

Disarray in the Demuth Garden

Editor's note: Among the projects undertaken during the astonishingly productive term of our retiring president, Mimi McQueen, perhaps none has such far-reaching significance as the construction of a vault for our permanent collection of paintings and drawings by Charles Demuth. Mimi's labors have been as far-sighted as they have been energetic, and we are proud to have her offer a report on the subject.

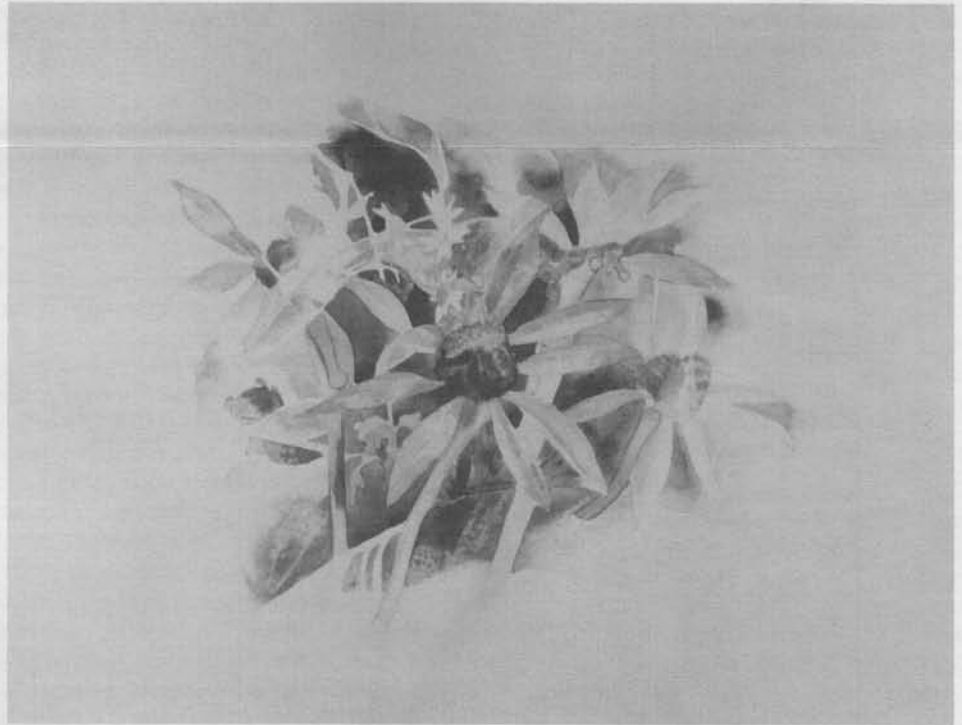
It's only a temporary inconvenience for permanent improvement. Plants are being moved from the south-west bed to bloom in the garden at 116 East King Street so W. Fred Kinsey and his associates can begin their archeological investigation of the site of the former privy and garden shed. Who knows what treasures may be unearthed? Will they find Charles Demuth's discarded paint tubes? Shards of china? Traces of eighteenth century memorabilia?

The dig will precede reconstruction of the garden shed and privy, designed internally to provide vault protection for our growing collection of Demuth art and archives.

The Steinman Foundations' grant of \$15,000 has been matched 2:1 and even surpassed through generous individual and corporate donations. Our initial estimate of construction costs exceeds this total, but we are so convinced of the need for this building to safeguard our collection that we are starting work before all funding has been received.

If you have not been a supporter, perhaps you will reconsider and help with this project. The building, unlike a bank vault, will have a scientifically controlled environment to protect Demuth's delicate watercolors and drawings. No longer will they be subjected to crating and uncrating and a bumpy ride up East King Street each time they are exhibited. *Pink Tulips* can reside peacefully and permanently in its frame, and our collection will be more readily available to scholars and more easily and frequently placed on public exhibit.

When you visit our garden this summer, imagine how it will look with its authentic brick and slate garden shed, and know that you have helped make our future possible.



Daisies Join Demuth Collection

As a gift from the Estate of the late Joan Charlton, another work by Charles Demuth—titled *Daisies*—has joined the Foundation's permanent collection, completing a quartet of recent acquisitions. Each of the new pieces illustrates a different facet of Demuth's art: *Landscape with Windmill #1*, 1896, his first formal work of art; *Aviariste (Woman with Parrots)*, 1912, one his vaudeville pieces; and *Man and Woman on the Beach, Provincetown*, 1916, a lively scene including the sea and sailboats.

Daisies is a 9 3/4" x 11 5/8" watercolor and pencil rendering on paper, with an added bonus that calls its 1922 date into question.

Affixed to the watercolor's frame backing is a card from Alfred Stieglitz's "An American Place" gallery, on which Stieglitz himself has authenticated the work and altered its date from 1922 to 1932, verifying the correction with his signature.

The celebrated photographer was among the first of Demuth's patrons and notable as well for fostering the careers of many other young American artists during the early years of the century. Founded in 1929, "An American Place" succeeded Stieglitz's "Intimate Gallery," at both of which Demuth's work was regularly exhibited.

Stieglitz's legendary Photo-Succession Gallery, better known for its street address as "291" on Fifth Avenue, had closed in 1917, prior to his showing Demuth's work, but he was responsible for first linking Demuth's name with those of Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, Paul Strand, and his own as "Seven Americans."

Daisies appears to belong to a later period in Demuth's career, and in every likelihood Stieglitz's 1932 dating is correct. Late or early, however, it is a handsome addition to the Foundation's collection.

Demuth's Poster Portraits

Charles Demuth's poster portraits constitute a major contribution among his various gifts to twentieth century painting. The eight works in the series, enriched by studies for three poster portraits he never completed, reinforce Demuth's significance as a major American artist and offer impressive evidence of his inventiveness.

All dating to the period 1923-1929, the poster portraits may be unique in art history, employing images to suggest the subjects' vocations as part of the composition.

In no instance did Demuth make any attempt to depict the physical appearance of his subjects, although some of his contemporaries—Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp, for instance—made portraits of faces or bodies resembling fantastic mechanical constructions. Perhaps these conceptions were only possible in a twentieth century machine-age civilization preoccupied with advertising. Indeed, the works may have anticipated later developments in patterns and juxtapositions of images, figures, numbers, and strongly contrasting blocks of color in both art and commerce.

Also, Demuth's portraits are unique in his own work, employing the hard-edge approach of cubist paintings like *My Egypt*, 1927, the supple romanticism of *Pink Tulips*, 1930, and the casual insouciance of his illustrations and figure drawings.

Like many of the word-portraits written by Gertrude Stein, Demuth's paintings are portraits of their subjects' work rather than portraits of the subjects themselves. Only by undisciplined stretches of the imaginations of some reviewers and curators do the paintings physically resemble the people whose work they celebrate: artists Arthur Dove, Charles Duncan, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, and Georgia O'Keeffe; vaudeville transvestite Bert Savoy; poets Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams; playwright Eugene O'Neill.

In every case, the paintings and sketches were designed to depict the artist's art rather than the artist, sometimes directly through images alluding to his or her work, sometimes including the names or initials of the subject, sometimes elliptical and mute. With this issue, the *Demuth Dialogue* begins an intermittent series of accounts of Demuth's interactions and associations with his subjects.



Charles Demuth and Georgia O'Keeffe, 1932, photograph by Carl Van Vechten. Reproduced with the permission of Joseph Solomon for the Van Vechten Estate.

I. Georgia O'Keeffe

Charles Demuth may have first met Georgia O'Keeffe through her work, on 3 April 1917 at the opening of her first one-person exhibition in New York at Alfred Stieglitz's legendary 291 gallery, first home to so many modernist painters. Stieglitz first exhibited Demuth's art in his Intimate Gallery as part of the "Seven Americans" show in 1925. Further, Demuth's letters to Stieglitz offer perhaps the strongest record we have of his personal and professional lives.

At the time of her first exhibition at 291, O'Keeffe was teaching in Texas and missed the show completely. At the same time, Stieglitz was in despair, convinced not only that the inevitability of World War I would end America's first modernist step forward in art but that Prohibition would put his first wife's family brewery out of commission, thereby cutting off the funds that financed his gallery and publications. 291 closed two months later, concluding one of the genuinely original movements in American art.

When O'Keeffe and Demuth did meet, probably before 1920, they were attracted to each other's work and personality. She thought he was more "fun" (to use her own word), than any of the other artists she knew, and until his early death in 1935 they remained devoted friends. After Robert Locher, Demuth seems to have considered O'Keeffe his closest ally; after Stieglitz, whom she married in 1924, O'Keeffe held Demuth in affectionate esteem.

She and Stieglitz saw him regularly whenever he was in New York. O'Keeffe and Demuth often attended exhibitions together, and later they visited the eventual site of the Museum of Modern Art, where in time they would both be substantially represented in its permanent collection. They were frequent companions, especially at the salon of the Stettheimer sisters, and they were both dinner guests there the night Demuth first announced publicly his dependence on insulin shots every two hours—then as radical as it was new as a treatment—to control his diabetes.

As early as 1923, O'Keeffe visited Demuth in Lancaster, stayed at the Weber Hotel across the street, but took her meals with the Demuths, before and afterward exploring with him the varieties of flowers in the garden available to them as subject matter for paintings.

Demuth's poster portrait of O'Keeffe is the first in the series, and by March 1924, according to one of his letters to Stieglitz, he was "having a lot of fun." A large pot of green vegetation—resembling the old-fashioned plant commonly called "snakeplant" or, more rudely, "mother-in-law's tongue"—emulates (rather than imitates) O'Keeffe's own paintings of flowers and foliage. Pale apples, pears, and perhaps a gourd flank the pot against sharp-edged black and blue angled planes. Further, her name appears vertically in bright red, deliberately broken apart and wrenched for spelling in reverse order, rising to the top of the image and spilling back onto it to form a cross surrounded by radiating lines to suggest light.

In later years, O'Keeffe reminisced about their association when she spoke with Donald Gallup, now the retired Curator of the Collection of American Literature at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. In his memoirs, Gallup reported on her memories of Demuth during his own decade of conversations with her:

"O'Keeffe always liked Demuth (she pronounced his name with the accent on the first syllable), 'he was so elegant'—far handsomer than any of the photographs reproduced in the various books about him, 'always so entertaining.' But in spite of his elegance, he used to spit on his hands to smooth down his hair—a habit O'Keeffe found as distasteful as curious in one of Demuth's temperament. (1965, 1971)

"One day he came to see O'Keeffe and informed her that he had just made a new will, leaving her all of his oil paintings. He had sold only one [*My Egypt*—to a museum. No one seemed to want to buy them, although everybody was eager to have the watercolors. He was leaving the oils to O'Keeffe, for it wouldn't matter to her whether she sold them or gave them away. The watercolors would go to his friend Robert Locher, who would never be able to make a living for himself and would need the money the watercolors would bring. (O'Keeffe never did get the oils in New York that should have come to her.)

Locher and his friend Richard Weyand had worked for several years on a

Gilbert Bequest

catalogue raisonné of the Demuth oeuvre. After Locher's death, Weyand continued the research. O'Keeffe and Doris Bry [her assistant, working with her on Stieglitz's papers] persuaded him that he should give the catalogue to Yale for the Stieglitz Archive. (He wrote us that he would provide for this in his will, but died unexpectedly before he had got around to carrying out his promise. Although one of his heirs was willing, another refused to allow the Demuth material to be turned over to Yale. It was held for several years in a bank vault in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. When the Weyand estate was finally settled, the Demuth catalogue, presumably divided among the four heirs, simply disappeared,* another sad monument to the inefficacy of even the best of good intentions.) (1976)¹



Charles Demuth Poster Portrait: O'Keeffe, 1923-24.
Poster paint on panel, 20"x16"
Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book
and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven

Demuth died in 1935; Stieglitz died in 1946; three years later, Gallup persuaded O'Keeffe that Yale University was a fitting repository for the large archive of Stieglitz's papers and many of his photographs. When an exhibition of these materials opened in 1951, she loaned five paintings by her contemporaries to enhance it, including Demuth's *After All*, 1933. Subsequently, she gave four of his poster-portraits—of Arthur Dove, Charles Duncan, John Marin, and the one of herself—to Yale.

Because of their mutual interest in African-American arts and letters, Carl Van Vechten then persuaded O'Keeffe to give several of the important paintings in the Stieglitz collection, including Demuth's poster-portrait of Bert Savoy, to Fisk University, in Nashville, Tennessee. The best known of the series, of William Carlos Williams [*I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold*, 1928] she had already given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The last of the Demuth paintings in O'Keeffe's possession, his 1931 *Chimney and Watertower*—of the Armstrong Floor Plant in Lancaster—was sold in 1995 to the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas.

In addition to his homage to O'Keeffe in his poster portrait of her, Demuth wrote a memorable note for her 1926 exhibition catalog:

"Flowers and flames. And color. Color as color, not as volume, or light—only as color. The last mad throb of red just as it turns green, the ultimate shriek of orange calling upon all the blues of heaven for relief or for support; these Georgia O'Keeffe is able to use. In her canvases each color almost regains the fun it must have felt within itself, on forming the first rainbow."

O'Keeffe once told Emily Farnham that Demuth was "a better friend with me than any other artist."²

*Subsequently some sections of the catalog were deposited at the Beinecke Library.

¹PIGEONS ON THE GRANITE, New Haven, CT: Beinecke Library, Yale University, 1988, 231. Reprinted with the permission of the author and publisher.

²Quoted in Emily Farnham, "Charles Demuth: His Life, Psychology and Works," Ohio State University, 1959, p. 934.

Editor's Note: Betty Gilbert was a great friend of the Demuth Foundation, one of its most loyal supporters and strongest advocates. Now, through a generous bequest from her mother, Mary Gilbert, who died in 1995 at the age of 103, the Foundation has been able to fulfill one of its primary aspirations. It has established a permanent endowment fund that will insure the continued growth of its major aims. The Board of Directors has unanimously resolved an initial intent for the endowment income to return 30% to the endowment itself, to reserve 35% for acquisitions, and to use 35% for programming and maintenance.

Born in Lancaster, Betty Gilbert—called "BG" or "Beege" by many of her friends—spent her winters working in the offices of the Lancaster Press and her summers playing. However, through the full year, she devoted her energies to the needs of the Demuth Foundation until her untimely death in 1992, drawing on her own cash reserves for loans to tide the organization over if necessary. "She put her money where her mouth was," an old friend recalled. "Nobody ever had to ask Beege to do that." Now another of the Foundation's most loyal supporters and strongest advocates, Gerald Lestz, recalls these two remarkable women.

The endowment fund of the Demuth Foundation was given a tremendous boost by a \$300,000 bequest from Mrs. J. Roland Gilbert, whose daughter Elizabeth was a founder and active supporter.

Bette, as most of us knew her, worked quietly on behalf of the Foundation fully in accord with its aims, purposes, and mechanics of its projects. She preceded her mother in death; her mother, "Mamie," sought to carry out what Bette would have done. Bette spoke up for the Foundation at a time when it was young and not totally established.

Mamie and Bette made their home first on Woods Avenue, and neighbors humorously called Mamie "the Mayor of Woods Avenue." They supported many forms of creative activity. Bette was a longtime director of the Fulton Opera House. To mark Mamie's 70th birthday, she and Bette brought the celebrated ragtime pianist Max Morath to the Fulton stage to present a Scott Joplin concert for their friends.

The family interest in support of cultural efforts dated back many years. Mamie's "Uncle Will" was William Uhler Hensel, the Pennsylvania attorney general, later honored by Franklin & Marshall College through Hensel Hall. He sparked the landmark 1912 Lancaster Portrait Show held on the roof garden of the old Woolworth Building. Mamie remembered attending (her memory was photographic) and meeting the renowned critic, Christian Brinton. Mamie's family was related by marriage to Milton S. Hershey, the chocolate tycoon, and she recalled the day he pointed out to her the site on which he planned to erect "a grand hotel."

The Gilberts traveled in a Puegot in Europe and had it shipped home. They visited many local antique auctions, and many art shows at galleries and museums; Bette's library of art books was extensive.

For the newly formed Foundation, Bette sought out all the cards, note papers, and posters showing Demuth paintings, so they could be sold in the museum gift shop. The larger museums were not always as cooperative or as skilled merchandisers as one might like, but Bette persisted in her efforts.

Bette was probably a closer friend to Dorothea Demuth, the owner of the tobacco shop, than any other trustee. At one time, Bette suggested that if Dot relinquished ownership of the tobacco shop, Bette would take it on behalf of the Foundation.

One of Bette's prized possessions was the Ford brougham her father had given her as a high school graduation present. She kept it fully restored, and the Foundation even took advantage of that. For a Demuth Flower Show at Rock Ford, Margaret Lestz asked Bette for the loan of the car overnight to station it on the grounds; in it were mannequins of Charles Demuth and his friend Georgia O'Keeffe, dressed for a picnic "sur l'herbe."

Bette gave the Foundation several Demuth snuff jars, her personal collection of pipes, and a group of decorative American tobacco jars which are currently displayed in the tobacco shop. Also, she gave the museum two small Matisse etchings, formerly owned by Charles Demuth, which she had purchased at the Locher-Weyand auction.



Quotations from Charles Demuth

Selected by Marie Zubatsky

In the late spring of 1922, Alfred Stieglitz, photographer and art impresario, created a series of photographic portraits of artists associated with his Gallery 291. While Charles Demuth is considered by some to be a peripheral member of this group, he nevertheless enjoyed a close friendship with both Stieglitz and his wife Georgia O'Keeffe. Stieglitz's portrait of Demuth shows the then 38-year-old artist, his face clearly reflecting the ravages of diabetes, in a deeply introspective, contemplative pose. On 2 May 1923, Demuth wrote to Stieglitz: "You have me in a fix: shall I remain ill retaining that look, die, considering 'that moment,' the climax of my 'looks,' or, live and change. I think the head is one of the most beautiful things that I have ever known in the world of art. A strange way,—to write of one's own portrait,—but, well, I'm a, perhaps, frank person. I send it this morning to my mother."

Hail and Farewell and Encore

The Demuth Foundation welcomes seven new members to its Board of Directors:

COLIN COOK calls himself a "Mr. Mom" for his three active youngsters, but he is an avid soccer player and an avid gardener too. Indeed, his garden was on the Demuth tour a few years ago. A native of Newcastle, England, Colin has lived in Lancaster for ten years.

SALLY JARVIS is a free-lance travel writer, and she organizes and conducts tours as well. For many years she was Assistant Director of the North Museum here in Lancaster, so her long experience with museum operations will be a welcome addition to the board.

M. WILLIAM JONES, a Lancaster native, has a wealth of experience in public relations. Retired in 1994 as Assistant to the President of Armstrong, Bill is active in the community as chairman of the Lancaster Airport Authority and as a member of Lancaster's City Planning Commission.

FRANK MCCARTHY recently retired as Managing Director for Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories in Marietta. A micro-biologist by vocation, Frank is an active gardener, and a few years ago his splendid garden was included on the Demuth Garden Tour.

NANCY RILL, retired principal from the Elizabeth Martin and Hamilton Elementary Schools, brings a wealth of experience to us from her broad interests and service on the boards of directors of the Y.W.C.A., the Lancaster Day Care Center, and the Heritage Center.

ROBERT L. SCHROEDER is Vice President and Resident Manager of Prudential Securities, Inc. His experience as a trustee of Old Zion Church in Brickerville will be most welcome, as will his warm memories of his great-uncle, the artist Robert Locher, Demuth's best friend.

MARGARET WOODBRIDGE wrote the recent article about the history of the Demuth Tobacco Shop for the *Demuth Dialogue*. An Associate Professor Emerita of English at Millersville University, Peg is currently a popular lecturer for the annual Quest and Beacon series.

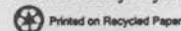
Reelected to second three-year terms on the board are CHRIS CHIANOS, JEAN GROMOLL, ROBERT LYON, SALLY THOMPSON, and VIRGINIA WITMER.

The Demuth Foundation will miss REBECCA CAMPBELL, MARY CHIANOS, WILLIAM EARLY (our expeditious and efficient secretary), CISI ESHELMAN, TIMOTHY LANZA, and JUNE WALKER, whose terms of office expire this year. And most especially we will miss MIMI MCQUEEN after her three productive years as President of the Board of Directors. Even a cursory inventory of her record of achievements for the Demuth Foundation is remarkable, and her combination of tenacity and tact is as enviable as it is admirable.

A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Pa. Department of State by calling toll free within Pennsylvania 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

The *DEMUTH DIALOGUE* is published four times a year by the Demuth Foundation. We welcome comments and ideas for future issues.

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