

Stuart Davis (1892–1964)

by Lisa Bush Hankin

A leading member of the first generation of artists who put a distinctly American spin on the modernist ideas then percolating in Europe, Stuart Davis is celebrated for his lively and colorful canvases that incorporate imagery from the American popular culture of his day. Davis is seen as a seminal figure in early modernism, and his works are highly sought after by both museums and collectors. As a result, his major paintings do not appear on the market very frequently, and — as back-to-back multimillion dollar sales at Sotheby's and Christie's in the fall of 2005 demonstrate — they bring considerable sums when they do.¹ Davis' prices have climbed steadily over the past twenty years,

with a current record auction price of four and a half million dollars (Fig. 1).

Born in Philadelphia, Davis was the son of professional artists (a sculptor and the art director for the *Philadelphia Press*), who relocated to northern New Jersey, outside New York City, when Davis was nine. Davis benefited early in his career from the guidance of

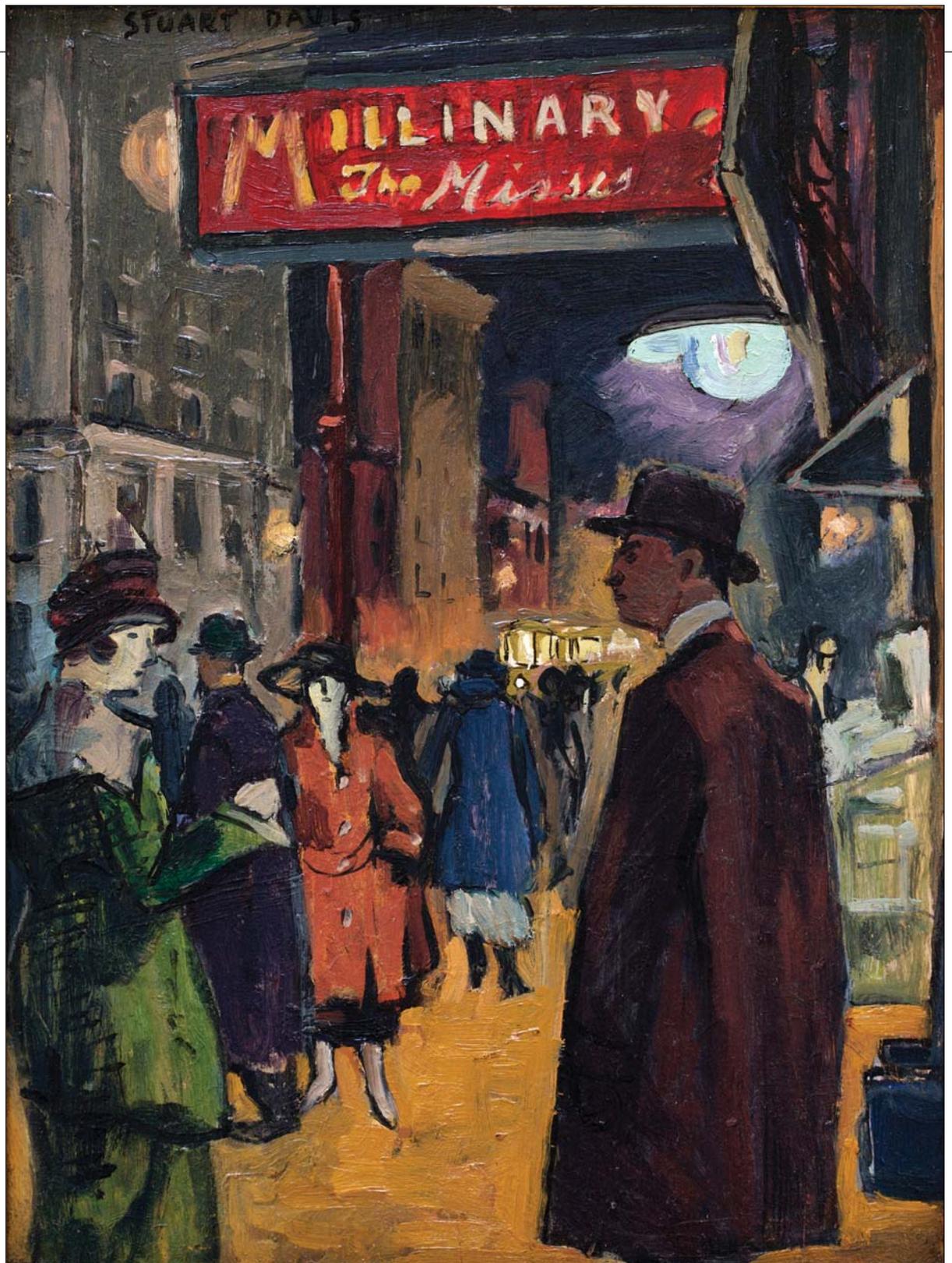
family friends Robert Henri (1865–1929) and John Sloan (1871–1951), whose early artistic support enabled the young man to participate in prominent exhibitions including the groundbreaking 1913 Armory Show, an event that profoundly affected the direction his art would take. Though Davis' early works reflect the influence of the Ashcan school (Fig. 2), he soon chose to depart from representing his subjects in an illusionistic manner, dispensing with 3-dimensional form in favor of using line, color, and pattern to capture the energy

Stuart Davis Record Prices for Work at Auction	
Present	\$4,500,000
2005	\$2,400,000
2000	\$2,400,000
1995	\$880,000
1990	\$880,000

Source: AskArt.com

Fig. 1:
Rue de l'Echaude, 1928.
Oil and sand on canvas,
23¾ x 36¼ inches.
Courtesy of Sotheby's, New York.

Fig. 2:
*Market and Broad
Street, Newark,
New Jersey, 1917.*
Oil on panel,
16 x 12 inches
Courtesy Brock &
Company, Carlisle, Ma.



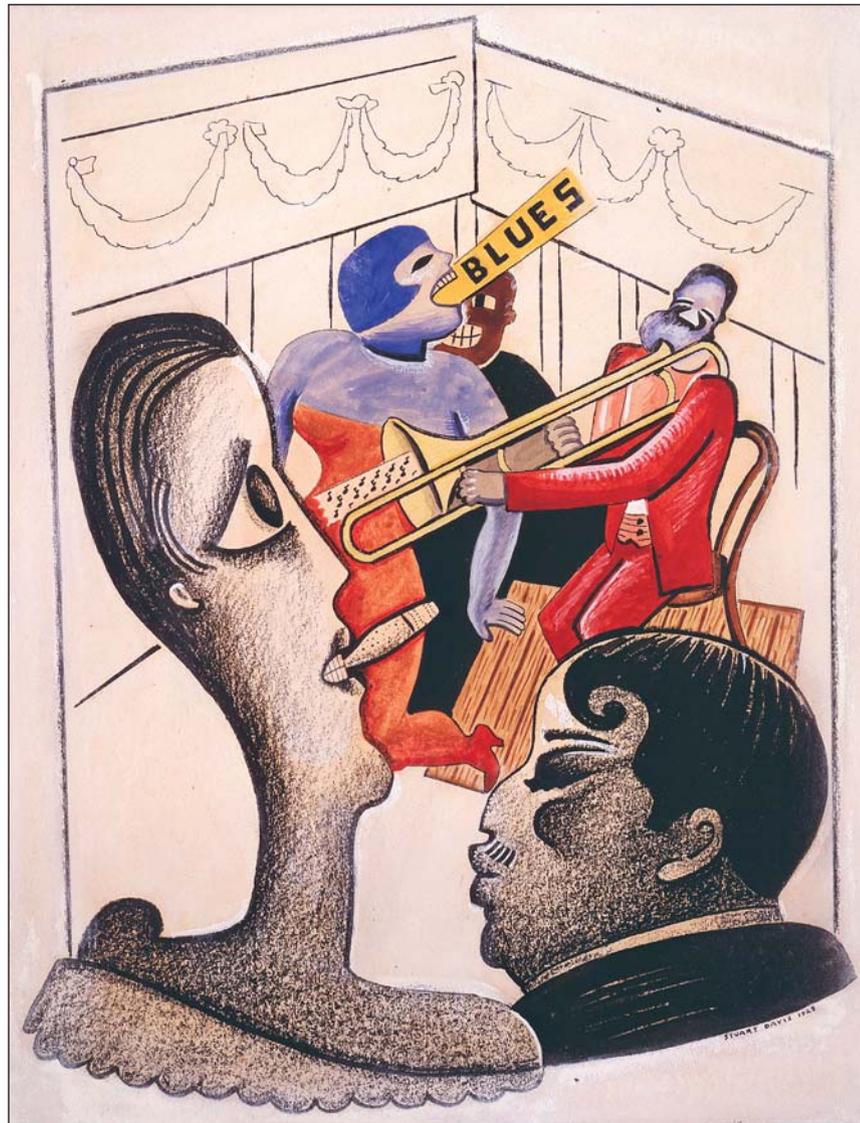
and variety of contemporary American life (Figs. 3–5). While Davis' crisp cutout-like forms owe much to the influence of French master Henri Matisse, his enthusiastic embrace of the signs, symbols and feel of America's burgeoning commercial culture were distinctively his own.

Davis drew his inspiration from the

everyday world around him, integrating elements of still life, figuration, and landscape in his trademark brand of abstracted realism. Often incorporating scenery from in and around Gloucester, Massachusetts (where he spent many summers), New York, and Paris, Davis' work was also informed by music (particularly jazz), advertising,

roadside architecture, car culture, and consumer packaging, to name but a few of the many influences that contribute to the vitality of his work.

Happily for collectors, Davis enjoyed a long and productive career (Fig. 4), creating prints, drawings, and watercolors in addition to his major oil paintings and mural commissions.



Although Davis' major pictures command seven-figure prices, his prints, drawings, mural studies and smaller paintings can be had for far less. Certain examples of his color prints begin at about a thousand dollars, with prices for other prints, drawings, and lithographs climbing from there. This variety of mediums and range of prices enable even enthusiasts on a tight budget to participate in collecting the work of this highly influential and immensely appealing artist.

Scholars Mark Rutkowski and Ani Boyajian have recently completed *Stuart Davis: A Catalogue Raisonné*, to be released by Yale University Press this fall. Comprised of three volumes that document some 1750 of Davis' works, the catalogue (produced in conjunction with New York's Salander-

O'Reilly Galleries) contains essays by scholars William Agee and Karen Wilkin as well as an exhaustive chronology of the artist's life. With its detailed documentation and inclusion of 600 works that have never before been illustrated, this volume will undoubtedly serve as an important resource for collectors interested in the artist's work for many years to come. **@**

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¹ *Rue de l'Echaude*, 1928 sold for \$4,496,000 at Sotheby's on November 30, 2005, and *Still Life with Flowers*, 1930, sold for \$3,150,000 at Christie's on December 1, 2005.

TOP LEFT:
Fig. 3: *Lounge*, 1930.
Gouache on paper, 14½ x 19½ inches.
Courtesy Owen Gallery, NY.

LOWER LEFT:
Fig. 4: *White Walls*, 1959.
Oil on canvas, 9 x 12 inches.
Courtesy AJ Kollar Fine Paintings, LLC,
Seattle, Washington

RIGHT:
Fig. 5: *The Blues*, 1925.
Gouache and ink on board,
9¼ x 11¾ inches
Private Collection; image courtesy
of Alexandre Gallery, NY.