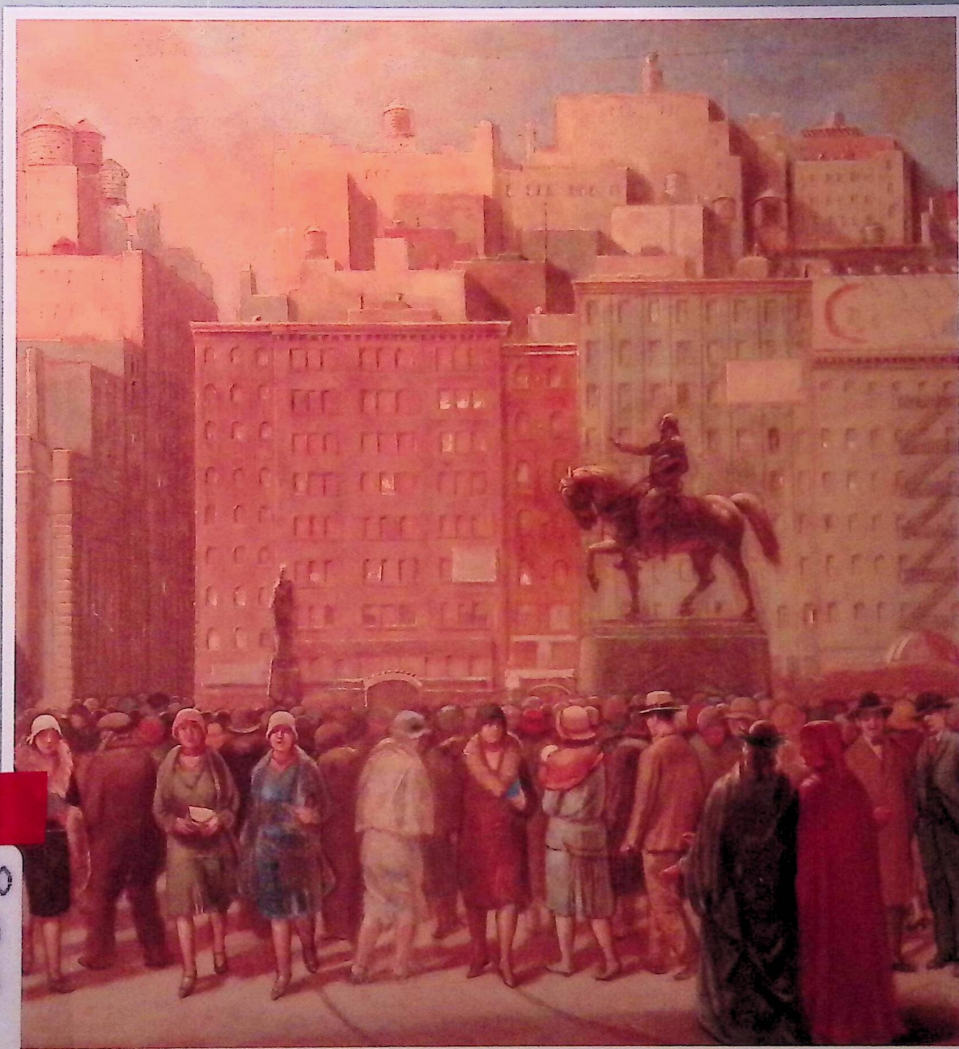


BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL



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Union Square in the 1930s



BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL



35 Edith Nankivell
Union Square, 1935
etching and aquatint, 9½ × 11
Collection of John Beck
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

BETWEEN HE Union Square

Exhibition curated by
Stanley I Grand

Essays by
James M. Dennis and Kathleen
Stanley I Grand

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SORDONI ART GALLERY / W
WILKES-BARRE, PENNSYLVANIA

JANUARY 21 THROUGH MARCH



BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL

Union Square in the 1930s

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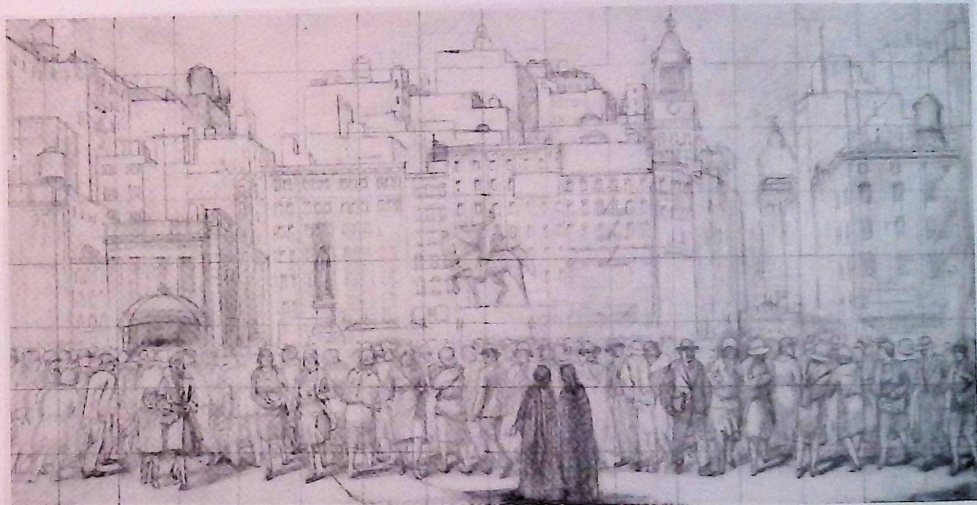
Essays by
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6 Isabel Bishop
Dante and Virgil in Union Square, 1932
oil on canvas, 27 × 52¹/₈
Collection of Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington
Gift of the Friends of Art, 1971
Photograph courtesy Delaware Art Museum

17 Isabel Bishop
Virgil and Dante in Union Square—Study, 1932
graphite, 13 × 26
Collection of Palmer Museum of Art,
The Pennsylvania State University
Photograph courtesy Palmer Museum of Art

A MODERN Isabel Bishop's *Dante and Virgil*

James M. Dennis
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Kathleen M. Daniels
College of St. Catherine

AS AN "AMERICAN-SCENE" painter, Isabel Bishop is generally associated with the Street School of the 1930s which included Kenneth Hayes Miller, Edward Hopper, and Raphael Soyer. At first, Bishop lived in the neighborhood on Fourteenth Street, and her sociologist Dr. Harold G. Wolff in 1934 took the subway from Riverdale to her home in the northwest corner of Union Square. Her etchings, and paintings continue to depict the (more often than men) who lived and shopped around this near-to-the-center of the city. Created two years before her death, the painting, indeed mystifying, of all her work is *Union Square* (Cat. no. 6) a contrived display of densely packed, shadowy silhouettes of the rooftops and a dozen figures distributed across the front row of the crowd, representing a scene that would never during that period have taken place in Union Square en masse, with the figures of Dante and Virgil. Bishop's painting is thus a genre depiction of a scene that does not possibly a history painting in the tradition of vernacular traditions. Rather, it should be interpreted allegorically.

Tenuous interpretations of the scene are based upon a familiar New York City scene that was published, and Bishop herself has given personal reasons for the unusual scene. Questions are raised but go unanswered. For example, did she move the Gutzwiller statue from the south end of the square around, and align it in the center of the scene? In pondering such matters,



Dante and Virgil in Union Square—Study, 1932
p. 26
Palmer Museum of Art,
Pennsylvania State University
courtesy Palmer Museum of Art

A MODERN AMERICAN PURGATORY

Isabel Bishop's

Dante and Virgil in Union Square, 1932

James M. Dennis

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Kathleen M. Daniels

College of St. Catherine

AS AN "AMERICAN-SCENE" urban realist, Isabel Bishop is generally associated with the Fourteenth Street School of the 1930s which included her teacher Kenneth Hayes Miller, Edward Laning, Reginald Marsh, and Raphael Soyer. At first, Bishop lived in the neighborhood on Fourteenth Street; but after marrying neurologist Dr. Harold G. Wolff in 1934, she commuted by subway from Riverdale to her new studio overlooking the northwest corner of Union Square. Her drawings, etchings, and paintings continued to depict women (more often than men) who lived, loitered, worked, or shopped around this near-to-downtown Manhattan hub. Created two years before her marriage, the most intriguing, indeed mystifying, of all her works, *Dante and Virgil in Union Square* (Cat. no. 6) confronts a strangely contrived display of densely packed people with the shadowy silhouettes of the robed, literary pair. Some two dozen figures distributed across the foreground as the front row of the crowd, represent a social class that would never during that period have jammed into Union Square en masse, with or without Dante and Virgil. Bishop's painting is thereby unreal. It does not qualify as a genre depiction of ordinary activity nor is it possibly a history painting in either the classical or the vernacular traditions. Rather, its personal iconography should be interpreted allegorically.

Tenuous interpretations of this curious intrusion upon a familiar New York City setting have been published, and Bishop herself suggested rather vague personal reasons for the unusual nature of the painting. Questions are raised but go unanswered. Why, for example, did she move the George Washington equestrian statue from the south end of the square, turn it around, and align it in the center with the two mystery guests? In pondering such manipulations, we intend to

offer more precise hypotheses with regard to the painting's diverse allusions than have heretofore been attempted. In pursuing a plausible explanation for Dante and Virgil's visit to a working-class gathering place suddenly crowded with fashionably dressed members of the middle class, we will look into Bishop's personal and professional origins and review the changing conditions of the square and its immediate surroundings as they relate or fail to relate to the painting. We will also compare and contrast Bishop's stage-like depiction to other examples of her Union Square work and to relevant examples by her neighborhood colleagues. Most significant, we will consider how the painting represents her basic social beliefs, in particular her faith in the American ideal of upward mobility.

Directly related to the latter consideration, it must be noted that Bishop lived a comfortable, apparently contented, and perhaps even complacent life throughout the Great Depression and beyond, enjoying her privileges without any apparent qualms. Therefore, simply to assume that Dante and Virgil are visiting a twentieth-century inferno, is, in view of her secure, optimistic outlook, misleading. In a 1976 interview with Cindy Nemser, Bishop stated unequivocally, "But the Square was not the *Inferno* to me. It was not hell; it was beautiful."¹ Such a positive opinion complies with her confidence in an ongoing condition of social progress. Accordingly, her many female figures "in motion," as opposed to relatively passive male figures, might be interpreted as signifying the assertive "New Woman" in quest of equality. On the other hand, if viewed as willingly submissive in expression, her office-girl portrayals by the mid-thirties represent young women biding their time in the marriage market.² While not a highway of guaranteed upward mobility, marriage was the mapped-out route for most; and Bishop, newly married to a prosperous man herself, apparently had no argument with this custom, accepting it as a given in a

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traditional, male-dominated system. Preceding the "girls" by a matter of months, her shopper-type female figures, some with fur collars and at least two with children, hold the front line of Dante and Virgil's carefully orchestrated Union Square.³ With such prominence they could stand for the dreamed-of destination of Bishop's hopeful young women working their way up.

A number of parallels can be drawn between Isabel Bishop's life up to 1932 and *Dante and Virgil in Union Square*. As outside observers, Dante and Virgil are clearly separated from the crowd of people that fills the square. When examining Bishop's earlier years, one soon discovers a pattern of social separation to the point of seclusion. She too was an outsider looking on.

The last born of her parents' five children, Bishop was thirteen years younger than the second of two sets of twins who preceded her. She grew up in a working-class district of Detroit on a street bordering a more affluent neighborhood. Her well-educated, intellectual parents turned their backs on their immediate neighbors and would not allow their youngest child to play with the children of the block. She watched them enviously from her windows, excluded:

We were very isolated in Detroit and had almost no social life because although we didn't have the money, we identified with the big houses on the next block. I wasn't supposed to play with the children in my block, or be connected with them but wanted to be. I thought, "Oh, they have a warmer life than I do—they all know each other, and see each other and we are isolated."⁴

She would continue to express this feeling as an artist depicting incidental activities viewed from her Manhattan studio:

I think my being drawn to the 14th Street people and my sympathetic fascination with them came partly out of my isolation as a child and my fascination with my block, although I didn't realize it myself until a long time after.⁵

Remembering her childhood generally as a state of lonely detachment, Bishop also spoke of painful estrangement especially from her mother: "I wanted to be special. I always wanted more than I got. I overheard her say one day she felt like a grandmother to me. I hated that. I wanted a mother."⁶

The reference to Dante in the painting, as well as the statuesque coldness of its female figures, in particular the mother on the left side, might be associated with the frustration she suffered because of her mother's lack of interest in her:

All the years of my growing up, she was totally absorbed in translating Dante. I recognize now that she was living with the disappointment of wanting to be a writer and of never getting published. But I was so mixed up then. . . . Everyone was trying to do something to me, except my mother. She was indifferent.⁷

On the other hand, her relationship with her father generally parallels that of Virgil to Dante:

My father adopted me as his special interest. He saw the family as divided into two groups, "we" and "they." Mother and my sisters and brothers were on one side, and my father and I were on the other.⁸

In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Virgil joins Dante as a mentor, guide, and protector on a journey through the afterlife. In real life, Dante, as a proto-Renaissance, classical humanist, had turned to Virgil's writings in search of inspiration and a model for his own. As Virgil had been of help to Dante, Bishop's father was of constant assistance to her on many levels. Consequently, despite her mother's translation of Dante's masterpiece, Bishop dedicated the painting to her father. It was scaled to hang over the fireplace mantle of her parents' house in White Plains, New York, where they lived from the time of his retirement as a teacher of Greek and Latin until his death.⁹

Following several years' study at the Art Students League, completely financed by her father's wealthy cousin, James Bishop Ford, Bishop settled into a studio-residence at 9 West Fourteenth Street a year or so before the Stock Market crash. There she stayed until her marriage in 1934, when she moved her studio to 857 Broadway, catercorner from the northwest end of Union Square.¹⁰ By that time, with encouragement from her close friends Reginald Marsh and the painter-critic Guy Pène du Bois, she had made a good start in overcoming the stilted, rather bulbous figural forms learned from her academic instructor, Kenneth Hayes Miller.¹¹ Though she attributed her disciplined techniques and working habits to him, while possibly looking to the figural style of Edward Laning as well (Cat. no. 29), her drawings and etchings of this period foreshadow a personal style advanced by *Dante and Virgil in Union Square*. Without adopting a Robert Henri, "life over art" spontaneity once practiced by John Sloan and George Luks, its finished figures, while precisely contoured, do retain a slight painterly quality inherited from preparatory studies (Cat. nos. 16, 17, and 18).

The ironic display of highly prosperous-looking people on what had become a gathering place of depression-stricken workers may have been aimed at the artist's parents, a kind of compensation in view of their inability to achieve the upper-middle-class status they envied, a common dilemma of secondary teachers and scholars. Historically, such a fantasy of economic elevation harks back to an earlier phase in the life of Union Square.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Union Square district, especially Fourteenth Street, flourished as New York's center of fashionable entertainment and shopping, catering to, among others, the residents of mansions around the square. Built in 1854

15 Isabel Bishop
Union Square Looking East,
graphite, 6½ × 9½
Collection of Sordani Art
Gift of Judge Herbert W. S.

16 Isabel Bishop
Union Square Looking East,
graphite, 4 × 5½
Courtesy of DC Moore G
Photograph by Profession

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Union Square Looking East, n.d.
graphite, 6½ × 9½
Collection of Sordani Art Gallery, Wilkes University
Gift of Judge Herbert W. Salus

16 Isabel Bishop
Union Square Looking East, Study for Virgil and Dante, c. 1927
graphite, 4 × 5½
Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

on the south side of East Fourteenth, the Academy of Music hosted opera companies from abroad while plays were performed on the opposite side of the street at the Living Place Theater and Tony Pastor's theater. Tiffany's jewelry store and Brentano's bookstore were well established on Union Square West by the Seventies; and the original Hearn's, Macy's, and B. Altman and Company soon followed nearby as the city's most elegant department stores. In keeping with the rapid growth cycle of an American urban economy, the heyday was over by the turn of the century. Commercial buildings replaced the wealthy residences; most of the great stores had moved further uptown; and Fourteenth-Street theater declined to vaudeville, then to burlesque, and finally to striptease. The predominance of garment-industry sweatshops among the growing number of small manufacturers put a finishing touch on the general deterioration of the area as a residential neighborhood.¹²

Construction of new apartment buildings to the south, in what is now called the East Village, helped to revive the growth of retail businesses around Fourteenth Street and Broadway during the twenties. Hearn's, still in its original location, led the way by expanding toward Fifth Avenue. Then the giant discount stores, Ohrbach's and S. Klein's, specializing in women's wear and accessories, opened. In addition, a half-dozen banks, the Guardian Life Insurance Company, the Consolidated Edison Company, and several other major office buildings were erected by the end of the short-lived, post-World War I boom.¹³

The Crash of 1929 halted the progress. This was visible until the mid-1930s on Union Square itself. From 1928 until 1936, a major subway construction project, designed to unite Union Square Station on the Broadway line with the Fourteenth Street line, dragged on. It was necessary to raise the square some five feet or more and build a retaining wall around it in place of a nineteenth-century wrought-iron fence. With complete relandscaping, it seemed to take forever. Henry Kirke Brown's equestrian statue of George Washington, completed in 1856, was moved from its original location at the intersection of Fourteenth Street and Fourth Avenue to face downtown on the exact center of the south end of the square, while his Lincoln statue of 1868 was taken from its traffic-ridden spot at Fourteenth and Broadway and relocated toward the north end of the square. Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi's Lafayette statue, the first to be shifted from one place to another, was placed on the east side of the square looking across at S. Klein's annex.

As indicated by the excavated area around Adolf von Donndorf's *Mother and Children Fountain*, 1881, shown in her 1930 painting, *Union Square During the Expansion of the 14th Street Subway Station* (not in exhibition), Bishop lived through the changes, large and small. However, she bore little witness to them, drawing much of her subject matter from Fourteenth Street. In *On the Street (Fourteenth Street)*, 1931 (Cat. no. 13), two aggressive

women dressed in white stride forward, shoulder-to-shoulder, through a sidewalk group of shabby, conversing men.¹⁴ The men of *On the Street*, in contrast to the five most prominent male figures opposite the poets in *Dante and Virgil in Union Square*, are doubtlessly working class, probably unemployed. Their appearance of sullen discontent is as close as Bishop ever came to acknowledging the local gatherings that had recently increased in the form of unemployment demonstrations, political rallies and protests against police brutality. Labor unions and the newly formed Communist Party U.S.A. shared May Day around and finally on the park of the square throughout the Depression.

Though not an active participant in any of these events, Bishop could not have avoided being aware of them, especially after moving her studio in 1934: the marchers coming down Broadway and converging at Union Square, the noise, the music, the chants and speeches. All of these she relished as a main course of the neighborhood's basic menu:

I imagine I listened to the Third International from morning until night. I watched the parade floats and heard the shouts to free Tom Mooney. My world is through my window. I look out of my window and I feel I've eaten.¹⁵

Individual body language rather than rhetoric, physical mobility rather than political movements and their ideologies, preoccupied Bishop from her student years of life-drawing to the "walking" pictures toward the end of her career. "Earthy" female nudes in action poses or paired, young working women from the surrounding offices, attentive to each other's talk, represent her most intimate art.¹⁶ The majority of her men, Union Square idlers, "bums" she called them, appealed to her artist's eye as a ragged fringe. So her sketch-to-painting responses to them, in works such as *The Club* (Cat. no. 4), were physically empathic rather than politically sympathetic.

People have said to me "You must have been very socially conscious then because of the depression," but I did not see it that way. I felt then, and still feel, that these are aliens by temperament. I don't say their economic disadvantages haven't something to do with their condition but essentially they are persons who are eccentric. They are really hedonists. I got to know them as I had a series of them come up here. They would bring each other and they would take anything they could lay their hands on.¹⁷

Close up and quiet, without intruding in detail upon the individual portrayed. Bishop approached men and women in essentially the same way. Though very similar in technique to Honoré Daumier's *Third Class Carriage*, c. 1862, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, her painting of bunched-up, coarsely clothed men at the base of the Washington equestrian statue in *The Club*, 1935 (Cat. no. 4) was not meant to expose a critical



26 Peter Hopkins
Riot at Union Square, March 6, 1930, 1947
oil on canvas, 37 x 48
Collection of Museum of the City of New York
Gift of the Artist
Photograph courtesy Museum of the City of New York

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Gift of the Artist

Photograph courtesy Museum of the City of New York

condition as an appeal to reform it.¹⁸ Whatever the human dilemma might be, social, psychological, or (as is most likely) a combination of the two, the figures impart an aura of calm. A melancholy of endurance contrasts considerably to the obtrusive melodrama of Albert Halper's descriptions of the raucous masses in his 1933 novel *Union Square*:

With the first crack of daylight the parade of the Fourteenth Street beggars began. There were legless fellows; blind men who held onto small, faithful dogs; deformed, cleanly shaven fellows who wore army shirts and overseas hats to give a good "ex-service" effect. . . . The noise was terrific, everything was bedlam. Folks crossed the street against the traffic and were shouted at by our vigilant police. Everywhere you turned a vender shoved an object under your nose, yelling, screaming, urging you to buy.¹⁹

Such raucous conditions find a substantial degree of confirmation in early 1930s works by Bishop's colleague Reginald Marsh. Painted a year after Halper's novel, Marsh's *In Fourteenth Street* (not in exhibition) includes at least two pathetically handicapped men, one in the lower right-hand corner and the other in the left middleground. The latter, legless on the curb, seems to be screaming rather than merely begging for change, the crowd oblivious to his pleas. The other leans heavily on crutches, face somber, clothes disheveled in shocking contrast to the mannequin-like, blonde glamour girl nearest to him.²⁰

While not as overtly critical in his imagery as Marsh, Raphael Soyer also sympathized with the down-and-out of Union Square and the Fourteenth Street area. The heads of three pathetic men dominate the lower right corner of the painting, *In the City Park*, 1934 (Cat. no. 43). The central man, a self-portrait of the artist wearing a cap, stares downward woefully. In front of him, a friend or stranger sleeps with his mouth open. Head fallen back, he cushions it with his left hand whose arm rests heavily on a twine-wrapped bundle. The third man, also sleeping or in a trance, leans forward with his jaw sunk in a hand as thick-fingered as that of the foreground. In the middleground, a newsboy, two women, and a man in shirtsleeves circle and turn toward the equestrian statue of Washington retreating on its high pedestal in the direction of Fourteenth Street buildings. Several more men sit idly in the background.²¹

Bishop's intolerance for such crisis content in paintings biased her description of an exhibition of over 500 entries she judged in the mid-thirties. Highly skeptical of their subject matter, she wrote: "You'd think this great country was entirely composed of these little tiny [*sic*] people living in slums."²²

As indicated in the best of her "bum" pictures, *The Club* (Cat. no. 4) (previously mentioned), she looked upon the impoverished inhabitants of Union Square with a traditional eye for the picturesque. The men especially had the aesthetic appeal of any crusty, highly

textured forms. They could be rendered in graphite, ink, or pigment as "colorful," as abstractions—with a minimal concern for their physical, psychological, or social condition:

I've been interested in bums and so on for years. I was interested because I could get them. They were available, and they were very beautiful to draw. . . . I didn't feel they were victims exactly, but that their lives were largely a matter of choice.²³

Viewing poverty as picturesque prevailed in European painting from the Early Renaissance. As early as 1476, the three shabby shepherds in Hugo van der Goes' *Portinari Altarpiece* tumble into the nativity scene as a beautiful arabesque of down-to-earth reality. Religious iconography aside, a detached aesthetic attitude toward the poor continued to be assumed by many leading artists as diverse as Dürer, Hals, Rembrandt, Murillo, and Manet. In New York, Bishop's predecessors in Henri's circle of urban realists, especially George Luks, maintained a similar detachment in their attraction to the lower Manhattan poor, an aesthetic class consciousness with little apparent intention of exposing social ills. The working people provided them a subject matter with an unspoiled, rough "edge," as Luks termed it. Sounding essentially like Bishop in his attitude toward poverty, Luks considered the slums from an optimistic point of view characteristic of the Progressive period, that is, as a refuge for the momentarily poor:

It is not in human nature to repose, passive and resistless, on the bottom. The result is that all hands go to work to pull themselves up out of their rut of poverty, and the dominant message of the slums becomes "We Strive." There are many other notes in the song that the slums are singing, but that one expresses the prevailing spirit of it all. And that spirit bears fruition, too. The people do overcome their poverty and pass on into other spheres.²⁴

That a bum's life was "largely a matter of choice" to Bishop clearly reflected a basic belief advanced by the Progressive period. Accordingly, poverty, at least for most white Americans, need only be a temporary condition. As social historian Robert Bremner concluded in *From the Depths*: "In normal times Americans were accustomed to think of unemployment as exclusively the problem of the inefficient and indolent."²⁵ In short, class mobility resulted from ambition and personal effort in a society of ostensible equal opportunity. To be prosperous was a virtue, a sign of puritanical blessedness while poverty was a punishment for the deadly sin of sloth.

Bishop's comments on the subject simply repeated an American adage that a middle-class existence awaits anyone who strives for it: "It's something that's true of America. The people I paint are clearly defined as a class. But they are not bound to that class. There's no limitation to what they may do and no telling where they may wind up."²⁶

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Bishop's comments on the subject simply repeated an old adage that a middle-class existence awaits whoever strives for it: "It's something that's true of all classes. The people I paint are clearly defined as a class. They are not bound to that class. There's no limitation on what they may do and no telling where they may



18 Isabel Bishop
Virgil and Dante in Union Square—3 Studies, 1932
graphite, 6½ × 3¼
Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

If individuals of the working poor wanted to move, Bishop believed they could "in a social sense."

I was after mobility and I felt about these class-marked people that they were mobile in life, and that some of them did move. I've kept track during many years and some have moved in life. Others, of course, haven't, but an emphasis on this possibility seems to me a characteristic of American life.²⁷

While possible improvement of one's class status might be read into Bishop's paintings of young working women, *Dame Fortune*, or at least her rewards of advantageous choice in a mobile society, is allegorized in only one major work: *Dante and Virgil in Union Square* (Cat. no. 6). The Calvinist-Puritan doctrine that an outward show of inward grace awaits those predestined few who profitably tend their earthly gardens equates with the well clad, obviously prosperous people who fill the lower third of the composition. All the women wear cloche hats, and most of them sport fur-collared coats or separate fur pieces. Their outfits are in the style of the day; their skirts are fashionably knee-length. They carry clutch purses and some packages. Except for the woman on the far right who seems to enjoy her conversation with a smiling male companion to the point of laughing out loud, the faces remain relatively expressionless.

The fewer men are dressed in two- and three-piece suits, bow ties, neckties, and mostly fedora-type hats. While they engage in the same leisurely coming and going as the women, two of them, who stand to the right of center, appear to be discussing the strange looking pair in front of them. With the introduction of Dante and Virgil as supplementary subject matter, any literal "genre" meaning in the painting is replaced by an obtuse, allegorical one. As critic Craig Owens, in reference to Benedetto Croce's theory of allegory, explains: "Conceived as something added or superadded to the work after the fact, allegory will consequently be detachable from it. . . . The allegorical supplement is not only an addition, but also a replacement. It takes the place of an earlier meaning, which is thereby either effaced or obscured."²⁸

Not only the foremost figures of Dante and Virgil, but two other figures at the far left of the painting become crucial to an allegorical reading. Suggesting hardship and discrepancy, a presumably elderly woman in a full brown skirt that touches the ground, drab gray shawl, and narrow-brimmed, dome-crowned hat turns her back to us. Perhaps meant to represent an immigrant, she obviously does not represent the middle class.²⁹ To the right, separated from her by two stylish women accompanying a pert little boy in a short red outfit, a working-class man is dressed entirely in dark brown, his three-quarter length coat bulging and his baggy trousers hanging over his shoes. Unlike the other men in their full-brim hats, he wears a cap, a sign of his

lower status. He too walks away from us in an oblique direction converging with that of the woman. They would meet at a crowded point in front of a peculiar background structure: a weakly supported, rounded awning ambiguously located in front of the Union Square Savings Bank building. Originally sketched as a relatively solid, freestanding, arched entranceway (Cat. no. 18), this final version casts a dark oval shadow against which three other capped heads appear. In their triangular relationship, the two outcast figures and their vague destination serve as a subtle reminder that Union Square is not easy street.

Along with this token of impoverishment, the peculiar presence of Dante and Virgil causes Bishop's painting to become something more (or less) than a "rose-tinted" view of an affluent shopping-center extension of Fourteenth Street. The meaning of this as a social statement must stem in part from her often-repeated childhood memory of living on a borderline between prosperity and poverty.

This region—Union Square—interests me in a way that I don't understand myself. I think it has to do with a deep association from the time of my childhood in Detroit, and there was a kind of appetite that I developed for the other direction, toward the slum region. It seemed warmer to me. It seemed more human, and I liked it better, and yet I know that my family's feeling was that we were only one street from the good section, they wished to associate themselves with the good section. There was conflict. I feel that may be part of the reason for my loving this Union Square region, which is a rather shabby business region of New York.³⁰

On the one hand, Bishop was attracted to Union Square and its neighborhood for the same reasons she had been attracted to the poor neighborhood back home in Detroit: its human warmth. On the other, she eased her conflict with her parents' class-conscious envy by converting the square momentarily into a "good section" of affluence. This accommodation, combined with her belief in the American "boot-straps" myth of social mobility, lends a clue as to what aspect of the *Divine Comedy* Dante and Virgil's New York visit most convincingly alludes and how this reference expresses her basic reaction to the worst years of the Depression.

Dante, it must be remembered, takes the reader on a progressive tour of hell and purgatory with Virgil as his guide. Hell, or inferno, is divided into nine stages, each a different punishment befitting an earthly sin. The first stage, limbo, indefinitely confines the souls of the unbaptized and virtuous heathens. In contrast to Delacroix's famous painting, *The Barque of Dante and Virgil Crossing the River Styx*, 1822, based on an episode from Canto VIII of the *Inferno*, Bishop's rather benign scene of orderly people, snugly deposited on Union Square, represents none of the specific stages of Dante's hell. She obviously did not intend to illustrate any given punishment and left possible association with limbo.

2 Isabel Bishop
At the Noon Hour, c. 1932
tempera and pencil on composition board, 21
Collection of Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield
James Philip Gray Collection
Photograph courtesy Museum of Fine Arts

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2 Isabel Bishop
At the Noon Hour, c. 1932
tempera and pencil on composition board, 25 × 18 1/4
Collection of Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts
James Philip Gray Collection
Photograph courtesy Museum of Fine Arts

hell, or purgatory open to interpretation. In a characteristically understated manner, she claims only to have enlisted Dante and his ancient guide to witness "a multiplicity of souls."³¹ She does not say they were lost or doomed and, in fact, seems to stress the setting rather than its occupants. In reading a "literal" translation of Dante, perhaps her mother's, she discovered that his descriptive passages matched her warm attachments to the physical nature of Union Square:

Dante's *Inferno*, in this down-to-earth "unpoetical" translation, has to me a marvelous homely quality, almost a "genre" feeling in its reference to the definite, particular and concrete features of objects. They are thus given an every day character even in the midst of the fantastic underworld! This "genre" aspect connected in my mind with my feeling for Union Square, which I felt to be homely, ugly, and in that quality, lovable (instead of fearful) as the setting for hordes of human beings.³²

Bishop's reading of the *Inferno* ironically did not dwell on terror but on pleasant references. These related to her positive feelings for Union Square inversely conditioned by her memories of the marginal residential district in Detroit. In conformity with her parents' preference for the well-to-do a block away, the "multiplicity of souls" is hardly a "genre" subject of working-class people in the traditional art-historical sense of the word. With two definite exceptions, this crowd was enlisted from the hordes of middle-class shoppers on Fourteenth Street. Furthermore, from their pant-legged appearance in the original pencil studies, even Dante and Virgil evolved from immediate pedestrian beginnings (Cat. no. 18). In the final preparatory drawing (Cat. no. 17) they face the east side of the square; and in the painting, the sun is to their backs, shining from the northwestern sky over their left shoulders. This would make the time of day mid-to-late afternoon, as indicated by the lengthening shadows. In contrast to the darkened foreground of Dante and Virgil and the cloud-filled, background sky, three clusters of buildings absorb the sunlight and shine forth. As in the early fourteenth-century *Peaceful City* from Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco *Allegory of Good Government* in the Sala della Pace of the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, the radiant city of pristine surfaces reflects a civic ideal of prosperity, an ideologically blessed system, which in the United States promises upward mobility. This context, among others, needs to be considered in interpreting the meaning of Bishop's *Dante and Virgil in Union Square vis-à-vis the Divine Comedy*.

The rush-hour velocity of rapid descent into what might have originally been intended as a subway—clearly emphasized on the left side in two of the pencil studies—almost completely disappears in the painting. Acceleration decelerated to a leisurely pace until the majority seems to be in a state of peaceful wandering. Only the two humbly clothed figures move toward a definite point, as indeterminate as it may be. The "awning" in front of the four-columned, fully entablatured bank

facade is topped by three stacked balls. If only golden, these could be read as attributes of Saint Nicholas of Myra, the patron saint of travelers as well as the prototype for Santa Claus, a transfiguration in keeping with a hoped for benefit and well-being.³³

While praising the execution and "poetic ambiguity" of Bishop's early major painting as superior to any paintings by either Kenneth Hayes Miller or Reginald Marsh, Helen Yglesias flirted with an interpretation of its Union Square as a contemporary hell:

If the multiplicity of human souls on the square are the sinners in a circle of hell, then hell is the ordinariness of daily living and the "sinners" face their "lives of desperation" with a measure of patience, courage and dignity that overlays the scene with a strange calm.³⁴

Lacking the dynamic sublimity or agonizing disruptions of a convincing hell à la Delacroix, the final version of the painting, with its crowded quietude, contrasts with Bishop's earliest painting bearing the name of the place. In *Union Square During the Expansion of the 14th Street Subway Station*, 1930 (not in exhibition), two men work around Von Donndorf's fountain of motherly love waist deep in dirt and debris, similar to the fifth stage of Dante's hell where the wrathful sink into a mire. In a setting dark and barren, a wagon, retaining wall, some sheds, and a few more vaguely discernible figures blend into the bottom stories of tall, dark buildings receding down a side street. Foreboding, these provide no sense of security, not even a fire escape. Only the dusky golden sky and the isolated sculpture of a mother with her children offers relief in an otherwise desolate atmosphere.

In the second and third small pencil sketches (Cat. no. 18) preliminary to the painting of *Dante and Virgil in Union Square*, the possible image of a crowd being drawn into a subway entrance as if siphoned into a netherworld, might be related to the second stage of hell in which the souls of carnal sinners are continuously blown around by stormy winds. The subway train, in its dark subterranean tunnels, moves people here and there, day in, day out. However, as discussed earlier, Bishop abandoned the frenzy of these sketches in the final painting and settled on a quiescent arrangement of clearly delineated figures against a background of bright rectangular forms.

Karl Lunde, in his brief 1975 monograph on Bishop, while intending to focus on the content of her work, avoided concrete conclusions concerning any of its particulars. He did, however, in asking the question "What are Dante and Virgil doing on Union Square?" hypothesize that a central theme of limbo began with their appearance before the staid city crowd and continued through several subsequent paintings.

Who are the *Strap Hangers* being hurtled through the underground? And what is the meaning of the cathedral's complexity of the station shown in *Under Union Square*?

12 Isabel Bishop
Noon Hour, 1935
etching, 7 x 5
Collection of Sordani Art Gallery, Wilkes Univ.
Sordani/Myers Acquisition Fund Purchase
Photograph by Professional Photographic Service

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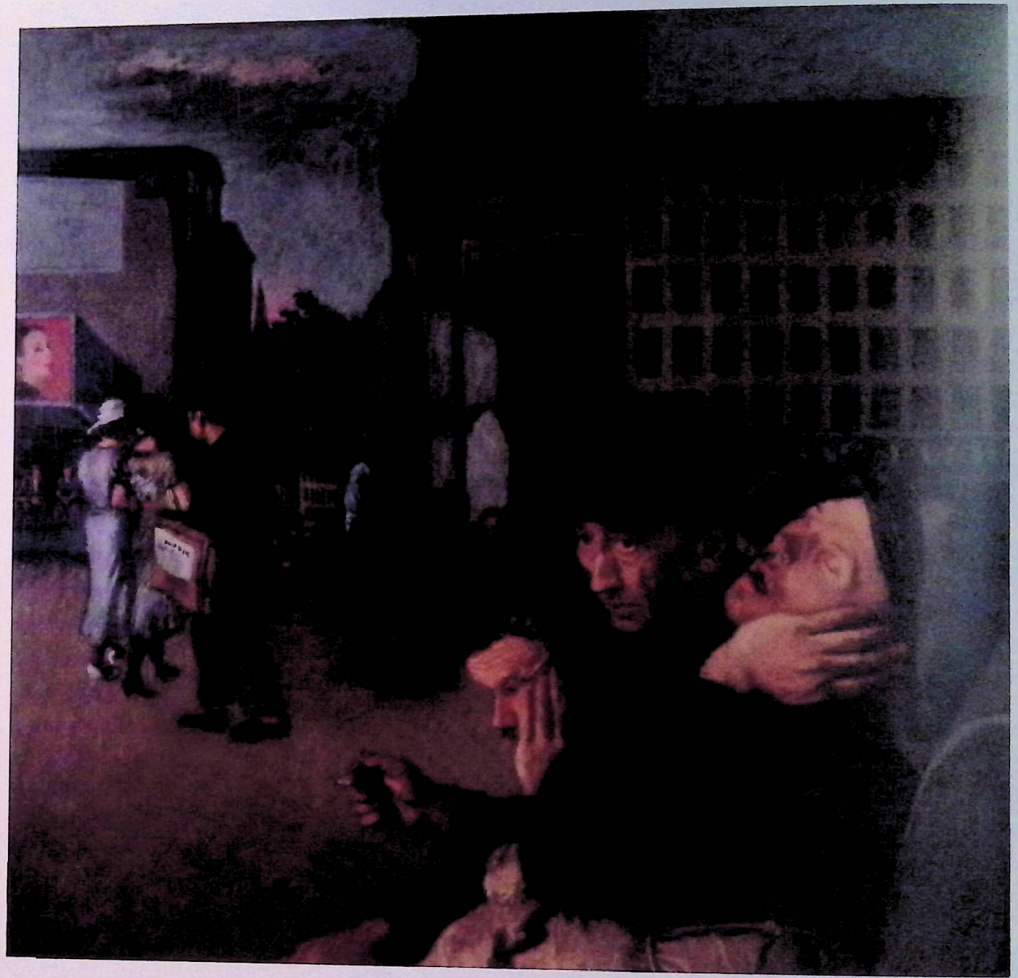
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Noon Hour, 1935
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Collection of Sordoni Art Gallery, Wilkes University
Sordoni/Myers Acquisition Fund Purchase
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services



43 Raphael Soyer
In the City Park, 1934
 oil on canvas, 37 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 39 $\frac{1}{2}$
 Private Collection
 Photograph by Michael Thomas

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Why is the painting so calm and still? Where are these people? They are in Union Square, in the subway, in life—and they are in limbo.³⁵

He went so far as to apply his hypothesis to the “walking” paintings of the sixties and seventies in which “the figures are doing what the title denotes, but they are also transparent wraiths in a limbo where paths cross and recross and no one ever touches or meets anyone else.”³⁶

Ruth Weisberg, in her 1985 article on Isabel Bishop, reiterated the limbo interpretation of *Dante and Virgil in Union Square*. From its criss-cross ambling of women and men in front of shining high buildings Bishop returned “again and again to the limbo of the modern city and its shifting patterns of purposeful walkers.”³⁷ In reference to the 1957–1958 *Subway Scene* (not in exhibition) Weisberg observed: “The overall transparency and fleeting, ghostly presence of people remind us again of Dante and his evocation of souls who wander timelessly in limbo.”³⁸

The evenly placed figures of *Dante and Virgil in Union Square* mark a point in her early career at which Bishop formalized a rather mechanical pattern of human interaction. That this was meant to express a limbo-like existence, however, is questionable in view of their sartorial display of upward social mobility. Furthermore, as its final composition evolved, *Dante and Virgil in Union Square* extended indefinitely on both sides, allowing figures to enter and exit at will. Very significant to our interpretation, this opening out of an otherwise center-oriented composition complements Bishop’s fixation on an unfixed state of class distinction. And, by the time she completed this major work the increasingly rhythmic animation of her collective figures allowed itself to be equated metaphorically with self-assertive social advancement. This is consistently verified in her retrospective references to the growth of her figural style:

I was conscious of their being class-marked, but not class-fixed. If I succeeded in making them seem to the onlooker that they could turn and move in a physical sense, this opened up a subjective potential which could include the mobility of content.³⁹

It was this potential that Bishop apparently wished to project through nineteen stage-front women in her 1932 Union Square spectacle, accompanied by seven men, a boy, and a baby. Lunde, in spite of his limbo contention, summed up this early interest in social mobility accurately when he wrote:

The single aspect of nature that most interests her is humankind in the environment of Union Square. People in movement, in transition, flux and change are the source of what she paints.⁴⁰

The central significance of mobility and change to a decade that saw an annual average of five million Americans move across state lines in search of economic betterment underlies Bishop’s maneuvering of Brown’s

equestrian George Washington. She moved the bronze monument from the south end of the square, reversed its direction, and placed it in the exact center of the composition, the horse’s hindquarters and tail coinciding with the middle contour of Dante and Virgil (Cat. no. 17). So relocated, it helps to fasten together the two most energetic zones of the painting: that of the milling people and that of the erratic tops of tall buildings. Both horizontal bands signify dynamic change, while the equestrian Washington provides a constant. As a historic icon, highlighted by the 1932 bicentennial of his birth, the grand commander of loosely organized colonial forces blesses the mass of twentieth-century people below with an outstretched hand, summoning them to repose as he did his motley troops. By the same token, he now gestures toward what had become the “ladies mile,” the fashionable Broadway shopping area above Union Square. For the immediate future prosperity assumed an uptown direction. Thus, far from seeing Union Square as a chaotic hell-like environment, Bishop took compositional and iconographic control of it.

To the left of center, exactly halfway between the George Washington and the mysterious, ill-defined awning, Bishop placed another statue on a high pedestal. In the final, squared-off pencil drawing (Cat. no. 17), the pedestal of the second statue closely resembles that of Bartholdi’s *Lafayette* (Cat. no. 14) which, in its original location, faced the equestrian Washington offering his sword of assistance. The elongated figure, the sketchiest detail of the drawing, however, indicates none of the swirling, baroque contrapposto of Bartholdi’s animated *Lafayette*. In the painting, the pedestal is clearly that of Brown’s *Lincoln* and while the figure remains obscure, its back turned to the observer, it stands straight and still in a Lincolnesque manner with an illuminated contour following the lines and proportions of the sculpture. If it is indeed the nation’s redeemer, his proximity to the father of the country would relate to Bishop’s basic theme of promise and fulfillment.

Her major painting symbolizes a positive social transition, the progressive presumption of expansive economic upgrading. As described by John Hart, the biographer of novelist Albert Halper, Union Square, “in its honest and genuine concern for betterment, had always been American to the core . . . the past forever being overthrown; the future forever being coaxed into existence. It is the vortex of change; it is America in transition.”⁴¹

Betterment becomes the allegorical theme of the painting as the modest, round-shouldered woman in a shawl and the brown-clad worker follow other receding figures toward the shadowy background entranceway detached from the front of a bank. In provocative contrast, two pairs of fashionably dressed, upper-class women flank him and step assertively into the foreground. From Bishop’s faith in an inevitable state of well-being, the six figures signal the beginning and end

of upward mobility. The same may be said of a left-to-right progression of back-turning female figures, each bearing to the right. It starts with a woman carrying a child close behind the long-skirted one. Her pose is repeated by a figure placed in the middle of two curving lines, which appear to be streetcar tracks, that stop inexplicitly at the left toes of two flanking women. This third figure, in sketchy white apparel, seems in a state of transformation from her counterpart to the far left. The ultimate good life manifests itself in a fourth figure to the far right which gravitates toward the sunny side of the street that opens up the distant buildings. She is dressed in a beautiful green coat and white fur shoulder piece. Her large-crowned yellow hat functions as the dot of an exclamation mark created by the bright vertical of the most radiant building facade in the block.

Bishop expressed her confidence in progressive social mobility in the overall tonality of her painting. Its golden haze radiates optimism in distinction to the shadowy depths reached by the Depression in 1932, when forty percent of the work force was unemployed and the income of corporations had fallen from eleven billion dollars to two since late 1929.⁴² In this regard, at least one passage in Dante's *Purgatorio* compares convincingly with Bishop's *Dante and Virgil in Union Square*. While hell knows no sun, it shines once again in purgatory and brings contentment. A stanza in Canto II reads:

My master and I, and all that people around
Who were with him, had faces so content,
As if all else out of their thoughts were drowned.⁴³

That *Dante and Virgil in Union Square* serves as a timely allusion to Dante's *Purgatorio* is supported by Bishop's basic meaning of mobility as "potential for change" and, in the progressive American sense, change for the better. Even in the midst of an economic depression, she viewed deprivation as a matter of choice and from a traditional *laissez faire*, liberal point of view, a matter of purgatorial expiation rooted in hope. As opposed to Lunde's and Weisberg's negative interpretations of Bishop's painting as a Virgilian limbo, a theme of purgatory seems by all evidence to be more appropriate to *Dante and Virgil in Union Square*. While limbo is an intermediate region between heaven and hell in which souls are confined and barred from entering heaven through no fault of their own, purgatory is a temporary state where souls pause to purify, where mobility is elevation. As stated by T. S. Eliot in his *Dante*.

The souls in purgatory suffer because they wish to suffer for purgation. And observe that they suffer more actively and keenly, being souls preparing for blessedness, than Virgil suffers in eternal limbo. In their suffering is hope, in the anesthesia of Virgil is hopelessness; that is the difference.⁴⁴

In sum, Bishop's basic social beliefs, as indicated in her purgatorial view of Union Square vis-à-vis Dante and Virgil, reflect Herbert Spencer's application of

Darwinist natural selection to economic growth. So loved by post-Civil War, American entrepreneurs, Social Darwinism meant that the evolution of capitalism, left free from state interference, could, in theory, "end only in the establishment of the greatest perfection and most complete happiness"⁴⁵ for the very fittest of a modern society. Therein lies the original meaning of liberalism with its view of unlimited economic opportunity. The most enterprising among us rise to the top from the humblest beginnings.

The acceleration of corporate consolidation in the new century had rendered this innocent version of the American dream outmoded, indeed archaic, by 1932—the Great Depression notwithstanding. Nevertheless, many still adhered to the belief—including Isabel Bishop. With faith in individualism, she would continue to look down upon failure from a conservative point of view. The marginal male members of society she witnessed on Union Square, not the system, were to blame for their own impoverishment. To her they were misfit bums who could succeed in rising above their miserable condition only through personality adjustment, not through social change. In order for Bishop's "working girl" of the mid-thirties to dream of becoming a well-dressed shopper, she had to behave herself on the job and wait patiently for either a rare promotion or a proposal of marriage. Self-redemption in one way or another releases the soul from purgatory to ascend toward heavenly existence.

As evidenced by cautious analysis of the painting, augmented by Bishop's guarded statements regarding its meaning, it is clear that she did not intend it to be either an inferno or a limbo. Eternal torture would hardly correspond with her attraction to bodily energy and her belief in its social equivalent: the American "bootstrap" theory that sustained self-assertion guarantees success. Curiously linked to Dante and Virgil, this American postulate allows that the painting is best interpreted as a modern purgatory.

NOTES

The authors thank Stanley Grand for his constructive observations.

1. Isabel Bishop, as quoted in Cindy Nemser, "Conversation with Isabel Bishop," *The Feminist Art Journal* 5 (Spring 1976): 15.

2. In both her Ph.D. dissertation ("Gender, Occupation and Class in Paintings by the Fourteenth Street School, 1925 to 1940," Stanford University, 1987, Chapter 5, "Isabel Bishop's Deferential Office Girls," pp. 282-322) and its rewritten and redefined book version (*The "New Woman" Revised, Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993], Chapter 7, "The Question of Difference: Isabel Bishop's Deferential Office Girls," pp. 273-311), Ellen Wiley Todd thoroughly demonstrates that Bishop's conservative imaging of young female office workers conforms in type to demographic tables, statistical surveys, government reports, periodical studies, advice manuals, employment counselor publications, and employers' demands. Bishop's volunteer models reveal the deferential manners, modest clothing, make-up, and hair styles expected of the fledgling office girls whose "balanced behavior" and proper attitude were essential to obtaining and retaining their low-paying jobs. Promotion out of a stenographic pool to a secretarial position delineated their narrow road to success. Todd points out that

4 Isabel Bishop
The Club, 1935
oil and tempera on canvas, 20 × 24
Private Collection

Darwinist natural selection to economic growth. So loved by post-Civil War, American entrepreneurs, Social Darwinism meant that the evolution of capitalism, left free from state interference, could, in theory, "end only in the establishment of the greatest perfection and most complete happiness"⁴³ for the very fittest of a modern society. Therein lies the original meaning of liberalism with its view of unlimited economic opportunity. The most enterprising among us rise to the top from the humblest beginnings.

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Bishop's peculiar late style of vibrant, horizontal striations leaves the young female figures in an ambiguous state of "painterly mobility," and suggests that this may serve as a metaphor for socioeconomic stress. That Bishop used this same decorative technique for young male figures, as well as female figures, in her repetitious "walking" pictures, beginning in the 1950s, modifies any gender distinction that might be made of it.

3. In an interview with Ellen Wiley Todd, Bishop referred to the dominant figures in *Dante and Virgil in Union Square* as Fourteenth Street shoppers (Todd, "Gender," p. 323).
4. Bishop (quoted in Nemser, "Conversation," p. 15).
5. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
6. Bishop, quoted by Helen Yglesias from her seven interviews with the artist in 1982, 1983, and 1987 (*Isabel Bishop* [New York: Rizzoli, 1989]: 10).
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.
10. See map of Union Square artists' studio locations in Todd, "New Woman," p. 94.
11. Yglesias, *Isabel Bishop*, p. 12.
12. Todd, "New Woman," pp. 85-86.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
14. The etching served as the basis of *On the Street* (*Fourteenth Street*, 1932 (private collection, not in exhibition). The women in both works retain a resemblance to the shopping women of Bishop's 1927 painting, *Hearn's Department Store—Fourteenth Street Shoppers* (private collection, not in exhibition), which provided prototypical female figures for *Dante and Virgil in Union Square*.
15. Bishop, quoted by Fred Ferretti, "Artist Losing Her Window on the World," *The New York Times*, June 24, 1978, p. 21.
16. See for example *Homesick*, 1951, which depicts two young women straphanging on the subway.
17. Bishop, quoted by C. Nemser, "Conversation," p. 18.
18. The same may be said of the austere mother and sleeping child in *Waiting*, 1938.
19. Albert Halper, *Union Square*, (New York: Literary Guild, 1933): 47-48.
20. In her discussion of this painting, Ellen Wiley Todd tends toward a hell analogy in the direction of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*: "At the center of a swirling maelstrom of lost souls, attracted to the temptations of 14th Street's sidewalk commerce, the central hawker . . . assumes the pose of the judging Christ." (Todd, "Gender," p. 66). Since the pose is reversed, however, he is transformed "into a deceptive figure who raises his sinister left hand instead of his right and offers seduction instead of judgment." (*Ibid.*, pp. 66-67). Also see Todd "New Woman," pp. 118, 209-210. In both her dissertation and her book, Todd assumes that Marsh borrowed directly from Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in creating the hawker and crowd for *In Fourteenth Street*. The connection actually appears rather loose. For example, the raised left hand of the awkward-looking hawker touches forefinger to thumb, creating a tight circle far removed from the open right hand of Michelangelo's muscular, athletic-looking Christ. In Marsh's *Holy Name Mission*, 1931 (private collection, not in exhibition), hungry men line up in the dark, their hard-bitten faces partially illuminated by the light from inside. In the immediate foreground, garbage cans and debris litter the streets. His etching of the same subject, *Bread Line—No One Has Starved*, 1932 (not in exhibition), emphasizes hats, caps, and loosely hanging overcoats, as well as baggy pants and sleeves, with hands sunk deeply into pockets for warmth. Both works underline the plight of powerless have-nots in a country of abundance and greedy indulgence, the loss of a large percentage of the working population suffering from an ailing economic system.
21. In Raphael Soyer's *Transients*, 1936 (not in exhibition), more of the same downtrodden sit in a nondescript interior. A hunched over, bald, elderly man, a caricature of the artist's twin brother Moses,

stares at the viewer from beneath wrinkled brow. Next to him, in the very center, a much younger man grasps his left hand in his lap, his lips parted and eyes wide open as if dumbstruck by his situation. The third man in front holds onto a pair of crutches as he leans back in an attempt to sleep. The others, to the rear, while slightly varied in their expressions, share a mood of despondency. Except for the partially highlighted faces, the painting is appropriately dark.

22. L. M. Starr, "Interview with Isabel Bishop," *The Oral History Research Office, Columbia University*, 1956, Part 2, No. 16.
23. Bishop, quoted from an interview, March 18-19, 1974, with Sheldon Reich (Reich, *Isabel Bishop* [Tucson: University of Arizona Museum of Art, 1974]: 25).
24. Luks, quoted by L. Baur, "The Message of Proletaire," *Bookman* 34 (December 1911): 402.
25. Robert H. Bremner, *From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 1956): 14.
26. Bishop, quoted by Adelaide Kerr ("Isabel Bishop Paints Four Pictures a Year," *Toledo Times*, May 2, 1943).
27. Bishop, quoted from an interview, March 18-19, 1974, with Sheldon Reich (*Isabel Bishop*, p. 24). In general reference to Bishop's depictions of "working girls," the docent handout notes for *Dante and Virgil in Union Square* at the Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, reiterates the consensus: "She has also said that what she was trying to capture in her models was 'mobility,' not necessarily potential movement, but rather social mobility, the possibility that these people could do anything they wanted."
28. Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 84.
29. This figure does not appear in the final, squared-off drawing of *Dante and Virgil in Union Square* but was added in the painting.
30. Bishop, quoted in Starr, "Interview," Part 2, No. 65.
31. Bishop, quoted in Yglesias, *Isabel Bishop*, p. 16. The full statement is: "I used Union Square as a subject, crowds, people, the multiplicity of souls. I was reading Dante then, in a very literal translation. It struck me as a good story. It was the idea of the multiplicity of souls that was enormously important to me."
32. Bishop, quoted in *American Painting and Sculpture* (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 1975): 122.
33. George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961): 135-136.
34. Yglesias, *Isabel Bishop*, p. 16.
35. Karl Lunde, *Isabel Bishop* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975): 17.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
37. Ruth Weisberg, "Webs of Movement and Feeling," *Artweek* 16 (March 9, 1985): 7.
38. *Ibid.*
39. Bishop, quoted by Reich (*Isabel Bishop*, p. 24). A year later, apparently unaware of Bishop's consistent explanations of what she meant by "mobility," the critic Lawrence Alloway, in an article entitled "Isabel Bishop, the Grand Manner and the Working Girl" (*Art in America* 63 [September 1975]: 63), saw Bishop's figures as "embedded in their time" without the flexibility of moving beyond their inherited stations. He considered her attraction to the Fourteenth-Street "working girl, for example," as a traditional upper-class view of laboring people. She depicted them as a continuation of Dutch peasant genre, uninhibited and robust. He dismissed the implications of mobility, therefore, as spurious. In his opinion, Bishop valued her working girls because they represent a stratum of tough, unchanging vitality.
40. Lunde, *Isabel Bishop*, p. 14.
41. John Hart, *Albert Halper* (Boston: Twayne, 1980): 45, 50.
42. Basil Rauch, *The History of the New Deal, 1933-1938* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963): 8.
43. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, translated by Laurence Binyon in *The Portable Dante*, (New York: Viking, 1963): 193.
44. T. S. Eliot, *Dante* (London: Faber, 1930): 39-40.
45. Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, 4th ed. (New York, c. 1880): 530.



31 George Luks
High Tide at Luchow's, 1933
 oil on board, 16 x 20 1/4
 Collection of Sordani Art Gallery, Wilkes University
 Gift of Helen Farr Sloan
 Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

the viewer from beneath wrinkled brow. Next to him, in the foreground, a much younger man grasps his left hand in his lap, his eyes wide open as if dumbstruck by his situation. The man in front holds onto a pair of crutches as he leans back in an effort to sleep. The others, to the rear, while slightly varied in their expressions, share a mood of despondency. Except for the highlighted faces, the painting is appropriately dark.

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40 John Sloan
Fourteenth Street, The Wigwam, 1928
 etching, 9 3/4 x 7
 Collection of Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington
 Gift of Helen Farr Sloan
 Photograph courtesy Delaware Art Museum

UNION SQUARE'S ICON OF FREEDOM

Stanley I Grand
 Wilkes University

ON NOVEMBER 25, 1783, a contemporary observer watched General George Washington lead his “weather-beaten and forlorn” troops into New York City. As Washington approached from the north, a welcoming delegation gathered at “The Forks,” a spot where Old Bloomingdale Road (now Broadway) and Battery Road (once part of the Boston Post Road, now Fourth Avenue) met. Earlier in the day, General Sir Guy Carleton had evacuated the remaining British garrison onto ships anchored in the East River. The war for American independence was won.

Since that November day, the area once known as The Forks, then as Union Place, and finally Union Square, has been associated with the concept of freedom. How this tradition evolved over two centuries will be traced in this essay by considering the physical development of the area, examining the iconography of the major public artworks sited on the square, and exploring the social history associated with the square.

HISTORY OF THE SQUARE

LONG BEFORE Captain Verrazano and the crew of the *Dauphine* became the first Europeans to sight Manhattan in the spring of 1524,² the area destined to become Union Square was a sand hill in the middle of the heavily forested island, populated by Algonquins of the Wappinger Confederacy.³ Almost a hundred years passed between Verrazano’s sighting and the arrival of the first white settlers, primarily French, in 1623, aboard the *New Netherland*, which belonged to the Dutch West India Company. For safety reasons these settlers decided to establish a trading post on Governor’s Island, a small parcel of land off the southern tip of Manhattan. Three years later, on May 4, 1626, Peter Minuit, the Director General of the Dutch province of New Netherland, assembled the local Indian chiefs, distributed among them 60 guilders worth of beads, cloth, hatchets, and



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similar articles, and thereby purchased Manhattan for the equivalent of approximately forty dollars.⁴ Over the next 175 years, the future Union Square was deforested, farmed, and used as a potter's field.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, as New York City continued to grow and expand northward, the state legislature realized that a plan was necessary to avoid the chaotic jumble of streets, lanes, and alleys characteristic of lower Manhattan and Greenwich Village. In 1807 the legislators empowered a commission, consisting of Gouverneur Morris, Simeon De Witt, and John Rutherford, to draw up a comprehensive city plan for the area north of Fourteenth Street. In the prior year, 1806, it had been decided that Broadway should proceed due north, commencing at Tenth Street, which required the thoroughfare to make an acute angled bend to the west. Now, to obviate the maladroit intersection of Broadway and Bowery Road,⁵ the commissioners decided in 1811 to create Union Place since "the Union of so many large Roads demands space for the Security and convenience and the morsels into which it would be cut by continuing across it the several Streets and Avenues would be of little use or value."⁶ A year later, in 1812, a Common Council committee became anxious over the "very heavy and unnecessary expense" and recommended that the square be "discontinued."⁷ The Legislature ignored the recommendation although it did reduce the size of the square in 1815. By 1831 members of the Common Council had become concerned that the square was neither adequate in size nor pleasing in form. They petitioned the Legislature to reconfigure the "shapeless and ill-looking place, devoid of symmetry."⁸ This was accomplished in 1832, and Union Place became Union Square.⁹ In the following year, the authorities ordered the existing "buildings and incumbrances" razed and the hill itself "graduated [graded] to the city level."¹⁰

The ideal of civic well-being was dramatically symbolized by the Croton Fountain in the center of the

Square.¹¹ In the early nineteenth century, the city had been plagued by outbreaks of yellow fever (1819 and 1822) and cholera (1832 and 1834) that resulted from polluted water supplies. Finally, in 1835, voters approved a referendum to supply the city with water from the Croton River in Westchester County. The plan involved damming the river and constructing an aqueduct. The High Bridge, which carried the water across the Harlem River, was justly held as "an aqueduct in the Roman sense, worthy of Pope Sixtus V's Acqua Felice of 1588 or those wondrous ruins from Libya to France . . . as at the Pont du Gard near Nîmes."¹² On July 5, 1842, the city celebrated the arrival of water at the Croton distributing reservoir, a great structure built in the Egyptian manner, which was located on Murray Hill at Forty-Second Street and Fifth Avenue.¹³ Although the Union Square fountain symbolized a freedom from disease caused by impure water, the diarist George Templeton Strong was unimpressed: Shortly after its inauguration he described the fountain as "a circular basin with a squirt in the middle, and nothing more."¹⁴

A "squirt" or not, the fountain was the focal point of the most fashionable residential district in the 1840s. Along with wealth came culture. The Academy of Music, which opened in 1854 and which Edith Wharton described in the *Age of Innocence*, was located one block away on Irving Place. Nearby "other institutions of elite culture" were to be found:

On Fifteenth Street was the Century Club, with the Union League Club not far away on another border of the Square. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's first home was on Fourteenth Street, the New-York Historical Society was just to the east on Second Avenue, while the Astor Library, the New York Society Library, and New York University were just to the south. To the west was fashionable Fifth Avenue, and just off the northeast corner was Gramercy Park, the city's most elegant neighborhood.¹⁵

As early as 1860, however, the neighborhood had begun to change as commercial enterprises increasingly appeared in the area. The transformation was complete in 1869, when the Church of the Puritans, built scarcely twenty years earlier, was demolished to make way for the cast-iron Tiffany Building (subsequently the Amalgamated Bank Building) at 11-15 Union Square West. In addition to Tiffany's jewelry store and Brentano's Literary Emporium, both of which fronted the western side of the square, other prestigious retailers, such as Vantine's, which specialized in Oriental goods, and Gorham's, known for its silver and stationary, competed for the patronage of the carriage trade.¹⁶ Catering primarily to a female clientele, Hearn's, which opened its Fourteenth Street store in 1879, was known for its selection of women's apparel. Residents and shoppers could dine nearby at Delmonico's or Lüchow's (established 1882); a half-century later, the latter was still

going strong, if boisterously, according to George Luks's *High Tide at Lüchow's* (Cat. no. 31).

By the 1880s, the Union Square neighborhood was the center of the theater district (known as The Rialto).¹⁷ Not only did legitimate theaters appear, but, after 1869, burlesque as well. In 1881, Tony Pastor opened his famous vaudeville theater—offering wholesome family entertainment—in Tammany Hall. This landmark building, which John Sloan depicted in *Fourteenth Street, The Wigwam* (Cat. no. 40) housed the Tammany Society until 1929 when it moved into new headquarters on the corner of East Seventeenth Street and Union Square East. New Tammany Hall, a classically inspired building with a pediment surmounting four columns in the center, appears in Betty Waldo Parish's *Union Square Rally* (Cat. no. 36). Led by Steinway and Sons in 1853, almost a dozen piano manufacturers vied to supply the growing theatrical business with well-crafted instruments. At this time, as Thomas Bender has observed, Union Square, "more than any other place in the city . . . represented . . . the cultural complexity" of New York.¹⁸ Not only was "the Square . . . the home of theaters, hotels, restaurants, department stores, and Broadway . . . the Square was also [by the 1880s] the place of both work and play for the working and immigrant classes of New York."¹⁹

By the 1920s, the square had become a major shopping center: "According to some accounts, stores sold more women's apparel in one day on Union Square than in any other place in the country."²⁰ Symbolizing the change from Rialto to emporium is Samuel Klein's purchase in 1924 of Steinway Hall, which he tore down and replaced with a seven-story department store that catered to the lower-class bargain shopper. The growth of S. Klein's proceeded rapidly—in the thirties he was able to open a more upscale annex—and the signs adorning his shops appear in many works including Eugene C. Fitch's *Unemployed Union Square* (Cat. no. 23) and *Union Square* (Cat. no. 24). The legions of women shoppers who frequented the square became the subjects of works such as Kenneth Hayes Miller's *Leaving the Shop* (Cat. no. 34) or Mary Fife's *Two Women with Children Crossing the Street* (Cat. no. 21).

Over the years, Union Square itself underwent major changes. The square has assumed different shapes from ellipsoid of the 1840s to the present shield-like form. Architecturally, unlike the Place Vosage in Paris, Union Square is an eclectic mix of period styles: the aforementioned cast iron Tiffany Building, the Romanesque Lincoln Building (1889, 1 Union Square West),²¹ the Spanish-Moorish Union Building (1893, 33 Union Square West), and a bit later, the Classical Revival Union Square Savings Bank (1907, now American Savings Bank, 20-22 Union Square East). Not all critics find this variety pleasing. Richard Sennett, for example, decries the "mechanical quotations" of Renaissance and Baroque architectural forms adding that "you don't recover the spirit of the



34 Kenneth Hayes Miller
Leaving the Shop, 1929
etching, 7 1/8 x 9 7/8
Courtesy of Susan Teller Gallery, New York
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past by quoting its forms.²² The Square's elevation has been lowered and then raised, between 1928 and 1936, in order to accommodate the expansion of the subway system. Isabel Bishop's *Union Square During the Expansion of the Fourteenth Street Subway Station* (not in exhibition) depicts the work in progress. During that campaign, the Washington, Lincoln, and Lafayette statues were relocated. Work on the Sixth Avenue Line, two blocks to the west of Union Square, provided the subject of Charles Keller's *Open Cut—6th Avenue Subway* (Cat. no. 28). Not all artists, however, welcomed the changes. Morris Kantor, for example, was moved to bid a nostalgic *Farewell to Union Square* (Cat. no. 27). More recently, the square underwent a major facelift during the 1980s.

Throughout its history, public art has found a home in Union Square. Works commemorating Washington, Lincoln, Lafayette, and Gandhi—along with Maternal Charity and the Declaration of Independence—have been given by well-meaning citizens. The following discussion will demonstrate that the ideal of Freedom unites these disparate monuments.

THE MAJOR ARTISTIC MONUMENTS TO FREEDOM

THE FIRST STATUE to be sited at Union Square was the large bronze equestrian *George Washington* (1852–1856) created by Henry Kirke Brown (1814–1886) assisted by John Quincy Adams Ward (1830–1910).²³ Prior to receiving the commission, Brown executed a plaster model, which was subsequently cast in bronze (Cat. no. 19). Not only was this the “first statue ornamenting a public site erected in New York since that day [November 25, 1783],”²⁴ but was, as well, the only public statue of Washington then to be found in the city. Brown based Washington's face on Houdon's bust portrait, which the French artist had created from life.²⁵ Richard Upjohn (1802–1878) designed the austere, fourteen-foot granite pedestal. The statue was presented to the nation on July 4, 1856, by a number of wealthy New Yorkers, who—under the leadership of Colonel James Lee—had raised \$30,000 to pay for it.²⁶ According to one authority, the statue was located “on the very spot” where the citizenry had “received” Washington and his army.²⁷ As originally installed, therefore, the statue would have greeted those imaginary citizens with an elevated view of the horse's ample backside!

In his patriotic and learned speech delivered at the official inauguration of the statue, the Reverend Doctor George W. Bethune praised the sculptor for achieving the “highest duty patriotism could demand of art.”²⁸ A master of the now-unpracticed art of rhetoric, the Reverend Dr. Bethune observed that Washington

has not put off the Continental Uniform, whose quaint rigidity is more graceful to our eyes than any classic drapery; nor has he dismounted from the charger that bore him through the vain fires of adverse batteries; but

has ridden from out the horrors of war his heart endured only for its ends of justice, calmly restraining his proud steed amidst the acclamations of victorious peace and assured liberty, his sword, ever wielded with strength tempered by mercy, is firmly sheathed nor to be drawn again, for his country's foes are vanquished and he knew no other; his broad, benign brow is bare in acknowledgement of our unanimous love; and, as he passes on from the great past of his glorious deeds into the great future which will develop the stupendous destinies of the nation, whose life he inaugurated, his hand is stretched forth, with grave gesture, not more in promise to national loyalty than in deprecation of the . . . treason that would imperil our vital unity by goading the silkiness of sectional jealousy into the blind fury of fratricidal hate.²⁹

Continuing on this theme by comparing the accomplishments of Washington with leaders ancient (Fabius, Cato, Scipio Africanus, Epaninondas, Cincinnatus) and modern (Cromwell and Napoleon), Bethune concluded that “Washington alone has the honor of having established free principles and perpetuated his work.”³⁰ Yet he cautioned that those very principles were in danger and pleaded to

God, who gave him, keep that life in us! for, when that spirit is lost, when our elements revolt from their oneness, and, like the maniac among the tombs, whose devils were Legion, we cut and tear ourselves, this fair confederacy will soon lie beneath the heavens the most mangled, loathsome corpse that ever polluted the breath of humanity with its putrefaction. Some of the devils are in us now.³¹

In sum, Dr. Bethune's words, uttered before a vast gathering and transmitted to an even greater audience on the following day when the entire speech appeared on the front page of the *New York Evening Times*, urged the return to the ideals associated with the founding of the Republic and served, further, as a tocsin against the gathering storm of sectional conflict that was to erupt four years later in 1860.

Brown's *George Washington* joined a long parade of monumental equestrian civic monuments celebrating military victors. At the head of this tradition is the second century A.D. bronze *Marcus Aurelius*, which Bethune indirectly evoked by picturing Washington “ascending the Capitoline height to rule.”³² Marcus Aurelius, the humanist Roman emperor whose *Meditations* encapsulate concisely the stoic ideal, represented for many Plato's philosopher king. With the decline of the Roman Empire, however, the ability and necessity to produce large bronzes of this type faded and the skills to do so were lost. Although works such as the stone *Bamberger Rider* (late thirteenth century, Bamberg, Germany) were occasionally carved for architectural sites,³³ it was not until the Renaissance when the rediscovery of lost casting techniques, revived interest in the antique, a growing cult of fame, and economic prosperity resulted



19 Henry Kirke Brown
General George Washington on Horse
bronze model, 37½ × 42½ × 12½
Collection of Yale University Art
Given in Memory of Edmund T.
and Eliphalet Bradford Ter
Photograph courtesy Yale Unive

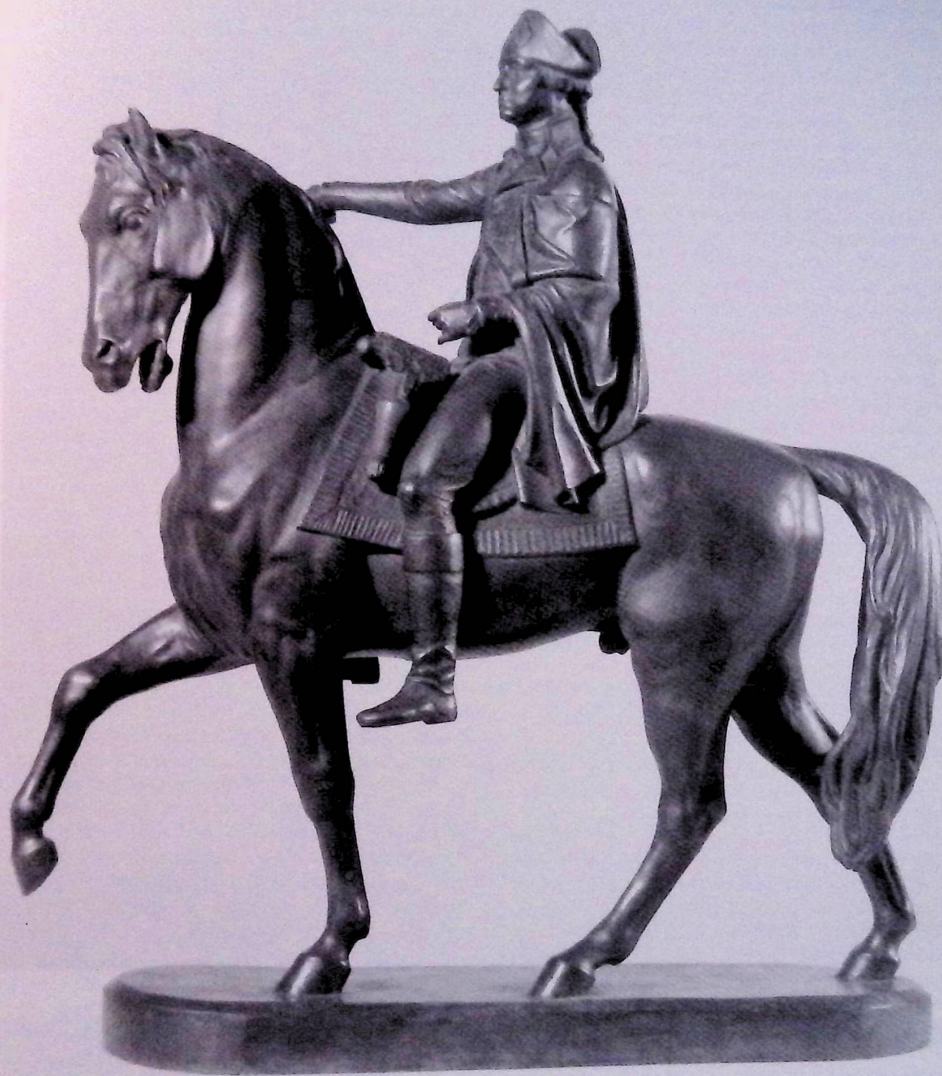
has ridden from out the horrors of war his heart endured only for its ends of justice, calmly restraining his proud steed amidst the acclamations of victorious peace and assured liberty, his sword, ever wielded with strength tempered by mercy, is firmly sheathed not to be drawn again, for his country's foes are vanquished and he knew no other; his broad, benign brow is bare in acknowledgement of our unanimous love, and, as he passes on from the great past of his glorious deeds into the great future which will develop the stupendous destinies of the nation, whose life he inaugurated, his hand is stretched forth, with grave gesture, not more in promise to national loyalty than in deprecation of the . . . treason that would imperil our vital unity by goading the sickness of sectional jealousy into the blind fury of fratricidal hate.¹⁹

Continuing on this theme by comparing the accomplishments of Washington with leaders ancient (Fabius, Cato, Scipio Africanus, Epanimondas, Cincinnatus) and modern (Cromwell and Napoleon), Bethune concluded that "Washington alone has the honor of having established free principles and perpetuated his work."²⁰ Yet he cautioned that those very principles were in danger and pleaded to

God, who gave him, keep that life in us! for, when that spirit is lost, when our elements revolt from their oneness, and, like the maniac among the tombs, whose devils were Legion, we cut and tear ourselves, this fair confederacy will soon lie beneath the heavens the most mangled, loathsome corpse that ever polluted the breath of humanity with its putrefaction. Some of the devils are in us now.²¹

In sum, Dr. Bethune's words, uttered before a vast gathering and transmitted to an even greater audience on the following day when the entire speech appeared on the front page of the *New York Evening Times*, urged the return to the ideals associated with the founding of the Republic and served, further, as a warning against the gathering storm of sectional conflict that was to erupt four years later in 1860.

Brown's *George Washington* joined a long parade of monumental equestrian civic monuments celebrating military victors. At the head of this tradition is the second century A.D. bronze *Marcus Aurelius*, which Bethune indirectly evoked by picturing Washington "ascending the Capitoline height to rule."²² Marcus Aurelius, the humanist Roman emperor whose *Meditations* encapsulate concisely the stoic ideal, represented for many Plato's philosopher king. With the decline of the Roman Empire, however, the ability and necessity to produce large bronzes of this type faded and the skills to do so were lost. Although works such as the stone *Bamberg Rider* (late thirteenth century, Bamberg, Germany) were occasionally carved for architectural sites,²³ it was not until the Renaissance when the rediscovery of lost casting techniques, revived interest in the antique, a growing cult of fame, and economic prosperity resulted



19 Henry Kirke Brown
General George Washington on Horseback, c. 1852 (cast 1932)
 bronze model, 37 1/2 x 42 1/2 x 12 1/4
 Collection of Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven
 Given in Memory of Edmund Terry, B.A. 1837, Edmund Roderick Terry, B.A. 1878,
 and Eliphalet Bradford Terry, B.A. 1888, by Miss Marion Terry
 Photograph courtesy Yale University Art Gallery

in the reappearance of large, freestanding bronze equestrian statues. The iconography of the monumental, mounted *condottiere*, or military leader, reappears in Paolo Uccello's painting *Sir John Hawkwood* (1436, Florence); within a few years of its completion, Donatello began his *Gattamelata* (c. 1445-1450, Padua), the first surviving monumental bronze equestrian statue since Roman times. This was followed by Verrocchio's *Bartolommeo Colleoni* (c. 1483-1488, Venice) and Leonardo's ill-starred, never completed project for Milan. Subsequently, the equestrian statue became one of the most popular and potent images of monarchical authority and became the visual grounding for countless vista's and public spaces, both in Europe and in the United States. Brown's achievement, however, consists not only in his ability to create a work of this magnitude and complexity—it was one of the first large equestrians to be cast in the United States—but also in that he redefined a symbol long associated with absolutism and tyranny into one befitting of the founder of the American republic.³⁴

The civic ideals embodied in the statue were under great challenge at the time of its inauguration. Not only, as Bethune noted, did a growing separatist movement threaten to destroy the Union itself, but also the great influx of immigrants, most of whom were uneducated in the traditions of American democracy, were viewed by many as a growing menace. In 1856, the same year the equestrian was installed, the American Sunday School Union lamented,

The refuse population of Europe . . . congregate in our great cities and send forth wretched progeny, degraded in the deep degradation of their parents—to be the scavengers, physical and moral, of our streets. Mingled with these are also the offcast children of American debauchery, drunkenness, and vice. A class more dangerous to the community . . . can hardly be imagined.³⁵

Paul Boyer has observed that "As anxiety about urban disorder mounted and the wicked-city stereotype gained currency in the late antebellum period, the moral-control impulse became, for some, correspondingly more urgent."³⁶ Thus Brown's *George Washington* would have also served as a didactic paradigm, a point underscored by Bethune: "we have set the lofty image there, that it may stand forth a memorial of divine mercy, a monitor of our duty, an example to all coming generations."³⁷

Bethune's concept of duty, which he shared with many of the era's other moral leaders, might well be described as *noblesse oblige*. Praising the benefactors who paid for the statue, he said: "Wealth has heavy responsibilities and must therefore have its reputation; when one [won] by private or public dishonesty, it is a livery of shame[;] when hoarded or spent for mere self, it is like gilding on vile pottery; when fairly acquired and fairly used it is respectable; but when liberally devoted to true charity and the common benefit, it deserves extraordinary celebration."³⁸ Ironically, during the difficult years of the

depression, the base of Brown's statue became a favorite spot for the unemployed to gather, a scene recorded in Reginald Marsh's *Discussion (At Base of Union Square Washington Statue)* (Cat. no. 32) and his *Union Square* (Cat. no. 33). Although Washington's gesture of blessing appears twice in Eugene C. Fitsch's *Union Square* (Cat. no. 24), it cannot provide any relief to men without jobs.

Henry Kirke Brown also created the second statue to be placed at Union Square, a bronze *Abraham Lincoln*, which was paid for by popular subscription organized by the Union League Club.³⁹ Originally standing on a small parcel of land at the intersection of Fourteenth Street and University Place, the statue was installed in 1870 without, curiously, "any formal ceremony."⁴⁰

Lincoln rises almost eleven feet in height and stands on a twenty-four foot granite pedestal. Although the pedestal has no inscription, "a galaxy of stars [36 of them] representing each State in the Union" is incised in the upper stone.⁴¹ Subsequently a parapet and balustrade were installed around the statue. On the plinth of the parapet is the inscription, taken from Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, "With Malice Toward None, With Charity For All."⁴² The statue (but not the parapet) was moved to its present location, seen in Raphael Soyer's *On the Steps* (Cat. no. 44), when Union Square was raised during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

The reporter who covered the installation for *The New York Times* observed approvingly that Lincoln's "well-known face is reproduced with photographic accuracy."⁴³ From the shoulders of the but-recently-martyred president falls an "ample cloak . . . in the fashion of a Roman toga."⁴⁴ The head is bare and the left hand holds the Emancipation Proclamation. Subsequent critics, however, have tended to denigrate the aesthetic qualities of the work, faulting especially its static, column-like form. One commentator felt that the *Lincoln* "suffers in outline for being a too literal expression of the very prosaic sartorial fashion of the years immediately following the Civil War."⁴⁵ A more telling appraisal was that Brown, like his American contemporaries "rarely created a penetrating psychological study of his subject. . . . Instead, a naturalistic likeness was all that was demanded. Brown could not go beyond this even with such a heroic figure as Lincoln."⁴⁶

On April 25, 1865, approximately five years before Brown's *Lincoln* came to stand at Union Square, the Great Emancipator's body, after lying in state at City Hall, continued its slow, solemn, homeward journey to Illinois. The funeral procession headed up Broadway to Fourteenth Street, passed by the southern end of Union Square before proceeding up Fifth Avenue and then westward to the Hudson River Railroad depot. Shortly after the procession passed by, a memorial service for the martyred President was held in Union Square. Two thousand citizens gathered in front of the speakers' platform and heard George Bancroft deliver the principal eulogy. After noting that "the friends of freedom of

44 Raphael Soyer
On the Steps, 1930s
watercolor and pencil, 9 x 7 1/4
Courtesy of Forum Gallery, New York
Photograph courtesy of Forum Gallery

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every tongue and in every land are his mourners," Bancroft evoked Lincoln's great achievements:

the members of the government which preceded his administration opened the gates of treason, and he closed them; that when he went to Washington the ground on which he trod shook under his feet, and he left the republic on a solid foundation; that traitors had seized public forts and arsenals, and he recovered them . . . that the capital, which he found the abode of slaves, now the home only of the free . . . and the gigantic system of wrong, which had been the work of more than two centuries, is dashed down, we hope forever.⁴⁷

Bancroft then asked "How shall the nation most completely show its sorrow? . . . How shall it best honor his memory?" and answered that, "above everything else, [the Emancipation Proclamation must] be affirmed and maintained."⁴⁸ After providing a lengthy legal defence of the Proclamation, Bancroft concluded by stating "that a constitution which seeks to continue a caste of hereditary bondsmen through endless generations is inconsistent with the existence of republican institutions."⁴⁹ Before dispersing, the crowd heard several prayers and a pair of poems—one but a few hours old—by W. C. Bryant.

On September 6, 1876, a new apostle of freedom joined Washington and Lincoln in Union Square. While the assembled bands played the "Marsellaise," Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi (1834-1904) unveiled his *Marquis de Lafayette*.⁵⁰ Edmond Breuil, the French Consul General, presented the statue to New York City on behalf of his government in gratitude for assistance rendered during the Franco-Prussian War.⁵¹ Although now facing Union Square East, at the time of its dedication the statue was sited at the southern end of the Square, in such a way that Lafayette appeared in an "attitude of offering his hand and his sword to Washington."⁵² "To The City of New York, France, In Remembrance Of Sympathy In Time Of Trial. 1870-71" and "As Soon As I Heard of American Independence My Heart Was Enlisted. 1776" are inscribed on the pedestal along with garlands of laurel, symbolizing victory, in low relief.⁵³

Although Brown's *Lincoln* and Bartholdi's *Lafayette* show some formal similarities, fundamentally they exemplify two different sculptural traditions.⁵⁴ In both figures one arm crosses the chest (Lincoln's right, Lafayette's left) while the other is extended downward. In both, massive drapery falls from the shoulder; however, Lincoln's deeply folded drapery is awkwardly truncated whereas Lafayette's flows gracefully and lightly to the base. Moreover, while Lincoln's cloak covers and conceals the figure, Lafayette's robe emphasizes the youth's gracefulness by classically juxtaposing the drapery and figure. Like the Marquis' generous assistance, the convex lines of the statue flow outward in contrast to the concave, inward and withdrawn silhouette of the Lincoln. The former seems to represent the idealism of youth, the latter the disillusionment of age.

Like the nation itself during these postwar years, Brown's *Lincoln* embodied a spirit "darker, sadder, soberer."⁵⁵

The dedication of Bartholdi's *Lafayette* concluded a summer of celebrations honoring the centenary of American Independence. Present were a large number of military troops, including a "phalanx" of elderly veterans from the War of 1812.⁵⁶ F. R. Coudert gave the main address, which *The New York Times* printed "in substance." Like the other speakers, Coudert evoked Lafayette's love of freedom: "He served the cause of freedom in a foreign land [and] the same cause in his own land."⁵⁷ After noting that he spoke on Lafayette's birthday, Coudert found the physical placement of the statue symbolic and most appropriate:

He [Lafayette] would surely tell us that the place for him was next to the one [Washington] who called him "Son," and who loved him with a father's love. And lest, looking up to these two founders of our nation, and glorying much in the heritage which they have transmitted, we should forget that the bloodiest of our trials was brought upon us, not by foreign hands nor rival nations, but by our own hot and intemperate haste, we have before us the image of that President [Lincoln] whose fortune it was to hold the helm of State during the stormiest times of our history, and we may all, I think, unite in saying that whatever faults partisan spirit may justly or unjustly impute to him, whatever shortcomings he may have carried with him to the judgment seat, yet was he so earnest in his love of freedom, so honest in his love of country, so kindly and so gentle in his love of his fellows, that the illustrious men who now bear him company would cheerfully admit him to their friendship.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, the font of enlightenment idealism, optimism, and liberalism on which the Declaration of Independence had been drawn (and indeed codified) had become polluted by the political realities of the day. The party of Lincoln had, under President Grant, become synonymous with corruption, cronyism, and criminality. The same and worse, much worse, could be said of the governance of New York City under Boss Tweed, whose "ring" had systematically robbed millions of dollars from the city treasury.⁵⁹ A few months after the dedication, in an occurrence symbolic of the era, Rutherford B. Hayes literally stole the presidential election of 1876.⁶⁰

Five years after the dedication of Bartholdi's *Lafayette*, New Yorkers assembled for the unveiling of the *Union Square Drinking Fountain* (the James Fountain), which *The New York Times* characterized as "the handsomest fountain on Manhattan Island."⁶¹ Created by Karl Adolph Donndorf, and presented to the City by D. Willis James, the fountain was "more pretentious as a work of art than any other in the city."⁶² Atop the bronze fountain is a group, seven feet high, also of bronze,

consisting of a mother and two children, one a babe in arms, the other a bare-legged little boy running at her side. . . . The mother is clothed in drapery in the classic

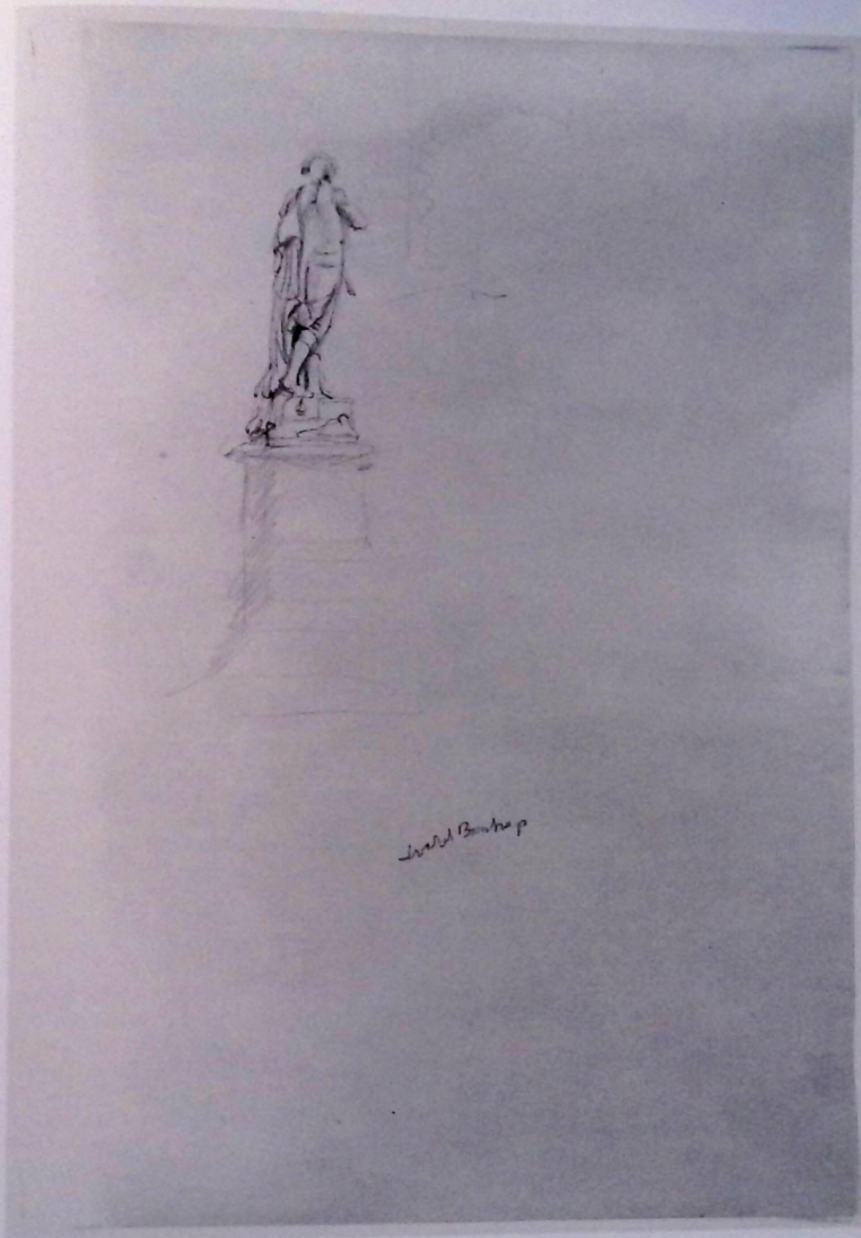


14 Isabel Bishop
Study of Lafayette, n.d.
graphite, 10¹/₂ × 7¹/₂ (sheet)
Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

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 graphite, 10 1/4 x 7 1/4 (sheet)
 Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York
 Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

style . . . the babe rests on her right arm, with one arm clasped around the mother's neck and the other extended downward to the little brother, who is trying to take from his mother the pitcher she carries in her left hand, and which, if it contained water, as it is supposed to, would, at the angle at which it is held, be spilled by any but a person of bronze.⁶¹

The fountain itself consists of four basins, shaped like giant shells, into which once flowed jets of water from the mouths of four lions. The remainder of the fountain is highly decorated with a menagerie of flying birds; crawling salamanders; butterflies; dragonflies; and garlands of flowers, leaves, and fruits.⁶⁴ Together these symbolize earthly bounty and abundance. The lower portion of the fountain, including bronze basins, is visible in Isabel Bishop's *Girls Sitting in Union Square Fountain* (Cat. nos. 8 and 9), *Man at Fountain* (Cat. no. 10), and *Mending* (Cat. no. 11).

The theme of charity invoked by the inscription surrounding the nearby *Lincoln* predominates in the James Fountain, which was intended as an allegory of Charity, the foremost of the three theological virtues.⁶⁵ In his dedicatory remarks, James made this interpretation explicit: "If the bronze . . . shall be the means of kindling in any heart that spirit of love—Charity—it is intended to illustrate, I shall indeed be more than compensated."⁶⁶ Professor J. Leonard Corning, who gave the keynote speech of the day, concurred by seeing in the fountain "the exemplification of that best chosen emblem of charity, the motherly instinct. It will ever stand a silent preacher of the institutes of Christian kindness as well as an enduring work of art."⁶⁷

Both Mayor Grace, who accepted the fountain on behalf of New York City, and the Reverend Dr. Roswell D. Hitchcock saw in the fountain an altruistic gesture to help the disadvantaged, many of whom were recent immigrants. The mayor thanked the donor for his other "munificent work . . . for the betterment of the condition of the poor and working classes by providing for them tenement-houses, clean, healthy, and at a reasonable rate of rental—the most practical and munificent of works of charity."⁶⁸ The Reverend Dr. Hitchcock echoed this sentiment as he praised "the merchant princes of New York [who] were . . . leading the world in beneficences for the public good, of which this fountain is an example, and in this way earning what their fortune should incite them to obtain more than anything else, the reward of popular gratitude and affection."⁶⁹ But the need for charity was not directed only toward the poor; the nation itself needed charity, and forgiveness, after undergoing an incredibly destructive Civil War. Charity, personified in the James Fountain, was an essential component in the realization of the American ideal of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

To commemorate the sesquicentennial of the Declaration of Independence, the Charles F. Murphy Memorial Association underwrote the Independence Flagstaff.

Rising to a height of ninety feet in the center of Union Square and costing \$80,000, the flagstaff replaced an earlier Liberty flagpole erected by the Tammany Society that had stood at the southern end of the square.⁷⁰ The base of the Murphy flagpole was intended to be a "permanent public exposition" of the Declaration of Independence, whose text, along with the names of the signatories, appears in high relief on an eight-foot-square tablet. Encircling the base, a six-and-a-half-foot bronze relief, on which Anthony de Francisci (1887–1964) labored for three years, depicts "the evils of oppression and bondage and the blessings of independence and liberty."⁷¹ These allegorical figures trace "the march of mankind from slavery to freedom."⁷² Sadly, the well-dressed, seated figures in Isabel Bishop's *At the Base of the Flagpole (Idle Conversation)* (Cat. no. 1) were shortly to be replaced by more desperate individuals enjoying "the blessings of independence" brought on by widespread urban unemployment. Inscribed on the pedestal by Perry Coke Smith is Thomas Jefferson's admonition: "How little my countrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of and which no other people on earth enjoy."⁷³ Other decorative motifs include the coats of arms of the United States and of the original thirteen states.

The most recent statue to be installed at Union Square is a likeness of *Mohandas Gandhi* by the Indian sculptor Kantilal B. Patel. Dedicated on October 2, 1986, the 117th anniversary of Gandhi's birth, the eight-foot bronze depicts a bespectacled, striding Gandhi holding a bamboo walking stick and wearing a *dhobi*, a garment associated with Hindu asceticism.⁷⁴ The figure stands on a low concrete pedestal about four feet high, to which a bronze plaque is attached with Gandhi's dates (October 2, 1869–January 30, 1948) and a quotation that sums up his political philosophy: "My optimism rests on my belief in the infinite possibilities of the individual to develop nonviolence. . . . In a gentle way you can shake the world." The plaque further indicates that the statue was presented to "the city of New York and the citizens of the United States of America" from the Gandhi Memorial International Foundation. Yogesh K. Gandhi, a great-grandnephew of Mohandas, led the effort to place the statue in Union Square; Mohan B. Murjani underwrote most of the \$60,000 cost.⁷⁵

At the dedication, Parks Commissioner Henry J. Stern observed "I can think of no better place to honor Mahatma Gandhi than Union Square park, which has been a forum for public assembly and peaceful protest since the early part of the 20th century."⁷⁶ His remarks addressed objections that had been raised by various groups, including the Union Square Park Community Coalition.⁷⁷ Even more relevant, however, Gandhi continued the tradition of honoring individuals who had dedicated their lives to the ideal of freedom. Like Washington, Gandhi was *pater patrie* who had led a colonial revolt for freedom against the British. Unlike



9 (left) Isabel Bishop
Girls Sitting in Union Square Fountain, 1936
etching, 5⁷/₈ × 4⁷/₈
Collection of Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan
Photograph courtesy Delaware Art Museum

10 (right) Isabel Bishop
Man at Fountain, 1945 (printed 1985)
etching, 4¹/₂ × 3¹/₂
Courtesy of Sylvan Cole Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Service

to a height of ninety feet in the center of Union Square and costing \$80,000, the flagstaff replaced an Liberty flagpole erected by the Tammany Society and stood at the southern end of the square.⁷⁰ The Murphy flagpole was intended to be a permanent public exposition of the Declaration of Independence, whose text, along with the names of the signatories, appears in high relief on an eight-foot tablet. Encircling the base, a six-and-a-half-foot relief, on which Anthony de Francisci (1887-1964) labored for three years, depicts "the evils of slavery and bondage and the blessings of independence and liberty."⁷¹ These allegorical figures trace "the path of mankind from slavery to freedom."⁷² Sadly, the seated figures in Isabel Bishop's *At the Base of the Flagpole (Idle Conversation)* (Cat. no. 1) were shortly replaced by more desperate individuals enjoying the blessings of independence⁷³ brought on by widespread urban unemployment. Inscribed on the pedestal by Coke Smith is Thomas Jefferson's admonition: "Little my countrymen know what precious rights they are in possession of and which no other on earth enjoy."⁷³ Other decorative motifs include the coats of arms of the United States and of the thirteen states.

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Washington, however, Gandhi employed nonviolent resistance in his struggle. His walking stick, for example, alludes to the many marches that Gandhi led; his *dhobi* recalls the movement for economic self-sufficiency, symbolized by his wearing homespun clothing, that served as a powerful weapon against the British; and finally, his thin, birdlike body, recalls the numerous hunger strikes he undertook in the cause of liberty. Although some had questioned the appropriateness of honoring a foreign leader such as Gandhi, this objection seems ironic, especially when one recalls the importance of his teachings for the leaders—especially Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—of the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

SOCIAL HISTORY

AS WE HAVE SEEN, the association of Union Square with freedom began with Washington's triumphant approach to the city in 1783. Until the 1860s, however, City Hall rather than Union Square was the locus of political protest in the city. As residential neighborhoods moved northward, so did political activity. Between the Civil War and World War II, Union Square was the gathering site for rallies of every cause.

Although a few organized protests had been held in the square during the 1850s—in 1859 George Templeton Strong recorded in his diary observing "a grand demonstration" of two thousand "Reds" honoring "the pious Orsini" and a co-conspirator who had attempted, unsuccessfully, to assassinate Louis Napoleon⁷⁸—the tradition of protest truly began with the Civil War. In December 1859, a mass rally was held in favor of preserving the Union. The "largest" political gathering to date—estimates of the crowd vary from 100,000 to 250,000—was held shortly after Confederate forces attacked Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor during the early morning hours of April 12, 1861.⁷⁹

Along with demonstrations in favor of national unity, Union Square increasingly became a site of class conflict. Yet, as Paul Boyer has noted, "Urban disorder was familiar enough from the antebellum period . . . in the Gilded Age it took on a more menacing aura as a direct expression of labor unrest."⁸⁰ One of the earliest labor demonstrations occurred in 1860 when striking railroad drovers gathered at the George Washington statue. Workers who had lost their jobs in the economic depression of 1873 rallied at Union Square and urged the city to hire the unemployed. In the 1880s, the Knights of Labor repeatedly called for the adoption of the eight-hour workday and the establishment of Labor Day as an official holiday. In 1887, when the state legislature proclaimed the first Monday in September as Labor Day, a crowd of 20,000 celebrants gathered in Union Square. Two years later, workers responding to the Second Socialist International's call for an eight-hour day converged on Union Square and marched in the first of many May Day parades. By the late nine-

teenth century, Union Square had become synonymous with labor unrest. According to David Dunlap's somewhat oversimplified view, "As the square became a focal point for unionists, socialists, and anarchists, the old stores slipped away to Fifth Avenue."⁸¹

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, Union Square was the site of numerous demonstrations. In the summer of 1914, the Anti-Militarist League held a "funeral service" for three anarchists, who died under mysterious circumstances, after protesting the "Ludlow Massacre," which had occurred when company guards shot and killed striking miners and their families in Ludlow, Colorado.⁸²

After a decline in the number of political rallies during most of the 1920s, the final years of the decade saw a reawakening of unrest. On the evening of August 22, 1927, thousands gathered in the square to await the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti.⁸³ Violence erupted when police sought to disperse the crowd. As the twenties drew to a close, political activity increased. Responding to the new mood, the Communists, in 1929, organized the first May Day parade in thirteen years.⁸⁴ Later that year, on October 29, the stock market crashed.

Writing in 1939, Frederick Lewis Allen dramatically summarized the impact of the market decline: "In a few short weeks it had blown into thin air thirty billion dollars—a sum almost as great as the entire cost to the United States of its participation in the World War, and nearly twice as great as the entire national debt."⁸⁵ The repercussions were immediate: unemployment, reduced production, a decline in prices, postponed expansion, and a curtailment of foreign trade. Breadlines, "the worm that walks like a man" in Heywood Broun's poignant phrase, began to form.⁸⁶ Reginald Marsh's *No One Has Starved* (not in exhibition), which appeared in the *New Masses*, depicts one such worm. Marsh's title brings to mind Jonathan Norton Leonard's mordant description in *Three Years Down* (1939): "All of them [the striking miners] were hungry and many were dying of those providential diseases which enable welfare authorities to claim that no one has starved."⁸⁷

Although stocks rose briefly in the early months of 1930, in April they began the long descent that continued until they reached their nadir in 1932. In March, 1930, the New York State Industrial Commissioner announced that unemployment had reached its highest level since the state had begun collecting statistics in 1914.⁸⁸ Despite this evidence, many otherwise well-informed individuals did not comprehend, or chose to ignore, the seriousness of the problem: In a poll conducted by the National Economic League in January 1930, respondents rated unemployment eighteenth among the "paramount problems" facing the nation.⁸⁹

This background provides the context for the events of March 6, 1930, when Union Square witnessed the largest Communist demonstration ever held in New York City.⁹⁰ Estimates of the size of the crowd varied



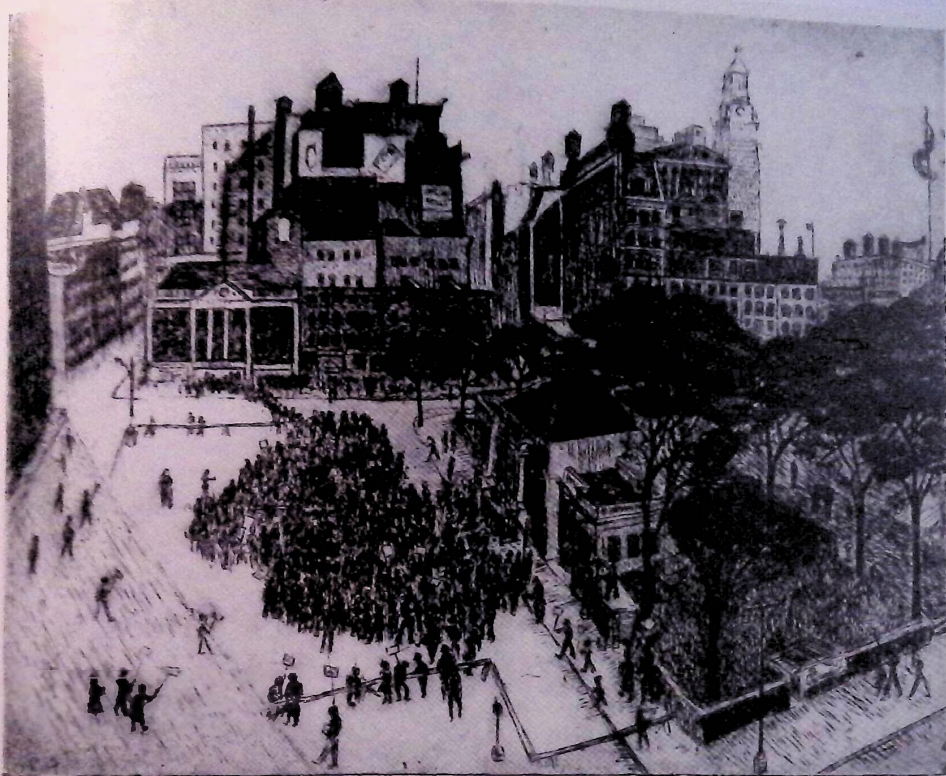
36 Betty Waldo Parish
Union Square Rally, c. 1935-1945
etching, 7³/₄ × 9¹/₄
Courtesy of Sylvan Cole Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Service

Union Square had become synonymous with protest. According to David Dunlap's somewhat idealized view, "As the square became a focal point for communists, socialists, and anarchists, the old Union Square moved away to Fifth Avenue."⁸¹

In the two decades of the twentieth century, Union Square was the site of numerous demonstrations. In 1914, the Anti-Militarist League held a "Ludlow Massacre" for three anarchists, who died under mysterious circumstances, after protesting the "Ludlow Massacre" which had occurred when company guards killed striking miners and their families in Colorado.⁸²

In the 1920s, the final years of the decade were marked by a period of unrest. On the evening of August 12, thousands gathered in the square to await the verdicts in the Sacco and Vanzetti case.⁸³ Violence erupted in an attempt to disperse the crowd. As the decade drew to a close, political activity increased. In the new mood, the Communists, in 1929, held their first May Day parade in thirteen years.⁸⁴ On October 29, the stock market crashed. In 1939, Frederick Lewis Allen dramatically described the impact of the market decline: "In a few minutes it had blown into thin air *thirty billion* dollars—almost as great as the entire cost to the United States of its participation in the World War, and as great as the entire national debt."⁸⁵ The consequences were immediate: unemployment, reduced production, decline in prices, postponed expansion, and a reduction of foreign trade. Breadlines, "the worms like a man" in Heywood Brown's poem, began to form.⁸⁶ Reginald Marsh's *No. 1* (not in exhibition), which appeared in *Artforum*, depicts one such worm. Marsh's title is a reference to Jonathan Norton Leonard's mordant poem *Three Years Dozen* (1939): "All of them [the worms] were hungry and many were dying of various diseases which enable welfare authorities to say that no one has starved."⁸⁷

Stocks rose briefly in the early months of 1933 but then they began the long descent that continued to reach their nadir in 1932. In March, 1933, the New York State Industrial Commissioner reported that unemployment had reached its highest point in the state. The state had begun collecting statistics in 1930. In the face of this evidence, many otherwise well-meaning individuals did not comprehend, or chose to ignore, the seriousness of the problem: In a poll conducted by the National Economic League in January 1933, 60 percent rated unemployment eighteenth among the "most important problems" facing the nation.⁸⁹ The historical context provided by the events of 1930, when Union Square witnessed the largest anarchist demonstration ever held in New York City, estimates of the size of the crowd varied



36 Betty Waido Parish
Union Square Rally, c. 1935-1945
etching, 7 1/4 x 9 1/4
Courtesy of Sylvan Cole Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

from 35,000 to 100,000. The rally had been called by the Third International to focus attention on International Unemployment Day. At a meeting with representatives of the Communist Party, Police Commissioner Grover Whalen stated that the rally was illegal since a permit had not been obtained. Nonetheless, he allowed the rally to proceed on the condition that it terminate by 1 P.M. When the deadline approached, however, the crowd began to march out of Union Square toward City Hall. Commissioner Whalen thereupon ordered his police to fall upon the marchers and a bloody riot ensued—"the worst disorder New York had seen in many years."⁹¹ Peter Hopkins and Edward Laning responded to this disorder; Hopkins, painting seventeen years after the event, sought to capture the tumult and chaos in his *Riot at Union Square, March 6, 1930* (Cat. no. 26). Laning, on the other hand, depicted a preternatural stillness in his *Unlawful Assembly, Union Square* (Cat. no. 29), whose composition is clearly indebted to a photograph that appeared in *The New York Times*.⁹² The riot did have one positive consequence: It "galvanized the public against police interference, and under pressure, city officials guaranteed the right to free assembly in the square."⁹³

Throughout the 1930s, Union Square was the undisputed "center of America's radical movement."⁹⁴ Headquartered in the area were numerous radical publications—the *New Masses* and the *Daily Worker* among the most prominent—and organizations—including the John Reed Club and the Communist Party.⁹⁵ Demonstrations became a way of life in the square and artists including Leonard Pytlak (*May Day* [Cat. no. 38]), Louis Lozowick (*Demonstration* [Cat. no. 30]), Betty Waldo Parish (*Union Square Rally* [Cat. no. 36]), Albert Potter (*Parade in the Park—Union Square Demonstration* [Cat. no. 37]), Ben Shahn (*May Day [Union Square Demonstration]* [Cat. no. 39]), and Raphael Soyer (*The Crowd* [Cat. no. 42]) treated the subject.

Mostly, however, the unemployed men waited. They lounged on the park benches (Raphael Soyer, *In the City Park* [Cat. no. 43] and Eugene C. Fitch, *Unemployed Union Square* [Cat. no. 23]); they crowded together at the bases of the various monuments (Reginald Marsh, *Union Square* [Cat. no. 33] and Raphael Soyer, *On the Steps* [Cat. no. 44]); they populated employment agencies (Isaac Soyer, *Employment Agency* [Cat. no. 41]); they waited for things to change. Finally, as the economy began to heat up in anticipation of World War II, conditions improved.

The end of the thirties signaled a change in American attitudes. The United States' involvement in World War II, followed by an unprecedented period of prolonged prosperity, made the role once served by Union Square obsolete. As Isidore Wisotsky lamented in 1958:

World War II spelled the end of the square as a free-for-all political forum, except for a few Communist sorties. It has been years now since radical issues and nonconformist speakers could find large and interested audiences there. The old generation has moved on and lost interest,

and the authorities discourage the square's former uses. Now permission for meetings in the square is rarely asked and more rarely given.⁹⁶

Today, Union Square seems best known for its farmers' market. The heritage of long-past struggles for freedom remains only in the iconography of freedom, shared by all the major monuments in Union Square.

NOTES

1. Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965): 268.
2. Edward Robb Ellis, *The Epic of New York City: A Narrative History* (New York: Old Town Books, 1990): 11.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-26.
5. Originally laid out by Peter Minuit's engineer, Bowery Road, a north-south artery, was named for the dozen farms (*bowwerias*) that were nearby. Broadway, originally an Indian warpath, was also known as High Street and Bloomingdale Road.
6. Quoted in M. Christine Boyer, *Manhattan Manners: Architecture and Style 1850-1900* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985): 10.
7. Quoted in Richard Hoe Lawrence, Harris D. Colt, and I. N. Phelps Stokes, *History of the Society of Iconophiles of the City of New York and Catalogue of Its Publications, With Historical and Biographical Notes, etc.* (New York, 1930): 122.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.* According to M.C. Boyer (*Manhattan Manners*, p. 11) the area became a public square in 1831; Lawrence, however (*History of the Society of Iconophiles*, p. 123) states that this occurred in 1839. The iron fence that surrounded the Square (illustrated in M.C. Boyer, *Manhattan Manners*, p. 46) was erected in 1835 and 1836. (Lawrence, *History of the Society of Iconophiles*, p. 122). The iron fence was removed in the 1870s (*The W.P.A. Guide to New York City: The Federal Writers' Project Guide to 1930s New York* [New York: Pantheon, 1982]: 200). *The W.P.A. Guide to New York City* incorrectly claims (p. 200) that the area did not officially become known as Union Square until the 1870s.
10. Quoted in Lawrence, *History of the Society of Iconophiles*, p. 122.
11. Paul Boyer reminds us that "Today, parks are so ubiquitous and familiar a feature of the urban scene that we give little thought . . . to their social significance. Thus, it takes a considerable imaginative leap to realize that the park movement once had the force of a fresh social discovery that could arouse intense and passionate commitment, and that its moral implications were carefully explored and debated by moralists, urban reformers, social critics, landscape designers, and municipal authorities alike" (*Urban Masses and Moral Order in America: 1820-1920* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978]: 236).
12. Norval White, *New York: A Physical History* (New York: Athenaeum, 1987): 42.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
15. Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City, from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987): 216.
16. Maxwell Marcuse, *This Was New York! A Nostalgic Picture of Gotham in the Gaslight Era*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: LIM Press, 1969): 225-229.
17. For a detailed study, Bender cites John W. Erick, Jr., "The Rialto: A Study of Union Square, the Center of New York's First Theater District, 1870-1900" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1983).
18. Bender, *New York Intellect*, p. 216.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Ellen Wiley Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised: Farming and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 96. For a discussion of Herz's and S. Klein's, see pp. 96-100.



29 Edward Laning
Unlawful Assembly, Union Square, 1931
tempera on composition board, 14 1/2 x 36
Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Gift of Isabel Bishop
Photograph Copyright © 1995: Whitney Museum of American Art

the authorities discourage the square's former uses. Permission for meetings in the square is rarely asked and more rarely given.²⁴

Today, Union Square seems best known for its artists' market. The heritage of long-past struggles for freedom remains only in the iconography of freedom, embodied by all the major monuments in Union Square.

ES
Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965): 268.
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Originally laid out by Peter Minuit's engineer, Bowery Road, a north-south artery, was named for the dozen farms (*bowweries*) that lined the street. Broadway, originally an Indian warpath, was also known as the Bowery Street and Bloomingdale Road.

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ibid., p. 44.

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ibid.
Bender, *New York Intellectual*, p. 216.

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- 29 Edward Laning
Unlawful Assembly, Union Square, 1931
tempera on composition board, 14 1/4 x 36
Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Gift of Isabel Bishop
Photograph Copyright © 1995: Whitney Museum of American Art

21. Among the artists who had studios in the Lincoln Building were Reginald Marsh (1937-1954), Raphael Soyer (1939-1943), Charles Keller (1940-1941) and Georges Schreiber (1944-1965). See Susan Teller, *Union Square* (New York: Associated American Artists, 1987): unpaginated, and Todd, "New Woman," p. 94.
22. Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: Norton paperback, 1990): 164, 218.
23. The composition of the statue is as follows: 88 parts copper, 9 parts tin, 2 parts zinc, 1 part lead. The statue was cast at the Ames Foundry, Springfield, Massachusetts. The body of the horse was cast in one piece with an average thickness of 3/8 inches. The statue took four years to complete.
24. J. Sanford Saltus and Walter E. Tisné, *Statues of New York* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1923): 28.
25. Houdon visited Washington at his Mount Vernon home for two weeks in October 1785. A copy of Houdon's bust belonged to Senator Fish, who introduced Bethune at the inauguration of the statue. *New York Evening Times* (hereafter cited as *NYET*) (July 5, 1856): 1.
26. *NYET* (July 5, 1856): 1. A list of the subscribers appears in the *NYET* (ibid.). The sponsors' names were inscribed "between the hooves" of the horse. (*The New York Times* [Hereafter cited as *NYT*], July 11, 1930): 21.
27. Saltus and Tisné, *Statues of New York*, p. 28.
28. *NYET* (July 5, 1856): 1. Subsequently, in the late 1860s, Henry K. Brown created a portrait statue of Dr. Bethune for Brooklyn's Packer Institute (Wayne Craven, *Sculpture in America* [New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1968]: 156).
29. *NYET* (July 5, 1856): 1.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid. Located on the Capitoline Hill atop a pedestal by Michelangelo, *Marcus Aurelius* (c. A.D. 165) is the only statue of its type to have survived from the ancient world. During medieval times it was believed to represent Constantine, the first Christian emperor. Other famous, but now lost, examples of the genre include monuments to Trajan (Rome), Justinian (Constantinople), and Theodoros (which Charlemagne removed to Aachen after he was crowned Holy Roman emperor in 800).
33. Other stone medieval equestrian statues include the Saint Martin in Lucca, the Otto I in Magdeburg, and the Bernabò Visconti in Milan (Charles Rufus Morey, *Medieval Art* [New York: W.W. Norton, 1942]: 295-296).
34. This was especially true for New Yorkers, who in gratitude for George III's repeal of the Stamp Act, caused an equestrian statue of the king to be erected in the city's Bowling Green, at the foot of Broadway. The gilded lead statue, set on a massive pedestal, was dedicated on August 21, 1770. Six years later, the citizens destroyed what had become a hated symbol of oppression.
35. Quoted in P. Boyer, *Urban Masses*, p. 80.
36. P. Boyer, *Urban Masses*, p. 75.
37. *NYET* (July 5, 1856): 1.
38. Ibid.
39. *NYT* (September 17, 1870): 2. According to *The New York Times*, the statue weighs almost 3,000 pounds (ibid.). It was cast by R. Wood & Co., Philadelphia in 1869.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Moses King, *King's Handbook of New York City: An Outline, History and Description of the American Metropolis* (Boston, 1893): 176. The parapet was not reinstalled when the statue was moved to its current location in 1930.
43. *NYT* (September 17, 1870): 2.
44. Saltus and Tisné, *Statues of New York*, p. 40.
45. Ibid.
46. Craven, *Sculpture in America*, p. 156.
47. *NYT* (April 26, 1865): 8.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Bartholdi's best known work is the colossal *Statue of Liberty* (*Liberty Enlightening the World*), 1875-1884. For the story of the *Statue of Liberty* see Ellis, *Epic*, pp. 384-392.
51. Saltus and Tisné, *Statues of New York*, p. 32.
52. The statue was moved to its present location in August 1929. *NYT* (August 7, 1929): 18. See also Saltus and Tisné, *Statues of New York*, p. 32.
53. King, *King's Handbook*, p. 176. Also inscribed on the plinth is "Erected 1876."
54. Although Brown had made the Italian pilgrimage and indeed spent four years working first in Florence and then Rome, he became convinced, especially after his return to New York in 1846, of the need to forge a truly American art. To this end he rejected continental neoclassicism in favor of American subjects rendered directly and naturalistically. Bartholdi, on the other hand, was a true inheritor of the European sculptural tradition. In his elegant *Lafayette*, one sees the sophisticated interplay of light and movement, the subtle surface relationships, the animating contrapposto, and the idealization that characterize that tradition.
55. Lewis Mumford, *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America 1865-1895*, rev. ed. (New York: Dover, 1971): 2.
56. *NYT* (September 7, 1876): 1.
57. Ibid., p. 7.
58. Ibid.
59. William Marcy Tweed was arrested in December 1871. After his first trial ended in a hung jury, prosecutors successfully retried him, in November 1873, and obtained convictions on 120 counts. On appeal, his sentence was reduced to one year in prison and a \$250 fine (Ellis, *Epic*, pp. 351-354).
60. Morison, *Oxford History*, pp. 733-734.
61. *NYT* (October 26, 1881): 8.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid. Originally scheduled to be completed within two and a half years from the date of the commission contract, May 10, 1877, the work dragged on until 1881. The sculptor's wife and infant served as models for the figural group. The standing child was a Stuttgart youth renowned for his "ideal grace of form." The bronze statue was cast in Brunswick, Germany, at the G. Howaldt foundry (ibid.).
64. The pedestal is a highly polished red Swedish granite. Three steps enable individuals to reach the ornamental fountain basins (ibid.).
65. "And now abideth faith, hope and charity...but the greatest of these is charity" (I Corinthians 13:13). Giving drink to the thirsty (symbolized by the bucket full of water) represents the second of the Six Mercies (Matthew 25:35-37). Since the fourteenth century, Charity has been personified as a mother with two (usually suckling) infants.
66. *NYT* (October 26, 1881): 8.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. *NYT* (May 22, 1930): 1. The flagstaff was dedicated on July 4, 1930; the actual sesquicentennial had occurred in 1926. Charles Francis Murphy was a Tammany Hall leader.
71. *NYT* (July 5, 1930): 1.
72. *NYT* (May 22, 1930): 1.
73. *W.P.A. Guide*, pp. 202-203.
74. *NYT* (October 3, 1986): II, 3.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.
77. The Union Square Park Community Coalition, for example, had objected to the addition of a new statue, claiming that the other Union Square statues were not being maintained properly (*NYT* (July 15, 1986): II, 3). Mujani silenced this objection by donating an additional \$100,000 to the Parks Commission for maintenance of all the Union Square statuary (*NYT* (October 3, 1986): II, 3).
78. Quoted in M. C. Boyer, *Manhattan Manners*, p. 85.

best known work is the colossal *Statue of Liberty* (*Statue of Liberty*, 1875-1884. For the story of the *Statue of Liberty*, see *Statue of Liberty*, pp. 384-392.

Tisné, *Statues of New York*, p. 32. It was moved to its present location in August 1929. See also Saltus and Tisné, *Statues of New York*, p. 18.

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See also Ford, *The Broken Decades: A Study of the Arts in America, 1870-1900*, rev. ed. (New York: Dover, 1971): 2. See also *Artforum*, number 7, 1876: 1.

Henry Tweed was arrested in December 1871. After his trial by a hung jury, prosecutors successfully retried him, and obtained convictions on 120 counts. On appeal, he was reduced to one year in prison and a \$250 fine (see *Artforum*, number 7, 1876: 1).

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...bideth faith, hope and charity...but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13). Giving drink to the thirsty (the bucket full of water) represents the second of the seven virtues (see *Artforum*, number 25:35-37). Since the fourteenth century, the figure has personified as a mother with two (usually suckling) children.

See also *Artforum*, number 26, 1881: 8.

...22, 1930): 1. The flagstaff was dedicated on July 4, 1930, on the sesquicentennial of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Charles M. Murray was a Tammany Hall leader.

See also *Artforum*, number 22, 1930: 1.

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...Square Park Community Coalition, for example, objected to the addition of a new statue, claiming that the other statues were not being maintained properly (*NYT* [July 19, 1986]: 1). The coalition's objection was silenced by donating an amount of money to the Parks Commission for maintenance of all the statues (*NYT* [October 3, 1986]: II, 3). See also M. C. Boyer, *Manhattan Manners*, p. 85.



20 Ernest Fiene
Lincoln Monument in Union Square, 1935
lithograph, 13 1/4 x 10 1/8
Collection of Wolfgang A. Herz
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

79. Ellis, *Epic*, p. 296.
 80. P. Boyer, *Urban Masses*, p. 125.
 81. David W. Dunlap, *On Broadway: A Journey Uptown Over Time* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990): 122.
 82. The fifteen-month strike by coal miners began in September 1913. The infamous "massacre" occurred on April 20, 1914, when Company B of the Colorado National Guard opened fire on the miners' tent city. When the fusillade ended twelve hours later, the guardsmen torched the tents. Numerous women and children were burned to death.
 83. *NYT* (August 23, 1927): 1.
 84. Todd, "New Woman," p. 122.
 85. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Since Yesterday: The Nineteen-Thirties in America* (New York: Harper, 1940): 26.
 86. Quoted in Ellis, *Epic*, p. 533.

87. Quoted in Allen, *Since Yesterday*, p. 64.
 88. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
 89. *Ibid.*, p. 31. In 1930 the top five issues all concerned crime (1) Administration of Justice, (2) Prohibition, (3) Lawlessness, Disrespect for Law, (4) Crime, and (5) Law Enforcement. In the January 1931 poll, unemployment moved up to number 4 (*ibid.*).
 90. Ellis, *Epic*, p. 537.
 91. *Ibid.*, p. 539.
 92. *NYT* (March 7, 1930): 2. Laning reversed the photograph's composition.
 93. Todd, "New Woman", p. 122.
 94. *WPA Guide*, p. 199.
 95. See Todd, "New Woman", p. 342, n. 68.
 96. Isidore Wisotsky, "Echoes of the Union Square That Was," *The New York Times Magazine Section* (October 12, 1958): 72.



1 Isabel Bishop
At the Base of the Flagpole (Idle Conversation), 1930
 etching, 5 x 6
 Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art
 Felicia Meyer Marsh Bequest
 Photograph Copyright © 1995: Whitney Museum of American Art

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3) Lawlessness, Disrespect
nt. In the January 1931
(ibid.).

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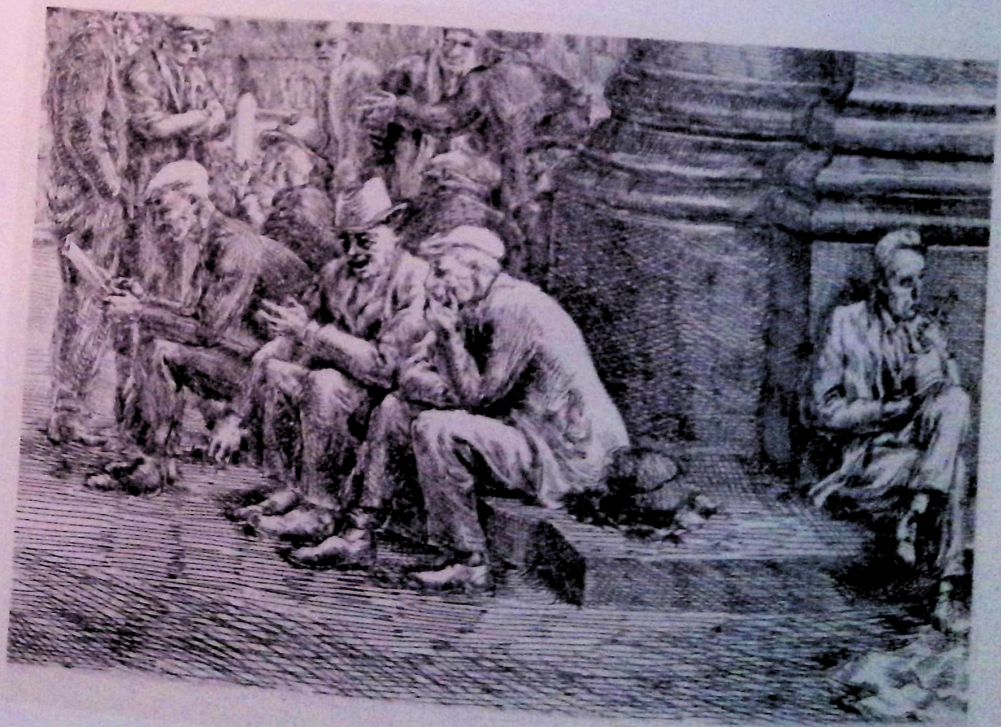
on Square That Was," *The*
2, 1958): 72.

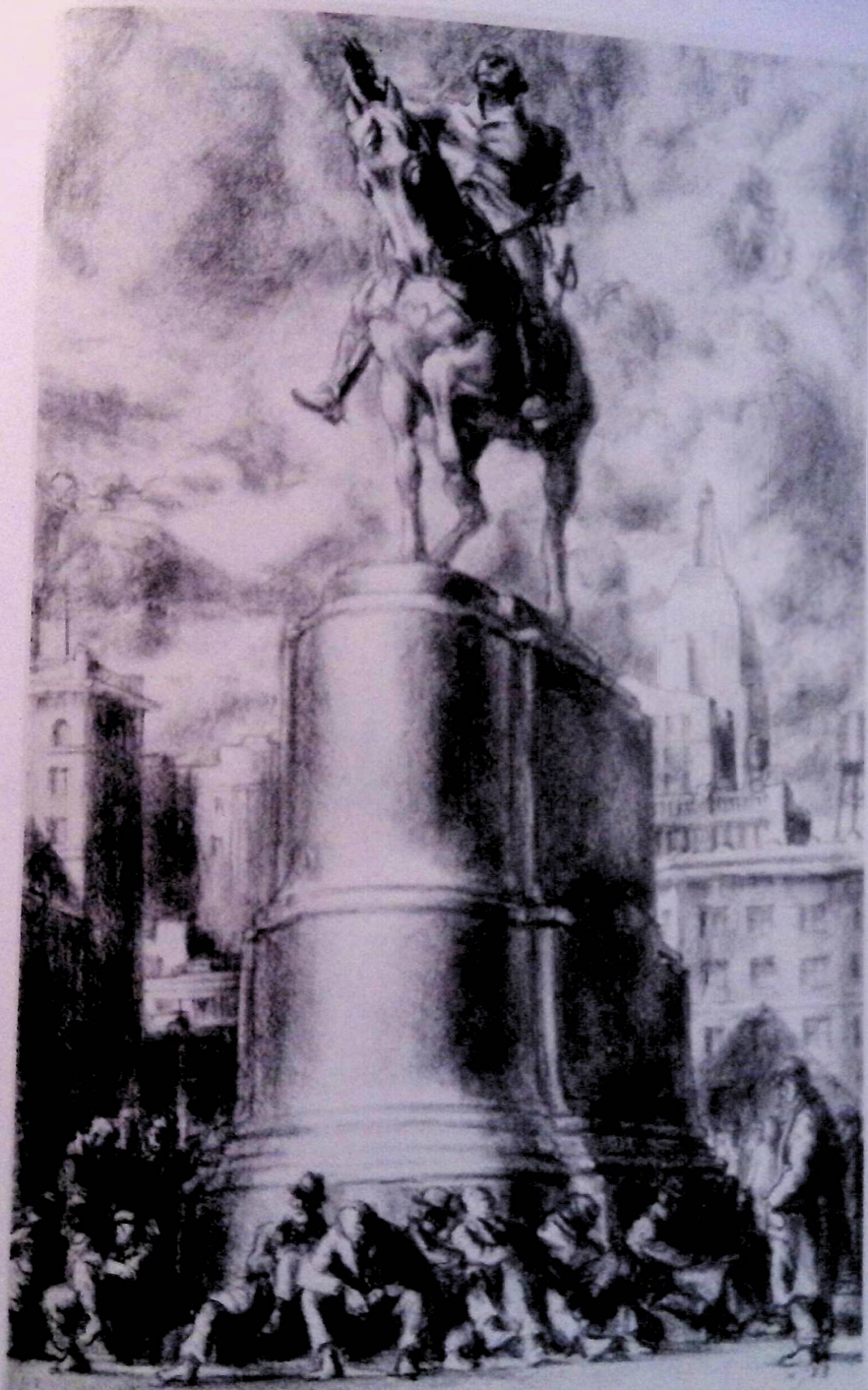


1 Isabel Bishop
At the Base of the Flagpole (Idle Conversation), 1928
etching, 5 × 6
Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Felicia Meyer Marsh Bequest
Photograph Copyright © 1995: Whitney Museum of American Art

32 (below) Reginald Marsh
Discussion (At Base of Union Square Washington Statue), 1934
etching, 6 × 9
Courtesy of Susan Teller Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

33 (opposite) Reginald Marsh
Union Square, 1933
lithograph, 13½ × 8½
Courtesy of Hatay Stratton Fine Prints and Drawings, Vero Beach, Florida
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services







3 Isabel Bishop
East Black, 1933-1934
oil on paper mounted on fiberboard, 19 7/8 x 17
Collection of Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution
Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966
Photograph by Lee Stalworth

5 Isabel Bishop
Conversation, 1934
etching, 6 x 4
Collection of D
Gift of Helen F
Photograph con



5 Isabel Bishop
Conversation, 1931
etching, 6 x 4
Collection of Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan
Photograph courtesy Delaware Art Museum



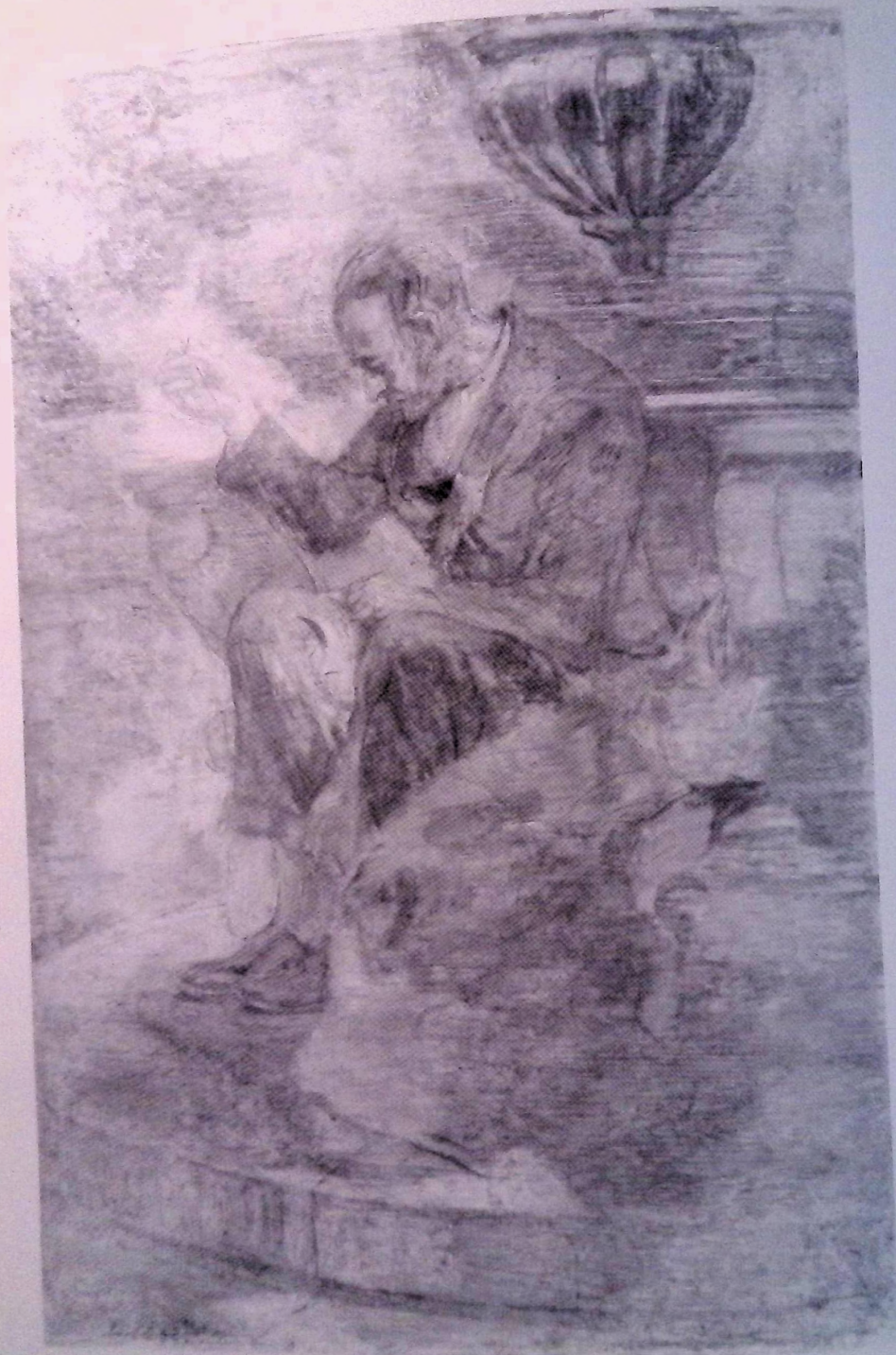
blunt copper

7 (opposite) Isabel B
Equestrian Statue,
graphite, 10 1/4 x
Courtesy of DC
Photograph by P
8 (above) Isabel Bisl
Girl's Sitting in Un
oil and tempera
Collection of Mr



7 (opposite) Isabel Bishop
Equestrian Statue, Union Square, c. 1927-1931
graphite, $10\frac{3}{4} \times 7\frac{1}{4}$
Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

8 (above) Isabel Bishop
Girls Sitting in Union Square Fountain, 1936
oil and tempera on gesso panel, 16×14
Collection of Mr. & Mrs. John Whitney Payson



11 (opposite) Isabel Bishop
Mending, 1945
oil on fiberboard, 25¹/₈ × 16⁷/₈
Collection of National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
Gift of the Sara Roby Foundation
Photograph courtesy National Museum of American Art

13 (above) Isabel Bishop
On the Street (Fourteenth Street), 1931
etching, 4⁷/₈ × 10¹/₄
Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Felicia Meyer Marsh Bequest
Photograph Copyright © 1995: Whitney Museum of American Art



11 (opposite) Isabel Bishop
Mending, 1945
oil on fiberboard, 25 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 16 $\frac{7}{8}$
Collection of National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
Gift of the Sara Roby Foundation
Photograph courtesy National Museum of American Art

13 (above) Isabel Bishop
On the Street (Fourteenth Street), 1931
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Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Felicia Meyer Marsh Bequest
Photograph Copyright © 1995: Whitney Museum of American Art



21 (opposite) Mary Fife
Two Women with Children
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Courtesy of Susan Telle
Photograph by Profession

22 (above) Eugene C. Fitsch
14th Street Union Square
lithograph, 9×15
Courtesy of Sylvan Cole
Photograph by Profession



- 21 (opposite) Mary Fife
Two Women with Children Crossing the Street, c. 1925
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Courtesy of Susan Teller Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services
- 22 (above) Eugene C. Fitch
14th Street Union Square, 1931
lithograph, 9 × 15
Courtesy of Sylvan Cole Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services



23 Eugene C. Fitch
Unemployed Union Square, 1936
lithograph, 9 × 13
Courtesy of Sylvan Cole Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services



24 Eugene C. Fitch
Union Square, 1936
lithograph, 10 × 13
Courtesy of Sylvan Cole Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

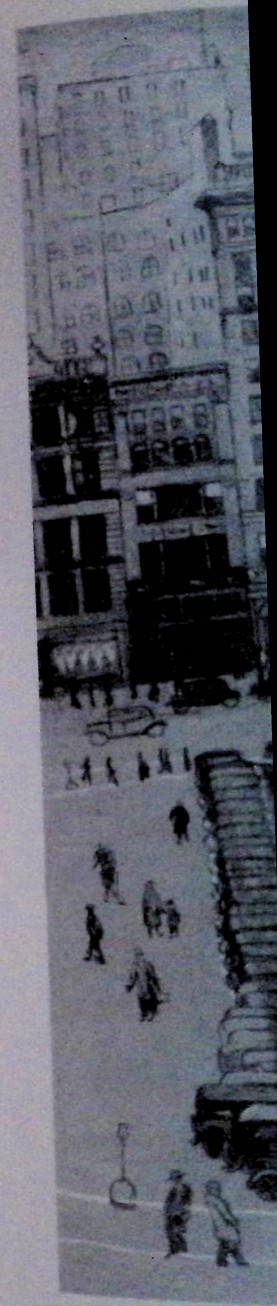


24 Eugene C. Fitch
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Courtesy of Sylvan Cole Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

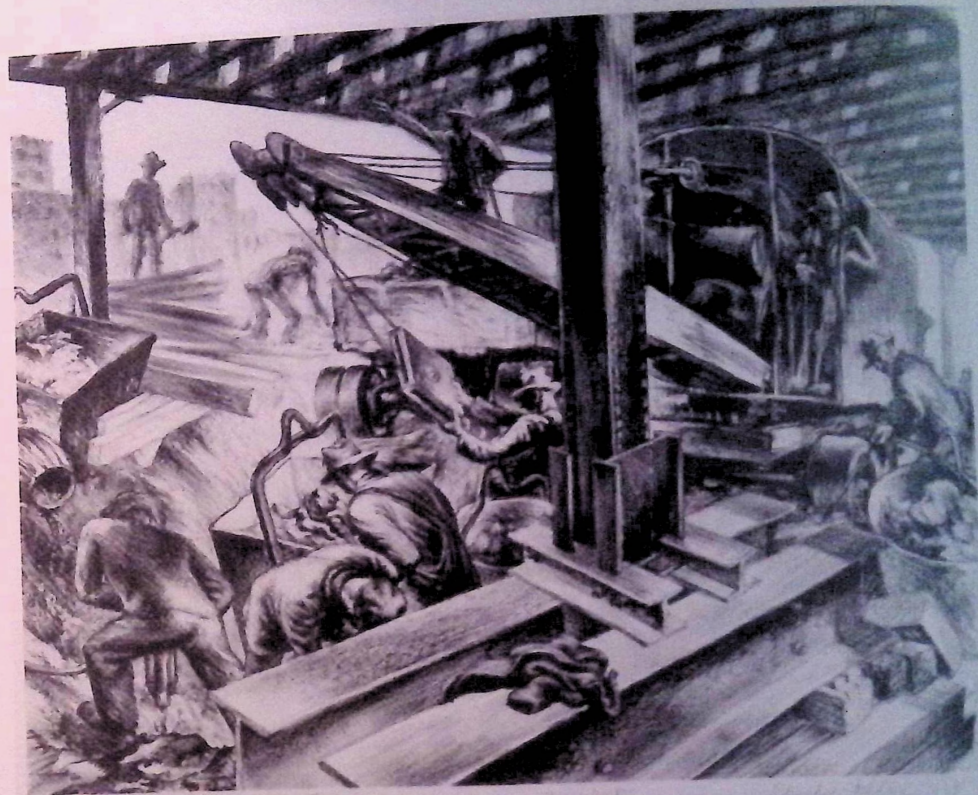


25 (above) Emil Ganso
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Courtesy of Madeleine Fortunoff Fine Prints, Locust Valley, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

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Collection of The Newark Museum
Purchase 1946, John Cotton Dana Fund
Photograph by Armen May







28 (above) Charles Keller
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Courtesy of Susan Teller Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

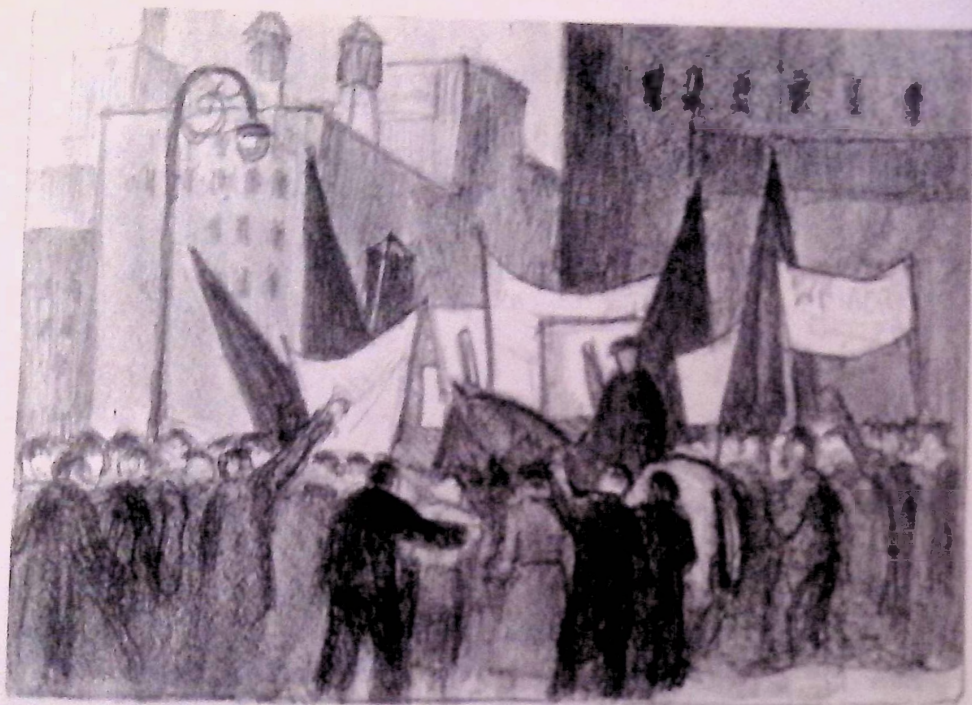
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Collection of National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
Gift of Adele Lozowick
Photograph courtesy National Museum of American Art





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Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

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lithograph
Courtesy of
Photograph



38 Leonard Pytlak
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Courtesy of Susan Teller Gallery, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services



The Shaker



39 (opposite) Ben S.
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Collection of
© 1996 Estate
Photograph by

41 (above) Isaac S.
Employment of
oil on canvas
Collection of
Purchase
Photograph C.



Ben Shahn



39 (opposite) Ben Shahn
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Collection of Bernard Bryson Shahn
© 1996 Estate of Ben Shahn/Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York
Photograph by Professional Photographic Services

41 (above) Isaac Soyfer
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Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Purchase
Photograph Copyright © 1995: Whitney Museum of American Art

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All dimensions in inches, height precedes width

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Sordoni Art Gallery thanks the lenders and sponsors for their generosity in making this exhibition possible.

We also thank James M. Dennis and Kathleen M. Daniels for their catalogue essay; Susan Teller and Sylvan Cole, Jr., who have been especially supportive and helpful; and John Beck, who designed the catalogue.

James Dennis, Lawrence Kuhar of Wilkes University, and Nancy Krueger, my associate at the Sordoni Art Gallery, read early drafts of my essay; I appreciate their comments and insights.

SIG

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