

Macdonald-Wright in California

WILL SOUTH

S. MacDonald-Wright furnished the foundation of whatever education I have.

—John Huston, filmmaker¹

Pure theory is a grown man's toy. It is also an ersatz for experience.

—Stanton Macdonald-Wright²

In 1916, two years before he returned to California, Stanton Macdonald-Wright was compared with several of that state's leading painters, including Guy Rose (1867–1925). Rose, a native Californian, had received traditional academic instruction in France in the late 1880s. Like many Americans of his generation, he came under the influence of Impressionism and assimilated his hard-won traditional skills to painting out-of-doors. Rose's primary subject matter

became the light-filled landscape and, when he returned to California, the oceanscape. Arthur Hunt, reviewing Willard Huntington Wright's book, *Modern Painting*, for *Out West Magazine*, felt it revealing that the synchromists had not painted any marine paintings:

*It is a significant thing that in the illusive objective of a great body of water the Synchromists have not tried to apply their theory that color is form. I can imagine MacDonald-Wright trying to give us in several different colors and compositional figures a study of the sea. If any painting needs mass and form and composition it is marine painting. Each hour, each minute of the day produces a different color, both in the water and the surrounding sky. In that much is the form and color simultaneous, but the color does not determine the forms.*³

In short, synchromist theory, such as Hunt understood it, was inherently flawed and was hardly the final step in painting that Wright had declared it to be. Guy Rose, by comparison, was “modern in every respect.” According to Hunt, Rose, more than either of the Wright brothers, had learned what Hunt felt were the lessons of Cézanne regarding form and light: “It [a painting entitled *The Old Bridge* by Rose, fig. 56] is probably most typical of Southern California and modern art in that it has brilliant light, rhythm, balance, and expresses an emotion.” Hunt forcefully rejected Willard's book while at the same time defending the local aesthetic: “Mr. Wright's *Modern Painting* is of no avail if we cannot apply his principles to the work of Southern California painters.”⁴

Hunt's attitude reflected the pervasive conservatism of the California critic, artist, and public of 1916. Not unlike the vast majority of Americans who preferred the sensually pleasing surfaces of the impressionist mode, Southern Californians were hostile to the “isms” emanating from Europe and finding an audience (albeit small) in New York. For the most progressive

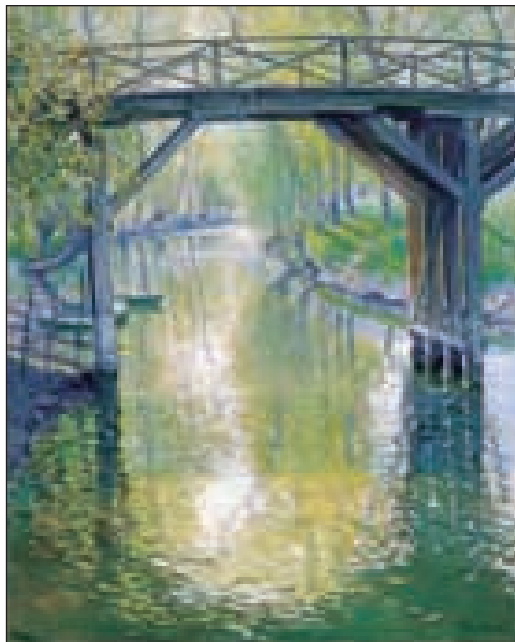


Figure 56 Guy Rose, *The Old Bridge*, ca. 1910, oil on canvas, 39½ x 32 in. The Rose Family Collection

of Los Angeles painters, the word *modernism* itself was associated with an Ash Can—school sensibility. Founded in 1916, the Los Angeles Modern Art Society included as members Ben Cressey, Meta Cressey, Helena Dunlap, Edgar Kellar, Henrietta Shore, and Karl Yens. They promised at the time to bring modern art to California—in the form of paintings patterned after Robert Henri, mixed with stylistic elements of regional Impressionism. Even the local critic Arthur Vernon realized the temerity of such “modernism” but was realistic enough about local resistance to call the promise “a good start.”⁵ However, by April 1918, Vernon was still lamenting the total absence of modernism from shows sponsored by the California Art Club (the largest and most powerful art organization in the region) and warned that it will “suffer for it” and become like the National Academy of Design in New York City.⁶ When Stanton Macdonald-Wright returned to Los Angeles in the fall of 1918, it was to a city all too familiar from his youth, a city warm and beautiful but where the painters still preferred the “regular Lawson landscape and Sargent portraiture.”⁷

Macdonald-Wright left New York feeling he was “ready for other scenes,” and one might rightfully wonder if he chose to return to Southern California because it promised a cultural environment without the competitive pressures and expectations of Manhattan. In later years he often recalled that his move back to California initiated a “retirement” from the exhibition field and a period of experimentation in his artwork free from the gallery world and a fickle public. However, at this time the artist was anything but a retiree from the art world, and Los Angeles was just entering a boom period that disqualified it as a retirement community. As was his wont, almost immediately on his return to California, Stanton undertook a wide variety of projects designed to stimulate, illuminate, and rearrange the Southland’s art community and to establish himself within that fast-growing city as a guiding force. These projects included publishing on art and aesthetic theory, lecturing, teaching, founding a new and more vital modern art society, renewing experimentation with film and kinetic art, exhibiting his own work, and organizing exhibitions calculated to inspire public confidence in the new art movements.

Although Macdonald-Wright’s contributions during the 1920s were many, his success in altering the West Coast artistic milieu in tangible ways was limited. His audience was ill-equipped to follow esoteric philosophical speculation. His ambitions were often outside the realm of financial and/or technological feasibility. At times during the next two decades his own easel painting fell short of the exhilarating rhetoric of which he was capable. Because of these factors, a great deal of the influence Macdonald-Wright did have came through his charismatic and defiant personality. Into the quiet and polite art world of Los Angeles, Macdonald-Wright injected a contempt for authority and anything resembling a smug self-righteousness. For many younger painters, he offered an alternative to conventions of any kind. Stanton Macdonald-Wright continually challenged both his students and his public to look beyond societal pretensions and to find a meaning deeper than mere prettiness in a work of art.

Relocation

During the roughly ten years of Macdonald-Wright’s absence, Los Angeles had changed, but those changes were minimal compared with the growth that would occur in the 1920s. At the beginning of the decade, the city’s population was 576,673; at the end, it was 1,470,516. When Macdonald-Wright left Los Angeles for Paris in 1909, Hollywood Boulevard was still lined with orange trees. On his return in October 1918, the downtown traffic arteries of the city were being planned exclusively for the automobile. Indeed, by the mid-1920s, with over 400,000 cars in the city, traffic had become a way of life.

The surge of building and industrial expansion that took place in the 1920s physically altered the City of Angels that Stanton had known as a boy growing up in the Hotel Arcadia on the Santa Monica coast. Throughout the decade, city planners, entrepreneurs, boosters, and other visionaries promoted Los Angeles as a city where the perennial American search for the better life

could still be found. The resulting internal migration was nothing less than astonishing. However, whether or not the dominant social ethos of Southern California changed substantially is another matter: throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s Los Angeles remained a predominantly white (in 1926, of a population of 1.3 million, there were only 45,000 Hispanics, 33,000 blacks, and 30,000 Asians), Anglo-Saxon, Protestant community. A strict, conventional moral code was the norm (not unlike elsewhere in America, there was a plethora of local ordinances governing behavior from beach wear to public embracing), and biblical fundamentalism was widespread.

Yet if the communal desire for prosperity and material gain was everywhere apparent, the average Angeleno was indifferent to or completely unaware of the high-minded cultural ambitions that drove Macdonald-Wright. An optimist in 1920 might have surveyed the growth in Southern California and called it progress and modernity, whereas a jaded observer might have labeled it reckless acquisition and consumption on a mass scale. Macdonald-Wright himself vacillated during this decade between a romantic desire to instill an aesthetic enlightenment to parallel the economic boom around him and a grim awareness that no audience existed for his intricately conceived artistic agenda. Regarding his relocation, Stanton wrote to Alfred Stieglitz: "I am like a man quarantined and sequestered from the world out here in this christ bitten (I use this term literally, as the virus of militant moralism seems to have become violent) country and any word I receive from the real people of America comes as drink to the thirsty."⁸

When Stanton arrived in Los Angeles in the fall of 1918, he was penniless. His first wife, Ida, was then in the city, and the two saw each other for the last time when negotiating a long-overdue divorce. With no financial resources, Stanton was fortunately taken in by his mother, who was also helping to support Willard's first wife, Katherine, and their young daughter, Beverly. A crucial development provided the stability Stanton needed to regain personal and creative momentum: in 1919 he successfully triumphed over opium addiction.

Both Stanton and Willard had been smoking opium for years; Stanton since 1914 in New York, while Willard had certainly preceded him, as it was he who introduced the drug to his younger brother. Willard's abuse of narcotics was among the factors that contributed to the downward spiral of his career in New York during the war years. In 1917, facing insurmountable debts, fatigued and practically friendless (a condition not aided by his aggressive pro-German sentiment), Willard returned to Southern California. The debilitating effects of his habit were evident to his mother and to his wife, Katherine, despite the fact they had not cohabited since 1912. Willard made an attempt at working, but by April 1918, with his nerves completely frayed, he was admitted to the Sierra Madre Sanatorium.⁹ When he was released from the hospital later that summer, his marriage deteriorated further. In the fall, Willard and Katherine moved to San Francisco and made an attempt at reconciliation, and Willard was hired by the *San Francisco Bulletin* to do a weekly column. Neither the attempt at reconciliation nor the job lasted long, and Willard's continuing abuse was among the causes of his frustration and failures.

Stanton returned home after Willard had already left for San Francisco. The brothers, always keenly aware of each other and their common ambitions (as well as differences), shared the idea that the West Coast could be educated about modern art. Despite his marital and physical problems, Willard was in the North writing and lecturing on modern art and artists. He wrote in February 1919: "The West, with its broad tolerance and freedom from precedent and tradition, is the logical place for the development of new ideas, and the time will come when the younger painters will find and project the beauty of modern art."¹⁰ Meanwhile, Stanton was contemplating his own campaign for modernism in the South. Though the two would again join forces as they had for the Forum Exhibition in 1916, a critical difference between the brothers revealed itself when Willard returned to Los Angeles in 1919. Willard, for all his past rhetoric about the superior man, could not control his drug use. Stanton, capable of extreme pragmatism, saw that this self-destructive path was a serious obstacle to any future plans and opted—successfully—for complete withdrawal.

In addition to overcoming his drug addiction, Macdonald-Wright found a new love in his life, Jeanne Redman. In sharp contrast to the relationships of his past, this one would last (aside from a brief separation), ending only in 1951 with Jeanne's death. In a stable relationship for the first time in his life, free from a drug addiction that sapped his energy, and living in a place that he felt to be geographically the most beautiful in the world, it is not surprising that Macdonald-Wright, possessed of a renewed vigor, undertook a wide variety of artistic projects.

Paintings, 1919–1920

Macdonald-Wright always retained an enthusiasm for expounding his views in print, the most formidable early example being the 1913 *Forum* article, "From Impressionism to Synchronism," solicited and signed by his brother. During his first year back in Los Angeles, Stanton selected an essay topic that symbolized modernity and futurity—the airplane—and used the subject of aviation to explain why technology and art were actually inseparable pursuits. His article, "Influence of Aviation on Art: The Accentuation of Individuality," emphasized the unity of all disparate things (evidence of his continued and developing interest in oriental thought) and the prioritization of nature:

*To speak of the possible relationship of aviation and art, two activities seemingly at variance with each other, may at first appear chimerical. But when we come to consider the counter-acting interdependence of all physical and metaphysical things, which, like reflected lights, are ever playing back and forth, we must realize that all thoughts of the human mind, of which flying machines and pictures are merely the concrete manifestations, have an eternally reciprocal dynamic influence.*¹¹

The technology of aviation, Macdonald-Wright argued, could lead to the valuable realignment of individual perception and, consequently, individual psychological and philosophical postures. Once immersed in the broader view of nature that aviation could provide, the artist's personality would be "submerged." This would be of inestimable value, he thought, since it was personality that caused artists to be vain and pretentious, as opposed to genuinely creative. Personality actually suppresses artistic liberty and creates schools of followers, who, for Macdonald-Wright, were simply "*soi-disant* actors" and "mountebanks." By contrast, the individual who is truly self-reliant (an attitude aviation could stimulate) will see his dependence on the whole:

*Strangely enough, as man becomes more individual, he loses all vanity and the pretence of petty conceits. He becomes conscious of his dependence as well as his unconscious influence on the things about him. His attitudes toward life change radically, for the new vision opens the doors to a new life of thought and experiment. In other words, he has achieved the philosophical mind, and he applies it to the little things of every day import as to the larger problems of existence. Such a mental outlook is the only possible one for expression, for expression is merely the restatement of the rhythmic order from which we spring and to which we return.*¹²

As he had stated in early synchronist manifestoes, nature was the source of art and the end of art, as nature was our source and destination as a species. New subject matter to be gained from aviation, such as unprecedented views of mountain ranges or the tops of houses, was of no importance, "for in subject matter there is no originality." He recognized the merits of art-work with aviation themes done by his own former student, Thomas Hart Benton, and of his former French rival, Robert Delaunay (to whom he referred as "a young Frenchman of great talent"), but this work still fell far short of the potential abstractions aviation could foster. Mastery of the air could make clear the essential contrast between earth and atmosphere, a physical duality that forms the unity of our world. Apprehension of this basic duality was a goal of the philosophical mind. And art was, "as ever, the way to all new thought."¹³



Figure 57 *Aeroplane Synchromy in Yellow-Orange*, 1920
Oil on canvas, 24¹/₄ x 24 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York. Alfred Stieglitz Collection,
1949
CATALOGUE 24

Macdonald-Wright demonstrated the influence of aviation on his own work in *Aeroplane Synchromy in Yellow-Orange* of 1920 (fig. 57). As the artist was still painting in scales during the early twenties, it is instructive to look ahead to his assessment of the emotional meaning of the yellow-orange scale in his 1924 *Treatise on Color*: “Yellow-Orange has also a braggart tendency but at bottom it is weak and sickly. It is like the last pretences dying in a pompous soul. On this account it has a quasi-sad note, like an old man who feels senility to be not far off.”¹⁴ At first it seems curious that the artist would choose a scale that is “weak and sickly” to express the power of aviation. However, his deliberate selection of a given color scale was often for subtle reasons. The notion that the scale of yellow-orange is “like the last pretences dying in a pompous soul” relates to the idea in “Influence of Aviation” that the individual personality, and with it all vestiges of pretense, must be overcome before meaningful art can be created: “To experience nature’s dynamic rhythms we must as nearly as possible subjugate our ego. We must try to realize that our essential composition is the same as those forces [of nature]. We must forget the specific in contemplation of the general.”¹⁵ Yellow-orange is a braggart, but the bravado

is false and “quasi-sad,” for this pretense to power is about to dissolve like a formerly agile mind undermined by senility. In a like sense, the power of aviation points to the submergence of personality and, with it, personal ego (bravado). Yellow-orange suggests a change, or an appearance contrary to fact (braggartly, but in reality weak). Aviation, a metaphor for Macdonald-Wright for an expanded consciousness, also suggests a change—from ignorance to awareness.

Although the artist declared subject to be of no importance, the viewer cannot help but identify the ostensible subjects of *Aeroplane Synchrony*, rooftops and the airplane. While Macdonald-Wright intended deeper meaning and felt communication would be achieved by the universal qualities inherent in color and scales and their use in defining form, that very communication is compromised by illustrative associations. Just as the abstract qualities in Delaunay’s *Homage to Blériot* (fig. 58) are circumscribed in part by the painting’s telling the story of an airplane in flight, so too are Macdonald-Wright’s. The “cosmic consciousness” he referred to in his aviation article is not readily accessible in the rather obvious description of known things (rooftops, planes). Man-made objects are more clearly revealed than nature’s forces. Macdonald-Wright certainly would have countered (as he often did in private correspondence) that the subtleties of his work were lost on insensitive people. While that may be true of most art in general, *Aeroplane Synchrony*’s intended deeper content is masked in the type of conventional representation that ensured the bulk of his audience could not reach beyond it. In short, *Aeroplane Synchrony* is an early example of how Macdonald-Wright’s painting at times did not correspond to his eloquent philosophical discourse.

He proceeded undaunted, supported by his deep, romantic belief that he was right about the preeminence of nature, the universality of form and color and their meaning, and that creation based on anything less than these tenets was charlatanism. If some contemporary critics and many later ones saw Macdonald-Wright retreating into a type of decorative realism, he saw his work as a process of embracing the natural. He wrote for the benefit of his students in his *Treatise on Color*:

*Never make the mistake, however, of trying to paint from memory or from pure invention. This last always results in a thin and unconvincing picture, for the reason that man’s mind can never imagine the infinite number of significant relationships to be found in the simplest subject. Without these relationships before him, suggesting ever new and rich combinations of color he makes a rapidly logical, and hence dead, design.*¹⁶

Two other paintings from the same period also feature aerial views of rooftops and mountains: *Cañon Synchrony* and *California Landscape* (figs. 59, 60). These images extend Macdonald-Wright’s interconnected ideas as presented in the article on aviation and, like *Aeroplane Synchrony*, were painted using the momentum of the late New York–period Synchronies. All three of these paintings evidence a shift away from the dominant subject matter of the New York years, the figure, but the two landscapes, more than *Aeroplane Synchrony*, suggest the consolidation in the artist’s mind of certain guiding principles. *Cañon Synchrony* and *California Landscape* are defined by vertical compositions with no central focus. Both make ample use of the empty passages that connect color sequences (the *espacement* discussed in the section on Synchronism). This verticality and use of voids, in combination with the aerial perspective, mimic the work of Chinese landscape painting.



Figure 58 Robert Delaunay, *Homage to Blériot*, 1914, distemper on canvas, 98⁵/₈ x 99 in. Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kunstmuseum



Figure 59 *Cañon Synchrony*
(*Orange*), ca. 1919

Oil on canvas, 24 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 24 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.

Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at
the University of Minnesota,
Minneapolis, Minnesota. Gift of Ione
and Hudson Walker

CATALOGUE 23

The idea of harmony that so intrigued Macdonald-Wright from his earliest student days—that the classical rhythms of the Greeks and Michelangelo had a place in modern painting, that color, form, movement, and solidity could all be compositionally unified—was increasingly confirmed and expanded by his exposure to oriental thought, especially the idea of Tao. Macdonald-Wright fully realized that one could not simply set out to illustrate Tao; it resided in the tension between opposites, in the yin and the yang. The Tao is tied to Earth as well as to Heaven; the Tao resides in nature as well as nothingness. In Chinese landscape painting, forms dissolve into voids and reappear in a cycle of ceaseless becoming. Voids in Chinese landscape painting had a function remarkably similar to the use of *espacement* in the synchronist aesthetic; both imparted meaning to the whole. But, as Macdonald-Wright increasingly felt, the work of his youth was academic and logical compared to the more deeply mysterious and spiritually broader Chinese tradition. *Cañon Synchrony* and *California Landscape*, in their frank imitation of Chinese prototypes combined with synchronist technique, were the products of Macdonald-Wright's continued immersion in Chinese philosophy. His adoption of landscape as



Figure 60 *California Landscape*,
ca. 1919
Oil on canvas, 30 x 22¹/₈ in.
Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus,
Ohio. Gift of Ferdinand Howald
Catalogue 22

subject matter in 1919 had less to do with his move to California than with his growing commitment to understanding Eastern thought.

Even Macdonald-Wright's use of scales would have been confirmed by early texts on Chinese art. The best-known of these, and one certainly known to Stanton by 1919, was *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*.¹⁷ On painting, the *Manual* says: "To be without method is deplorable, but to depend entirely on method is worse. You must learn first to observe the rules faithfully; afterwards, modify them according to your intelligence and capacity."¹⁸ Although color scales were a method, Macdonald-Wright depended on them less and less, until he instructed his own students in his *Treatise on Color* of 1924 to do exactly what the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual* advised: learn this method, then go on to express yourself. The *Manual* listed twelve things to avoid in painting; number twelve was: "color applied without method."

As to the psychological meanings of color, Macdonald-Wright would have found the following passage from the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual* a confirmation of his thought: "Ah! considering the vastness of the heavens and the earth, looking around at people and things, read-



Figure 61 *American Synchrony No. 1 (Green) — Male Torso*, 1919
Oil on canvas, 34 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 23 in.
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut.
The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund
CATALOGUE 19

ing polished essays, listening to brave utterances, all these go together and make a whole and colorful world. How can color be said to apply only to painting?”¹⁹

Perhaps Macdonald-Wright’s clearest assimilation of oriental influence in his own work in 1919 was his matching pair of paintings, *American Synchrony No. 1 (Green)* and *American Synchrony No. 2, Yellow-Orange Minor* (location unknown). The first *Synchrony* (fig. 61) is a male nude, the second a female nude (studies exist for each, figs. 62, 63). Each figure is depicted in a strong rhythmic pose that echoes the basic “hollow and bump” (balance of opposites) strategy. Seen together, one figure moves opposite the other, very much in the visual formula (), repeating again “the hollow and the bump” and further unifying the composition (in this instance, both figures are conveyed in heroic, Michelangesque terms, and the male figure seems definitely based on the figure of Christ from Rubens’s *Raising of the Cross* [fig. 64]). The

pair of figures, nude and free of extraneous compositional elements, forms the basic male/female (yin/yang) pattern that symbolizes the fundamental equation of nature.

The color scales used in these two paintings are open to varying interpretations, though again we may return to Macdonald-Wright's own summaries of color meanings for a point of departure. *American Synchromy No. 1*, the male nude, is in the key of green: "Green is the normal color. It is weak, lackadaisical and seems to have arrived at a point where it halts contentedly, a disciple of non-action, of calm, of quiet."²⁰ The female nude is painted in the key of yellow-orange minor.²¹ Yellow-orange (the same key used for *Aeroplane Synchromy*) is, as previously noted, a weak scale: "Yellow-orange, while being rich, is at bottom weak. . . . It is gracious and suave and has an evanescent quality peculiar to itself."²² The meaning of this key altered to the minor mode most assuredly was different for Macdonald-Wright, but he does not indicate the specific personal meaning of this minor scale. However, he did write that color combinations, including the combination of color scales altered meanings yet again. In his *Treatise*, the artist noted: "The most brilliant combination possible to use is orange and green."²³ The two color scales, then, each weak when isolated, could become strong and vital when juxtaposed. In other words, the characteristic weakness of green is canceled by the presence of orange and becomes brilliant. In these two paintings, the predominantly green male and yellow-orange female become more than the sum of their parts when united. In short, the mutual deficiencies of male and female complete each other when unified. Using figures from the Western classical tradition, Macdonald-Wright restated the principle of yin/yang.

Believing in the vitality of his work in 1919, and possessed of an eagerness to proselytize his aesthetic, it was not long before Macdonald-Wright both found and created venues to promote it.

The Art Students League of Los Angeles

In September 1919 the *Christian Science Monitor* reviewed the annual California Art Club exhibition and noted that Edouard Vysekál (1890–1939) was the only artist with modern tendencies.²⁴ By the very next year, such a review would have been difficult to defend. Also in September 1919 the following notice appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*:

*Stanton Macdonald-Wright, one of the discoverers of the new idea in art called synchromism, and himself a brilliant painter of portraits and figures, has come from New York to Los Angeles with the intention of starting an art school. Mr. Wright is a brother to Willard Huntington Wright, the novelist and critic. In the projected school, Mr. Wright will insist upon a close study of anatomy; he will demand intelligent drawing, and he will teach the methods of the modern man, so that those whose penchant is independence may choose what best fits them. He will also give weekly lectures to the pupils of the school.*²⁵

As it happened, Macdonald-Wright did not need to continue with the classes he started, as his alma mater, the Art Students League of Los Angeles, was turned over to him in 1923. Its former director, Rex Slinkard, had died in 1918, and left no clear heir. League members sought out Macdonald-Wright for the job, as his international credentials were appealing and his communicative skills already legendary. Once installed at the league, located by then at 115 North Main Street (relocated shortly thereafter to a room above the old Lyceum Theater between Second and Third Streets on Spring Street), Macdonald-Wright became, in Arthur Millier's words, "Master of the temple of art, and he was just that."²⁶

Always forceful, charismatic, and energetic, Stanton led the league throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. Here, he emphasized "intelligent drawing," that is, a mastery of the figure based on the Greek and Renaissance prototypes he so admired (but which he could not himself tolerate to be taught in traditional French academies). There was no drawing of plaster casts, but rather only work from live models. Drawings were not laboriously finished over days or



Figure 62 Study for "American Synchromy No. 1," 1919, charcoal on paper, 17¼ x 11 in. Private collection

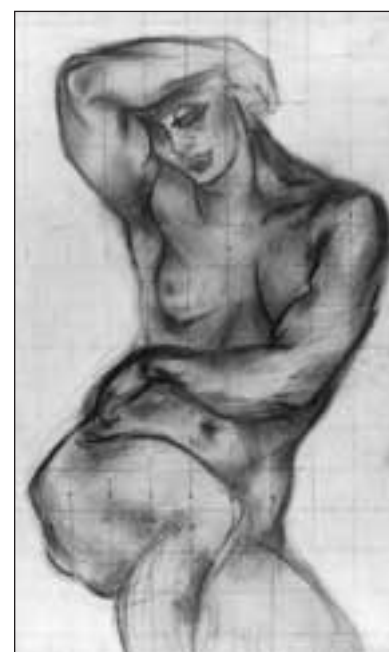


Figure 63 Study for "American Synchromy No. 2," 1919, charcoal on paper, 17¼ x 11 in. Private collection

weeks, as Macdonald-Wright taught students to look for the essential rhythms of the body and for basic anatomical correctness, not for surface detail.

In addition to the league, Macdonald-Wright taught at the Chouinard School of Art, which was founded in 1921 by Nelbert M. Chouinard.²⁷ The league, though, was Macdonald-Wright's own, and he was responsible for the curriculum, pace of instruction, indeed the entire ambience of the school. He himself had never attended the Art Students League in New York and made no pretense that his school was anything like its more famous predecessor. Students of all persuasions made their way to Spring Street, from the occasional Sunday painter (who quickly dropped out on discovering the instructor's gravity of intent) to more serious students such as Mabel Alvarez (1891–1985), Nick Brigante (1895–1991), Albert King (1900–1982), and James Redmond (1900–1944).

Alvarez recorded a number of lectures Macdonald-Wright gave to the league from 1920 to 1925.²⁸ He taught his students about the use of color scales and about “the hollow and the bump.” Further, he offered the students the oriental ideas that he was trying to incorporate into his own art and thinking, even if some of them did not fully understand his thinking. One of the first things he told students was that imitation by itself did not make art: “Imitation thus approximates but one world—that of objectivity, and if we consider the work of art to be the entire expression of the man, it must be an equally balanced manifestation of man's existence in this dual world.”²⁹ He discussed the single, “unique gesture” by which an artist conveyed all the qualities inherent in his art, such as the polarities of hot and cold, light and shade, hollow and bump. In all the great periods of art, he told them, in Greece, Italy, and China, “we find the arts being produced with this idea uppermost in the minds of the artist.”³⁰ Macdonald-Wright even broached the difficult concept of the “void”: “This relationship of thing or action to the observer, is the starting point of a work of art. The event itself is of no possible importance further than being the spark which ignites. Here again is a demonstration of Lao Tzu's ‘Empty Spaces.’ Nothing exists between the thing and the result which follows, and yet every particle of its importance to the artist lies in this vortex of nothingness.”³¹

Macdonald-Wright challenged his students to think and create on the highest levels. Although some of the students were not as intellectually gifted as their teacher, Stanton proceeded as if they were all his equal. If it is difficult to document the influence he tried to exert on students, some of them recalled with gratitude the effect Macdonald-Wright had on their lives. The filmmaker John Huston, for example, attended the Los Angeles Art Students League in 1923 as a young man of seventeen, thinking that painting might be his vocation. He later credited Macdonald-Wright for providing “the foundation of whatever education I have.”³² Macdonald-Wright introduced Huston to Cézanne, the Renaissance, the Greeks, the Orient, and French literature, among other topics. Huston recalled: “Although I had been exposed to music, opera and ballet, he introduced me to Scriabin, Alban Berg, and other experimentalists.”³³ Huston went on to great success in film, a medium Macdonald-Wright struggled with himself.

Effective as a writer, teacher, and painter, Macdonald-Wright also had formidable organizational skills he used to promote modernism in general and his own art specifically. In 1919, in tandem with his other art activities, he began to plan what was arguably the first show of modern art in Los Angeles.

“The Exhibition of Paintings by American Modernists”

In San Francisco in 1919 Willard Huntington Wright was writing art reviews and social commentary for the *San Francisco Bulletin*. One of the more popular items of the latter variety was “Los Angeles: City of Dreadful Night,” a follow-up harangue to the author's 1913 “Los Angeles: Home of the Chemically Pure.” The first article had caused a stir and drawn a great deal of attention to Willard, who enjoyed spotlighting what he considered to be the dim-witted and prudish behavior of Angelenos. “Dreadful Night” was essentially an update that indicated



Figure 64 Peter Paul Rubens, *A Study for the Figure of Christ*, ca. 1609–1610, black chalk and charcoal, heightened and corrected with white chalk on buff antique laid paper, 15³/₄ x 11³/₄ in. Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Gift of Meta and Paul J. Sachs

nothing much had changed in the Southland. Still, in his first art review for the *Bulletin*, “Exhibit Shows New Impulse: California Artists to the Fore,” Willard began a series of arguments designed to win over the public to the idea of modernism:

*One feels that there is something of vital and aspiring nature stirring beneath the work [of Henrietta Shore, Joseph Raphael, William H. Clapp, E. Charlton Fortune, and Maynard Dixon] among other [Californians]. There is evident a discontent with the older forms and methods—an intellectual protest against scholastic conventions and conceptions—a sincere and earnest reaching out toward a new ideal in aesthetic expression. One sees here curious transformations and strange amalgamations—Sargent evolving into Matisse, Whistler fading out into Signac, Bouguereau metamorphosing into Picasso. But who would not prefer such healthy indications of progress and aspiration to the smug and self-satisfied decadence of academic conventionality?*³⁴

Indeed, Willard’s willingness to advance the causes of modern art was expressed to Alfred Stieglitz in a 1918 letter: “When I get sufficient strength, I am going to endeavor to educate this part of the country . . . to the idea of modern painting.”³⁵ In San Francisco, Willard undertook a lecture series on modern art entitled, “What Is Art, and Why?” In typical fashion for the cocksure Huntington Wright, these lectures were billed as “the most important on their subject ever given in America.” Though the lectures were well attended and Willard was invited to speak to the San Francisco Art Association, the results of his efforts—both his newspaper column and his lectures—seemed nil. Huntington Wright’s biographer noted the dilemma:

*Once again, Willard’s optimism about the cultural climate of the day ran aground of some undeniable facts: the Stieglitz-circle painters he believed in mattered less to San Franciscans than the realists, Impressionists, or area talents they were more accustomed to, and in any case art was everyone’s lowest priority. . . . The presence of men he [Willard] respected, like the art dealer [Erwin] Furman or J. Nilson Laurvik, the city’s museum director, didn’t seem to make much difference. People simply didn’t care about paintings the way that they did about their cars and homes, and no one’s social standing was raised by purchasing a great work of modern art.*³⁶

In poor health due to his penchant for overworking himself in bursts and ongoing substance abuse, with his marriage perennially unstable, and with no coterie of like-minded moderns around him as there were in New York, Willard decided to return to Los Angeles. One of the most brilliant moderns he knew, his brother, was there.

Like Willard, Stanton had the idea of replicating the 1916 Forum Exhibition in Southern California. Such an exhibition not only would highlight artists the brothers felt to be among the best in the world but would confirm Stanton’s place in that group. Not long after he had returned home, Macdonald-Wright had made the acquaintance of Frank Daggett, the director of the Museum of History, Science and Art located in Exposition Park. Not centrally located, hardly suited for the exhibition of paintings modern or otherwise (the dinosaur bones discovered at the La Brea tar pits were the primary focus of the museum), and with an advisory board not particularly sympathetic to modernism,³⁷ Exposition Park was nonetheless the most appropriate venue for such a show among the very limited choices then in Los Angeles. Macdonald-Wright, using his formidable verbal skills and citing his equally formidable exhibition record, talked Daggett into sponsoring the show, scheduled for February 1920. This was no easy feat, as a controversy was then under way within the ranks of the powerful California Art Club as to whether the fledgling and hardly modern Modern Art Society could show at Exposition Park at all as a group.³⁸

Macdonald-Wright did most of the organizational work, with Willard offering support.³⁹ Stanton turned to his erstwhile New York dealer, Alfred Stieglitz, as the single source for the artists needed to mount the exhibition. He wrote to Stieglitz: “I believe there will be some sales because, as I have said, the women here are more alive than their sisters of the ‘great

metropolis' [New York],”⁴⁰ an obvious sales pitch for the show. In the same letter, Stanton declared that he was willing to “work and talk and lecture and write like the devil to make a go of it.”⁴¹ Though Stieglitz had no reason to assume his stable of moderns would fare well in California, he had no compelling reason to deny the enthusiasms of an artist he had recently promoted in New York. Shipment of examples of all the artists who were in the Forum show was arranged, plus five more: Charles Demuth, Preston Dickinson, Konrad Kramer, Joseph Stella, and William Yarrow. Macdonald-Wright requested the work of Georgia O’Keeffe, but she declined to participate.⁴² He felt that no other local painter’s work merited inclusion in the show, and so local representation was limited to himself.⁴³ And it was Macdonald-Wright who provided the foreword to the exhibition’s catalogue, which read in part:

*We modern artists are just what our name implies; we are alive with you today—we are not animated corpses—we speak your language, the language of the hum and stir of moving things, of energy and intensity, of the aspirations of the twentieth century. More than any movement since the sixteenth century, we venerate the masters of the past; we study them over, and aspire to their stupendous achievements—we understand them, but we are of a different age and we know that petty imitation and the rattling of their bones for a cheap authority is a sacrilege beneath our sincerity.*⁴⁴

Stanton reiterated a deeply held conviction in noting the link between the moderns and the masters of the past. Not simply a ploy to establish credibility in the minds of a reticent public, his pitch for modernism as a natural evolution in society was something he believed wholeheartedly. Whether or not “the better people” of Los Angeles (as Stanton had referred to them in a letter to Stieglitz) were prepared to follow his line of evolutionary thinking was another matter. While the show did not arouse anything like the widespread and vehement reaction caused by the Armory Show in 1913, it similarly baffled the public that did see it and engendered several mocking reviews in the press. Typical of the negative reaction was “Futuristic Art Shocks L.A.—Paint Daubs Spoil Canvas—Masterpieces Go to Cellar”: “In the main art gallery at Exposition Park loud peals of laughter resound where once stalked silence and reverence. The gallery is thronged with curiosity seekers instead of the long lines of art lovers who once crowded its portals. . . . Some call it bolshevistic.”⁴⁵

Antony Anderson of the *Los Angeles Times* proved himself to be a more thoughtful critic. Anderson, a personal acquaintance of both Stanton and Willard, admitted in his review of the show that he had until very recently found modern art (specifically Cubism and Futurism) horrifying, but that he was trying to be more sympathetic to modernism in general.⁴⁶ His review did not seek to provide insight (on the contrary, he admitted his ignorance of much of what he saw), but it did attempt to legitimize the work based on his own aesthetic standard, one that revolved around a conception of conventional, classical beauty. Demuth’s watercolors were notable for their “crispness of execution,” while George Of’s flowers were “lovely.” Macdonald-Wright’s portrait of Morgan Russell (not listed in the final catalogue) was criticized as not being “clean in color”: “The synchromists slump badly, now and again, when they descend from the abstract to the concrete—their concrete is so much in color and texture like that of our main-traveled roads.” Not surprisingly, however, Anderson praised Macdonald-Wright in a tone that bordered on civic boosterism:

*By far the most interesting pictures in the collection are those painted by Stanton Macdonald-Wright, his “American Synchromy No. 1, Green,” his “American Synchromy No. 2, Yellow-orange Minor,” his “Fantasy after Bach, Blue-Green,” with several still life studies of great charm. . . . There is classic grandeur in his color-studies of the figure, they remind one of Michael Angelo’s collossals [sic]. . . . I do not understand Mr. Macdonald-Wright’s synchromatic studies, but they pique my curiosity. They hold me in thrall, they even delight me—and I shall go back to them again and again before they are taken away from Exposition Park.*⁴⁷

In terms of sales, the show was disappointing.⁴⁸ Though the exhibit generated some favorable press and strong attendance (even if the majority of these were curiosity seekers), its commercial failure was discouraging to the Wright brothers. Stanton, keenly realistic about the business end of art, would not be easily defeated. Over the next two years he attempted to exhibit modern tendencies again on a large scale.⁴⁹ He did, however, blame Stieglitz for not sending better examples of modernism and wrote frankly to his friend and former dealer that blame for the failure of the show lay with the artists:

*God what canvases. I am heart broken, I simply cannot go ahead with buoyant enthusiasm and claim genius for these pictures. I am living here, they are not, and aside from making a monkey of myself I would jeopardize any chance I now have to make a living, and this for men who don't give a tinker's damn and don't see beyond 47th St.*⁵⁰

Go ahead Stanton did, though, with his usual public enthusiasm. He lectured to large crowds at Exposition Park and toured women's clubs promoting the exhibit.

Willard, meanwhile, took out his frustrations with the public and the critics immediately in the local press:

And this new expression, whatever its present defects and shortcomings, will endure, for it is too closely related to life to be alienated by cheap humor or discouraged by ridicule. The day will come when the pictures in this exhibition will not seem bizarre and incomprehensible; and I believe that if these persons who are sincerely interested in painting will strive conscientiously to find their way into the new territory, instead of scoffing and refusing to follow the artist in his complicated efforts, they will in time arrive at a comprehension of the new work.

*Modern painting is not a fad; it is not a transient aspect of art. The false prophets have been predicting its death for years, just as they predicted the demise of all great art movements during their lifetime. But the work goes on, new life is constantly being infused into it; and the corpse has yet to be laid.*⁵¹

Willard's diatribe could be easily dismissed by a community that had only recently endured his scorn in "Los Angeles: City of Dreadful Night." Many of his readers knew him only as an angry and arrogant self-appointed aristocrat, not to be taken seriously in the realm of common sense.

All of Stanton's efforts may have seemed to him at the time to have been wasted on an ignorant and irretrievably adolescent community. Yet, as disappointing as the show was in financial and critical terms, he did see value in trying again and again to make the modernist point of view both known to and more appreciated by the general public of Southern California. His "Exhibition of Paintings by American Modernists" at Exposition Park represented an alternative, one of the first and certainly one of the most significant, to the dominant aesthetic and established mode of expression as represented by the California Art Club. Modernism had made a small inroad and would remain a permanent fixture on the local scene.

The Kinetic Light Machine and Experimental Film

In 1922 Alfred Stieglitz decided to devote an entire number of the magazine *Manuscripts* to the following question: "Can a photograph have the significance of art?"⁵² Thirty-one artists and/or critics were invited to submit their opinions, among them Stanton Macdonald-Wright. The invitation sent by Stieglitz read in part: "Would you like to say something on the subject? We are under the impression you have given it some thought." Not only had Macdonald-Wright given the medium of photography "some thought," at the time he was involved enough with film to sign his contribution, "Stanton Macdonald-Wright, Painter and Color Motion Picturist, Los Angeles."⁵³ Indeed, in the early 1920s Macdonald-Wright was, in addition to numerous other projects, actively pursuing an interest he and Morgan Russell had shared for some time: making colors move.

An early and essential aspect of the synchromist aesthetic was dynamic rhythm, the fusion of opposites recorded in passages of color that would reveal themselves in time like the progression of notes in music. The next logical step in the development of a sound-color analogy was to make color change sequentially over time, and film could make this happen. Macdonald-Wright wrote to Stieglitz privately that “painting had had its say”; the future of painting was, in his opinion, kinetic. In the early 1920s, while collaborating on the Exposition Park show of modernism and after, Willard and Stanton discussed this very topic. The result was Willard’s last serious work of art criticism, *The Future of Painting*.⁵⁴

The story of Macdonald-Wright’s experimentation in film throughout the 1920s and 1930s was, however, one of frustration and defeat. His grandiose ambitions for the union of color, film, and sound remained beyond his technological and financial means for over twenty years. It has been suggested that because Macdonald-Wright was living in Los Angeles, where film was a principal industry, he was “therefore inspired by the work being done around him” and, further, that “he could afford to make the machine.”⁵⁵ To the contrary, Macdonald-Wright despised the work being done in Hollywood, had little association with the film industry, and the costs associated with trying to produce a kinetic light machine put him heavily into debt. Nonetheless, he remained faithful to his idea of color and the possibilities of kinetic art. In 1969 Macdonald-Wright finally built a color machine that survives, the Synchrome Kineidoscope (see fig. 107).

Some idea of Macdonald-Wright’s attitude toward the Hollywood film industry in the early 1920s is revealed in the 1922 article he wrote for Stieglitz:

As painting intensified expression of sculpture (the sculptural impulse having dominated all painting as it was originally conceived), so literature will be reborn to a greater avatar and a more concentrated expression when it uses the moving picture as a medium.

*The stupidity of the photo-drama as it is produced today should not blind us to its possibilities as an art any more than when gazing at magazine covers we should deny Rubens. As bad as these plays are from the standpoint of literature, some of them are beautiful as photography; as ridiculously directed as most seem to be, we can definitely perceive in many instances the art impulse of the photographer. The medium is stronger than that which utilizes it. It is outrunning the ignorance of those who employ it.*⁵⁶

In 1918, the year Macdonald-Wright returned to Los Angeles, the movie *Tarzan* was made (based on the book by Edgar Rice Burroughs, who became a resident of Southern California and whose ranch ultimately became the city of Tarzana) and grossed over \$6 million. Movies like *Tarzan* were immeasurably distant from the aesthetic goals Macdonald-Wright had in mind (however symbolic one might find the content of *Tarzan*). Essentially, the artist wanted to bring to film the same impulses he brought to his painting: pure movement, color, form, and rhythm that were universal in nature and compositionally unified.

Historically, there were precedents for the type of light machine he envisioned, including Louis-Bertrand Castel’s color organ of 1734 and Alexander Wallace Remington’s of 1895 (Macdonald-Wright may have been aware of the latter).⁵⁷ The most immediate and notable precedent was the symphony in color and music by Alexander Scriabin performed at Carnegie Hall in New York on 20 March 1915, *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire*, op. 60.⁵⁸ Macdonald-Wright had returned to New York from London the previous month and could have seen the actual performance. At the very least, he was well aware of Scriabin and discussed his work with others in Los Angeles in the early 1920s.⁵⁹

Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915) was a Russian composer whose first works were influenced by the earlier romantic composers Frédéric Chopin and Richard Wagner. Scriabin became deeply involved with symbolist poetry and the German philosophers Schopenhauer, Kant, Hegel, and Fichte, was a member of the Society of Free Aesthetics in Moscow, and eventually turned toward mysticism and Theosophy. *Prometheus* was an important culmination of historical

attempts to fuse color and music. Its performances before its New York debut lacked the color component that Scriabin wrote to accompany the music. A color organ was built especially for the New York performance by the Edison Testing Laboratories, a machine called the Chromola.

Critical reaction to *Prometheus* was generally negative, with detractors pointing out that there was no relationship between the music played and the colors projected onto the eight-by-ten-foot gauze strips that faced the auditorium. However disappointing *Prometheus* may have been to its 1915 audience, it still must be understood as an important event for those interested in synesthesia. As the music professor James Baker has pointed out:

*The concert received a tremendous amount of notice worldwide, and stimulated a great deal of serious thinking on how to go about creating an art of mobile color. If Scriabin's arbitrary sound-color relations failed to persuade, the performance nevertheless convinced many that color music is feasible, if only it were based on the scientific study of color and its psychological effects as well as the development of a sophisticated technology for projecting colors and forms. Prometheus stood as a model of how to shape an artwork around a spiritual concept, and its premise that the art of light could be based on the laws of music would certainly have made an impact on artists striving for nonobjective painting.*⁶⁰

Inspired by the Carnegie Hall performance of *Prometheus*, the architect and Theosophist Claude Bragdon staged a light show entitled “Cathedral without Walls” in Central Park in 1916. Though it is not known whether Macdonald-Wright attended this performance, it is difficult to imagine that he was not aware of it. Bragdon later founded the Society of Prometheus with a studio-headquarters on Long Island, where color-music technology was researched. It was there that the Danish-born Thomas Wilfred built his Clavilux light machine in 1921, a development Stanton could have been aware of from the media attention it received.⁶¹ Beginning in 1919 Macdonald-Wright began researching filmmaking and became associated with Walter Wright (no relation), who had been a Hollywood cameraman. Macdonald-Wright admitted having no filmmaking knowledge. Despite the fact that color film had not yet been developed, Stanton wanted to create individual color images that would be filmed with a simple stop-motion technology. Not unlike the relationship between his article on aviation and the painting *Aeroplane Synchromy*, the artist chose a subject with a slight narrative, an erupting volcano, as the basis for a sequence of over five thousand pastels (though not five thousand separate pastels; changes were made to a given image, filmed, then changed again, etc.). This approach afforded him great flexibility and opportunity for color forms in what was an experimental project. He wrote Stieglitz: “This will open a greater field for artists I believe and naturally I am crazy with joy over the prospect of it all.”⁶²

However primitive the results of this initial foray into color filmmaking must have been, it inspired Macdonald-Wright to continue research and experimentation into a color projector that did not require the messy and time-consuming process of creating each image first in some other medium (e.g., pastel or paint). This project absorbed the artist's time off and on over the next decade and, as noted, was resumed toward the end of his life. He exchanged letters with Morgan Russell on the subject throughout the 1920s. Russell, still living in France, designed a small light machine sometime in the early part of that decade (fig. 65). A constant theme with Stanton, as it was with Willard, was that art, like everything else in the world, was constantly evolving, and, while the essential universals remained the same (emotions, states of mind, physical sensations), the symbolic forms necessarily changed. In a description of what his ideal film machine could project, Macdonald-Wright prefigured visual kinetic representations that were decades away:

*Painting is no longer universal enough to move the emotions of our contemporaries. What we need is enormous space, greater emotional possibilities, a more universal appeal and an expression which does more than cause intense introspection in the audience or among the spectators—which—in short—moves. Such an art, which answers all these needs, which is a great compositional art, is about to be born.*⁶³

Figure 65 Morgan Russell, *Study for Kinetic Light Machine*, ca. 1916–1923, ink on paper, 8⁷/₈ x 6⁵/₈ in. Morgan Russell Archives and Collection. The Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, New Jersey, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry M. Reed

Limited by funds and balancing his film activity with other projects, Macdonald-Wright made slow progress on a kinetic light machine that would accomplish his goals. He wrote to Morgan Russell in the 1920s that he had perfected a light machine, and it may have been this “color organ” that he used in theatrical productions of 1927 with the Santa Monica Theater Guild (see below). However, with no one to sell it to, and without money to sustain lab rentals, materials, and other production costs, subsequent developments were slow. In the aftermath of the Great Depression and over many years in which the artist’s fortunes took often unfortunate turns, Macdonald-Wright’s interest in a kinetic light machine was often subordinated to other pursuits. In 1939 the Synchrome Corporation he had established to pursue and legally patent his ideas went bankrupt.

Exhibitions and Paintings of the Mid-1920s

The next significant exhibition of modernism in Los Angeles after the 1920 Exposition Park show was “The First Exhibition of the Group of Independent Artists of Los Angeles.”⁶⁴ The 1920 exhibition, for which Macdonald-Wright was solely responsible, focused on East Coast artists. The 1923 Group of Independents show, composed of the work of local painters, was evidence of the small but steadily growing coterie of modernists in the Southland and of their

increasing confidence in showing their work and being taken seriously. Prior to the exhibition, held in 1923 in the Taos Building on West First Street, a poster (featuring a design by an unsigned artist) was distributed declaring the aims of the new group, the majority of whom were Angelenos.

To all workers in the Graphic Arts who rebel against the rule of thumb in Art! The Group of Independents of Los Angeles has been organized to bring together experimental and creative artists, and, by holding frequent exhibitions of their work, afford opportunity to the public to follow the progress made in the field of artistic research. . . .

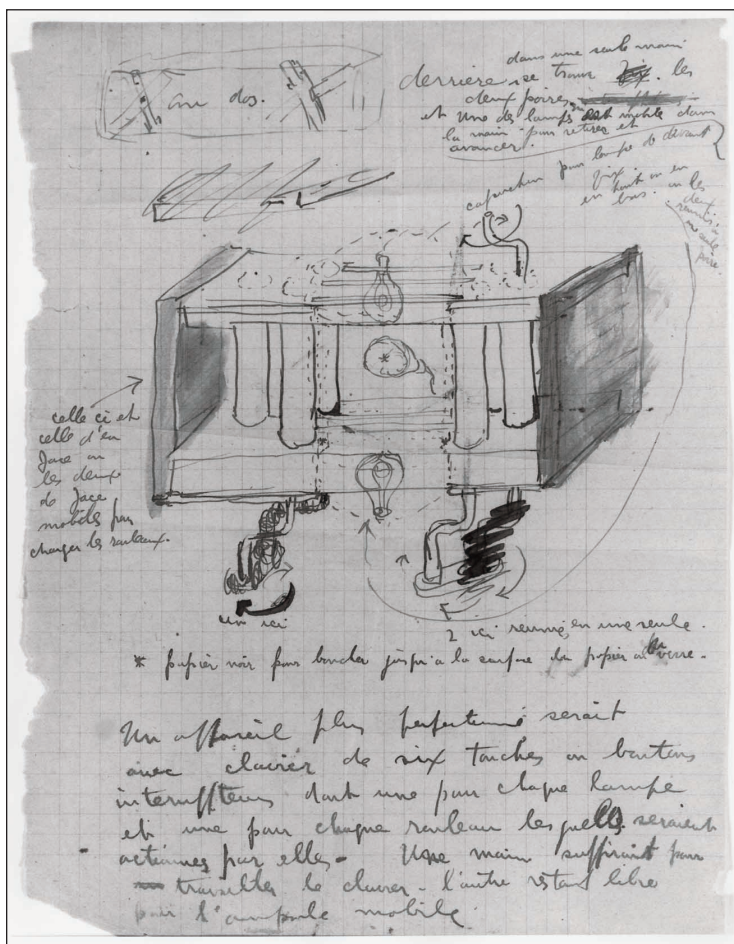
The Group maintains that artistic manifestations, such as cubism, dynamism, and expressionism are sincere intellectual efforts to obtain a clear aesthetic vision.

The fact that any departure from the academic ideal has been deliberately kept in the back ground through the conservative and retrogressive spirit of local exhibition juries makes the formation of a group of this nature imperative. . . .

*With the presentation of these exhibitions held under the auspices of the Group, the public will at last have an opportunity to comprehend the new form, and an incentive will thus be provided for a more fluent expression on the part of the artist.*⁶⁵

This declaration on behalf of modernism clearly expressed the more radical posture of the Group of Independents in relation to the organizations that had preceded them, such as the 1916 Modern Art Society or the Group of Eight.⁶⁶ Though not an officer for the group, Stanton Macdonald-Wright was at its center and authored the foreword for the exhibition catalogue. In it, Stanton argued persuasively, if not stridently, for open-mindedness, fairness in judgment, and the validity of modern art. To imitate the past was anachronistic:

The modern artist striving to express his own age (whether good or bad makes little difference), who is a creature of his age and hence a victim of its basenesses or splendor, cannot be expected to project himself with any degree of sureness five hundred years back and drag forth



*by the aid of necromantic stupidity the corpse of an art inspired and nourished by a period environment, a greater art, if you will, but a corpse nonetheless. . . . Let our work affect you as it will, but at least let your final opinion not be the result of a preconceived antagonism.*⁶⁷

Typical of Macdonald-Wright's easel paintings in the mid-1920s is *Chinese Valley Synchrony* (fig. 66). Here, the objective forms of the landscape are emphasized through clear drawing and forceful modeling. These same forms are linked to amorphous backgrounds of shifting tonalities that interpenetrate the main subject, as if the landscape were emerging from, or back into, the nonobjectivity of the surrounding space. More simply put, objectivity and nonobjectivity are blended and balanced. The artist's expanding belief in the necessity of joining opposites (and in the primacy of nature) was given a visual analogue in these paintings.

In the following year, Macdonald-Wright privately published his *Treatise on Color*, which has been discussed at length in this study. It should be noted here, though, that it was printed in an edition of only sixty copies and sold exclusively to his students. Each of the copies was accompanied by hand-painted color wheels and templates designed to locate color scales, and each was placed in a handmade slipcase. (So rare had the *Treatise* become by 1967 that Macdonald-Wright had to borrow a copy from a former student so that the text could be reprinted in a catalogue of his work.)⁶⁸ Printed in such a small edition, with limited distribution and esoteric content, the initial influence of this text on the local art community must likewise have been small. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the very presence of such a treatise and its availability were more contributions made by Macdonald-Wright, along with his own paintings, manifestoes, and exhibition projects, that provided unconventional ideas and opportunities to other artists around him.

Macdonald-Wright described the *Treatise* as "an instrument for the sensitive artist to use—not a theory or system to make colorists of boneheads."⁶⁹ Despite this retrospective disclaimer, Stanton asked a fellow teacher to read the *Treatise* for the purpose of providing a quotation that would be useful in promoting the book. Robert Henri provided the following:

*My opinion of your book is that it is the simplest, the most informing, and the best book I have ever read on the use of color [emphasis Henri's]. I have underscored the foregoing lines thinking that you might prefer to quote them. . . . I hope that any additions you may make (in your letter you suggest that there may be some) will be only what is vitally necessary in stating more clearly what you have to say, if that is possible. To me, as it stands, it is a masterly work.*⁷⁰

Once the sixty copies of the *Treatise* were distributed, Macdonald-Wright did not reprint it. The original copies required a great deal of work to manufacture, and there may have been very little market for them beyond the original sixty. In addition, it was characteristic of Macdonald-Wright to enjoy the precious quality of such enterprises. The limited edition of the book, its handsome production values, and its elite audience combined to make the book something of an aesthetic experience, the kind Oscar Wilde might have approved of. Moreover, at the very time of its publication, the artist was moving away from the strict use of color scales and was painting in an intuitive manner informed by his increasingly Eastern preoccupations until, by the later 1920s, he had abandoned color scales altogether.⁷¹

In 1925, in conjunction with a number of local artists who had long shown tendencies toward, or at least sympathy with, modernism, Macdonald-Wright helped to reorganize the Group of Independents that had exhibited together into the Modern Art Workers. As with the Group of Independents, Stanton held no official office, but he wrote the Workers' manifesto.⁷² This particular "manifesto" took the form of an open letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, in which Macdonald-Wright was decidedly less acerbic than he had been in past manifestoes, forewords, and artist's statements:



Figure 66 *Chinese Valley*
Synchromy, 1923
 Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 in.
 Courtesy of Joseph Chowning Gallery,
 San Francisco.
 CATALOGUE 26

The Modern Art Workers was formed in answer to what we felt was a need in Los Angeles. First of all, it is against nothing. Our desire is to provide exhibitions wherein artists who do not exhibit in the regular official shows will have an unprejudiced showing. We believe, furthermore, that it is necessary to exhibit all types of sincere work for the approval of the art-interested public, without regard for the personal predilections of like-minded juries. . . .

We all have infinite faith in the future of Los Angeles, both as a great metropolis and as the greatest art center of the world, and our primary desire is to form a group in which any sincere artist coming here will feel, no matter what his affiliations, a genuine and intelligent congeniality. . . .

*We feel the time is ripe to get a more cosmopolitan atmosphere into the art life here, build up some real vitalizing competition, and tear down a few "taboos."*⁷³

The first exhibition of the Modern Art Workers opened on 5 October 1925 and continued into November at the Hollywood Library. When Macdonald-Wright spoke at the opening, he was asked why a key could not be given to the meaning of modern pictures: “Mr. Wright repeated that it is ‘sensitivity’ in the individual that is the key.”⁷⁴ As baffling as that response may have been to Macdonald-Wright’s public, so, too, would have been his *Yin Synchrony* (fig. 67) of that year (exhibited at the Los Angeles Museum in April, and almost certainly with the Modern Art Workers in October). The painting shocked numerous viewers and enchanted others,⁷⁵ while most missed the idea of the languorous nude as an expression of the female principle, and the tiger as an expression of the male or yang principle, as understood in traditional Chinese thought.

Synchromist Theater and Late Paintings of the 1920s

In the mid-1920s Macdonald-Wright’s growing absorption in things oriental led him to study the Chinese language. More and more of his time was spent in Chinatown, where he became particularly enamored of traditional Chinese theater. Both Stanton and his brother, Willard, had been theatergoers from an early age when their mother took them to Broadway in New York from their home in Virginia. For Macdonald-Wright, however, Chinese theater was a very different experience, one where abstractions mingled colorfully with conventionally understood symbols. With typical zealotry, Macdonald-Wright procured every book he could on the subject and thoroughly studied its history and structure. He met a number of the local actors, sketched costumes, and eventually painted a number of scenes directly out of plays he watched.

In 1927 Macdonald-Wright became director of the Santa Monica Theater Guild. As he was making some money directing the Art Students League, lecturing, and selling an occasional painting (and since his wife, Jeanne, was working), he was in a position to devote considerable time to community theater if he so desired. The job also paid one hundred dollars a month. His by-then considerable status as an organizer, possessed of both verbal and written skills, his reputation as a highly creative person, and his own interest in theater combined to make him an obvious candidate for the directorship.

Initially, Macdonald-Wright directed contemporary plays by Eugene O’Neill and Noël Coward, as well as reviving a play by Oscar Wilde. After the very first season, however, Stanton took advantage of the situation to experiment with his own ideas for the stage, ideas that were heavily influenced by the Chinese theater in which he had become immersed. He wrote four plays: *The Infidelity of Madame Lun*, *Beyond*, *The Tiger’s Tail*, and *The Wild Goose*. He also directed them, designed the sets, and sometimes played small roles. Like his paintings, Stanton’s plays were replete with Western conventions but everywhere tinged with a flavor and attitude that stemmed from contact with the East.

Director’s notes, a list of props, and the script for *The Infidelity of Madame Lun* survive.⁷⁶ As in Chinese theater, stage decoration was minimal. For example, the first act took place in a “wooded scene.” To create this atmosphere, Macdonald-Wright suggested that a chair be placed stage right with a neat placard suspended from it that read simply “wooded scene.” Yet his lighting directions were given with utmost care:

*But there should be a color atmosphere of sous-bois over the whole scene. This is blue, a rich ultra-marine blue, intensified by orange sunspots which fall upon the clothing of the actors as they walk about. On a plain back-drop, preferably silver, but not necessarily so, there should be a light not seen on land nor sea; made by two flood lights throwing their beams upwards, and toward each other; one of blue-green, and one of purple. If the electrical equipment permits, a magnificent sunset effect may supplant the two floods.*⁷⁷

Likewise, Macdonald-Wright took care in the description of the characters’ costumes. He brought in a Chinese actress for the title role and even instructed the amateur troupe of the



Figure 67 *Yin Synchronomy*, 1925
Oil on canvas, 24 x 29½ in.
Collection of Anne and John
Summerfield
CATALOGUE 28

Santa Monica Theater Guild in basic symbolic hand-gestures of Chinese theater. The play itself was a satire on the foibles of human nature, not without a good deal of humor. The lines are marked by Macdonald-Wright's self-termed "exaggerated and flowery verbiage": "*Woman: Curb, I beg you, the iridescent flow of your admitted eloquence. I came here to expedite the dying of the earth! Sage: Ah, peerless moon-face, the smooth exterior of your scintillating personality is only equalled by the priceless frankness of your unconventionality.*"⁷⁸

Macdonald-Wright called his work with the guild "Synchromist Theater." In 1927 he told the *Christian Science Monitor* that his early experiments in Synchromism played a large part in his theater work, as it was color that established abstract equivalents.⁷⁹ His emphasis on the abstract as well as his use of a color organ (a presently unlocated device that grew out of his work in color film and the development of a kinetic light machine) were described in the newspaper:

For example of this, in one scene of his play, "Beyond," the action of the play takes place in nowhere, at no time, therefore to have other than a purely abstract setting would not only be incongruous but ridiculous. The mood induced by the use of these synchromistic settings is definite, and together with the use of Wright's color organ, which can throw any or all of the colors of the spectrum upon any spot he wishes, evoke an illusion and atmosphere of a fresh sort. . . .

[Macdonald-Wright] believes that the one way for the theater to move is toward the philosophical spectacle, putting theatrical production in the form of satire; to transform the beauty of an idea that you receive intellectually into a visual idea giving you beauty. To this end

*Wright has embodied much that has been used in Chinese theater; his reason for so doing is that comparatively few people know about the interpretive forms of the Chinese theater and therefore won't expect what they have seen before—in other words they are liberated from all preconceived ideas as to how a theatrical performance should be given.*⁸⁰

As small as the Santa Monica Guild was, it provided Macdonald-Wright with yet another venue to propound his idea first presented in his 1919 article on aviation: that philosophical thought was an end in itself. Such thought could lead to an awareness of the limitations of pure logic, of the mystery inherent in nature, and of the unity of things material and spiritual. Macdonald-Wright remained remarkably consistent in his attachment to this ideal throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

In 1927 Macdonald-Wright's activities in the theater and his determination to learn the Chinese language did not prevent him from indulging his penchant for organizing exhibitions. This time, as opposed to the American Modernists show of 1920, the Group of Independents of 1923, or the Modern Art Workers of 1925, Stanton planned a show solely for himself and Morgan Russell, entitled simply "Synchronism."⁸¹

The two artists had maintained a lively correspondence ever since Macdonald-Wright moved to California, and they returned again and again to two subjects: Morgan's relocation to California (which never happened, though he visited in 1931), and the possibility of their working together again (specifically, on a light machine). Another topic was the dire financial situation the two artists were always in. Macdonald-Wright acted as an agent for Russell's paintings in California, putting them into all the shows he could and handling sales negotiations whenever the occasion arose. Stanton was forever apologizing for the paltry amounts of money he sent to Morgan in France—usually five or ten dollars, sometimes twenty. Payments were few and far between. A show of Synchronism in 1927 would accomplish a number of things: it would provide a venue for Macdonald-Wright's latest paintings; it would confirm his role as the region's preeminent modernist; and it might generate some income for Morgan.

"Synchronism" was held at the Los Angeles Museum in Exposition Park in February 1927. In physical appearance, it was far different from the Synchronism of the 1913 Paris exhibition. On view was Macdonald-Wright's *Nature Synchrony* (a multigure composition), *Prometheus* (a narrative of the ancient myth), *Water* and *Earth* (part of a series of four allegories on the elements), three scenes taken from Chinese theater, a *Self-Portrait* (fig. 68), two landscapes, four still lifes, and two figures. Of the twenty-two works Russell sent from France, eight were either bathers or nudes, and at least seven were still lifes. The fact that both painters had returned to more representational work yet desired to exhibit under the rubric of Synchronism is telling. Both Macdonald-Wright and Russell maintained harmony and balance of form and color in their 1920s production, which, they felt, was consistent with their early work in abstraction and finally nonobjectivity. Retention of the movement's name was not meant to recapture a past glory or to capitalize on whatever notoriety they could attach to their role as early moderns (Macdonald-Wright was realistic about how much Angelenos did not know): both painters genuinely felt the term still applied to their individual aesthetics.

Whereas Macdonald-Wright's primary concern as a synchronist in 1913 had been to balance light and dark, warm and cold, movement and unity, now, in 1927, he was concerned with the balancing of occidental and oriental traditions: "Art, according to Mr. Wright, is now in the process of a spiritual awakening, and from the inoculation of the Oriental influence with the Occidental ideal new forms will arise."⁸² Believing fully that such a fusion was both possible and necessary, Macdonald-Wright blatantly laid synchronist color over naturalistic renderings, which were in turn related thematically to the Orient. However, he felt himself to be using line in a wholly different way in these paintings. He later explained his understanding of the Chinese use of line:



Figure 68 *Self-Portrait*, 1926–1927
Oil on canvas, 28 x 24 in.
Grand Rapids Art Museum, Grand
Rapids, Michigan. Gift of the Vivian
Stringfield Collection, 1934.1.3
CATALOGUE 29

*To us [in the West] the brush is no more than an indispensable instrument, the traces of its passing often purposely hidden, but the Chinese proudly demand its imprint on every integer of their work. Abstraction is the inescapable technical foundation of Chinese art, for the brush generates the technical attitude of the painter. The brush is instinct with certain capacities which of necessity impose themselves upon the user. Without the brush, Chinese art could not be, and hence Chinese painting from at least the Han dynasty has retained the force of primitive directness and evocation, integrated with a nearly perfect transphysical philosophy based on the deepest psychology.*⁸³

Macdonald-Wright believed that adding synchromist color and fragmentation to both oriental subjects and Western draftsmanship was far from a decorative enterprise, but rather a simultaneous stylistic updating of each mode. If the inherent meanings in his use of line were not understood or appreciated, he would be the last to be surprised. Macdonald-Wright believed adamantly that just as technology and art needed to fuse in projects such as kinetic light machines, so, too, did the illusory division between East and West need to be overcome. The critical dilemma in his paintings of the 1920s is whether the overt blending of traditionally Western formal qualities and vestiges of Synchromism with quasi-oriental subject matter and a partial adaptation of Eastern line satisfied this objective.

In the late 1920s, the deeper mysteries of *ch'i* (spirit), which Macdonald-Wright sought in brushstrokes derived from Chinese calligraphy, collided head-on in his paintings with a Western

realism weighed down with materiality. Typical of his still-life production was *Still Life Synchrony No. 3* of 1928 (fig. 69), featuring a formal simplicity marked by the inclusion of recognizable oriental motifs. Among its many meanings, the lotus flower symbolizes consciousness and rebirth and can represent the sun, the greatest light. *Still Life Synchrony No. 3* is painted in the key of blue-violet, that is, blue-violet is the tonic color, so the complete scale is blue-violet, red-violet, red-orange, orange, yellow, green, and blue. “Blue-violet,” according to Macdonald-Wright, “is the introspective, the inspirational color.” The subjects best suited to the key of blue-violet are those where “the reaction desired is more of thought than of feeling.”⁸⁴

Eventually, however, Macdonald-Wright’s involvement with Eastern thinking, especially Taoism, led him to believe that the idea of painting strictly in color scales at all was simply too linear, too logical, too bound to materiality. He continued to advise students to learn color scales, so they could understand the intricacies of color mixing and get a feeling for the emo-



Figure 69 *Still Life Synchrony No. 3* (Water Lily Still Life No. 3), 1928
Oil on canvas, 19⁵/₁₆ x 24³/₁₆ in.
Williams College Museum of Art,
Williamstown, Massachusetts. Bequest
of Lawrence H. Bloedel, Class of 1923,
77.9.9
CATALOGUE 30

tional and psychological power of color. For the mature artist, though, especially the one who would go beyond the conventions of Western thought, an emotional and spiritual identification with the subject replaced the scales system, which, if used correctly, had promised to evoke certain states of mind automatically. In his *Dragon Trail: Still Life Synchrony* (fig. 70), the artist improvises freely with color, balancing a carefully drawn still life with misty voids in the background landscape. Years later, Macdonald-Wright’s interest in Eastern thinking would ultimately bring him back to both Synchronism and color scales.

Based on a series of drawings made beginning in 1929 (see cats. 31a–e), *Dragon Trail* depicts a long and curving firebreak (a strip of land cleared to stop the spread of fire) winding through what appear to be the hills north of Santa Monica. The phrase *dragon trail* is a reference to the firebreak, to its existence in the wake of the dragon’s power (the dragon being the most complex and multitiered symbol in Chinese cosmology): we see in the foreground of the still life an image on a vase of a dragon breathing fire. At the center are two erect bananas, the one on the left incised with distinctly vaginal folds. The reference here is to the fire of intercourse, making the space between man and woman, that seeming void, a dragon trail.

Figure 70 (opposite) *Dragon Trail: Still Life Synchrony*, 1930
Oil on canvas, 34¹/₈ x 27¹/₈ in.
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture
Garden, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C. The Joseph H.
Hirshhorn Bequest, 1981
CATALOGUE 32



- 1 John Huston, *An Open Book* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 28.
- 2 Stanton Macdonald-Wright (hereafter SMW), quoted in *Stanton Macdonald-Wright: A Retrospective Exhibition, 1911–1970* (Los Angeles: The UCLA Art Galleries/The Grunwald Graphic Arts Foundation, 1970), unpaginated.
- 3 Edwin Arthur Hunt, "The Wright Criterion," *Out West Magazine* 43, no. 4 (April 1916): 161. On Guy Rose, see Will South, *Guy Rose: American Impressionist* (Oakland, Calif.: The Oakland Museum of Art in association with the Irvine Museum, 1994).
- 4 Hunt, "Criterion," 161.
- 5 Arthur G. Vernon, "Modern Art in California," *Graphic*, 1 February 1917. Copy in Mabel Alvarez Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter AAA).
- 6 Arthur G. Vernon, "Modern Art in California," *Graphic*, 20 April 1918. Copy in Alvarez Papers, AAA.
- 7 SMW to Alfred Stieglitz, 30 June 1924. Alfred Stieglitz Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
- 8 SMW to Alfred Stieglitz, 20 November 1918. Alfred Stieglitz Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
- 9 For a detailed account of Willard's (hereafter WHW) personal and domestic struggles, including his bout with drugs, see John Loughery, *Alias S. S. Van Dine: The Man Who Created Philo Vance* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992).
- 10 WHW, "Innovators Will Find West Good Field for All Sound Modernism," *San Francisco Bulletin*, 22 February 1919, clipping, Willard Huntington Wright Scrapbooks, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University Archives.
- 11 SMW, "Influence of Aviation on Art: The Accentuation of Individuality," *Ace: The Aviation Magazine of the West* 1, no. 2 (September 1919): 11–12.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 14 SMW, *A Treatise on Color* (Los Angeles: privately printed, 1924), 20.
- 15 SMW, "Influence of Aviation," 12.
- 16 SMW, *Treatise*, 33.
- 17 Mai-Mai Sze, *The Tao of Painting: A Study of the Ritual Disposition of Chinese Painting, with a Translation of the Chieh Tzū Yüan Hua Chuan or Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting, 1679–1701*, vol. 2, *The Chieh Tzū Yüan Hua Chuan*, Bollingen Series 49 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1956). Macdonald-Wright, an avid bibliophile, would have been undaunted in acquiring the 1887–1888 Shanghai edition, the one most widely used up until recent times. He may have known of its existence since his early contact with Focillon. Also, the *Manual* was translated into French in 1918 by Raphael Petrucci as the *Kiai-Tseu-Yuan Houa Tchouan, Les Enseignements de la Peinture du Jardin Grand comme un Grain de Moutarde: Encyclopédie de la Peinture Chinoise* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1918). The following quotations are from the 1956 Princeton edition.
- 18 *Mustard Seed*, 17.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 20 SMW, *Treatise*, 19.
- 21 See *Exhibition of Paintings by American Modernists* (Los Angeles: Museum of History, Science and Art, 1920), no. 63, *American Synchromy No. 2 (Yellow-Orange Minor)*.
- 22 SMW, *Treatise*, 26.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 24.
- 24 "Current Tendencies at Los Angeles," *Christian Science Monitor*, clipping, Mabel Alvarez Papers, unfiled, AAA.
- 25 Antony Anderson, "Art and Artists," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 September 1919.
- 26 Arthur Millier, "Now There's Only a Parking Lot," *Los Angeles Times*, clipping, SMW Papers, roll LA 5, frame 47, AAA.
- 27 On the Chouinard, see Robert Perine, *Chouinard: An Art Vision Betrayed* (Encinitas, Calif.: Artra Publishing, 1985).
- 28 SMW, "Lectures to the Art Students' League of Los Angeles," recorded and transcribed by Mabel Alvarez, Museum of Modern Art Library (hereafter "ASL Lectures"). Photocopy in possession of the author from the original, courtesy of Pauline Khuri-Majoli. On Alvarez, see Will South, *Mabel Alvarez: A Retrospective* (Los Angeles: The Laband Art Gallery, Loyola Marymount University in association with the Orange County Museum of Art, 1999). Mabel Alvarez notes made from SMW lectures dating from 1920 courtesy of Glenn Bassett, Pasadena, California.
- 29 SMW, "ASL Lectures," 1.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 30–31.

- 32** John Huston, quoted in Lawrence Grobel, *The Hustons* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), 105.
- 33** Ibid.
- 34** WHW, "Exhibit Shows New Impulse: California Artists to the Fore," *San Francisco Bulletin*, 25 January 1919, clipping, Willard Huntington Wright Scrapbooks, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University Archives.
- 35** WHW to Alfred Stieglitz, quoted in Loughery, *Van Dine*, 146.
- 36** Loughery, *Van Dine*, 147.
- 37** The three advisory board members were William Wendt, one of Southern California's premier impressionist painters; William Preston Harrison, a prominent collector of the Ash Can school; and Mrs. Randall Hutchinson, a moderate-to-conservative patron of the museum.
- 38** "Modernist Exhibits Are Given Sanction," *Los Angeles Express*, 27 June 1919, Scrapbooks of the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art, 1913–1927, on file at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. The California Art Club felt that it had always given "due consideration and space to the work of the artists of the newer school," that modernists should show only under the auspices of their organization, which, of course, put the moderns at the mercy of a jury appointed by officers of the California Art Club.
- 39** Loughery agrees with this assessment of WHW's playing a "supporting role" in the show's organization. See *Van Dine*, 149.
- 40** SMW to Alfred Stieglitz, 12 October 1919. Stieglitz Archive, Yale University.
- 41** SMW wrote a long and convincing article on the legitimacy of modern art and America's leading role in its development, which appeared soon after writing to Stieglitz of his [SMW's] promotional intentions: SMW, "Americanism in Art and Letters," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 November 1919.
- 42** SMW to Stieglitz, 12 October 1919. "I naturally want O'Keeffe to be represented." Stieglitz Archive, Yale University.
- 43** SMW meant to include fourteen of his own paintings in this show, and indeed, the catalogue first printed for the exhibition listed them all. Copies of this unedited catalogue are in the Scrapbooks of the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art, 1913–1927, and in the library of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The catalogue that visitors actually received at the opening is in the Mabel Alvarez Papers, unfiled, AAA. In this revised version, only five paintings are listed for SMW. However, Antony Anderson's review, "Our American Modernists," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 February 1920, mentions paintings by SMW that were not listed in the revised catalogue. Thus, all fourteen paintings might have been hung.
- 44** SMW, foreword to *Exhibition of Paintings by American Modernists*.
- 45** "Futuristic Art Shocks L.A.—Paint Daubs Spoil Canvas—Masterpieces Go to Cellar," *Los Angeles Record*, 19 February 1920, clipping, Scrapbooks of the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art, 1913–1927. See also "Modern Art Exhibition Varied," *Los Angeles Express*, 12 February 1920, Scrapbooks: "decidedly freaky."
- 46** Antony Anderson, "Our American Modernists," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 February 1920, clipping, Scrapbooks of the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art, 1913–1927.
- 47** Ibid.
- 48** Only one painting sold, an oil by William Zorach. SMW wrote to Stieglitz: "You [Stieglitz] will get a check for \$175 minus (I suppose) 10% gallery fee for the Mountain Path of Zorach. This is the sales total! Why anyone should pick out the worst canvas of a bad show is beyond me, but there you are!" SMW to Stieglitz, 8 March 1920. Stieglitz Archive, Yale University.
- 49** SMW exhibited again that very year: "Synchronistic [sic] School to Hold an Exhibition," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 August 1920, 18. Little is known of this particular exhibit, though the article cited here indicates that Thomas Hart Benton, Preston Dickinson, SMW, and William Yarrow were the main artists featured.
- 50** SMW to Stieglitz, 3 February 1920. Stieglitz Archive, Yale University.
- 51** WHW, "Art and Aunt Maria," *Los Angeles Times*, clipping, Scrapbooks of the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art, 1913–1927.
- 52** "Can a Photograph Have the Significance of Art?" Thirty-one statements in *Manuscripts* 4 (February 1922).
- 53** SMW, "Photography and the New Literature," in *Manuscripts*, 7.
- 54** WHW, *The Future of Painting* (New York: Huebsch, 1923).
- 55** Marilyn S. Kushner, *Morgan Russell: The Origins of a Modern Masterpiece* (Montclair, N.J.: Montclair Art Museum, 1998), 109.
- 56** SMW, "Photography and the New Literature," 7. SMW thanked Stieglitz for a copy of *Manuscripts*.
- 57** Gail Levin suggests that Russell (hereafter MR) knew of Remington's work, and therefore MR could

have made it known to Wright. See Levin, *Synchromism and American Color Abstraction, 1910–1925* (New York: George Braziller in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978), 44.

58 See James M. Baker, "Prometheus in America: The Significance of the World Premier of Scriabin's *Poem of Fire* as Color-Music, New York, 20 March, 1915," in Kermit S. Champa, ed., *Over Here! Modernism, the First Exile, 1914–1919* (Providence, R.I.: David Winton Bell Gallery, Brown University, 1989), 90–111.

59 See Grobel, *The Hustons*, 105.

60 Baker, "Prometheus," 106.

61 On Wilfred, see Stark Young, "The Color Organ," *Theatre Arts Magazine* 6, no. 1 (January 1922): 20–32. Wilfred's objective was to build a light machine that functioned like an organ, but his interests were not in synesthesia as he firmly believed there was no direct relationship between color and sound. Another light machine developed at this same time was built by Mary Hallock Greenewalt. See "Applying 'Spectral Colors' to Music a New Fine Art," *Current Opinion* 71, no. 1 (July 1921): 66–67, and Mary Hallock Greenewalt, "Decorating with Light and Color," *Art & Decoration* 15 (June 1921): 104–105.

62 SMW to Stieglitz, ca. 1920. Stieglitz Archive, Yale University.

63 SMW to Stieglitz, 3 August 1920. Stieglitz Archive, Yale University.

64 Full text of the catalogue reprinted in John Alan Walker, ed., *Accounts of Early California Art: A Reprint Anthology* (Big Pine, Calif.: privately printed, 1988), unpaginated.

65 Ibid.

66 Founded in 1921 for exhibition purposes, the Group of Eight included Mabel Alvarez, Clarence Hinkle, Henri de Kruif, J. H. Rich, E. R. Shrader, Donna Schuster, Edouard Vysekal, and Luvena Vysekal. See Nancy Moure, *Publications in Southern California Art, 1, 2, and 3* (Los Angeles: Dustin Publications, 1984), B-10.

67 Quoted in Walker, *Accounts*.

68 Pauline Majoli, interview by Will South, 1992. SMW borrowed the *Treatise* from Mabel Alvarez to be reprinted in *The Art of Stanton Macdonald-Wright* (Washington, D.C.: National Collection of Fine Arts, 1967).

69 SMW to Stieglitz, 22 April 1924. Stieglitz Archive, Yale University.

70 Robert Henri to SMW, 1 May 1924, collection of Mrs. Stanton Macdonald-Wright. Photocopy from the original in possession of the author, courtesy Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright.

71 A most interesting probability regarding SMW's *Treatise* is that a copy was owned by the eccentric art teacher at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles in the 1920s, Frederick Schwankovsky (1885–1974). Schwankovsky was a devotee of the color-music analogy and was a practicing Theosophist. For his students, he made a booklet on color theory that contained, like SMW's, a color wheel. More like Scriabin than SMW, Schwankovsky assigned each color a specific musical tone, but very much like SMW, he assigned colors an emotional content. Schwankovsky could have derived all or most of his color ideas from the Theosophical text *Thought Forms* and from Kandinsky without the benefit of SMW's book. However, the similarities between SMW's *Treatise* and Schwankovsky's booklet (and the smallness of the Los Angeles art community at the time) are too similar not to consider the possibility that the latter's work was influenced by the former's. In 1928–1930 the young Jackson Pollock was a student of Schwankovsky's.

72 SMW, "An Open Letter from a Modernist," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 October 1925, 35. In this letter, SMW noted that George Stojana was president, Mabel Alvarez vice president, and Eduoard Vysekal treasurer.

73 Ibid.

74 "Hollywood Has First Modern Art Exhibit: Public Shows Appreciation of Creations," 6 October 1925, clipping, roll LA 5, frame 274, AAA. Also see Marjorie Ross, "Modern Artists Score in Exhibit," *Hollywood Citizen*, 6 October 1925.

75 "However, such haunting things as McDonald Wright's 'Yin Synchromy' reconciles some beholders to the thought that there may be both beauty and emotion in this modernistic chaos. It is a curious and fascinating canvas that Wright has hung. A woman is sprawled in utter relaxation in a billow of strong and primitive colorings. Behind her, beautiful, austere with a dignity that transcends that of humans, the brooding face of a lion looks out upon eternity. One of the fascinating details of this picture is the perfectly drawn hands of the woman in the foreground, and its lines of complete exhaustion." Caroline Walker, "Art Exhibition Reveals New Painters," April 1925, clipping, roll LA 5, frame 224, AAA.

76 Photocopies provided to the author by Mrs. Jean S. Macdonald-Wright, 1992.

77 SMW, director's notes for *The Infidelity of Madame Lun*.

78 SMW, from the script of *The Infidelity of Madame Lun*, 2.

79 "Synchronist Theater at Santa Monica," *Christian Science Monitor*, 1927, clipping, files of the Joseph Chowning Gallery, San Francisco.

80 Ibid.

81 *Synchronism* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum, 1927).

82 Claudia Colonna, "The Art of Stanton Macdonald-Wright," June 1927, clipping, roll LA 5, frame 222, AAA.

83 SMW, "Some Aspects of Sung Painting," *Magazine of Art*, October 1949, 222.

84 SMW, *Treatise*, 25.

