

# Incursions of Modern Art in the Regionalist Heartland

by Evan R. Firestone

**A**S CHARLES ATHERTON CUMMING looked around toward the end of his life (he died in 1932), it must have seemed to him that the art world was hopelessly debased. Modern art was clearly gaining ground, and advancing into his native Midwest. American Scene painters as well as traditionalists such as Cumming resisted these incursions. But by the 1940s modern art had established a strong foothold and had won a sizable audience — in Iowa as across the nation.

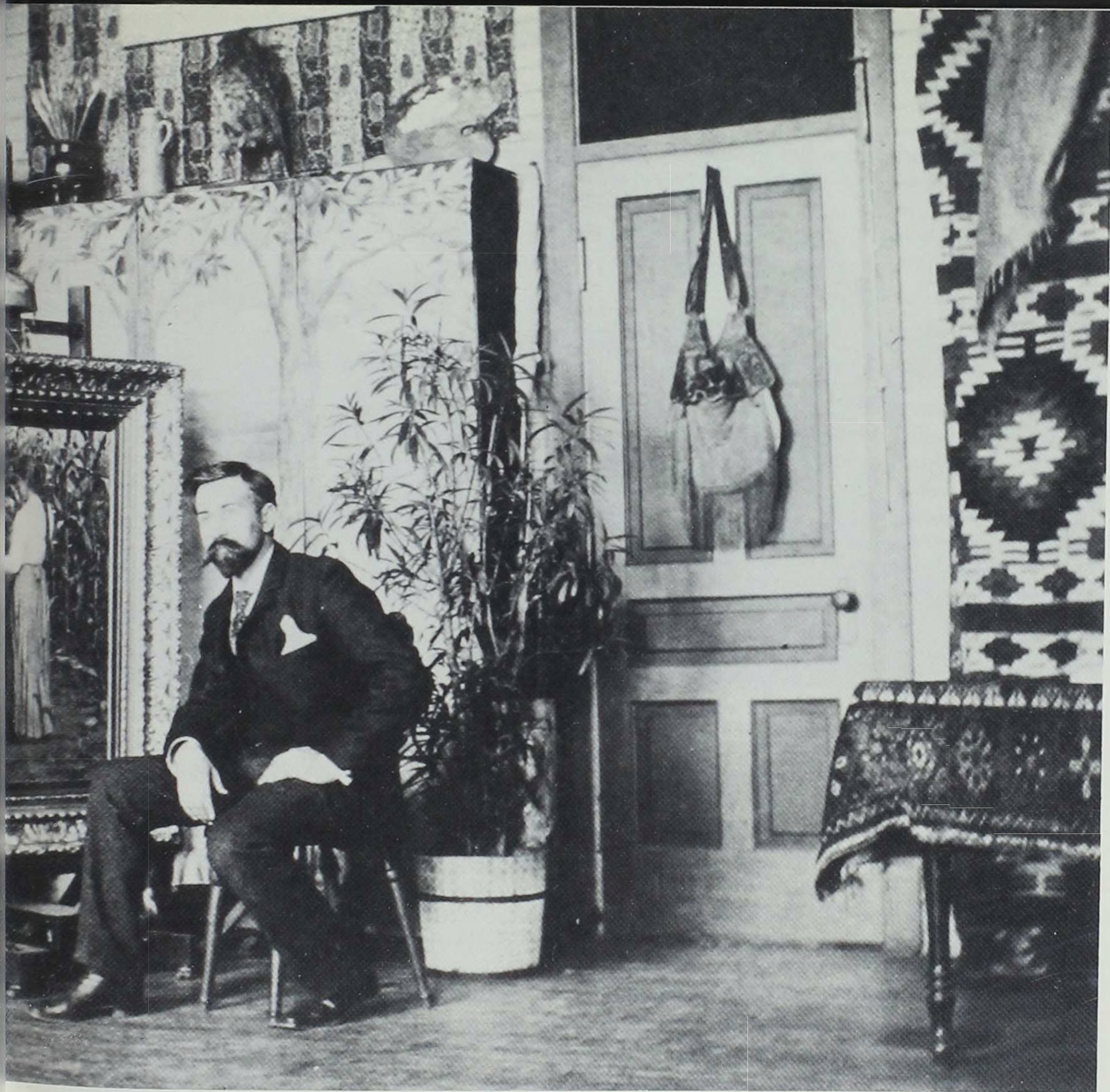
Charles Atherton Cumming is best known for his portraits of prominent Iowans and as an art educator. Iowa's acknowledged "dean" of painters, he definitely was an artist of the old school. On two occasions, in 1885 and 1889, he had studied in Paris at the Academie Julien, where his teachers included the noted French academicians Gustave Boulanger, Benjamin Constant, and Jules Lefebvre. Although he later practiced a restrained impressionism when painting landscape subjects, for the most part Cumming retained a thoroughly academic perspective on art and teaching throughout his lifetime.

In 1895 thirty-seven-year-old Cumming



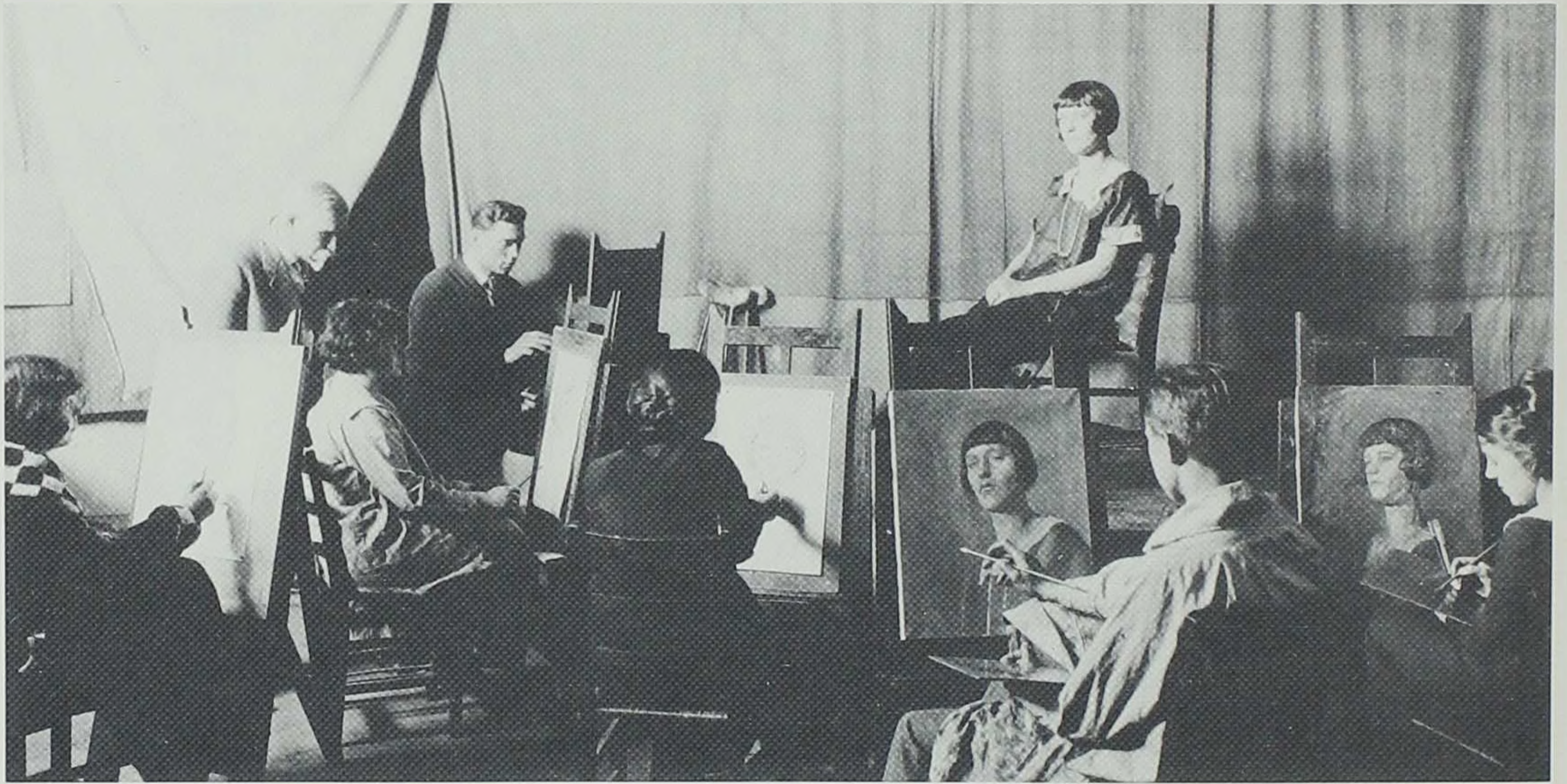
Charles Atherton Cumming in his studio at Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, 1894. Acknowledged as the "dean" of Iowa painters, Cumming was the most important figure in Iowa art circles during the first quarter of this century. He directed the Cumming School of Art and founded the University of Iowa's art department.

assumed the directorship of the Des Moines Academy of Art, which was renamed the Cumming School of Art five years later. The school was conducted in the centuries-old academic tradition. Students began by drawing from casts, moved on to still life, and finally were permitted to draw and paint from the live model. Students generally worked from casts and still life set-ups for a year each before they



were considered proficient enough to tackle the human figure. The school prospered, and into the 1930s a large segment of the Iowa art community subscribed to his conservative position. Not only did the Cumming forces rail against the new abstractionists, but they also were not sympathetic to American Scene painters, who, although representational, were considered "moderns" because they concerned themselves with contemporary life. This factionalism, however, was not unusual. Vigorous disagreement between conservatives, American Scenists, and abstractionists existed throughout the United States in the 1930s.

**I**N 1928 Cumming published a pamphlet in Des Moines titled *Democracy and The White Man's Art*. In it he advocated an art "based upon a certain concept of visible reality as manifest in natural laws of form, light and shade, color, atmosphere, and perspective; its purpose being to truthfully record visible reality." As would be expected, Cumming not only condemned avant-garde developments in art, which he called "modernistic jazz painting," but he also rejected stylized approaches in imagery, which although "diagrammatically may very closely resemble the forms of nature," nevertheless are not the product of scrupulous observation. The work of



Cumming (standing, left) critiques the work of University of Iowa art students painting a live model. Founded and directed by Cumming, the art department continued to grow throughout the 1920s.

Grant Wood, with its emphasis on surface pattern and conventionalized form, certainly was subject to Cumming's criticism, although these traits emerged most emphatically in Wood's paintings of the 1930s.

Although Cumming will be remembered for many contributions to the development of art in Iowa, unfortunately some of his views discredit him. His attack on any art other than academic was not simply on stylistic grounds; it was racist and possibly fascist. His pamphlet could have been published in Germany in the same period. Cumming maintained that "throughout the world the abstract representation of primitive races is being foisted upon us by the art dealers association under the name of 'modernistic'. . . . [There is] a prevalence of abstract mindedness which is the characteristic of all colored and primitive races."

He went on to invoke Aryan superiority: "A portion of the white race, probably the Nordic branch of the Aryan race has . . . developed the art of realistic representation. The art first appeared in Greece about the time of Pericles. A thousand years or more later we find evidences of it in Spain, Italy, and the capitals of Europe. Wherever it appeared seems to have been in the white race under the encouragement of Nordic nobility and the cultured

classes. The new art continued to develop in these capitals of highest culture until the white race mixed its blood with primitive peoples or till the government fell into the hands of democracy. . . . I doubt if democracy will ever be able to continue the white man's art because it was born and maintained only during periods of the Nordic white man's highest culture."

The influences of Japanese, Oceanic, and African art on vanguard European artists were the racial basis for Cumming's objections to "modernistic" art. He wrote a second tract sometime after 1928 titled *A Defense of The White Man's Art* that reiterated and elaborated on his fuzzy aesthetic theories and warped view of cultural history.

**T**HE THREAT of modernist art in Iowa, felt so keenly by Cumming in the 1920s, was more imagined than actual. Yet instances here and there anticipated later developments. In Des Moines, Carl Weeks, the self-made cosmetics millionaire who at the time was constructing Salisbury House, acquired three paintings from modern artist Joseph Stella in the mid-1920s. Soon after meeting Stella in New York in 1925, he pur-

chased *The Tree of My Life* (1919) and *The Birth of Venus* (1922), and commissioned *Apotheosis of the Rose* (1926). Although Stella was one of the earliest American modernists to absorb the lessons of Cubism and Futurism, the organic nature paintings Weeks acquired reveal a more personal and fantastic side of Stella's art.

More visible in Des Moines was the occasional modernist work shown by the Des Moines Association of Fine Arts, the forerunner of the Des Moines Art Center. In 1928, for example, the association secured the Chicago Art Institute's annual exhibition of American painting, which was described in *The Des Moines Register* as containing "everything from the strictly academic to the neo-futuristic." This "jazz art" in the association's exhibitions literally invaded Charles Atherton Cumming's personal territory. Since 1903 the Cumming School of Art had been located in the upper story of the Des Moines Public Library building, which also housed the offices and galleries of the Des Moines Association of Fine Arts. Cumming was outspoken about not only the modernist paintings the association exhibited, but also the "unacademic" work it purchased and hung in the library. When his school was asked by the library in 1928 to vacate quarters in the building to provide more space for library activities, Cumming charged that the real reason for the removal was his feud with the Des Moines Association of Fine Arts. At this time, in declining health, Cumming chose to live in San Diego, California (1926-1930), but his presence and influence were still very much felt in Iowa. Upon his return to Iowa in 1930, although weak and within two years of death, Cumming continued to aggressively wage the battle against the forces of modernism.

Despite Cumming's disapproval of various artistic activities in the library, for the most part the exhibitions and visiting speakers were in the mainstream, as reported in the *Des Moines Register*. Charles Webster Hawthorne, then well known as a portrait and genre painter, and founder of the Cape Cod School of Art, told a meeting of the Des Moines Association of Fine Arts in 1930 that "cubism . . . will be forgotten in twenty-five years. . . . There

are no means of following the gyrations of the various fads and gaining final cognizance of them." A month later, Leon Kroll, another celebrated American painter of that era, was in Des Moines for an exhibition of his paintings at the library. He echoed the same sentiments: "The old tradition of painting recognizable things must be followed if the artist wants to get the utmost vitality in his work. . . . It is hard for people to understand that art is not a matter of fads and style." In the following year, an Iowa Art Guild exhibition held in the library was said to demonstrate "the failure to bow to futurism and the inclination to mirror nature truly rather than to become trapped in the transient modes of modernism." The conservative tenor of the Iowa Art Guild's exhibition was not surprising. Cumming had founded the organization in 1914, and the guild was responsible for managing his school from 1927 to 1931.

ONE OF THE MORE interesting appearances of modernist art in Iowa occurred later in the decade with the visit to Des Moines of New York art dealer Daizell Hatfield in 1938. Hatfield set up shop for one week in the Hotel Fort Des Moines with a group of paintings that included works by Gauguin, Vlaminck, Raoul Dufy, and Picasso. Hatfield, however, probably did not expect to do much trade with this artwork. His real purpose for coming to Des Moines was to show ten oil paintings and seven watercolors by Russell Cowles, a hometown artist then living in Santa Fe. Paintings by Cowles were concurrently on exhibit in the gallery of the Des Moines Fine Arts Association (the organization's name had been changed slightly), then located at 610 1/2 Walnut Street. His paintings represented the American Scene genre.

American Scene painting, which dominated American art in the 1930s, generally is understood in terms of two major tendencies, Social Realism and Regionalism, although distinctions between them frequently become blurred. Social Realism primarily reflected an urban sensibility conditioned by the hardships of the Great Depression, whereas Regionalism



Grant Wood, circa 1940. Following his great success with *American Gothic* in 1930, Wood became a national figure. In 1934 he was named director of the federally sponsored Public Works of Art Project in Iowa, and was appointed to the art faculty at the University of Iowa, where he spent eight controversial years.

was midwestern and agrarian in outlook. Although Iowa had proponents in both camps, the art of the state was largely identified with Regionalism because of the presence of Grant Wood, who came into national prominence with the success of *American Gothic* at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1930. Whether Social Realist or Regionalist, American Scene painters were staunchly opposed to what they considered to be the decadent manifestations of European modernism. Only in this one respect were they aligned with Cumming and other academic artists. In Iowa in the 1930s, American Scenists and artistic conservatives spent a great deal of time battling each other.

The conflict between American Scenists — who were, confusingly, labeled “moderns” — and conservatives is illustrated by an incident involving Grant Wood. In 1934 Wood had been named director of the federally sponsored Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) in Iowa. Working for Wood were both “moderns” and more academically inclined artists, as was the case with the PWAP project in neighboring Nebraska. A *Des Moines Register* article of February 4, 1934, describes the solution to this

problem for both projects: “The clash between followers of the modernistic style of art in Iowa and the more conservative school in Nebraska apparently was settled Saturday after several exchanges of artists engaged in civil works administration work had been made between the two states.” The *Register* continued, “Thomas R. Kimball, conservative Nebraska administrator of art, had received several conservative artists from Grant Wood, Iowa administrator, in exchange for a number of moderns who wanted to depict such scenes as Herbert Hoover in a modernistic pose representative of the 1928-29 period.” The extent of the conflict becomes clear when one realizes that the depiction of figures in contemporary dress was anathema to some academic artists.

**I**N ADDITION to controversy over public mural projects, which persisted through the 1930s, the battle between “moderns” and conservatives was waged over the annual art exhibition at the Iowa State Fair. Selection of the judge was the crucial issue for both sides. This “battle of the ballots” by Iowa artists to select the 1935 judge created, according to the *Register*, a “mildly cyclonic atmosphere in Iowa art circles” between modernists and conservatives “divided over the choice.” Dewey Albinson of Minneapolis, described as a “highly modern painter,” was narrowly defeated.

In the next year’s exhibition, however, Arnold Pyle, described in the *Register* as “a young modernist who said he was ‘only a farm boy until he took up regionalism,’” won the sweepstakes prize (best in show) for a landscape. Dewey Albinson was selected to serve as judge in 1937, and “moderns” again naturally fared well. Robert White won the sweepstakes prize with a Social Realist picture titled *Ages of Man* that depicted “a number of poorly clad characters, workmen and impoverished women . . . burdened from toil [with] pain and tragedy . . . written on each face.”

From this point on, “moderns” — or as we would call them, American Scene painters — dominated the Iowa State Fair art salons. This was the case for one painter in particular,



COLLECTION OF BARNEY A. EBSWORTH

Joseph Stella, *The Tree of My Life*. Oil on canvas, 83½ × 75½ inches, 1919. From the Collection of Barney A. Ebsworth. One of three paintings Carl Weeks purchased for Salisbury House in the mid-1920s from Stella. *The Tree of My Life*, which is filled with personal symbolism and allegory, anticipates the development of surrealism in the next decade. Salisbury House and its contents were acquired in 1953 by the Iowa State Education Association. In order to raise funds, in December 1986 the painting was sent to Christie's in New York, where it was sold in auction to Hirschl and Adler Gallery for \$2,200,000. Subsequently, *The Tree of My Life* was acquired by Barney A. Ebsworth of St. Louis.

Daniel Rhodes of Fort Dodge, Iowa, who later became known as a leading American ceramic artist and educator. In 1938, 1939, and 1940, he was awarded the sweepstakes prizes for paintings of laborers. It was customary to allow the sweepstakes winner to exhibit all the pictures submitted, but one painting Rhodes entered in 1938 was rejected by judge Paul S. Harris, newly appointed director of the Des Moines Fine Arts Association. Rhodes described his abstract painting to the *Des Moines Register*: "I painted the abstraction on a board which I found in the agricultural building. Some painters had set their buckets on it and used it to wipe their brushes. There was a good accidental composition, so I touched it up, and entered it — not as a joke but as a serious study in design." In this instance, an American Scene painter truly was a modernist. Rhodes's incorporation and reworking of accidental effects had been employed by the European surrealists, and anticipated an approach used by American abstract expressionists in the 1940s.

A number of other so-called Iowa "moderns" occasionally experimented with more radical forms of painting. In 1935 a group of sixteen young "modernists" established an exhibiting society they called Iowa Cooperative Painters. The group largely comprised painters who worked on the Iowa State College library murals under Grant Wood. As one might expect, much of their work was modern only in relation to the academic art of the Cumming forces. Yet when the cooperative exhibited their work the next year at the Blanden Memorial Art Gallery in Fort Dodge, Daniel Rhodes observed in his hometown newspaper that "if any general conclusion can be drawn from so varied a show, it is that modern tendencies are very much alive in Iowa painting, and that younger painters are not following slavishly the style of Grant Wood or any other of our more important painters." Rhodes referred to "a number of pictures which reflect directly the tendencies of extreme European modernism." In particular he cited a painting by Harry Jones, "which is probably a representation of a small building but which appears to the critical eye to be six spots of red and blue." Rhodes acknowledged that such studies by Jones, who

had won an award in the 1935 Iowa State Fair art salon, hold "little interest to any except fellow artists," but "are very stimulating and are seen all too seldom."

**F**ORT DODGE may have been the most favorable place in Iowa to show work such as Jones's in the 1930s. Nourished by wealth and education, a climate sympathetic to advanced ideas had developed in that city. From the late nineteenth century, Fort Dodge was a wealthy town. Brick and tile companies, and gypsum mines and mills fueled the economy of this major railroad, retailing, and wholesaling hub in central Iowa. With prosperity, a variety of other enterprises also flourished. At one time Quaker Oats had a plant there. The wealthy families of Fort Dodge for the most part were cosmopolitan in their outlook and well traveled. Often, their children were sent east to study. In such an environment, attention inevitably turned to art.

In 1923, a Fort Dodge chapter of the American Federation of Arts was organized with eighty members. By 1926 one of its leaders, Lida Pittman, advocated the establishment of a gallery. "What finer advertisement could Fort Dodge have, what greater appeal to people of culture and refinement, what could do more for the welfare of Fort Dodge? A gallery would not only be a storehouse of art treasures," she told the *Fort Dodge Messenger and Chronicle*, "but, in this age of materialism, its beneficent influence would prove a blessing beyond words." The goal was realized in 1930 with a gift of funds from Charles G. Blanden, a former Fort Dodge resident who lived in San Diego, to erect a gallery in memory of his wife, Elizabeth Mills Blanden.

The taste for "modernistic" art in Fort Dodge was not unanimous, of course, but a number of its proponents in the 1930s can be identified, including the young Daniel Rhodes, Jennie B. Smeltzer, Ella Wasem, and F. L. Knowles. In a March 1931 talk to the local chapter of the American Federation of Art (which had become the Blanden Memorial Art Gallery's support organization), Knowles, an orthopedic surgeon, told his audience, "Mod-



Max Beckmann, *Flower Cart in Nice*. Oil on canvas, 47¼ × 39⅞ inches, 1947. Blanden Memorial Art Museum, Fort Dodge, Iowa. Gift of Ann Smeltzer, 1952. Beckmann, one of the most important of the German expressionists, emigrated to the United States following World War II. The first Beckmann work to find a home in Iowa is *Carnival*, a triptych purchased by the University of Iowa in 1946.

ernistic art is the idealistic rather than the realistic showing the abstract rather than the full and detailed characteristics. It is the reproduction in oil or stone . . . of the subject approaching in many respects its fundamental design. It approaches a subject with blunt directions and suggests rather than portrays, sacrificing truth for suggestion and often leaves the interpretation of the suggestion to the observer." In this rather astute analysis of modern art, reported in the *Messenger and Chronicle*, Knowles observed that its sources in this country "might go back to the American Inca and Aztec Indians." This was just the kind of comment that would have provoked Charles Atherton Cumming into a diatribe on white man's art.

Jennie B. Smeltzer, whose mother gave the land on which the Blanden was built, also spoke to the art federation in September 1932 on the relationship between modern art and music. Using the examples of Ravel and

Debussy, Smeltzer emphasized that in their compositions modern artists use "planes of color not unlike those in which modern musicians work in tones." Her comparison — voiced in an Iowa town in the 1930s — was one that frequently had been made in the most sophisticated intellectual and artistic circles internationally.

Daniel Rhodes was just one of a number of young people from Fort Dodge who were encouraged to formally study art because of the positive atmosphere in their community. Others included Thomas Savage, Duane Wood, Richard Cervene, Ann Smeltzer, and Robert Brady. Brady, who as a high school student attended summer programs at the Art Institute of Chicago, studied at the University of Iowa in 1946/47 and then went on to the Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia. There he met the great art collector Albert C. Barnes. Brady also studied at the Barnes Foundation school, sponsored by Barnes to foster appreciation of modern art. Through Brady and his friend Ann Smeltzer, Barnes learned of the Blanden Memorial Art Gallery and was persuaded in 1951 to donate nine works to the museum, including paintings by modernists Louis Marcoussis and Alfred Maurer.

A few years earlier, in 1948, Ann Smeltzer, the daughter of Jennie B. and C. B. Smeltzer, made her first gift to the Blanden, an oil painting by cubist Lyonel Feininger titled *Church at Morning* (1946). During the late 1940s and early '50s, Smeltzer lived briefly in Paris and spent time in New York City, where she studied painting with the famed modernist teacher Hans Hofmann. Her enthusiasm for art prompted a rash of philanthropy that greatly benefitted the Blanden.

In the early 1950s, for instance, Smeltzer gave the Blanden works on paper by Chagall, Giacometti, Klee, and Gorky, and oil paintings by Beckmann, Miró, Hofmann, and Motherwell, among others. Three-dimensional pieces included sculpture by Marini, Calder, De Rivera, Lipchitz, Moore, and Noguchi, a Nigerian bronze, an Ivory Coast mask, a Mexican Bulto figure, and a pre-Columbian Colima figure. Ella Wasem, an old family friend who was active in the art federation from the 1920s, also gave the Blanden a watercolor by Kan-





Jacques Lipchitz, *Woman with Guitar*. Bronze,  $10\frac{5}{16} \times 6 \times 6$  inches, circa 1927. Blanden Memorial Art Museum, Fort Dodge, Iowa. Gift of Ann Smeltzer, 1955. So far as known, this is a unique cast, making it a one-of-a-kind piece by this major twentieth-century sculptor.

dinsky and an oil by Prendergast in 1952.

Many of the nearly thirty works Ann Smeltzer donated were specifically acquired by her for the Blanden in New York and Europe with the advice of Fort Dodge native Robert Brady. Smeltzer's gifts virtually ceased after 1955, but by then the museum had a notable collection of modern art. In fact, when the Blanden exchanged exhibits with the Des Moines Art Center in 1954, art center director Dwight Kirsch commented, "In many cases these paintings are more daring examples of

modern art than the Des Moines Art Center has yet been able to acquire."

**A**NOTHER LOCALE that encouraged progressive thinking was Iowa City, where the University of Iowa emerged in the 1940s as an educational leader in support of modern art. In prior decades, however, no one could have anticipated a sympathetic atmosphere for modernism. This is because, for all practical purposes, Charles Atherton Cumming was the founder of the university's art program. Although the university did offer a few history and appreciation courses before 1909, it was not until that year, when Cumming was invited to establish an art department, that a commitment was made to a serious studio program. Cumming struck a deal with the university whereby he would spend at least two days a week in Iowa City while continuing to direct his school in Des Moines.

The university's Department of Graphic and Plastic Arts, as it was soon called, prospered. A four-year curriculum leading to a bachelor's degree in art was instituted, and by 1923, there were eleven art faculty members. All of them, hand-picked by Cumming, necessarily subscribed to his academic views on art, and several were his former students.

In declining health, Cumming was granted a leave in 1925 and resigned a year later. For the next ten years, one of his faculty members, Catherine Macartney, directed the department. Towards the end of her administration, Grant Wood, Iowa's leading painter, was appointed to the faculty in 1934. He arrived in that den of conservatism as a "modern." In a few short years, as a new director took over, he was viewed as a reactionary.

Art historian Lester D. Longman was appointed head of the department in 1936. Longman, Princeton-educated, well-traveled in Europe, and previously affiliated with Columbia, Ohio State, and McMaster University in Canada, was not particularly sympathetic to the Cumming group or to Grant Wood. Over the next several years, he brought faculty into the department who reflected his own progressive ideas. John Canaday, later the author of *Mainstreams of Modern Art* and an



PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHUCK GREINER AT BLANDEN MEMORIAL ART MUSEUM

Hans Hofmann, *Nirvana*. Oil on canvas,  $38\frac{1}{16} \times 30\frac{1}{8}$  inches, 1951. Blanden Memorial Art Museum, Fort Dodge, Iowa. Gift of Ann Smeltzer, 1952. Hofmann, who emigrated from Germany in the 1930s, was perhaps the most important teacher of modern art in this country in the 1940s and '50s, and a central figure in the New York art world. Ann Smeltzer studied with him about the time this painting was executed.



Lester D. Longman, 1938. Appointed head of the art department at the University of Iowa in 1936, Longman transformed the department from a bastion of conservatism to a progressive force in American art education.

art critic for the *New York Times*, taught painting and etching in the 1938 summer session. H. W. Janson, the distinguished art historian, received his first teaching appointment at the University of Iowa for the 1938/39 academic year. Fletcher Martin, known for his vigorously expressive representational style, served on the studio faculty in 1940. Philip Guston, who came into national prominence as an abstract expressionist in the 1950s, taught in the department from 1941 to 1945.

Longman's gradual transformation of the department was accompanied by conflict that embroiled the university. For example, the hostility toward modernism was still so strong in 1939, that Janson, although soon reinstated, was fired in mid-semester by the dean of the College of Liberal Arts for taking his students to Chicago to see a Picasso exhibition.

Janson later maintained that Grant Wood had been involved in the incident. Whether the claim was true or not, Wood and Longman were clearly in a struggle for control of the department. Wallace Tomasini, the present-day director of the School of Art and Art History, believes that Longman's opposition to Wood was chiefly pedagogical (Wood was considered an inflexible teacher who wanted students to emulate him). Yet it is well known that Longman had low regard for Wood as an artist and felt Regionalism was insignificant. For his

part, Wood was opposed to an art historian running a studio program. He apparently wanted to chair the department or run a separate studio program.

Alice Davis, a university art faculty member from 1929 to 1945, recalled the conflict between Longman and Wood: "Dr. Longman once called in most of the faculty one by one to discuss their support for his chairmanship. The issue really came down to whose side faculty were on, his or Grant Wood's. Dr. Longman had the perception that Grant Wood was trying to take over the department. There was a fear that Grant Wood would dictate the kind of work students could do. Grant Wood did have some friends in higher administration, and I had the feeling that the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, in which the art department was located, was being pressured to support him."

In the 1940/41 academic year, Wood took a leave of absence, principally to let the air clear and to give university administration time to solve the dispute. A compromise was reached whereby Wood was given a university title, and registration for his courses was handled outside of usual art department channels. The viability of this plan was never really tested, however, because Grant Wood died of cancer in early 1942.

**T**HE WAR YEARS were a period of consolidation for the progressive forces in the University of Iowa Art Department. The transformation to modernism was underscored by the annual summer exhibitions of contemporary art organized by Lester Longman beginning in 1945. Of the 127 works included in the first show, the names of only a few artists need to be mentioned to partially convey something of the character of the exhibition: Milton Avery, Stuart Davis, Max Ernst, Arshile Gorky, Fernand Leger, Roberto Matta, Irene Rice Pereira, Jackson Pollock, and Rufino Tamayo. In the foreword to the catalogue, Longman wrote: "The purpose of this exhibition is to present to University students and to people in this part of the country a cross-section of progressive painting in the United States . . . the frontiers of experimentation are shown as well as much discriminating

work of less controversial character.

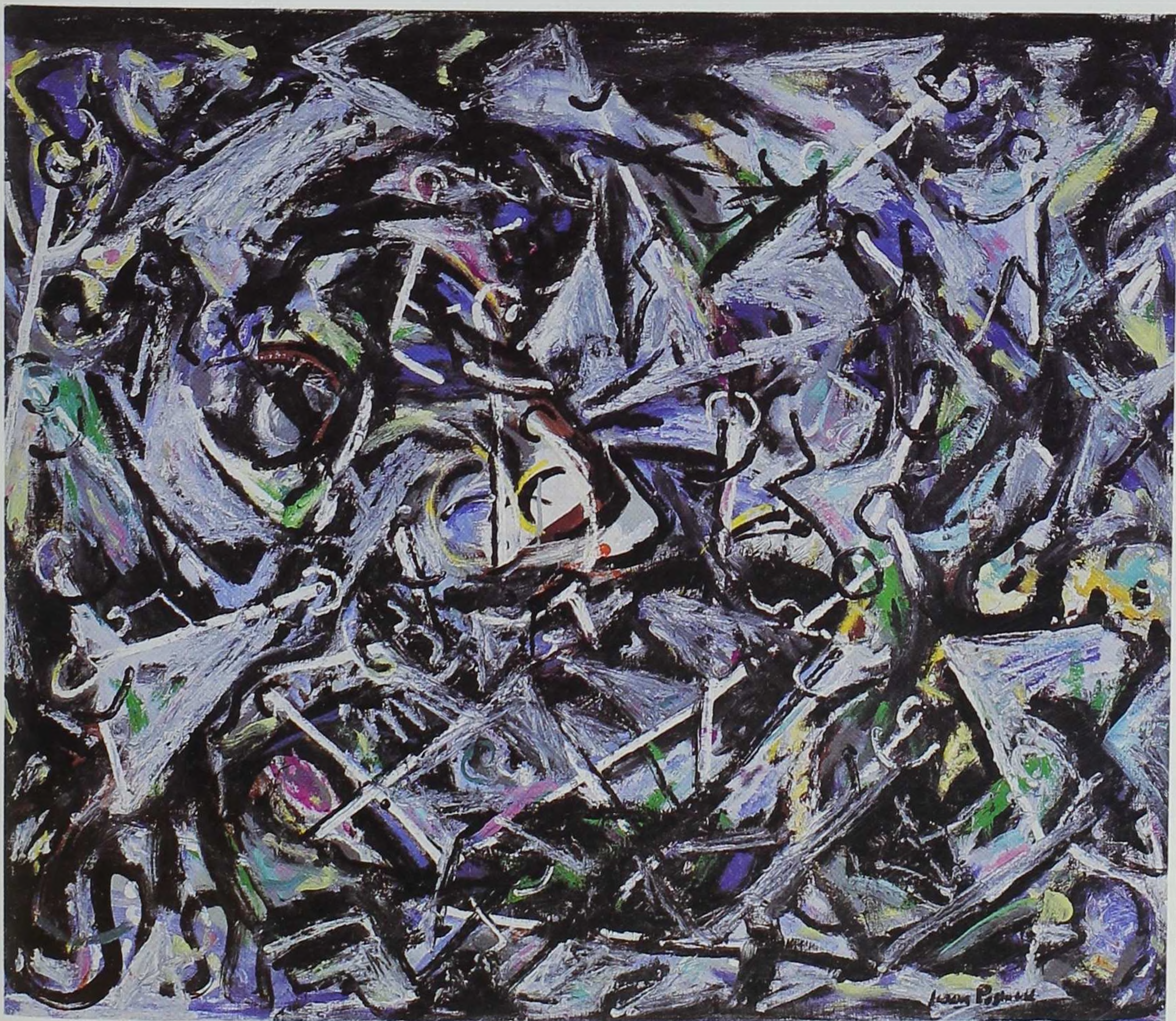
"Perhaps the most salient inference from the exhibition," Longman continued, "is that our terminology in the discussion of modern art is rapidly becoming obsolete. Fewer paintings are pure surrealism, abstraction, expressionism, neo-romanticism, or socially-conscious realism. Instead, many subtly fuse in new compounds the values sought by several of these movements. . . .

"We no longer feel it necessary to explain and justify Picasso, Matisse, Roualt and Beckmann," Longman wrote. "We take them in our

stride, recognizing that the artistic discoveries of the European schools reflect a time-spirit more truly than a place."

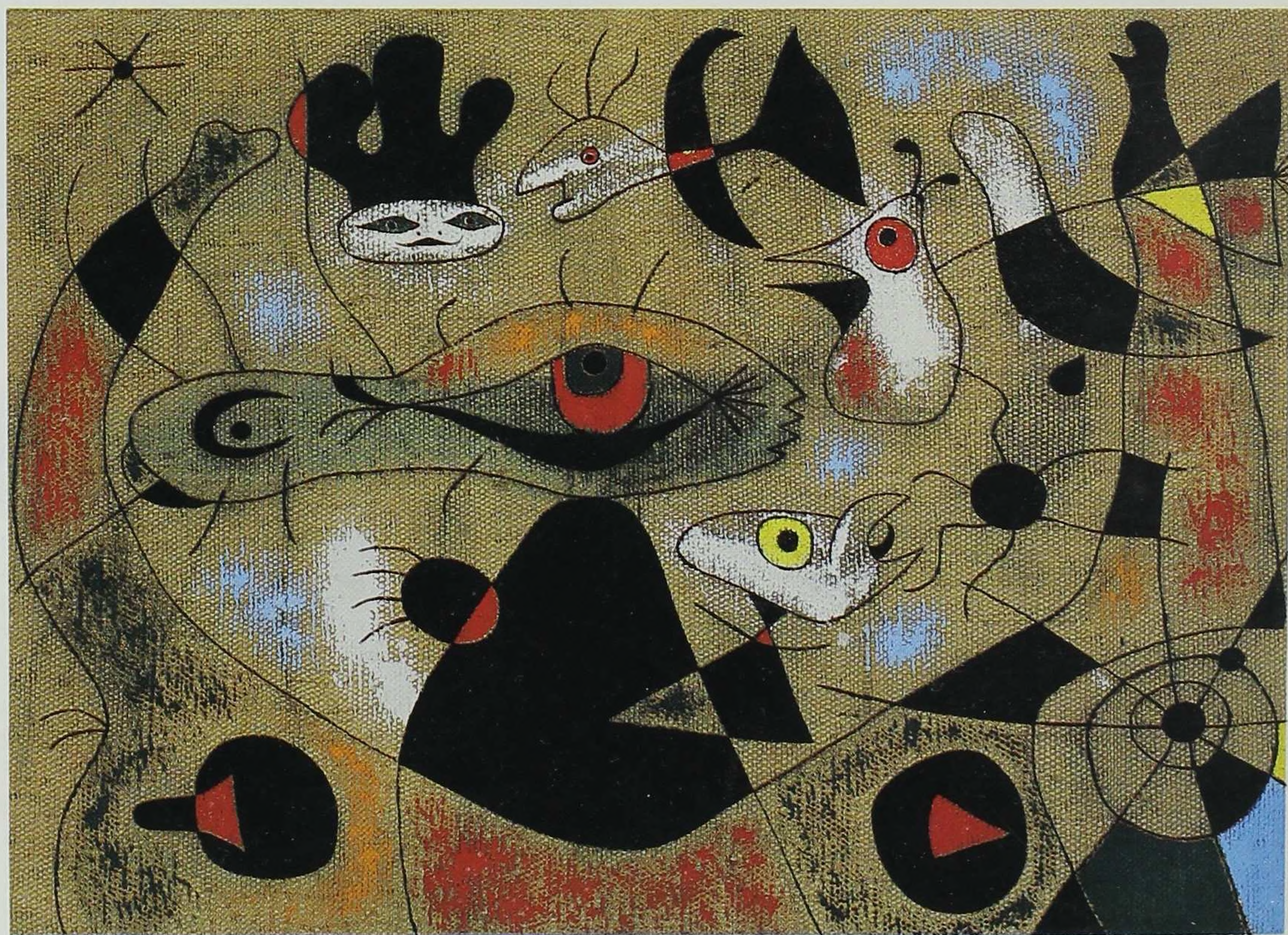
Succeeding summer exhibitions, accompanied by Longman's insightful catalogue essays, provided Iowa with as comprehensive and up-to-date surveys of contemporary American and European art as could be found anywhere in the country. And, beginning with the 1945 exhibition, works selected by Longman and invited jurors were purchased for the university's permanent collection.

Although it is arbitrary to make such a selec-



THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA MUSEUM OF ART. GIFT OF PEGGY GUGGENHEIM, 1947.39

Jackson Pollock, *Portrait of H.M.* Oil on canvas, 36 × 43 inches, 1945. University of Iowa Museum of Art. Gift of Peggy Guggenheim, 1947. Donated to the University of Iowa by Pollock's patron as a consequence of her friendship with Lester Longman. Known at this time to relatively few art cognoscenti, Jackson Pollock began to employ his soon-to-become-infamous "drip" technique in the year that Guggenheim donated this painting.



THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA MUSEUM OF ART, PURCHASE, MARK RANNEY MEMORIAL FUND, 1948.3

Joan Miró, *A Drop of Dew Falling from the Wing of a Bird Awakens Rosalie Asleep in the Shade of a Cobweb*. Oil on basketweave fabric, 25<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 36<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches, 1939. University of Iowa Museum of Art. Purchased in 1948 from the Fourth Summer Exhibition organized by Lester Longman, one of a series of summer exhibitions that brought to the University of Iowa major surveys of contemporary art.

tion, of the many modern masterpieces in the University of Iowa Museum of Art, two might represent the university's preeminence in academic support of contemporary art in the 1940s. As a consequence of Longman's friendship with Peggy Guggenheim, the renowned collector, dealer, and patron of modern art gave a number of paintings to the university, including Jackson Pollock's *Portrait of H.M.* in 1947. The painting had been exhibited in the university's Third Summer Exhibition of Contemporary Art. From the Fourth Summer Exhibition, the university purchased Joan Miró's *A Drop of Dew Falling from the Wing of a Bird Awakens Rosalie Asleep in the Shade of a Cobweb*, painted in 1939. A number of Miró

enthusiasts consider this painting to be one of his finest works.

FOR THOSE UNFAMILIAR with Iowa and inclined to think of it only as a sparsely populated agricultural state, the artistic vitality that existed here in the 1930s and '40s may come as a surprise. In addition to livestock and farm machinery exhibits, there was some interesting art at the annual state fair that began to indicate a shift towards modern art — as did the work created or exhibited by the Iowa Cooperative Painters, Des Moines Association of Fine Arts, Blanden Memorial Art Gallery, and the University of Iowa Art Department. In the final analysis, the conflict between conservatives, American Scene artists, and modernists was no sharper in Iowa than elsewhere. It was bitter every place. Outside our major American cities, however, it may have been more resonant in Iowa because of individuals like Charles Atherton Cumming, Grant Wood, and Lester Longman. □