

THOMAS AIELLO

## The Champion and the Corpse

Art and Identity in Richmond, 1950

Two men, a Richmond doctor and a New York museum curator, strolled through the quiet halls of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) in late April 1950, where they found an image of a bright and vibrant corpse, seemingly rotting in ribbons of technicolor paint. Aline Louchheim, art critic for the *New York Times*, later described the piece as the “miraculously painted iridescence of decay.” The doctor was skeptical of the work’s value. He turned to the curator and asked, “What do you think of it as a cadaver?” The curator took the question in stride. The doctor was neither the first nor the last patron to voice his displeasure. He was patient but direct. “And what do you think of it as a picture?”<sup>1</sup>

The exchange took place at the beginning of the controversial VMFA exhibition *American Painting—1950*, and it serves to encapsulate the complex negotiation that was the acculturative process of modern art’s move into Richmond. There was southern skepticism of northern intrusion. There was doubt about the subject matter’s appropriateness, as well as about its status as legitimate art. Additionally, Virginians expressed concerns that they would be the unwitting hostages of an elitist artistic intellectual community that had somehow lost its way. They grappled with the relationship between publicly funded exhibitions and publicly unpopular art. And, more broadly, they manifested a unique and particularly southern version of what Michael Kammen has termed “visual shock.”<sup>2</sup>



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In 1919, long before that shock would make itself manifest, John Barton Payne, former government official and head of the American Red Cross, donated his artwork to the state of Virginia, thereby beginning the collection that would become the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. The museum itself would open to the public fifteen years later in 1934, the first state museum in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Beginning in 1938, the VMFA began conducting biennial exhibitions, which were designed to supply a survey of the current state of American painting to a Virginia population that might not otherwise be aware of any artistic evolution. These events took place every two years, starting in 1938, with a respite during World War II. Before 1950, the museum director and a selection jury chose the content of these biennial exhibitions. The process, however, often came as a compromise. As a remedy, new museum director Leslie Cheek commissioned James Johnson Sweeney to select the representative paintings for the museum's 1950 biennial, to direct the exhibition, and to deliver a series of lectures in Richmond and its surrounding areas as a visiting scholar with the Richmond Area University Center. The exhibition opened on 22 April.<sup>4</sup>

Sweeney was certainly qualified. The Brooklyn native studied at Georgetown before moving on to graduate work at Cambridge and the Sorbonne. He had served as both the director of the department of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art and the vice president of the International Art Critics Association. He was the author of numerous books on various artists and artistic movements.<sup>5</sup>

"The poet," Sweeney argued in the opening essay of the 1950 exhibition catalog, "in dealing with his own time must see that language does not petrify in his hands. This is also the responsibility of the painter." Tradition, too, had its place, and the best art was a product of the tension between tradition and innovation.

A painting, like any other true work of art, is essentially a metaphor of structure. Relations are more real and important than the things they relate. And the work of art which introduces us through a metaphor in its own terms—line, color, and space, in the case of painting—to a fresh, or at any rate unfamiliar, configuration of relationships in nature is a new "noun," an expansion of human expression.

Sweeney ended his catalog essay with hope. "The road ahead," he wrote, "is clear."<sup>6</sup>

But the road ahead was anything but clear. Letters to the editors of local newspapers appeared soon after the exhibition's opening. "So-called modern art is not modern, and it assuredly is not art," wrote Richmond's W. C. Smith. "When the first little boy became angry with the first little girl, in some prehistoric age, the aggrieved party drew a picture expressing his emotion. And the picture was far more sincere and certainly as well executed as the monstrosities which are called modern art." Fellow Richmond resident W. Clyde Maddox echoed this sentiment in a similar letter to the editor printed the same day.<sup>7</sup> More would follow, propelled by a frustrated Richmond population.

The Richmond of 1950 had grown by almost 20 percent since 1940. The greater metropolitan area held more than three hundred thousand residents, nearly 75 percent of whom were white.<sup>8</sup> The median family income hovered around three thousand dollars per year, but far more families fell below that line than rose above it.<sup>9</sup> More than 60 percent of Richmond's residents over twenty-five years old did not complete high school.<sup>10</sup> Despite its growth, the city appeared unready for a change in its cultural definitions. "By tradition, inheritance, geography, and every intangible of the spirit," wrote James Jackson Kilpatrick, editor of the *Richmond News Leader*, in his 1962 *Southern Case for School Segregation*,

Virginia is part of the South. Richmond was for four years the capital of a de facto nation, the Confederate States of America; to this day, our children play soldier in the trenches and romp happily on the breastworks left from the bloody conflict in which the CSA were vanquished. The Confederacy, the War, the legacy of Lee—these play a role in Virginia's life that continues to mystify, to entrance, sometimes to repel the visitor of the State. Virginia's "Southernness" reaches to the bone and marrow of this metaphysical concept.<sup>11</sup>

Though there were a number of talented and well-known artists among the seventy-seven entries—Josef Albers, Isabel Bishop, Salvador Dali, Max Ernst, Arshile Gorky, Adolph Gottlieb, George Grosz, Edward Hopper, Willem de Kooning, John Marin, Robert Motherwell, Georgia O'Keefe,

Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Ben Shahn, Mark Tobey, and Andrew Wyeth among them—three in particular would stand out.<sup>12</sup>

Hyman Bloom, born in Lithuania in 1913 before coming to Boston at the age of seven, was influenced most directly by his Jewishness, and, consequently, the horrors of Nazi Germany. Two major themes dominated his work—religious scenes of synagogues and rabbis and death scenes of mutilated dead bodies, the latter considered to be inspired by the Holocaust. It was one of his images of dead bodies that appeared at the Virginia biennial, a painting titled *Female Corpse, Back View*. “One feels in the presence of these ‘mortality’ images an insistent invitation to be horrified,” wrote Hilton Kramer in a 1955 *Commentary* critique. “Bloom’s whole effort here is toward upsetting our traditional expectations of beauty in a work of art.”<sup>13</sup> The body pictured was decorated with vibrant color, with circles of red around the buttocks. Wild, white and brown strokes surrounded the slender arms and legs. A piece of the skull was cut away, revealing another swath of vibrant red. Pinks and yellows and blues combined on the corpse’s back. The picture was morbid but paradoxically brightly colored.

Bloom consistently denied that his corpses were Holocaust images. They were, in fact, intended as celebrations of life. “The paintings are emblems of metamorphosis,” he argued, “as the living organisms which inhabit the body in death transform it into life in another form.”<sup>14</sup> Bloom’s corpse was one of three paintings based on a 1943 visit to Kenmore Hospital’s morgue, in his hometown of Boston. Two years after that visit, Bloom painted *Severed Leg*, and *Female Corpse, Front View*. In 1947, he painted the work exhibited in the VMFA biennial of 1950.<sup>15</sup>

Bloom was a veteran of the WPA Art Program and an instructor at Harvard. Two years after the show, a young John Updike sat in Bloom’s advanced composition class. “He moved about the classroom on shoes notable for the thickness and the silence of their soles,” Updike later wrote. He noted that Bloom’s “moldering rabbis and corpses were notable more for their lurid coloring than for their linear draftsmanship.”<sup>16</sup>

These distinctions, however, fell by the wayside in Richmond. There was, after all, a painting of a decomposing dead body on the gallery wall. The leader of the sentiment against Bloom’s painting was the same man who led the fight against all of the work at the biennial, Ross Valentine. An editori-



alist and art critic for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Valentine believed that art had been perfected during the Renaissance and that all worthwhile art in 1950 did well to strive for a similar inspirational realism. Bloom's *Female Corpse* did not meet Valentine's criteria: "I maintain that an heroic oil painting of a female corpse stressing the decomposition of the bloated buttocks is nauseating, and should not be dignified by being exhibited in this Virginia temple of art," he wrote. "It is not art. It is either the pathetic handiwork of mild aberration, or the deliberate opus of a notoriety-seeking mountebank."<sup>17</sup>

Valentine was certain, however, that modern art was on its way out. Soon these artists would conform to more "wholesome, more honest standards," he believed, because there was a clear trend in that direction. And modern artists only followed trends. "Most of them," Valentine wrote, "give their opinion not because of any conviction they may feel (their individual critical sense has been atrophied), but because they will always voice an opinion they feel is expected of them." The modernists were making a last, desperate stand. But their efforts would be futile. "A younger and wiser generation, less gullible and more critical, will throw off the shackles of Parisian depravity . . . 'Modern Art' (and I mean specifically the Hyman Bloom 'Female Corpse, Rear View' kind) will, like a slatternly strumpet, be abandoned by her followers, and will sit among the ashes of her mercenary past, mumbling and weeping into her absinthe."<sup>18</sup>

The museum itself then singled out two more of its selections when it awarded them John Barton Payne medals for artistic excellence. James Johnson Sweeney's first lecture in his Richmond Area University Center series was at the VMFA, and though his original intent was to announce the winners of the medals for the show's most spectacular entries, the *Times-Dispatch* presented Sweeney as the "big gun" of the modernists, imported from New York to beat back the legitimate doubts of Virginians. And those doubts, from Ross Valentine and the public, were growing louder. Colonel Herbert Fitzroy, administrator of the Richmond Area University Center, introduced Sweeney, exaggerating that the exhibition controversy "had shared the headlines in Richmond with atomic bombs and attacks on the Truman administration."<sup>19</sup>

Sweeney emphasized vitality and the virtue of expression in his speech, while nodding toward southerners' most cherished ideal. "Tradition," he argued, both to the crowd and—through the press—to Valentine, "is one of the artist's most valuable assets, but it must not be permitted to freeze out the vitality of current expression." Sweeney explained further that "[t]oday's painters respect art from the past and from abroad, but they no longer imitate. They try to produce something from it that will carry a fresh accent, a fresh way of organizing line, color, and space suggestions as well as emotional stimuli." The *Times-Dispatch* noted that Sweeney did not mention Bloom's *Female Corpse, Back View*.<sup>20</sup>

The two medal winners were *De Mains Pales Aux Cieux Lasses* (*Pale Hands to the Tired Sky*) by Yves Tanguy and *Little Giant Still Life* by Stuart Davis. A French native, Tanguy came to America in 1939 and made his home in Connecticut. He was never formally trained, a fact that surely did not surprise many of the exhibition's patrons. Sweeney's explanation of the virtues of *Pale Hands* was minimal and prompted no angry response. "Tanguy's composition gives an example of perfect control," he said. "Every color, every shape, every empty space is in perfect harmony."<sup>21</sup>

The reaction to Tanguy's work proved minimal compared to that elicited by its medal-winning counterpart, to say nothing of Bloom's *Corpse*. Response to Stuart Davis's piece was both prompt and angry, descending upon a painting and an artist with a distinguished pedigree. Davis based *Little Giant Still Life* on an advertisement for Champion sparkplugs (known as "Little Giant" batteries, thereby giving the painting its title). He claimed to have chosen the logo not for its stimulating prospects but because of "the challenge of the lack of interest."<sup>22</sup> "The word 'champion,' is clearly the subject matter of the painting," wrote Davis, "and that was derived quite casually and spontaneously from a book of paper matches . . . and it was the challenge of the lack of interest in this case, rather than the direct stimulus of a subject."<sup>23</sup> Born in 1898, Davis studied with Robert Henri in "Ash Can" Philadelphia before taking the modern turn. Davis's father had been the art editor for the *Philadelphia Press*, giving Stuart entrée into the circles of Henri, John Sloan, George Luks, and others. His first and most important encounter with modern art was the 1913 Armory Show, though his own break with social semi-realism did not come until the 1920s. In 1950, he

worked as an instructor at the New School for Social Research in New York.<sup>24</sup>

The word “champion” dominated the thirty-three-by-forty-three-inch *Little Giant Still Life*, standing in red letters on a white background. A blue field surrounded the white, framed by a magenta swath. Playful yellow marks decorated the far left of the magenta frame. A green vertical bar rested just to the left of the champion’s “c,” balanced by a green “x” running through the word’s “n.” Three blue vertical lines cut through the “h,” “p,” and “o.” A rare appreciative visitor to the Virginia gallery, Mrs. J. B. Jackson, enjoyed the work’s “carnival spirit. It’s like the little shows that used to come up in the country on a hot summer day. I can feel the big banners, the balloons, the painted wagons, the bright poster colors and giant letters that built up each performance as the biggest and best.”<sup>25</sup>

Sweeney, in his explanation of his choice, again focused on the painting’s combination of the traditional and the innovative. He described *Little Giant Still Life* as “out of the folk vision of our contemporary industrialized world.” It was “puckish in the manner of Huck Finn; strident, yet soft; rough cast, but gentle; apparently casual, but pictorially subtle.” Sweeney also asserted that “it takes a poet of our industrial world to turn signboard material into a lyric.”<sup>26</sup>

But some patrons would not be so inspired. R. D. Lucas of Richmond was more than willing to bow to the experience of Sweeney and others, particularly on the matter of Davis’s *Little Giant Still Life*, but their validation did not help him make heads or tails of the work. “I know,” Lucas wrote, “that this is a most excellent example of art, because three New York experts have come right out and said so; but it’s one of those congenitally mute pictures that cannot speak for themselves. So its artistic value is as far out of reach as treasure at the bottom of the ocean.”<sup>27</sup> Lucas’s criticism, however, was mild compared to that of Ross Valentine.

The *Times-Dispatch* art critic reproduced a quote from London’s *Punch* magazine that suggested that modern artists striving for originality should “take a subject no more unusual than a beautiful woman and paint her as well as he knew how—a procedure which had commended itself to the most excellent masters.”<sup>28</sup> Valentine was convinced that something was wrong with Davis himself. “Having studied published reproductions of Mr. Davis’

earlier *pre-fauve*, intelligible paintings, I am convinced that (when he painted *those*) he knew what he was doing." Now, though, Davis was not only degenerate in form, but degenerate in morality. Valentine accused the painter of hiding the word "shit" upside down in the painting.<sup>29</sup> The accusation was unfounded, and his effort at deriding the work brought a strong defense from the editors of *Art Digest*. The magazine defended *Little Giant Still Life* as a worthy award-winner at the Virginia biennial but avoided specific evaluation of the painting in favor of denouncing its foremost detractor. According to the editors of *Art Digest*, Valentine, "an art critic of sorts," was not engaged in valid art criticism. Rather, he wrote "abusive riposte[s]" that passed for intelligent discourse. The issue included a painting by Davis on its cover.<sup>30</sup> Alfred H. Barr, Jr., director of museum collections for the Museum of Modern Art, also responded to Valentine's charge of the word "shit" being hidden in Davis's painting: "I suppose that we New Yorkers are not ordinarily considered to be innocents, yet neither Rene d'Harnoncourt, who has been involved in some debate with 'Ross Valentine,' nor James Johnson Sweeney, who selected the picture for the museum, nor the artist who painted the picture, nor the writer of this letter were able themselves to find any such word even after careful examination. 'Ross Valentine' must be gifted with a peculiarly prurient imagination."<sup>31</sup>

Rene d'Harnoncourt, director of New York's Museum of Modern Art, defended *Little Giant Still Life* as "distinguished" and described Valentine's assertions as "absurd and reprehensible."<sup>32</sup> D'Harnoncourt was decidedly correct in his assessment. Valentine's claim that Davis's work somehow challenged Valentine's own view of art was itself an argument for the painting's distinguished quality. He was fallaciously arguing that innovation had to conform to a fixed set of guidelines. As such, Valentine had backed the paradox of Hercules of Zeno, ever unable to move past the tortoise in front of him. Conformity precluded innovation. Far from silencing the issue, however, d'Harnoncourt only fired Valentine and his readership even further. "If I detest 'modern' art's vulgarities and distortions," wrote Valentine, "and resent their being compared favorably to the upward-strivings of creative genius like Michelangelo's, it is because I feel very strongly about what amounts to sacrilege by implication. As usual, I cannot help but consider Stuart Davis' 'Champion' as typical of such cynical daubs."<sup>33</sup> It was, for



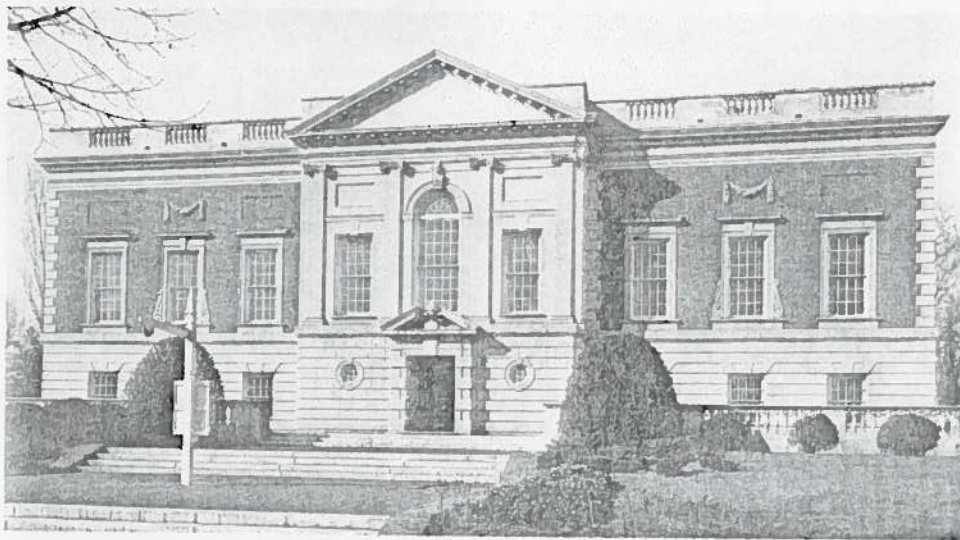


(Above): Stuart Davis's *Little Giant Still Life*, 1950, was the culmination of a series of studies of a Champion sparkplug box. It was also a culmination of Davis's steady artistic progression from the Ash Can influences of his youth to a greater level of abstraction. After the 1950 biennial, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts purchased the painting for its collection. (Right): Leslie Cheek (1908–1992) became director of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in 1948. He commissioned James Johnson Sweeney to curate the biennial and approved the museum's purchase of *Little Giant Still Life*. Cheek would serve as director until 1968, overseeing two decades of unprecedented growth, even through various aesthetic controversies. (Above: *Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. The John Barton Payne Fund*; right: *Photo Archives, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond*)





John Barton Payne (1855–1935) inaugurated the original catalog for what would become the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in 1919, when he donated his art collection to the state. The following year he became secretary of the interior, then chaired the American Red Cross beginning in 1921. The biennial's medals for artistic excellence were named in his honor. (*Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Reproduction no. LC-DIG-ggbain-36864*)



The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts opened in 1934 as the first state museum in the United States and Virginia's oldest state-owned art museum. Beginning in 1938, it began hosting a biennial exhibition designed to showcase the current state of painting. In 1950, more than 52,000 patrons entered its doors, drawn by the controversy raging in the local newspapers. (*Virginia Historical Society*)



Ben Shahn (1898–1969) was among the artists invited to present work in the 1950 biennial. A social realist, Shahn made his name in the 1930s with a series of paintings documenting the treason trials of Sacco and Vanzetti. Though his work had a decidedly left-wing bent, its lack of overt abstraction generally allowed Shahn to avoid the controversy generated by Bloom and Davis. (*Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Reproduction no. LC-USZ62-120969*)



Salvador Dalí (1904–1989) was a Spanish surrealist whose bizarre and often inscrutable imagery would seem to make him susceptible to Virginia criticism. But by the time of his inclusion in the 1950 biennial, Dalí's showmanship and self-publicity had made him famous. His reputation allowed him to avoid the sustained ire of Ross Valentine and his readers. (*Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Reproduction no. LC-USZ62-116608*)



Henri Matisse (1869–1954), the famed French fauvist, was cited by Ross Valentine as an example of the inscrutability of modern art. In Los Angeles, customs officials mistook a Matisse for packing material. Valentine compared his work to that of a child, arguing that any emotional evocation by painters must come with a certain modicum of artistic skill. (*Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Reproduction no. LC-USZ62-103699*)

George Gray Barnard's *The Birth* was exhibited at New York's 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art, known as the Armory Show. The exhibition was America's introduction to modern, abstract art and fundamentally altered the evolution of American painting. One of the thousands of attendees was Stuart Davis, who built from that influence and ultimately created *Little Giant Still Life*. (*Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Reproduction no. LC-USZ62-93410*)





Valentine's adherents, a "piece of glorified sign painting" and a "contaminated altar of the vulgar."<sup>34</sup>

Adding fuel to the interpretive fire, on 24 May 1950, the accessions committee of the VMFA announced its intention to purchase *Little Giant Still Life* at a price of \$2,000 (the actual cost was \$3,400). Funds for the purchase would come from an endowment established by the estate of John Barton Payne, who had died in 1935. The endowment was intended for the museum to use to acquire additional works based on Payne's original collection. Though many of the Richmond letter-writers railed against the purchase and the show as products of state action, the Payne endowment included no state money. The VMFA, in fact, did not (and does not) use government funding for art acquisitions. But the controversy had been raging over the painting for weeks, and the decision to purchase it by Leslie Cheek—himself a southerner from Nashville—and the accessions committee, most of whom were Virginians, took a tremendous amount of courage. Stuart Davis declared that the work was his best to date.<sup>35</sup>

Ross Valentine disagreed. He created a story based on the Sherlock Holmes mysteries of Arthur Conan Doyle. The beleaguered Holmes, in Valentine's tale, was charged with the duty of discovering just what Davis's *Little Giant Still Life* was. "Tell me what it means, Mr. Holmes!" demanded his employer. "It must mean something, else they wouldn't have bought it, would they? Or can this be a conspiracy against the sanity of the people of Virginia." Finally, though, Holmes had his answer. It was all too obvious. "Don't you see?" he asked his audience. "'The breakfast of champions! It is, my dear sir—a sign advertising *Wheaties!*'"<sup>36</sup>

As the controversy raged in Virginia, museums to the north banded together to endorse the modern art project and to defend freedom of expression. New York's Museum of Modern Art and Whitney Museum joined with Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art to offer a response. René d'Harnoncourt, the Museum of Modern Art's director, was the lead signatory.<sup>37</sup> "We believe that the so-called 'unintelligibility' of some modern art is an inevitable result of its exploration of new frontiers. Like the scientist's innovations, the procedures of the artist are often not readily understood and make him an easy target for reactionary attack." The group rejected the idea that art deviating from any preconceived norm was somehow un-American.

Their goal was to protect innovation from unfounded and often careless attacks.<sup>38</sup>

Two years later, the VMFA loaned *Little Giant Still Life* to the Venice International Exhibition of Contemporary Paintings, sparking Ross Valentine and his acolytes to revive their criticism. His northern counterparts, though, also had more to say. In his 1952 rebuttal of Valentine, d'Harnoncourt argued that "people who cannot see the difference between good and bad modern art and who deny that modern masterpieces have any merit, are unconsciously admitting to a lack of aesthetic sensitivity which is needed for the full appreciation of both modern art and the art of the old masters." He noted that Valentine seemed preternaturally opposed to the modern era itself. "He calls it a half century of fiscal alcoholism and confusion and accuses it of having brought us such heterogeneous evils as 'the spectacle of a mock United Nations,' Adolf Hitler, and perverted 'demonic ingenuity' used for destructive purposes."<sup>39</sup>

Valentine responded to d'Harnoncourt by calling on religion. "As in science," he wrote, "the upward-striving instinct of man demands that art, also, be not exempt from 'moral obligation' in the pursuit of achievements that, to use an old-fashioned phrase, should be 'pleasing in the sight of God.'" Valentine explained that the best art drew inspiration from God's work, and that of all the arts, modernist painting fell farthest from that ideal. Ergo, it could not be good.<sup>40</sup>

It was Valentine's readers, however, who produced the most telling criticism of the show. For those who wrote letters to editors of the local newspapers, this was an unwelcome imposition on local values brought by elitist New Yorkers who thought they knew best—an imposition very familiar to a Jim Crow society fighting a growing tide of civil rights agitation. This was not a society that accepted radical change without a fight.

They fought their art battles in much the same way that they would fight their segregation battles. George E. Barksdale, for example, did not like the painting, but his criticism, tellingly, went toward the government. "That a museum supported by a State should be used apparently as an agency of the galleries in New York . . . is just past belief!" This was not just the fault of irresponsible or degenerate artists. And it was not just Sweeney's poor selection. Agents of the museum were agents of Virginia, and they had allowed

and encouraged New York galleries to dictate what counted as legitimate art.<sup>41</sup>

This emphasis on the need for southernness as an arbiter of art legitimacy was not new. Richmonders had made the argument before. In 1937, the Treasury Section of Painting and Sculpture, a New Deal public art program, hired Paul Cadmus and Jared French to paint a mural for the Richmond Parcel Post Building. Cadmus chose a scene depicting Pocahontas saving John Smith, while French covered the Civil War subject of Jeb Stuart's ride around the Union Army. Both murals included—at different stages of their development—depictions of nude males, and Cadmus's nudity lasted until after the installation. But southerners had no real problem with "savages" being depicted savagely. Instead they turned their attention to French, who seemed to insult southern sensibility by depicting Confederate soldiers in a less-than-heroic style. Richmonders fumed. The United Daughters of the Confederacy pronounced the mural an insult. The southern soldiers, they argued, looked like Yankees. "I think," said B. A. Blenner, UDC president, "that the Confederate period should not be depicted unless the pictures are painted by Southern artists who know the spirit and traditions of the South."<sup>42</sup>

But the anger of Richmonders was not just directed at northerners. Local portraitist Hugo Stevens expressed similar dismay at the "chamber of horrors (miscalled 'American Painting, 1950') in a decidedly political critique of the event. He described the "wails of anguish coming from the apologists of this cult of the ugly, who must sense that their days are numbered and that the long-suffering Joe Doakes, who pays the taxes, is getting good and mad at supporting such trash. In time it will come out that the whole field of modern art is rotten with parlor pinks and Reds."<sup>43</sup>

The communist talk proved popular. Again, much as civil rights organizations would find themselves singled out by threatened southerners as possible harbingers of communist infiltration, so too would artistic innovators. "Elevating a befuddled modernism," wrote Frederick William Sievers, a Richmond sculptor of notable Confederate statues, "is not unlike the vacuous boast that communism is the only form of pure democracy. Some sort of hypnosis seems to overwhelm the converts of each."<sup>44</sup> Virginia Parsons of New Rochelle, New York, understood the Virginians' disgust and wrote a

letter of encouragement to the *Times-Dispatch*. "If only the financial supporters of this museum could realize the irreparable damage they are doing to American culture!" An anonymous Roanoke resident worried that "this wretched evil of modern art is one of the most fearful influences we have to put up with in America."<sup>45</sup>

Of course, the similarity in the messages of the angry art patrons of 1950 and those of angry segregationists of the later years of the decade does not necessarily indicate that those of the former were portents of the latter. They were symptoms, not warnings. Those disappointed in the linguistic turn of Stuart Davis's *Little Giant* or the serrated buttocks of Hyman Bloom's *Female Corpse* were not necessarily racists. They were not hardening attitudes that would reemerge through the decade to stifle civil rights agitation. Rather, they were demonstrating an attitude that was already hardened—that had been there since the arrival of the Union Army and would last through the arrival of Martin Luther King, Jr. The threatening similarity of the exhibition and desegregation was change. And white southerners responded in similar ways to that threat, despite its different forms.<sup>46</sup>

Mrs. Ora Rupprecht of Baltimore also felt threatened by the exhibition. "People who appreciate truth and beauty have always found them in nature, religion, art and music. In these unsettled times they look to them for a balm to the spirit and for inspiration to help promote a more settled and reasonable world. How can people find courage, cultural beauty, or anything but confusion in the modern pictures?" If the project of modern art distracted viewers from truth and beauty and inspiration, then it was more trouble than it was worth. Rupprecht continued, "They are taking advantage of the gullibility, acceptance and encouragement of a fad by that portion of the public always ready to follow a new idea, without ever looking for merit in the idea."<sup>47</sup>

Those who did find merit in the modernist project were far fewer in number and usually defended it in guarded prose. "How else except by looking at new art can people judge its worth for themselves instead of accepting judgments passed on to them by others?" asked Raymond B. Pinchbeck, dean of Richmond College. Pinchbeck called on "free speech," announcing that though he personally found the show repugnant, he respected the artists' right to create and display their works. Letter-writer Louis W. Ballou



of Richmond defended the show, reminding his fellow patrons that both painting and taste were the product of personal choice. "Sometimes [painting] is not easily understood because of lack of education, proper training or through pure prejudice." But it was William Bevilaqua of Richmond who defended the show most scathingly. He satirically argued that blood tests and written exams should be required of artists before they were allowed to exhibit their art. Perhaps a poll of what people want to see should be taken. Then artists could cater more specifically to individual audiences. "And as for those who refuse to conform," he wrote, "why, lynch them!"<sup>48</sup>

But the would-be art lynchers were not to be outdone. An editorial in the *Richmond News Leader* again took up Ross Valentine's cause in 1952. It described the story of customs officials in Los Angeles, who mistook a Matisse for packing material. An art dealer had to explain their mistake. The *News Leader* clearly sided with the customs officials. "Art, in our humble, browbeaten notion, ought to be some manifestation of beauty." The newspaper argued that art did well to evoke emotion but that the emotion had to be something more than "the irritable thought that junior could do better."<sup>49</sup> The editor established a double standard. Art must evoke emotion, but it must be a recognizable, approved emotion that is not threatening to the audience. Again, this insistence on recognizability as a prerequisite for acceptance, on the synonymous equation of foreignness and threat, appears in Virginia history—and white southern history—from the Civil War to the civil rights movement, in venues far afield of the museum floor.

Of course, this phenomenon was not limited to southerners. Historian Michael Kammen has noted that the bulk of negative reactions to modernism in the first half of the 1950s "equated modernism with disorder, a source of uncertainty and hence bewilderment." The most famous example of this came at the 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art—the notorious Armory Show—where modern European art made its American debut. Some who found the work baffling or distasteful interpreted it as a threat, an unwelcome European invasion that had missed the artistic point at best and presented innocent Americans with obscenity at worst.<sup>50</sup> Like the Richmond show, it was a foreign imposition, and that foreignness helped define the critique.

In Virginia, Yankees were the foreigners. Letter-writer Hugo Stevens, for example, told a similar tale to that of the Matisse mistake, emphasizing the gullibility of northern muckety-mucks. "A friend of ours (who wanted to show them up, by the way) won a second prize at the Detroit Museum with an old blotter from his office desk, framed and called 'The Lancers!' And the joke was on the modern experts, who raved about it, using fancy words like 'nuances.'" <sup>51</sup> Ross Valentine chimed in on this count, as well. "Swami Sweeney," he noted in 1952, "is a Brooklynite." <sup>52</sup>

But it was not just the Brooklynites. For all of Richmonders' outrage at the 1950 biennial, another segment of the Virginia population had consistently worked to bring to the state innovative new art by white and black painters. The same accessions committee that purchased *Little Giant Still Life* had already purchased works by African American artists Leslie Garland Bolling, Jacob Lawrence, and George H. Benjamin Johnson. The year following the biennial, the committee approved the purchase of a Benjamin Wigfall painting. Members of the committee had a far broader art education than most, but they, like those who wrote letters to the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* and *Richmond News Leader*, were southerners—were Virginians. Their work to enrich a public museum, particularly one that the public did not want "enriched," demonstrated that an anti-progressive attitude was not entirely uniform. <sup>53</sup>

The year before the 1950 biennial, Leslie Cheek had riled the public by bringing an exhibition of Alexander Calder's mobiles to the museum. The Richmond population was baffled, and Ross Valentine was angry. The idea of such "aberrations" having a place of honor in the museum "causes me to react like a cayuse to the prick of a burr on a saddle sore." He decried "the *deliberate* return to the primitive" as "a revolt against the mental discipline required to interpret an increasingly complex civilization." <sup>54</sup>

But Cheek had also been responsible for *Healy's Sitters: or, A Portrait Panorama of the Victorian Age*, which ran just before the American Painting biennial. The exhibition was a catalog of the nineteenth-century portraits by George Healy, "America's first international portraitist." The subjects included a variety of American statesmen and many Civil War generals. Also in the *Healy's Sitters* exhibition was a canvas titled *The Peacemakers*, which portrayed U. S. Grant, William T. Sherman, Abraham Lincoln, and Admiral

David Dixon Porter seated aboard the steamer *River Queen* at City Point. Portraits of Confederates Robert E. Lee and P. G. T. Beauregard also took places of honor. "General Lee is in a dominating position," noted the *New York Times*, "but Northern and Southern heroes are not segregated in the display."<sup>55</sup> It was this that Virginia museum patrons found appealing. Civil War portraits had the bravery, grandeur, and realism that proper art required. And they were, above all, familiar.

Leslie Cheek also oversaw acquisitions of paintings by Titian and Tintoretto, Rembrandt and Rubens, and the George Washington portraits by Julius Brutus Stearns. Cheek successfully fought for a \$1 million appropriation to build two new wings for the museum. (Valentine, however, was quick to point out that the appropriation was one million dollars of taxpayer money, and that if taxpayers were doling out to support a "fine" arts museum, the displays should categorically be "fine.") In 1950, the museum's endowment never reached \$250,000. Under Cheek's leadership, its endowment topped \$4 million by 1955.<sup>56</sup>

There was never any poll of the Richmond population as to whether or not a majority was for or against modern art, but many of the letters to the editors of Richmond newspapers were clearly against. Local letter-writer Florence Dickinson Stearns argued that she knew many opposed the biennial, but the fear of being thought classless or uneducated kept them from engaging in some form of protest.<sup>57</sup> That fear, however, did not keep them away from the museum itself. "Visitors to the museum," reported the *Times-Dispatch*, "invariably ask, in the manner of who-dunit detectives, 'Where's the corpse?'" Their anger led to curiosity. During the 1949–50 fiscal year, 203,236 people participated statewide in one or another museum activity; 52,258 visited the VMFA itself. More and more people were angry, but more and more people were paying attention. Even Ross Valentine was pleased about the attendance. Not only had the furor sparked an interest in art, but it also "has given some of us something to talk about besides atom bombs, hidden treason, deficit embezzlement and other historical obscenities in an age that has, I am afraid, become hardened to obscenities."<sup>58</sup>

Like the Confederates of Healy's portraits and segregationists on the civil rights barricades, however, Valentine's protests during the art controversy would eventually fall to the "obscenities" they tried to destroy. Angry

Virginians of 1950 would shudder to know that today the museum not only retains Stuart Davis's *Little Giant*, but it also owns works by such modern artists as Franz Kline, George Segal, Andy Warhol, and Jasper Johns.<sup>59</sup>

They still shudder. A 1999 canal walk mural project that featured Robert E. Lee and other famous Virginians sparked outrage from Richmond's black community. In 2003, a new statue of Abraham Lincoln at Richmond's Tredegar Iron Works elicited similar anger from the Sons of Confederate Veterans. But these later controversies concerned the racial politics left by the legacy of the civil rights movement. They were not, like Richmond's 1950 controversy, about a perceived imposition from a threatening outsider. They were not even about art. Neither the mural nor the statue came under scrutiny for miscasting or distorting an otherwise beautiful image. Instead, art became a battleground for policy disputes within the Richmond community.<sup>60</sup>

In 1950 art itself was the dispute. Modern art was at best a sacrilegious mistake, at worst a Trojan horse carrying with it the New York intellectual establishment. But despite the various controversies that still occasionally appear, twenty-first-century Virginians have largely divested themselves of those mid-twentieth-century fears. As eventual familiarity helped ease the process of white Virginia's reintegration into the Union, and as eventual familiarity helped ease the process of black Virginia's integration into public schools, eventual familiarity demonstrated its power to tame the profane images of 1950. When they became familiar, they ceased to be threats.



## NOTES

1. Aline B. Louchheim, "One Man Picks and Defends Biennial," *New York Times*, 30 Apr. 1950, II, p. 8.
2. Though Kammen's *Visual Shock* does not discuss the 1950 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Biennial, it references many other art exhibitions in a near-exhaustive analysis of America's relationship with its art. Kammen interprets art controversies as signposts of broader social and cul-



tural shifts that fundamentally change American expectations about what art should be. They are, therefore, avenues through which to engage cycles of social turmoil (Michael Kammen, *Visual Shock: A History of Art Controversies in American Culture* [New York, 2006], pp. xi–xii, 351–57).

3. Anne B. Barriault, *Selections: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts* (Richmond, 1997), pp. vii–viii; and Louis D. Rubin, Jr., “Art Row In Virginia,” *Baltimore Evening Sun*, curatorial administration, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond (hereafter VMFA). The VMFA was Virginia’s oldest state-owned art museum.

4. Cheek came to the VMFA in 1948 from the Baltimore Museum of Fine Arts. He had also served as associate editor of *The Architectural Forum*, as a faculty member of the history department at the College of William and Mary, and as founder of that university’s department of fine arts. *New York Times*, 30 Apr. 1950, II, p. 8; Rubin, “Art Row In Virginia”; Elizabeth L. O’Leary, associate curator of American art, VMFA, email correspondence, in possession of the author; Liza Kirwin, “Regional Reports: Southeast,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 33 (1993): 34–35; and *American Painting, 1950* (Richmond, 1950). The exhibition catalog does not include page numbers, so none are included in these notes. For a thorough biography of Leslie Cheek and his myriad exploits with the VMFA, see Parke Rouse, Jr., *Living by Design: Leslie Cheek and the Arts* (Williamsburg, 1985).

5. *American Painting, 1950*. For a selection of Sweeney’s work published before 1950, see James Johnson Sweeney, *Henry Moore* (New York, 1947); *Joan Miro* (New York, 1941); *Marc Chagall* (New York, 1946); and *Stuart Davis* (New York, 1945).

6. *American Painting, 1950*.

7. W. C. Smith, “The Graphic Garbage That Passes as Modern Art,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 6 May 1950, p. 6.

8. The total black population of greater metropolitan Richmond was 87,087, or 26.5 percent. All tabulations made by the author based on census data. “Table 12—Summary of Population Characteristics, for Counties and Independent Cities,” *Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population*, pt. 46, *Virginia* (Washington, D.C., 1952), pp. 46–30; and “Table 34—General Characteristics of the Population, for Standard Metropolitan Areas, Urbanized Areas, and Urban Places of 10,000 or More: 1950,” *Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population*, pt. 46, *Virginia* (Washington, D.C., 1952), pp. 46–54.

9. The median income of families and individuals was \$2,555. When families were considered by themselves, the number rose to \$3,283. “Table 37—Income in 1949 of Families and Unrelated Individuals, For Standard Metropolitan Areas, Urbanized Areas, and Urban Places of 10,000 or More: 1950,” *Census of Population: 1950*, Vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population*, pt. 46, *Virginia* (Washington, D.C., 1952), pp. 46–62. With that money, the average total retail sales per Richmond household was \$2,127 (*Richmond Times-Dispatch* and *Richmond News Leader*, *The New Dominion* [Richmond, 1942], p. 24).

10. Of the total number of people, 60,980 men had less than four years of high school (64.2 percent); 65,125 women had less than four years (60.7 percent). Of 202,365 adults over the age of twenty-five, 126,105 had less than four years of high school. All tabulations made by the author based on census data. “Table 34—General Characteristics of the Population, for Standard Metropolitan Areas, Urbanized Areas, and Urban Places of 10,000 or More: 1950,” pp. 46–54.

11. James Jackson Kilpatrick, *The Southern Case for School Segregation* (Richmond, 1962), pp. 7–8.
12. *American Painting*, 1950.
13. Hilton Kramer, "Bloom and Levine: The Hazards of Modern Painting: Two Jewish Artists from Boston," *Commentary* 19 (1955): 583, 586–87 and Dorothy C. Miller, ed., *Americans, 1942: 18 Artists from 9 States* (New York, 1942), p. 18.
14. Quoted in Isabelle Dervaux, "Color and Ecstasy in the Art of Hyman Bloom," in *Color and Ecstasy: The Art of Hyman Bloom*, ed. Isabelle Dervaux (New York, 2002), p. 21. Interestingly, in the sentence just before his statement about transformation, Bloom, seemingly contradictorily, stated, "The bodies are emblems in which the process of decay symbolizes the corruption of society and of the human spirit." Dorothy Abbott Thompson, however, does not read contradiction. She argues instead that Bloom saw the meaning of his pictures "on many levels" (Dorothy Abbott Thompson, *The Spirits of Hyman Bloom: The Sources of His Imagery* [New York, 1996], p. 35).
15. Dervaux, "Color and Ecstasy in the Art of Hyman Bloom," pp. 18–19 and Thompson, *The Spirits of Hyman Bloom: The Sources of His Imagery*, pp. 35–36.
16. John Updike, "Hyman Bloom," in *Color and Ecstasy*, ed. Dervaux, p. 11 and *Americans, 1942*, p. 18. For more on Bloom, see Linda Conti, ed., *Hyman Bloom: Paintings and Drawings* (Durham, N.H., 1992).
17. Ross Valentine, "'Modern Art' on Its Last Legs," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 30 Apr. 1950, p. 2-D. Bloom did have one documented supporter among the visitors to the museum. A Mrs. Flave Tyson told the *Richmond News Leader* that she disapproved of modern art but strikingly found *Female Corpse, Back View* the most successful of the collection. "I can understand," she said, "how an artist haunted by such an image would have to put it on canvas for release." "Modern Art Stirs Controversy at Virginia Museum," *Richmond News Leader*, 3 May 1950, curatorial administration, VMFA.
18. Whether or not the error was intentional, when mentioning Bloom's work by its full name, Valentine referred to the painting as *Female Corpse, Rear View* (instead of *Back View*). Valentine, "'Modern Art' on Its Last Legs," VMFA. After *Female Corpse, Back View* finished receiving its lashings in Virginia, the painting traveled to a summer exhibition of postwar paintings at the University of Michigan, where it was received with far greater sympathy. Frederick S. Wight, *Hyman Bloom* (Boston, 1954), p. 12. Bloom's *Female Corpse, Back View* is currently in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
19. "Museum to List Winning Art in Exhibition," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 4 May 1950, p. 2 and "Sweeney Picks Payne Medal Winners," *ibid.*, 6 May 1950, p. 2.
20. "Sweeney Picks Payne Medal Winners" (first quotation) and "Sweeney Tells of Paintings at Museum" (second quotation), both in *Richmond News Leader*, 6 May 1950, curatorial administration, VMFA, p. 5.
21. "Sweeney Tells of Paintings at Museum" and "Sweeney Picks Payne Medal Winners."
22. H. H. Arnason, "Introduction," in *Stuart Davis Memorial Exhibition, 1894–1964* (Washington, D.C., 1965), p. 34; Patricia Hills, *Stuart Davis* (New York, 1996), p. 128; and "Stuart Davis to Alfred Barr," 3 Nov. 1952, in Diane Kelder, ed., *Stuart Davis: A Documentary*

*Monograph* (New York, 1971), p. 100.

23. Stuart Davis, "Visa (1952)," in *Stuart Davis*, ed. Kelder, p. 100.
24. "Sweeney Tells of Paintings at Museum" and "Painting in Sweeney Collection Bought by Virginia Art Museum," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 24 May 1950, p. 7.
25. "Modern Art Stirs Controversy at Virginia Museum."
26. "Sweeney Picks Payne Medal Winners"; "Sweeney Tells of Paintings at Museum"; and "Donald Burgess Shows Drawings," *New York Times*, 6 May 1950, p. 13.
27. R. D. Lucas, "Sure, It May Be Art, But—What Does It Mean? He Asks," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 12 Mar. 1952, p. 14.
28. Valentine, "'Modern Art' on Its Last Legs."
29. The italics are Valentine's. "Well, They Asked for It," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 21 Mar. 1952, p. 14.
30. "Editorial," *Art Digest*, 15 Mar. 1952, pp. 3, 5. The cover art was *Owh! In San Pao*. The editorial was the first substantive writing in the issue.
31. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., "Fails to Find the World in 'Champion' Painting," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 21 Mar. 1952, p. 14.
32. Rene d'Harnoncourt, "What d'Harnoncourt Thinks of 'Little Giant Still Life,'" *ibid.*, 9 Mar. 1952, p. 5B.
33. Ross Valentine, "A Question for Mr. d'Harnoncourt," *ibid.*, 21 Feb. 1952, p. 16.
34. Florence Dickinson Stearns, "Sees Nothing 'Distinguished' About 'Champion' Painting," *ibid.*, 13 Mar. 1952, p. 17 and F. William Sievers, "Ross Valentine's 'Service' in Attacking Modern Art," *ibid.*, 2 Mar. 1952, p. 2B.
35. "Museum to List Winning Art In Exhibition"; "Painting in Sweeney Collection Bought by Virginia Art Museum"; Parke Rouse, Jr., *Living by Design*, p. 109; and Elizabeth L. O'Leary, email correspondence.
36. Ross Valentine, "The Case of the Little Giant," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 28 May 1950, p. 2D.
37. Other signatories were Alfred H. Barr, director of museum collections, and Andrew C. Ritchie, director of painting and sculpture, both of the Museum of Art Modern; Hermon More and Lloyd Goodrich, director and associate director of the Whitney; and James S. Plaut and Frederick S. Wight, director and education director of the Boston Institute (*New York Times*, 28 Mar. 1950, pp. 20, 33, 35).
38. *Ibid.*
39. Ross Valentine, "There Are Honest Modern Artists," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, curatorial administration, VMFA and Rene d'Harnoncourt, "'Unpulverized' d'Harnoncourt Answers Critic," *ibid.*, 20 Feb. 1952, p. 14.
40. Valentine, "A Question for Mr. d'Harnoncourt." At the same time, on 9 April, someone pulled a Degas brush drawing, *The Mounted Jockey*, from the wall of the museum, took it into the bathroom, removed it from its frame, and took the \$3,500 painting from the museum. *New York*



*Times*, 10 Apr. 1952, p. 31.

41. George E. Barksdale, "'Disgusting' Exhibition," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 6 May 1950, p. 6. This skepticism and disappointment with the government was and would continue to be a hallmark of segregationist thought. "That is the way the anti-Christ seeks to displace Christ," argued T. Robert Ingram in a 1962 editorial, "by promising and working for one world government under man." Segregationists placed the onus of coercion on government intervention and claimed that the different races simply belonged apart. Outside agitators and governmental officials were impinging on personal freedom. "In the final analysis," wrote William Workman, in his 1960 *The Case for the South*, "the burden of performance rests upon the individual, and his prospects for success vary in direct ratio to his ability, his ambition, his industry, and his determination to overcome obstacles." When the government got in the way, individuals suffered, whether that interference was in civil rights legislation or art hanging in the public museum. Homer H. Hyde, "By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them," *American Mercury* 94 (1962): 22; T. Robert Ingram, "Why Integration Is Un-Christian!" *The Citizen* 6 (1962): 9 (quotation); I. A. Newby, "Introduction," in *The Development of Segregationist Thought*, ed. I. A. Newby (Homewood, Ill., 1968), p. 16; David L. Chappell, "The Divided Mind of the Southern Segregationists," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 82 (1998): 50; and William D. Workman, Jr., *The Case for the South* (New York, 1960), p. 158. For an in-depth treatment of white Virginia's full relationship with Jim Crow, from its nineteenth-century birth until its post-civil rights death, see J. Douglas Smith, *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 2002).

42. Karal Ann Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post-Office Murals in the Great Depression* (Minneapolis, 1982), pp. 282–89. Quotation from the *Richmond News Leader*, 31 Oct. 1939, quoted in Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America*, p. 288.

43. Hugo Stevens, "When Will This 'Travesty On Art' End? He Asks," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 7 May 1950, p. 3D.

44. Sievers was a Richmond sculptor who made his reputation crafting the Virginia Confederate monuments at Gettysburg and Vicksburg. His reaction, like that of Stevens, is understandable. Not only were these artists responding to an aesthetic with which they disagreed, but they were also arguing for their professional lives. Our art, they seemed to be saying, was still viable. Dorothy B. Gilbert, ed., *Who's Who in American Art* (New York, 1953), p. 388 and F. William Sievers, "Ross Valentine's 'Service' In Attacking Modern Art," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 2 Mar. 1952, 2B.

45. This resort to communist name-calling would continue to be familiar. Segregationists deemed attempts at achieving social change as "radical" and radicalism as fundamentally communistic—just as disgruntled southern museum visitors similarly deemed attempts at artistic change. Many found the communist epithet a useful arguing tool. That said, such charges were not solely a southern phenomenon. Communism was more than just a foil for southern anger. Michael Kammen notes that the potential threat from modern art had been equated with the potential threat from Bolshevism, ever since the post-World War I red scare (Sievers, "Ross Valentine's 'Service' In Attacking Modern Art"; Virginia Parsons, "'Super Doodling' and 'Shrieking Distortions,'" *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 11 May 1950, p. 18; Rubin, "Art Row In Virginia"; and Kammen, *Visual Shock*, pp. 91–93, 103–4).

46. Stanley Cohen has described similar moments as "moral panics," when a society that sees itself in crisis mitigates impending disaster by defining itself against a supposed evil. It is a beast partic-



ularly fed by the nation's newspapers and other media outlets, who sell copies with lurid headlines while damning the intrusion from the editorial page. Of course, these "moral panics" have run far afield of art, and newspaper participation in the proliferation of such events dates at the very least to the 1880s and the birth of yellow journalism (Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and the Rockers*, 3d ed. [New York, 2002], pp. 1–3).

47. Ora Rupprecht, "Hopes Modern Art Soon Will Come to a 'Dead End,'" *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 7 May 1950, p. 3D.

48. "Modern Art Stirs Controversy at Virginia Museum"; Louis W. Ballou, "View Art With 'Open Mind' and 'Thirst for Knowledge,'" *Richmond News Leader*, 6 May 1950, p. 6; and William Bevilacqua, "Tongue-In-Cheek Proposal For Blood Tests for Artists," *Richmond News Leader*, 11 May 1950, p. 18.

49. "But Is It Art?" *Richmond News Leader*, 20 May 1952, curatorial administration, VMFA.

50. Aside from New York—host of the Armory Show—Kammen mentions Hartford, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and other northern venues as places that made a slow and difficult transition to accepting modern art (Kammen, *Visual Shock*, pp. 88, 90, 93–95, 102).

51. Stevens, "When Will This 'Travesty On Art' End? He Asks."

52. Valentine, "There Are Honest Modern Artists."

53. Elizabeth L. O'Leary, email correspondence.

54. The italics are Valentine's. In 1951, Cheek would sign, along with his fellow trustees of the American Federation of Arts, a petition in defense of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *American Sculpture—1951* exhibition (Rubin, "Art Row in Virginia" and "American Sculpture 1951," *College Art Journal* 11 [1952]: 287–88).

55. *A Souvenir of the Exhibition Entitled Healy's Sitters: or, A Portrait Panorama of the Victorian Age* (Richmond, 1950), pp. 5, 68–70, 76; *New York Times*, 25 Jan. 1950, p. 25; and "Antiquarian Society to Meet," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 19 Feb. 1952, p. 16. The exhibition ran from 24 January to 5 March, 1950. During the revived feud in 1952, the VMFA held an exhibition titled *Furniture of the Old South, 1640–1820*.

56. In 1953, Cheek designed Richmond's Artmobile, "a mobile exhibition gallery developed by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts as the most recent feature in its state-wide educational program." Cheek retired from the museum in 1968. Rubin, "Art Row In Virginia"; Valentine, "'Modern Art' on Its Last Legs"; Muriel B. Christison, "The Artmobile: A New Experiment in Education," *College Art Journal* 13 (1954): 295; Rouse, *Living by Design*, pp. 107, 167–69; and David S. Hudson, "The Virginia Museum Artmobiles," *Art Journal* 25 (1966): 258.

57. Stearnes, "Sees Nothing 'Distinguished' About 'Champion' Painting."

58. Rubin, "Art Row In Virginia"; "Sweeney Tells of Paintings at Museum"; and Valentine, "'Modern Art' on Its Last Legs."

59. Barriault, *Selections: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*, pp. 93, 110–12, 115–16.

60. Kammen, *Visual Shock*, pp. 147–48, 45–46.

