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Lecture

"The Clarity of Things" What is American about American Art?

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May 22, 2008

as prepared for delivery

As many in this audience already know, the National Endowment for the Humanities, in association with the American Library Association, has launched

in 2008 a program that will supply classrooms and public libraries with

reproductions of significant American art, one example on each side of twenty high-quality posters, forty examples in all, under the overall title *Picturing America*. It was my idea, invited to give the 2008 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities, to use some of these forty works, with others, to pose the question, "What is American about American art?" The question has often arisen; it was asked in almost these exact same words in 1958, by Lloyd Goodrich, then the director of the Whitney Museum of American Art. His essay was titled "What Is American—in American Art?" and began, "One of the most American traits is our urge to define what is American. This search for a self-image is a result of our relative youth as a civilization, our years of partial dependence on Europe. But it is also a vital part of the process of growth." Inquiries into an essential American-ness are less fashionable, my impression is, than they were fifty years ago, since they inevitably gravitate, in this age of diversity and historical revision, to that least hip of demographic groups, white Protestant males of northern European descent. These thin-lipped patriarchal persons figure, as founding Puritans or Founding Fathers, as Western pioneers or industrial magnates, at every juncture of traditional history books, and our diverse, eclectic, skeptical present population may have heard quite enough about them.

Yet my skimming survey of our sensitively diverse set of forty artworks cannot avoid these founders. Let us begin with the first great painter cast up by our art-sparse, undercivilized, Eastern-coastal New World, a young man as precocious as he was assiduous, John Singleton Copley. Born in 1738 of Irish immigrants on Boston's Long Wharf, his childhood marred by his father's early death and then, when he was thirteen, by that of his stepfather, the English artist and engraver Peter Pelham, Copley was all his life a striver and, with what I would like to think of as a typically American trait, a learner. Colonial Boston, a town of less than sixteen thousand, accounted for forty per cent of the colonies' shipping; it

abounded in shops and skilled craftsmen but was devoid of art schools and museums; European art entered its homes, if at all, in the form of fine consumer goods and inadequate monochrome prints. Copley was to complain in letters that his fellow colonials “generally regard [painting] no more than any other usefull trade, as they sometimes term it, like that of a Carpenter tailor or shew [shoe] maker, not as one of the most noble Arts in the World” and that his native land offered him “neither precept, example, nor Models.” Peter Pelham was proficient in the art of mezzotint, and Copley’s first known work, done when the boy was fifteen, skillfully imposed the head of one clergyman, the Reverend William Welsted, upon the torso of a portrait print his stepfather had executed of another, the Reverend William Cooper. [1]

Copley’s oil portrait of his stepbrother [2], Charles Pelham, executed a year or so later, is a typical stiff portrait of the period, with a totally indecisive background and a tabletop in odd perspective, yet with a pleasing care in such details as the pen and the vest and an arresting liveliness to the young subject’s glance. By 1756, the teenage artist attempted, in the portrait of Ann Tyng, [3] a nearly full-length female figure, a landscaped background, and an apparatus of pastoral conceit; by the next year, in that of the aristocratic Theodore Atkinson, Jr., [4] who still wears a wary stiffness in the pose and expression, the painter achieved a marvelous virtuosic realism in the white silk waistcoat embroidered with silver thread. A canvas of Epes Sargent, [5] the seventy-year-old owner of half of Gloucester, shows a textural brilliance of another sort, in the thoughtful aged face and the puffy, wrinkled hand set off against a coat of plain gray broadcloth. The painter’s voracious eye even notes the little snowfall on Epes’ shoulder from his powdered wig. By the year of this painting, Copley, not yet thirty, was already recognized as a worker of visual miracles, the supreme portraitist not only in New England but in all the colonies, combining a preternatural skill in rendering fabrics—as marvellous in pastel [6], as we see in this rendering of the merchant prince Jonathan Jackson and his blue-green silk morning coat, as in oil, with an increasing power of conveying the inner life behind the faces of his New World aristocrats. For instance, the expression of Mrs. James Warren, née Mercy Otis, [7] a colonial rarity, a female intellectual, poet and future playwright and historian, is as complex as the folds and lace trimmings of her blue-satin *sacque* dress in this portrait, done when Copley was only twenty-five.

The example chosen by the *Picturing America* series is this 1768 portrait of a successful Boston silversmith, Paul Revere,

[8] whose name, thanks to an 1861 poem by Longfellow, would come to reverberate in the legend of the American revolution. It is Copley's only portrait of a craftsman in shirtsleeves, and the painting itself shows some merely craftsmanly qualities. The shirt is splendid but the hand on the chin appears too big for the face, and the reflection of the fingers of the other in the silver of the teapot seems surreally artful. Whatever Revere is thinking about, it is most probably not the midnight ride he will undertake in eight years' time but the job he will undertake tomorrow morning, its meticulous graving and polishing. This painting, and one several years later of the rising firebrand Samuel Adams, [9] might lead one to associate Copley with the colonies' cause of independence, but in fact he married the daughter of Richard Clarke, principal agent for the British East India Company; it was Clarke's tea, largely, that was dumped into Boston Harbor by revolutionaries painted as Mohawk Indians. In the coming crunch, Clarke was a Tory, and by 1776 Copley had settled with his wife, children, and father-in-law in London's Leicester Square. But for a decade before this Copley had been seeking to make his painting more English. He wrote of yearning to "acquire that bold free and gracefull stile of Painting that will, if ever, come much slower from the mere dictates of Nature, which has hither too been my only instructor." In 1765, seeking better instruction, he submitted a painting of his half-brother Henry Pelham, titled *Boy with a Squirrel*, [10] to the 1766 exhibition of the Society of Artists in London. His friend Captain R. G. Bruce, who had carried the canvas to England, sent back the approbation of Joshua Reynolds, the leading British portraitist of the day and soon to be the first president of the Royal Academy. In Bruce's paraphrase, Reynolds said "considering the Dissadvantages . . . you had laboured under, that it was a very wonderfull Performance" despite "a little Hardness in the drawing, Coldness in the Shades, An over minuteness."

The same mail brought Copley word from Pennsylvania-born Benjamin West, who in three years of London residence had apparently mastered English artistic style and manners. West wrote of "the great Honour the Picture has gaind you," though he and some fellow artists had found fault with it as "being to [o] liney, which was judged to have arose from there being so much neetness in the lines." Reynolds, by way of Bruce, encouraged Copley to come to England "before your Manner and Taste were corrupted or fixed by your working in your little way at Boston," and the Society of Artists elected him a fellow on the strength of the "liney" canvas; the contemporary art authority John Wilmerding points out that it was the "first major work painted by an American artist for

himself, rather than on commission, and it also became the first American picture to be exhibited abroad." Copley, Tory or not, was the George Washington of American art, and, rather disconcertingly, he knew it, writing Pelham in 1775 from England's shores, "It is a pleasing reflection that I shall stand amongst the first of the artist's that shall have led that Country to the Knowledge and cultivation of the fine Arts."

This picture's transatlantic intentions give it a schizophrenic quality: the mahogany tabletop, the water glass, gold chain, and the tiny pet flying squirrel have all a dry minuteness, but the subject's face, unlike that of Copley's usual hard-faced colonials, is creamy, dreamy, and in romantic profile. Copley's customers for portraits in the colonial gentry put up with an absence of flattery, a refusal to glamorize, that British sitters of comparable status might not have accepted; even here, Copley's warts-and-all portrait policy permanized in paint his half-brother's oddly folded ear, as well as, elsewhere, Nathaniel Allen's hairy moles [11] and Miles Sherbrook's acne scars. [12] Copley's next submission to the Society of Artists, for the 1767 exhibition, was titled *Young Lady with a Bird and Dog*. [13] This time, Benjamin West complained that the girl looked "disagreeable" and conveyed Reynold's opinion that "Each Part of the Picture [is] Equell in Strength of Coulering and finishing, Each Making to[o] much a Picture of its silf, without the Due Subordination to the Principle Parts, viz the head and hands." What Reynolds meant is shown by a sampling of his own portraits of *Horace Walpole* [14] and *Lawrence Sterne* [15]. In both, light is sharply focused on the head and one hand. Incidental details are confined to papers, since both men are writers, acting out their roles on a minimalist stage. In Reynold's more elaborate portrait of Warren Hastings, [16] the first governor general of India, the proficiently painted details of clothing and furniture do not usurp attention from the casually posed nobleman and agent of empire, but frame him, in his relaxed dignity; he has a good opinion of himself, and the portrait agrees.

The confident theatricality of English portraits, when Copley attempts it, seems to embarrass his down-to-earth colonial subjects, and turns their expressions ironical, as we see Sylvester Gardner's here. [17] If their poses are stiff, it is an honest wooden stiffness; in Copley's paintings of English gentry, the stiffness is burnished to a metallic luster, and rings hollow. [18] Even in his most admired and ambitious English painting, a historical tableau in the approved Grand Style, *The Death of Major Peirson*, [19a] the central pictorial incident, with its single drop-shaped drop of blood, [19b] feels staged to the point of farce. And the dying hero's flowing hair, and

the spruce details of the uniforms crowding around him, seem, well, "liney."

What did Benjamin West mean by this word? A line is a child's first instrument of depiction, the boundary where one thing ends and another begins. The primitive artist is more concerned with what things are than what they look like to the eye's camera. Lines serve the facts. Folk art tends to be "liney," as we can see in these examples of anonymous portraits done well before Copley, earlier in the eighteenth century. [20] From around 1720, Lavinia Van Vechten, now in the Brooklyn Museum. [21] From 1721, a lady called Ann Pollard, in Massachusetts. [22] And Magdalena Douw, by an artist from the Hudson River valley, around 1729. Such portraits, executed as a "useful trade" like sign-painting and print-making, were the sole genre of high art widely practiced in America before the nineteenth century brought in romantic landscapes. They share a resolute attempt at likeness and an honest notation of such details as fabric patterns but lack a convincing atmosphere and a third dimension; they are, as it were, two-and-a-half-dimensional, and so was Copley's early work. The conventions of illusionistic painting, providing through tint and brushwork the sense of recession in space and of enclosing atmosphere, are not demanded by every culture. In the art-sparse, mercantile world of the American colonies, Copley's lavish literalism must have seemed fair dealing, a heaping measure of value paid in shimmering textures and scrupulously fine detail. "Overminuteness" could scarcely exist, as it did not exist for Holbein or Jan Van Eyck.

In the wake of the great Copley retrospective in Boston in 1966, the critic Barbara Novak ascribed Copley's sensibility not to any artistic predecessor but to a "conceptual bias" present in Puritanism; Jonathan Edwards wrote of "the clarity of 'things,'" of things as the mediator between words and ideas, between empirical and conceptual experience. "The manifestations God makes of Himself in His works," Edwards wrote, "are the principle manifestations of His perfections, and the declaration and teachings of His word are to lead to these." The first great painter of American landscapes, Thomas Cole, who also perpetrated a number of religious pictures and large allegorical canvases, lamented that the public preferred "things not thoughts." Moving from America to England, Copley passed from an art whose soul was empirical to one whose soul was conceptual, societal, and theatrical. Two self-portraits record his inner migration: a pastel at the age of thirty-one [23] shows, but for the touch of vanity in the elegant, leisurely costume, an enigmatically bland young man, his eyes watchfully on you. A tondo in oils

after a decade in London [24] paints in dashing brushstrokes a faintly haggard man of fashion in his forties. His eyes, directed away from us, are those described by an observer, not long after he had left America, as “small eyes, which, after fatigue, seemed a day’s march in his head.” Always laborious in his painstaking methods—sitters, including the younger daughters of George III, complained of being “wearied” during the many sittings Copley demanded—he had left behind the land that had rewarded him with unchallenged eminence and what he described as a “pretty living” of three hundred guineas a year, for an England where he always struggled to prove himself. Lloyd Goodrich’s essay puts it bluntly: “America lost her greatest artist, to add another good painter to the British school.”

In the ninety-eight years that went by between Copley’s birth and that of Winslow Homer, on Boston’s Friend Street, into the family of a well-to-do hardware merchant, Boston still had acquired no art school and very little of an artistic community. When young Winslow, whose mother was a dedicated amateur watercolorist, expressed a desire to be an artist, the best his indulgent father could do for him was to acquire, on a business trip to England, some instructive lithographs and to arrange for his son’s apprenticeship to an acquaintance, the commercial lithographer John H. Bufford. Winslow Homer did not speak well of his two years with two years Bufford; he called working ten hours a day for five dollars a week “bondage” and “slavery” and “a treadmill existence.” On his twenty-first birthday, he left Bufford’s and set up shop in Boston as a free-lance illustrator; he caught on very quickly, first with *Ballou’s Pictorial* and then with *Harper’s Weekly*, in New York. In 1859, Homer moved to New York, to be closer to his main source of income; there, in what had become the country’s most vital artistic center, he took lessons in painting and enrolled in life classes. His artistic education, however, was interrupted by the Civil War; in late 1861 *Harper’s* sent him as “a special artist” to “go,” he wrote his father, “with the skirmishers in the next battle.” Instead of going to Europe, as he and his family had intended, he went to war. Here is one of the many wood engravings based on the “special artist’s” work that *Harper’s* published in the next two years; [25] titled “The Army of the Potomac—A Sharp-shooter on Picket Duty,” it appeared in the issue of November 15, 1862, with the attribution, “From a Painting by W. Homer, Esq.” It was his very first painting, done in his late twenties. His friend Roswell Shurtleff attested that he “sat with him many days while he worked on it,” in Homer’s studio in New York’s University Building. [26] It is, in its careful delineation of pine branches and rumpled

trousers, "liney," though the darkness that swallows the marksman's head expressionistically conveys "the horror of that branch of the service" which Homer shared with ordinary foot soldiers.

The painting by Homer chosen for the NEH portfolio, *The Veteran in a New Field* [27], also concerns that most deadly of American wars, but from the happier perspective of disarmament. Painted in 1865, the canvas was used for a woodcut in an issue of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* of July 1867, [28] illustrating an article celebrating the widespread return of armies from the fields of battles as a triumph of a democratic society. The woodcut is liney, stalk by stalk, but the painting is not [29, same as 27]; the field being harvested forms a wall of solid golden-brown, and the stalks already cut in the foreground are indicated by a quite loose sprawl of dry brushstrokes. A close friend of Homer's, the painter Eugene Benson, also the art critic for *The New York Evening Post*, asserted of this painting that its style was "an effective protest against a belittling and ignorable manner in art"—that is, of the American followers of the English Pre-Raphaelites—and "a sign of that large, simple and expressive style which has made the names of Couture and Millet . . . so justly honored." French art had replaced English as the model; the peasants dignified in the images of Jean-François Millet and the landscapes of the Barbizon School, freed of mythological apparatus, prepared the ground for Impressionism and its vivacious brushwork—"the touch, the sweep, the dash of the brush," Benson wrote. Without these, "no man can be called a great painter." In late 1866 Homer and Benson sailed for Europe, and Homer spent nearly all of 1867 in or near Paris; it has been said, in a tone of complaint, that Homer paid insufficient attention to the newest French art, and returned with no sign of French influence; but even a painter as self-willed and individual as Winslow Homer needs courage, and he returned to his studio in the University building with a braver style.

An oil like *Croquet Scene* [30] in 1866 has the static lininess and posed "human interest" of his woodcuts. A holiday seaside scene such as *Long Branch, New Jersey*, of 1869 [31], strikes quite another note—breezier, vaster, with a deep perspective and an overall palette so bright we involuntarily squint. *Crossing the Pasture*, of 1872, [32] epitomizes the Homeric country idyll—the open meadow splashed with wildflowers, the monumental children caught in a moment of reverie. With little or no recourse to French models Homer has developed an American expressionism—the floating daubs of the flowers, the brilliantly painted tin pail, the

dazzlingly white shirt, the dashes of complementary green on the sun-reddened faces. Another pair, *Boys in a Pasture*, two years later, [33] gives us a low horizon, a hat of sunstruck straw, a Pythagorean triangle, and beautiful bare feet—we can feel the grass tickle them. The medium of watercolor lightens and loosens his style quite marvelously; in *Apple Picking*, [34] of 1878, opaque gouache strengthens the sun on the bonnets and skirts while sunlight presses in yellow dabs, the same size as the red apples, through the lacy screen of trees. Red plays about the girls' shoulders and their all but hidden faces; they are caught in a magic moment instantly freighted with nostalgic. The style, which in some of Homer's watercolors can be as dry as the pencil underdrawing, is here fluid and wet.

He spent most of his second stay abroad in the North Sea village of Cullercoats, where his paintings of fisherwives, more studied and chromatically subdued than his American watercolors, achieved an uncanny stateliness [35], as of priestesses from classic Greece. After his return to America in late 1882, up to his death in 1910, his allegiance belonged almost entirely to water—swampy and shadowed in the Adirondacks, sparkling aquamarine in the Caribbean, thunderous, surfy, and titanic off the coast of Maine. His father and brother, early in 1883, had bought up almost all of the peninsula in Maine called Prout's Neck. Visitors to Winslow Homer's separate cottage and studio may be struck, as was I, by how closely interwoven it was with the busy resort life his family had created within their compound, and how domesticated the nearby shore was, its paths worn through a broad margin of beach roses and grasses. From this cozy setting Homer wrested images of primal wildness and power, scenes of water and rock generally unpopulated. Here is *High Cliff, Coast of Maine* [36], a beautifully radical work of 1894 in which the rocks are broken into fragments of color as if by the weariless pummeling of the waves; frustrated by the painting's failure to find a buyer for nine years, Homer as if defiantly signed it twice. But *Northeaster*, done the next year, [37] is perhaps his signature canvas, unforgettable in the sense it gives us of the ocean's webbed, heaving weight. The following year's *Maine Coast* [38] is similar but freer, almost carefree in the manner of its painting, in brush scribbles and palette-knife slatherings of raw white. In admiring such pictures, and in gazing at the foaming left half of Homer's masterly tableau *Undertow*, [39] painted a decade before *Maine Coast*, we cannot but be conscious of the paint itself; white dabbled and stabbed, swerved and smeared into place in imitation of the water's tumultuous action; we simultaneously witness both the ocean and the painter at

work. These arduous passages of tumbling foam and exploding spray are at once representations of natural phenomena and examples of painterly artifice; thing and idea are merged in the synthesis of artistic representation.

Though Homer observed and imitated the surging waves as intently as Copley did the sheen of fabric and hair, the effect is not "liney." The opposite of "liney," it turns out, is "painterly." It is not an aesthetic mis-step to make the viewer conscious of the paint and the painter's hand; such an empathetic consciousness lies at the heart of aesthetic appreciation. Beginning as a rather dry, scratchy, anecdotal recorder of military and social life, serving in magazines an illustrative purpose that within a few more decades will be taken over by the novel art of photography and the technology of photo-engraving, Homer ended as the wettest of artists, not only a supreme watercolorist but an inventor, on this continent, of Impressionism and action painting in oils.

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In the long perspective of this talk the only contemporary of Homer's worthy of being considered a rival is Thomas Eakins. [40] This watercolor, *John Biglin in a Single Scull*, was done in 1873, one of a number Eakins executed of scullers on the Schuylkill around Philadelphia. Though the scene is watery, the technique is dry—a preparatory study, as exact as a blueprint, for the painting has been preserved. The ripples this side of the scull have been calibrated with a scientific precision, stippled to serve up the boat's reflection in measured wavelets. Eakins loved science, and his determination to give his students the undraped benefit of male anatomy put a cramp of scandal in his academic career. He dared attempt, in his *Portrait of Doctor Gross* [41], to show, with Rembrandtesque chiaroscuro, surgery in progress, and in his portrait of *Professor Benjamin Rand* meticulously rendered the anatomy of a microscope. [42] Only in his searching, tender portraits of friends and family members does he not seem "liney" to me; this favorite former student, Amelia Van Buren [43], is seated in a costume and a physical environment as carefully detailed as those in a Copley, but the brooding mood, and an evenly applied painterliness, unifies and humanizes the whole.

And what others in our government-sponsored *Picturing America* series might be called liney? Paul Revere, painted by Copley, reappears in Grant Wood's 1931 oil, *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*. [44] This aerial view certainly is guilty of what Benjamin West called "there being so much neatness

in the lines." But neatness was a main feature of Grant's style, often used, as here, with a flavor of parody; the village is toylike, a Christmas-yard village with its lit windows throwing out golden druggets onto the road. Revere's steed is stretched out in the position of a hobby horse, and the playfully patriotic mood of Longfellow's overfamiliar poem is knowingly evoked. *The County Election*, [45] by the less-well-known Midwestern painter George Caleb Bingham in 1852, has the same too-good-to-be-true polish, a citizenry busily engaged in civic duties but for the two idle boys and a slumping man in the foreground. The 1975 mural *Origins of Country Music*, [46], by Thomas Hart Benton, shows another energetically involved crowd, limned in Benton's usually wiry, restless lines. Such cartoonishness genially asks for a suspension of disbelief while it presents not so much an American scene as a rendering of America's self-image. An abundance of detail becomes, then, a reassurance that the vision is true, or will come true. What Joshua Reynolds called "Hardness in the drawing, Coldness in the Shades, An over minuteness" verifies a collective vision.

Charles Sheeler's 1930 *American Landscape* [47] portrays, in muted cool colors, an actual industrial site—the Ford Motor Company's huge River Rouge plant near Detroit—but ideally cleaned-up, with none of the grime, litter, and air pollution that actually attend industry. And—talk about "the clarity of things"—here are some locomotive wheels that Sheeler painted in 1939, entitled *Rolling Power*. [48] With a passionate closeness the details of piston and lever and fuel line are rendered to an effect of purity and silence, a reduction of machinery to its spiritual, Newtonian essence. In Walker Evans' 1919 photograph of the Brooklyn Bridge, [49] the lines do not regulate the distribution of power but gracefully resist the downward pull of gravity, as the pointed arches of a Gothic cathedral do; Joseph Stella's painting ten years earlier [50] uses those same lines to fragment a somewhat hectic native version of Cubism, an epochal European invention. In both Europe and America pictorial art was permeated by the intuition that machinery constituted Man's future; Futurism, an Italian movement in a wide spectrum of arts, was launched in 1909, espousing a rejection of the past and its sentimental humanism, and by the 1920s had involved its founder, the writer Filippo Marinetti, in support of Benito Mussolini and fascism, a totalitarian political creed prolific of romanticized, mechanized images of mass force.

Is this propagandistic image by Norman Rockwell, *Freedom of Speech*, from the *Saturday Evening Post* of 1943, [51] liney or painterly? It is rendered without visible brushwork,

the hallmark of a painterly manner, and is crammed with fragments of faces—an ear here, an eye there—that are, to quote Reynolds again, “Each part . . . Equell in Strength of Coulering and finishing, Each Making to[o] much a Picture of its silf.” Yet the artist does not fail on the score of “Due Subordanation to the Principle Parts”; attention is focused from all sides on the speaker, who dominates this ideal town meeting, his starry-eyed, open-mouthed head framed by what we guess is a school blackboard. Rockwell, like Copley before him, gave heaping measure to his clients, principally the *Post* and its millions of readers, always exceeding the necessary with an extra caricatural vitality or, in his late works, with lovingly observed detail. It does not add to the joke, for instance, of this *Post* cover of 1944, [52] to make the scale so vivid a thing, nor do we need, in this winsome cover of 1955, [53] the brick-by-brick wall through the window, the coat and hat on the hook, the spittoon, the geranium, and the kitten. Liney in its “overminuteness,” yes, but also painterly in its fond lavishness; this most successful of twentieth-century commercial artists also practiced art for art’s sake.

And is this robust portrait from 1797, [54] the so-called *Lansdowne Portrait* of you know whom, liney? Emphatically, no, for Gilbert Stuart, though born in Rhode Island, was at the age of thirteen a pupil of the recently arrived painter from Aberdeen, Cosmo Alexander, and received from him an essentially Scots artistic education. In 1775, only nineteen years of age, Stuart left the roiling colonies for London, where he at first supported himself playing a church organ and eventually became an assistant to Benjamin West, the native Philadelphian who had become history painter to King George III. The student outdid the master in mastering English technique, and succeeded as a portrait painter, though money troubles chased him in 1787 from London to Dublin, where he lived and painted five more years. Eccentric and profligate, given to quarrels and to continually talking while he painted portraits, Stuart opportunely returned first to New York and then to Philadelphia, where he developed a profitable business in the painting of President George Washington. This, the last of three poses he painted of Washington in the flesh, though only one of at least a hundred he produced by reproducing his originals—is excellent in the head, but Stuart used another model for the body, a much broader and softer body, Washington’s grandson complained, than the actual “matchless combination of bone and muscle” who served as father of this country. In using a portly body double Stuart was out of line but never liney; the *Lansdowne Portrait* in its dignifying, eloquent painterliness would befit a king.

Are *Picturing America*'s specimens of John Singer Sargent [55] and Childe Hassam liney? No—Sargent, like Stuart, was a European painter with American citizenship, though as with Copley his possibly too fluent style did best with American portrait subjects like *Elizabeth Withrop Chanler*. Childe Hassam is, with William Merritt Chase, a foremost American Impressionist. Yet there is little thoughtfully analytical, in the developed manner of Monet and Seurat, about Hassam's nervous, scratchy, hasty manner of painting. Of the hundreds of canvases he turned out, his flags, of which *Allies Day, May 1917*, [56] is one, bring the most money on the art market, perhaps for the elementary reason that Americans respond to their flag like few other nationalities. And what of Edward Hopper, as represented in *Picturing America* by a house right on the railroad line? [57] Like Homer, he began as an illustrator, and his work retained the clarity of illustration; yet he worked in broad planes of light and shadow, conveying a sense of volume as well, uncannily, of a lonely human drama being enacted, even though, as here, only a piece of architecture is painted. Unlike Andrew Wyeth, who similarly aspired to paint an inward America, he cannot be accused of being liney; Wyeth rejected what he called "the diversion of so-called free and accidental brush handling."

And, to leap ahead beyond the bounds of our forty chosen posters, into Abstract Expressionism, which for the first time in art history saw the United States decidedly shake off the influence of Europe and lead the way—what of this, by Mark Rothko, bleakly called *Number 10*, [58] dating from 1950? It has the two-dimensionality of liney work, but the rectangles would not float and intrigue the eye if they were less painterly, with the thin wash of variation within the central yellow panel and a casual dribble leaking from it; if the edges of were less feathery in their brushing, they would not hover in their ghostly way. But what of this, [59] by Jackson Pollock, *Number 30*, also from 1950? It is all line, dribbled and spattered in an ecstatic dance in the mystic space between concept and thing. Or these lines, [60] by the young Andy Warhol, in 1960? Or these, [61] the next year, in a liquidex and silk-screen work designed not to hang but to lie on the floor? Or these, [62] by Roy Lichtenstein in 1965, titled *Big Painting*, in obvious satire of the broad painterly strokes of Abstract Expressionism? Or this [63] by Lichtenstein the same year, satirizing our stock emotions as they are beamed back at us by comic books? Or these painstaking lines, [64] by the photorealist Richard Estes in 1979, titled *34th Street, Manhattan, Looking East*? The "overminuteness" is such that dozens of tiny signs can be read and the pale Empire State Building in the distance is reflected by the exquisitely

replicated smear in the foreground. This remarkable artist, beginning with commercial work in advertising and beginning to paint in a semi-Pop, Larry Rivers manner, quickly became the precisionist limner of our glassy, thing-ridden city streets.

Two centuries after Jonathan Edwards sought a link with the divine in the beautiful clarity of things, William Carlos Williams wrote in introducing his long poem *Paterson* that "for the poet there are no ideas but in things." *No ideas but in things*. The American artist, first born into a continent without museums and art schools, took Nature as his only instructor, and things as his principle study. A bias toward the empirical, toward the evidential object in the numinous fullness of its being, leads to a certain lininess, as the artist intently maps the visible in a New World that feels surrounded by chaos and emptiness.

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