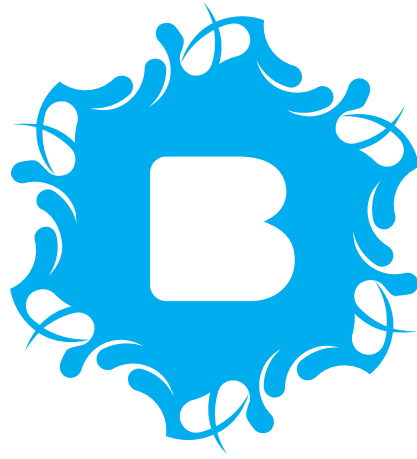


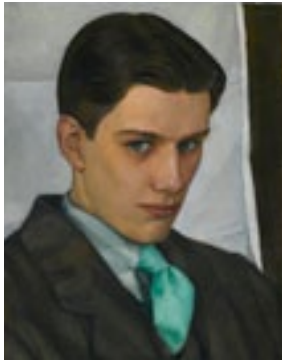
# Press Release



April 2011

## **Brooklyn Museum Presents First Large-Scale Exhibition of American Art of the 1920s October 28, 2011-January 29, 2012**

### **Press Preview, Thursday October 27**



**Luigi Lucioni (American, 1900–1988).**  
*Paul Cadmus, 1928.* Oil on canvas,  
16 x 12 1/8 in. (40.6 x 30.8 cm).  
Brooklyn Museum, Dick S. Ramsay  
Fund, 2007.28

The Brooklyn Museum will present the first wide-ranging exploration of American art from the decade whose beginning and end were marked by the aftermath of World War I and the onset of the Great Depression. *Youth and Beauty: Art of the American Twenties*, which includes some 138 paintings, sculptures, and photographs by 67 artists, will be on view from October 28, 2011 through January 29, 2012 prior to a national tour.

American life was dramatically transformed in the years following the Great War, as urbanization, industrialization, mechanization, and rampant materialism altered the environment and the way people lived. American artists responded to this dizzying modern world with works that embraced a new brand of idealized realism to evoke a seemingly perfect modern world. The twenties saw a vigorous renewal of figurative art that melded uninhibited body-consciousness with classical ideals. Whereas images of the modern body were abundant, artists represented American places and things as distilled and largely uninhabited arrangements of pristine forms. Encompassing a wide array of artists, *Youth and Beauty* celebrates this striking and original modern art and questions its relation to the riotous decade from which it emerged.

The first section of the exhibition's two primary thematic sections is Body Language: Liberation and Restraint in Twenties Figuration, which investigates the realist portrait, naturally erotic figure subjects, and heroic types. Throughout the twenties, motion pictures, advertising, "healthy body culture," and the theories of Sigmund Freud all contributed to an era of physical liberation, sensuality, and a near obsession with bodily perfection. Many artists celebrated the modern physical ideal in nude subjects that pictured the newly exposed body freed from conventional restrictions and empowered through fitness or liberating forms of dance. Artists also responded to the rising influence of urban black culture with representations of the idealized black body. Although startlingly direct, these images are also restrained in a way that suggests an uneasiness with the accelerated energy and action of modern life. Works that celebrate this controlled modern physicality include George Wesley Bellows 1924 *Two Women*, in which a nude and a fully

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clad figure are juxtaposed in a domestic setting; and Thomas Hart Benton's 1922 *Self-Portrait with Rita*, which portrays the bare-chested artist beside his wife, who sports a daring body-revealing swimsuit. Works such as Alfred Stieglitz's *Rebecca Salisbury Strand*, a voluptuous nude subject for which the wife of photographer Paul Strand served as a model, display a direct and frank sensuality. John Steuart Curry's 1928 *Bathers*, a scene of robust male nudes cooling themselves in a water tank, channels heroic proportions and Renaissance ideals to foreground healthy physicality in an age of rampant automation and urbanization.

The new realism was also apparent in portraits that portray natural beauty with decisive clarity and assertive immediacy. Often cast in the format of the newly popular "close-up," twenties portraiture emerged from a culture in which advertising prompted rigorous self-scrutiny and current theories of psychology suggested complexly layered personalities. The portraits on view will include Luigi Lucioni's magnetic 1928 likeness of the young artist Paul Cadmus; Imogen Cunningham's intimate photograph of the seminal writer Sherwood Anderson; and Romaine Brooks's stark 1924 portrait of Una, Lady Troubridge, lover of the English novelist Radclyffe Hall.

The exhibition's second half, *Silent Pictures: Reckoning with a New World*, explores subjects as diverse as still life and industrial and natural landscapes while highlighting their shared qualities of compositional refinement and muted expression. Painters and photographers depicted the ready-made geometries of industrial towers, stacks, and tanks, and the webs of struts and beams, with little reference to their utilitarian actualities or to human activity. In his masterful 1927 composition *My Egypt*, Charles Demuth transformed the functional architecture of a massive grain elevator complex into a transcendent composition swept by fan like rays. Charles Sheeler paid homage to modern engineering in his pristine 1927 photograph *Ford Plant, River Rouge, Blast Furnace and Dust Catcher*, commissioned by Ford's advertisers. In George Ault's 1926 *Brooklyn Ice House*, the artist's reductive treatment of the industrial buildings and playful description of a black smoke plume result in a compelling combination of the modern and the naive.

Challenged by the sensory assault of the modern urban-industrial world around them, artists also portrayed American landscape settings as precisely distilled and largely uninhabited. Intent on maintaining their own individuality in a new era of mass-production and mass-market advertising, they described the features of more remote American places with a marked intensity and austerity. In Edward Hopper's 1927 *Lighthouse Hill*, the forms of architecture and landscape are stripped of incidental details and cast in a transcendent raking light. Georgia O'Keeffe's 1927 *Lake George Barns* (one of seven works by the artist in the exhibition), offers a similar hybrid realism, as does Ansel Adams's 1929 photograph of the sculptural *Church at Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico*.

In their still-life compositions, American artists of the twenties applied a modernist penchant for essential form to exacting arrangements of insistently simple things. Objects as disparate as flowers, soup cans, razors, eggs, and cocktail shakers, appear in compositions that suggest the new tensions between the traditional and the modern in art and in life. Twenties images such as Peter Blume's *Vegetable Dinner*, in which one modern woman enjoys a cigarette while her counterpart peels some humble vegetables, prompts consideration of the individual's relationship to the larger material world. Imogen Cunningham's 1929 photograph *Calla Lilies* embodies a precise, natural perfection akin to modern body ideals, while Gerald Murphy's 1924 *Razor* employs a hard-edged billboard aesthetic to foreground the required accessories of the well-groomed modern man.

The exhibition has been organized by Teresa A. Carbone, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of American Art at the Brooklyn Museum. Following the Brooklyn presentation it will travel to the Dallas Museum of Art, Texas (March 4-May 27, 2012) and to the Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio (July 1-September 16, 2012).

A multi-author exhibition catalogue co-published by the Brooklyn Museum and Skira Rizzoli accompanies the exhibition. The first publication solely devoted to an overview of American painting, sculpture, and photography of the 1920s, it includes essays by Dr. Carbone; Dr. Sarah M. Lowe, a leading historian of modernist photography; Dr. Bonnie Costello, Professor of English, Boston University; and Dr. Randall R. Griffey Curator of American Art, Mead Art Museum, Amherst College.

*Youth and Beauty: Art of the American Twenties* is made possible by the Henry Luce Foundation. Additional support has been provided by The Mr. and Mrs. Raymond J. Horowitz Foundation for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Wyeth Foundation for American Art, and Sotheby's.

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**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Admission:**

Contribution \$10; students with valid I.D. and older adults \$6. Free to Members and children under 12 accompanied by an adult. Group tours or visits must be arranged in advance by calling extension 234.

**Museum Hours:**

Wednesday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; first Saturday of each month, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

**Directions:**

Subway: Seventh Avenue express (2 or 3) to Eastern Parkway/Brooklyn Museum stop; Lexington Avenue express (4 or 5) to Nevins Street, cross platform and transfer to the 2 or 3. Bus: B41, B69, B48. On-site parking available.