



The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935

Wanda M. Corn

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Wanda M. Corn's long-awaited new book proposes a remarkable revisioning of the history of American modern art between the two world wars. Moving away from issues of style and abstraction, she bases her work on a broad examination of culture and on discourses of national identity. Corn argues that the key questions for interwar modernists in New York and Paris were whether or not it was possible to create an art that was both American and modern, and if it was, what such an art would look like. Both European and American artists debated these questions and made art that responded to them.

Corn organizes each chapter around a careful reading of a work of art, probing first its peculiar poetry and style and then its connection to its artist and the cultural influences surrounding it. The result is an unfolding of the work's contingent relationships with history, literature, art criticism, music, and popular culture. The works she examines—from those made by the Stieglitz circle to those by European Dadaists—were part of the quest for "the Great American Thing," a quest that was international in scope and that inspired a decade of vibrant cultural exchange between the art capitals of Europe and New York.

Passionate and eminently readable, with more than 300 illustrations—drawings, paintings, sculptures, advertisements, cartoons, and documentary photographs—*The Great American Thing* indelibly alters the way we think about the first decades of American modernism and the legacy it created.

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