce the desired understanding when applied to Kuhn's work. As a prelude, two terms must be defined because, although they are commonly known terms, they can have many connotations. These are "social integration" and "assimilation." With concern to this chapter, Marvin E. Olsen defines both terms that he uses in his article "Durkheim's Two Concepts of Anomie" in *The Sociological Quarterly*. He writes, "Integration, which is a fundamental characteristic of all social organizations, may be defined as the degree to which the component parts of an organization are interrelated so as to give unity or wholeness to the total system."⁷ Olsen differentiates between social integration and assimilation by way of the individual's

⁶ Cooper, 12.

⁷ Marvin E. Olsen, "Durkheim's Two Concepts of Anomie," *The Sociological Quarterly*, 6.1 (1965), 37.

involvement; assimilation is the process of binding individuals into social systems, whereas social integration does not involve the individual, only components of a system.⁸ Social integration and assimilation are fundamental concepts that are seen throughout urban sociology, and particularly in the theories presented here.

Louis Wirth (1897–1952), born in Gemünden, Germany, came to the United States to study sociology at the University of Chicago. His mentor and professor was Robert Park, one of the founders of the Chicago School. Wirth subsequently joined Park in the university's department of sociology in 1926 after he received his Ph.D. Albert J. Reiss collaborated with both Wirth's wife and his daughter to republish Wirth's book *On Cities and Social Life* in 1964.⁹ Wirth considered sociology, more or less, an “organized body of knowledge about human behavior.”¹⁰ According to Howard Odum in his book *American Sociology* (1951), he was concerned with sociology as a discipline, what it entailed, the definition of sociology, and the formation of accurate definitions for relevant terms within the discipline. Wirth described sociology as a “science of leftovers,” an amalgamation of special subjects discarded by other social sciences, i.e., social problems, the family, and rural sociology.¹¹ In his essay “Consensus and Mass Communication” (1948) in *American Sociological Review*, Wirth states, “I regard the study of consensus as the central task of sociology, which is to understand the behavior of men in so far as that is influenced by

⁸ Olsen, 38.

⁹ Reiss relied heavily on Wirth's course notes, published papers, first-hand experience with Wirth, and interviews with students and colleagues in order to write his insightful introduction to the book.

¹⁰ Albert J. Reiss, “Introduction: Sociology as a Discipline,” in Louis Wirth's *On Cities and Social Life: Selected Papers*, ed. Albert J. Reiss Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), ix.

¹¹ Reiss, x.

group life.”¹² Wirth’s prime objective for sociology is significant because in trying to achieve this aim, he discovered that in modern societies the segmentation of values and interests and the general lack of assimilation with a group led to failure of men participating together to reach a common decision, i.e., a consensus.¹³

In mass society, Wirth argued, the common man is often excluded from participation in decision-making. The lack of participation in community is therefore an integral aspect of the mass society of the modern era.¹⁴ These arguments led to Wirth’s essay “Urbanism as a Way of Life” in the *American Journal of Sociology* (January 1938), where he discussed the effects of large populations in urban areas. In his essay Wirth states, “[L]arge numbers account for individual variability, the relative absence of intimate personal acquaintanceship, the segmentalization of human relations which are largely anonymous, superficial, and transitory, and associated characteristics.”¹⁵ He argues that the heterogeneity of a city encourages the modern idea of individuality, which then fosters the specialization of a dense population and results in less community assimilation. This reliance on specialization also creates a pecuniary nexus that further displaces acquaintanceship, and causes institutions to pander to the masses as opposed to the individual.¹⁶ The consequence of all this is a breakdown of community and other common social structures previously seen in Victorian-era villages. In the absence of community, individuals then rely on intersecting and tangential social groups with a high rate of

¹² Louis Wirth, “Consensus and Mass Communication,” *American Sociological Review: The Official Journal of the American Sociological Society*, 13.1 (1948), 20. First seen in Reiss.

¹³ Reiss, xi.

¹⁴ Reiss, xxi.

¹⁵ Wirth, 60.

¹⁶ Louis Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 44.1 (1938), 60.

membership turnover. Within these tangential social groups, the individual only becomes effective as he acts through organized groups, further alienating his own individuality without creating any intimate personal relationships. The effects of large urban areas on society that Wirth describes are reflected in Hopper's *Le Soir Bleu*, where none of the café customers are interacting despite their close proximity. Additionally, the clown featured in the center of the work is not part of his 'organized group' as he would be on stage with his fellow performers. He is no longer 'effective' as an entertainer, and in turn is alienated because of the individuality, which is setting him apart from the other customers. His introspective demeanor and downturned gaze reflect the consequences of this modern societal phenomenon.

Wirth's scholarship owes much to Georg Simmel (1858–1918), who was a prominent German sociologist in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Simmel studied and taught at the University of Berlin, where he stayed until moving at fifty-six, four years before his death, to Strasbourg. Despite his stellar academic and intellectual achievement, Simmel was an outlier in the intellectual world of his university and many of his essays and ideas were rejected by his professional colleagues, but were simultaneously hailed by some of his foremost contemporaries, such as Max Weber.¹⁷ Simmel charted new discoveries in sociology based on his objective to find subject matter for the field that would distinguish it from all other social sciences and humanistic disciplines.¹⁸ He wrote about concepts such as contemporary sociology as social distance, marginality, urbanism

¹⁷ Donald N. Levine, "Introduction," in Georg Simmel *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 1.

¹⁸ Ibid.

as a way of life, role-playing, social behavior as exchange, and sociological ambivalence.

Simmel was also the first to articulate and observe a clear distinction between the realms of social structure and culture.

The work that has the most significance to this chapter is Simmel's 1903 publication *The Metropolis and Mental Life*. The basis for the publication lies in how social integration functions within a large city and how individuals interact with one another within that large city. He wrote that the "deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life."¹⁹ The stimuli an individual experiences in a metropolis differs significantly from that of a small town; therefore, the technique of life that Simmel refers to alters dramatically as well. These contrasts create an "intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli" found in a large city with busy streets, a large population density, and increasingly loud atmosphere. This highly stimulating environment creates a more acute awareness of one's surroundings, forming an intellectualistic character of the mental life of the metropolis, according to Simmel. Furthermore, the intellectual disposition of urbanism supplants the feelings and emotional relationships of a small town mental life; this phenomenon causes the formation of particular kinds of identities or personality traits. Simmel asserts "instead of reacting emotionally, the metropolitan type reacts primarily in a

¹⁹ Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," adapted by D. Weinstein from Kurt Wolff (trans) in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, c. 1950), 12.

rational manner, thus creating a mental predominance through the intensification of consciousness, which in turn is caused by it.”²⁰ The continuous sensory stimulation and disruption of city life created emotional defenses and blasé attitudes in residents; Simmel describes this as a “psychic phenomenon...so unconditionally reserved to the city.”²¹ Additionally, he points out the economic-psychological aspect of the breakdown of intimate relationships: “The modern city...is supplied almost exclusively by production for the market, that is, for entirely unknown purchasers.”²² Whereas in smaller towns, because the production was for a customer, the producer and customer knew each other and an intimacy over a period of time was likely to occur.

In the modern city, specialization of the division of labor and mass marketing creates a matter-of-factness that negates any intimacy. Specialized division of labor also encourages and “requires from the individual an ever more one-sided type of achievement which, at its highest point, often permits his personality as a whole to fall into neglect.”²³ This process, when combined with the intellectualistic atmosphere of the modern city and blasé outlook, creates a persona of individuality characteristic of urban life, a persona that metropolitan types strive for in hopes of being distinct from one’s counterparts.

“Individuality... and his achievements which make him unique and indispensable but which at the same time make him so much the more dependent on the complementary activity of others.”²⁴ The need for individuality and the resulting dependence on others

²⁰ Simmel, 12.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Simmel, 11.

causes further break down in communities and social groups. These concepts provide the basis for many of the Chicago School principles and can be seen in Jean-Antoine Watteau's *Gilles*. The clown in the center, much like in *Le Soir Bleu*, is isolated from his peers. Gilles depends on his surrounding troupe to confirm his identity as an individual in an act. However, standing alone, Gilles' specialized role as a clown is useless without his counterparts, however different they are from him. The division of labor dictates that Gilles has a specific role to play as a clown, but he can only fill that role if he is accompanied by his stock characters, the Doctor, Léandre, Isabelle and the Captain; therefore, his goal to be unique and independent is actually a dependence on others.

The study of both the individual with a group, and the group within society is based on the research of the French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917). Durkheim is credited with founding and firmly establishing academic sociology in France, along with having a prominent international influence on the field.²⁵ Durkheim wrote four seminal publications in the field of sociology: *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), *Suicide* (1897), and *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). Today, Durkheim's methods are outdated, and the technology that exists in the present results in far more accurate data collection than Durkheim's methods; however, his conclusions and theories are the basis for modern-day sociology and many still stand as cornerstones.

In the introduction to his translation of *Suicide*, George Simpson asserts that

²⁵ George Simpson, "Introduction," in Emile Durkheim *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, ed. George Simpson, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 7.

Suicide “is among the very first modern examples of consistent and organized use of statistical method in social investigation.”²⁶ Simpson goes on to say how the publication represents Durkheim’s fundamental principles of social interpretation in action.²⁷ The objective in *Suicide* was to find the correlation between higher suicide rates and densely populated urban areas. Durkheim applied his social realism, which, as Simpson explains, “sees society as an entity greater than the sum of its parts, with its accompanying concepts of collective representations and the collective conscience,”²⁸ to the special problem-area of suicide.²⁹ Additionally, Durkheim developed the term “Anomie” for use in both *The Division of Labor in Society* and *Suicide*, and it carries a different meaning in each publication. Anomie in *Suicide* refers to his anomic suicide category and is never fully defined as a term by Durkheim. In reference to the name he assigns it, he writes, “The third sort of suicide, the existence of which has just been shown, results from man’s activities lacking regulation and his consequent sufferings.”³⁰ According to Olsen, “[T]he term anomie is the French translation of the Greek *anomia*, which means ‘no laws.’ The commonly used English equivalent of ‘normlessness’ catches the literal meaning of anomie.”³¹ Durkheim asserted that social integration and assimilation was key for individuals to keep their emotional needs in check. Social integration acted as an external

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Simpson, 9.

²⁸ Simpson, 15. Collective conscience is defined by Simpson as the totality of beliefs and practices, common sentiments in a community or group, “Where these common sentiments rigorously guide the individual, as in Catholicism, and condemn the taking of one’s own life, there the suicide-rate is low...”

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Durkheim, 277.

³¹ Olsen, 37. The term “anomie” and “anomy” are used interchangeably throughout this chapter. The spelling of “anomie” is only used within direct quotes, otherwise “anomy,” which is used directly in Durkheim’s scholarship, will be used.

force, as there was no internal factor capable of keeping or regulating an individual's passions, according to Durkheim.³² He states, "Either directly and as a whole, or through the agency of one of its organs, society alone can play this moderating role; for it is the only moral power superior to the individual..."³³ Durkheim commonly saw the disruption of the collective conscience of social integration following rapid technological change, resulting in the breakdown of social standards necessary for regulating behavior. The influence of Durkheim is seen in Simmel's theories of division of labor, and Wirth's notion that isolation and alienation seen in modern society is a result of the breakdown of small, socially homogenous communities.

Anomie can be used to describe the emotional breakdown of the subject in *Acrobat with Cigarette* (1930, Figure 34). In *Fifty Paintings by Walt Kuhn*, Kuhn examines the beaten-down performer in as a frankly psychological, sociological portrait: "You've seen him in the subway, along Main Street, or at the corner pool parlor. He has no sense of responsibility. He is a sullen incorrigible who made his own decision to run out on his opportunities. It's too bad."³⁴ These characteristics were a common phenomenon caused by the lack of social regulation. The acrobat has no community to fall back on, and no community to hold him accountable. He is adrift among a modern society where everyone is experiencing a detachment from one another. Kuhn also characterizes the subject in this passage as the metropolitan type Simmel refers to in *The Metropolis and Mental Life*,

³² Olsen, 40.

³³ Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, ed. George Simpson, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 247. First seen in Olsen, 40.

³⁴ Paul Bird, *Fifty Paintings by Walt Kuhn* (New York: Studio Publications Incorporated, 1940), 13.

Walt Kuhn published a type of retrospective, *50 Paintings by Walt Kuhn*, in 1940, where the comments are published as Paul Bird's, the assistant editor of *Art Digest*, but the content is original Walt Kuhn.

Kuhn's sitter personifies the blasé outlook and self-preservation of an urbanite of New York. In a *Citizen* review of *Acrobat with Cigarette* hanging in the Columbus Gallery of Fine Art, the author juxtaposes the personal histories of the model, Albert Driscoll, and Kuhn, creating a significant parallel that was commonly observed between the artist and his subjects.³⁵

It was posed by a young Irishman named Driscoll, a Broadway acrobat. He was born in Hell's Kitchen and grew up with the sparrows, dodging trucks in the gutter. He had to be tough to last through his childhood and afterwards Broadway and the four-a-day made him tougher. The artist who painted this remarkable picture also knows New York. He grew up on its docks, drew for its papers, canvassed for its politicians. He learned how to paint in Paris and Munich but he knew that what he painted must be New York to be true.³⁶

The powerful shoulders and clean-cut appearance of the acrobat belies the negative stereotypes placed on the subject. Kuhn's paintings strove to supplant society's common tendency to immunize against any personal connection.

Wirth and Simmel identify the disconnection between the city dweller and community, resulting in reserve and indifference that urbanites manifest in their relationships. Simmel suggests that through close physical contact with numerous individuals, social contact dwindles in consequence. Kuhn directly interferes with this social habit in the same way that Picasso did in the early 1900s with his saltimbanques. Kuhn presents a well-known subject of popular entertainment, where spectacle and glamour are supposed to distract them from reality, but instead, he holds up a mirror and

³⁵ The author of this review is unknown, and not published on the article. There will be further research into the author in the future.

³⁶ "Art Gallery Exhibits Kuhn Painting," *Citizen*. April 24, 1935. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/ABS-ACR--228500> 22 February 2015.

reflects the viewers' reality of a worn, tired, and indifferent individual. Still clad in their identifiable uniforms, Kuhn's characters are grounded and direct, with no distractions for the viewer to settle on. According to Wirth, in urban spaces the uniform is a highly recognized visual cue to denote the role of the functionary; in turn, the eccentricities and personality are hidden behind the uniform dismissing the notion of a unique disposition.³⁷ The uniform in Kuhn's paintings does act as a signifier for the profession of the sitter; however, the intent of the artist is to humanize the performer, therefore the uniform is strictly a signifier and does not act as a mask. Additionally, Kuhn allowed his models to choose their own costumes from a large selection that he and his wife hand-made; this in turn encouraged them to display their own tastes and part of their personality. Alternatively, the model could wear their own costume from a recent production, much like Bert Lahr did. The body of work Kuhn produced in the 1930s not only represents the zenith of his career but functions as a vehicle for an intimate personal connection for both artist and audience. *Plumes* (1931, Figure 35) and *Kansas (Portrait of the Artist as a Clown* – 1932, Figure 36) are paradigms in the concept of piercing the veil of anomie.³⁸

In 1931 Kuhn presented *Plumes*, a tronie of a chorus girl in full regalia isolated from the typically charged atmosphere of vaudeville.³⁹ The orange plumes that adorn her headdress wilt like thirsty ferns to frame her sullen face and emphasize her morbid pallor.

³⁷ Wirth, 13.

³⁸ Originally titled *Kansas* from its first public viewing until the artist's death, the painting was then renamed *Portrait of the Artist as a Clown* after 1949, per the artist's will. In the publication Kuhn published in 1940, *Fifty Paintings by Walt Kuhn*, the work is titled *Kansas*, and will be referred to as such in the remainder of this chapter. See Plate 5.

³⁹ *Plumes* was reproduced four times in the year it was first exhibited, the most of any of Kuhn's works, and a high number for any American artist at the time. Kuhn attempted to duplicate this work with *Plumed Head* in 1938, but he destroyed it in 1944 with *Elise*. See Plate 4. Reproduction approved by ARTSTOR.

It is obvious her life revolves around night, and the sun rarely touches her slender neck, cheekbones, or limbs. Her expression reinforces the slump in her shoulders, and both convey her exhaustion from the world of entertainment. Incarnadine lips give the sole sign of lifeblood, and they are as superficial as her costume and headdress. She is dressed for entertaining, but she is no longer in front of an audience. She is alone. Her mask of performance is slowly melting off of her face, and there is no longer a requirement for a broad smile and bright eyes. The reality of life is apparent in her jaded visage; the stress and hardship of the life as an entertainer breaks the cheerful guise of her on-stage character in this painting. The absence of backstage scenery, props, or dramatic lighting suggests she is off stage. Her body language further convinces the viewer if she is backstage, she has already endured a long, arduous day on stage and is in costume for her second or third performance. In *Fifty Paintings by Walt Kuhn*, Kuhn's caption for *Plumes* reads:

Think of a vase or bulb with a large graceful flowering. Or think of a fountain with arching sprays of beautiful color. But this does not have the charming setting of the Fountains of Versailles. These plumes spring from 'show business.' Fragile feathers on solid shoulders. Beauty supported by the commonplace.⁴⁰

Kuhn succeeds in rejecting the process of depersonalization in *Plumes*; he confronts the viewer with the burden of spectacle. Harpo Marx recalls his beginning on the vaudeville circuit: "We put up with whatever we could find for ourselves: one-night stands, conventions, picnics, benefits... Looking back, I simply don't know how we survived it. Those early days on the road were sheer, unmitigated hell."⁴¹ The impassive look on the showgirl's face tells a similar story of sweat and heartache. Although her uniform suggests

⁴⁰ Bird, 19.

⁴¹ Marx, 99.

her purpose is to smile and bring joy into the lives of her audience, Kuhn allows the viewer to see what Duncan Philips astutely describes as “somebody’s kid who dreamed of glory in the carnival looks disillusioned and sullen under her plumes. [Kuhn] paints the feathers with consummate skill and the face with startling frankness and just a hint of his understanding and compassion.”⁴²

Reminiscent of the alter egos of Picasso, *Kansas (Portrait of the Artist as a Clown)* not only symbolizes Kuhn’s deep attachment to vaudeville and the circus, but his self-identification with the struggle of the performer in the fragmented reality modernity created. The work was initially thought to be a portrait of Ralph “Kansas” Osgood, a famous circus performer. The subject is a white-faced clown, clad in a white cap, white cloak, and a shirt that mirrors the sage color of the sitter’s eyes. Carlyle Burrows, a critic for the *Herald Tribune*, reviewed his 1933 show at the Marie Harriman Gallery, where he presented *Kansas (Portrait of the Artist as a Clown)*. Adams considered the exhibit “daring, for it might seem to have been pushing his luck,” but Burrows’ review belies this assumption.⁴³ Kuhn only presented seven works in this show, but the show received encomiums from the leading critics, including Burrows. The columnist wrote:

Not every artist can make a well-rounded show with seven paintings as Walt Kuhn does...Mr. Kuhn uses a simple palette, with grays predominating, builds his images with broad, generalizing brush strokes and with direct illumination invests both color and form with heightened intensity. Especially striking in this way is the portrait of a clown, ‘Kansas.’⁴⁴

One year after Kuhn presented the work, he visited André Derain, a favorite of the

⁴² Adams, 211.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Adams, 142.

Harrimans, and the artist selected this piece as the best in Kuhn's oeuvre. The significance of this encounter with Derain is that Kuhn exhibited *Kansas* only once at its premier showing at the Marie Harriman Gallery, and only a single instance of publication in *Atlantica* one year later, in 1933, is documented. There is no provenance file for this work, or any notes or mention of it in his papers. Despite the accolades it received during the 1932 exhibit, the work was kept in the artist's possession, presumably until the Broadmoor Hotel purchased it in 1951. Kuhn was a private person, sharing only what he wanted, when he wanted; therefore, it speaks volumes that he promoted *Kansas* to Derain on his trip to Paris.

Kuhn's caption of *Kansas* begins with a sociological note: "Most of the nation's circus clowns come from Kansas and neighboring states. Why, nobody knows. This is one of [my] most severe paintings. It has a hard, granite quality of form, with every non-essential trimmed away. Fearless individualism. Splendid isolation."⁴⁵ At Kuhn's death in 1949, however, the painting was renamed *Portrait of the Artist as a Clown* per the artist's will. There are two other paintings in which Kuhn may have been the model, *Fox Farmer* (1931) and *The Guide* (1931), but *Kansas* is the only one he identified as a self-portrait. The posthumous action suggests there was a deeper meaning, more than likely a metaphor, which he preferred not to be questioned about. Unfortunately, there is little information on the painting itself, and no indication of why he decided to rename it after his death. The subject of the white-faced clown remained one of Kuhn's favorite subjects on stage and on canvas. His comments on the origin of most American clowns mimic

⁴⁵ Bird, 20.

Wirth's assertions that many of the city's inhabitants are in fact from the Midwest, pastoral states and are not native-born city dwellers like Kuhn. It is prudent to consider the idea that Kuhn thought himself part of the vaudeville and circus community, and particularly identified with the performers he painted.

The requirement for Kuhn to function within a certain role, as a middle class artist, contradicted his true predilections as a self-proclaimed showman. Critic Alan Burroughs described the artist's intentions in the catalog for the Marie Harriman exhibit in 1930:

He intends to make you feel the full value of a plainly recorded contact with something... He wants you to believe in his admiration for these shapes and his restraint in presenting them as objects of admiration... Cheap finery, he believes, is stimulating to paint, because it is universal and yet so difficult a vehicle for subtle effects. He extracts glamour from even a tawdry subject.⁴⁶

Feeling the entirety of any recorded contact was an extraordinary feat in a world shaped by modernity. The rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing sensations made it easy to become numb, and feel less in order to handle city life.⁴⁷ Escape from this bombardment was a commodity in high demand, but even more important was the opportunity to feel deeply and emotionally once more. As a staple character in popular entertainment, the white-faced clown in *Kansas* was very good at giving his audience a reprieve from reality, and bringing joy and sadness into his acts, encouraging laughter and quite possibly tears. This was the role of a performer; however, for the viewer to encounter the white-faced clown and not experience any emotions, but instead see the same blasé look upon the character's

⁴⁶ Adams, 128.

⁴⁷ McDonnell, 29.

face as they themselves carry around was shockingly real.

To conclude, Kuhn's experiences as an artist, organizer and author, internationally and within the United States, kindled an enthusiastic passion for capturing the American spirit. His ideal for American art was rugged, tough, and un-machined; he saw these qualities in popular entertainment, mostly in vaudeville. Vaudeville was the epitome of American modernism, with its bright lights and fragmented acts; however, it also helped ease the effects of modernity. Kuhn experienced this directly during his time as a creative director. Through his involvement backstage, Kuhn's paintings started to change dramatically in terms of style and composition. They went from being depictions of generic theatre scenes in the beginning of his theatre career, and soon blossomed into expressively penetrating tronies of show people after several years of working along side them.

Initially, it may appear as if Kuhn is simply divesting his performers of their theatrical masks and unveiling the person underneath. However, Kuhn instead uses the performer as a metaphor to reveal his emotions about the human condition. As Duncan Phillips, a loyal patron of Kuhn's, wrote intuitively about Kuhn's work in his foreword to the Phillips Memorial exhibition catalog in 1944:

The clowns are of many different types and reveal many individual idiosyncrasies and even complexities. Kuhn uses the language of design to aid him in suggesting these undercurrents of character beneath the make up and the costume. Far from describing his models, in all their flamboyant or grotesque professional appearances, with the exaggerations of subjective fantasy, he imposes upon himself the challenge of confronting only the facts about some very human personalities, conditioned to specialized jobs in burlesque, vaudeville and circus. He makes us think of the boy or girl as he or she began, back on the farm, before the days of the bright lights, the tights and the spangles. Somebody's kid who dreamed of glory in the carnival looks disillusioned and sullen under her plumes. He paints the feathers with consummate

skill and the face with startling frankness and just a hint of his understanding and compassion.⁴⁸

The farm boy or girl is no different than the patron staring into the painting, or the artist who created it. Kuhn's self-identification with the white-faced clown emphasizes his need to extend beyond the picture plane. He was not a performer, yet through this alter ego he painted himself as he wanted to be seen; in the same way his models felt that he painted them as they really looked. Although Kuhn met his models through tangential social groups, such as the theatre or circus, he formed close acquaintanceships with them. In an age where modernity undermined social connections, Kuhn's ability to relate to both the viewer and the sitter gave him an unparalleled ability to form a link between the two parties. Kuhn's portraits interrupt that fractured sense of reality modernity created, and encourage the metropolitan viewer to rekindle the need for intimate connections by ultimately seeing their own reality of weariness in his clowns and acrobats. Through his work, Kuhn embraced a modernist impulse of style, while holding on to his showman's instincts and fierce loyalty to the industry, in order to create iconic American images, which penetrated the social void that enveloped New York City at the turn of the century.

⁴⁸ Phillips, Duncan, "Foreword." Exhibition Catalog, *Walt Kuhn & Karl Knaths*. Phillips Memorial Gallery, Washington D.C., 1944. *Printed Materials: Exhibition Catalogs, Invitations, and Announcements, 1944*. Box 22, Folder 1, File 4. Walt Kuhn Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Exhibition-Catalogs-Invitations-and-Announcements--228839>. 21 February 2015.

Figure 33: Walt Kuhn, *The City*, 1919, oil on canvas.

Figure 34: Walt Kuhn, *Acrobat with a Cigarette*, 1930, oil on canvas.

Figure 35: Walt Kuhn, *Plumes*, 1931, oil on canvas.

Figure 36: Walt Kuhn, *Kansas (Portrait of the Artist as a Clown)*, 1932, oil on canvas.