Stuart Davis was born in Philadelphia on December 7, 1882, and spent his childhood in ﬂourishing New York. Having studied at the Art Students League, he came under the inﬂuence of the School of Paris. Davis was a master of modernism and the architect of American modernism. His paintings frequently feature titles that suggest social or cultural events, such as Decoration in Highbridge, Swing Landscape, or oil space events. In 1932, he was awarded the ﬁrst prize in the 1932 National Art Exhibition in Düsseldorf, one of the most valuable awards in the world of contemporary art. In 1935, he was awarded the ﬁrst prize in the 1935 Venice Biennale, and again in 1960. 

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The Armory Show

The Armory Show was one of America’s signiﬁcant and controversial art exhibitions. It was the ﬁrst time works by modern European artists, such as Pablo Picasso and Vincent van Gogh, were exhibited in the United States. The Armory Show was organized by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors, a group dedicated to supporting new work. Ten years later the association organized The International Exhibition of Contemporary Art from America and Europe. Not knowing the controversy it would cause, the association borrowed images of artworks from a large number of American artists from important collections. The Armory Show was considered controversial and explosive.

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Stuart Davis

American painting

1932–1951

oil on canvas, 40 x 50 1/4 in., Lent by the University of Nebraska at Omaha, L-1974.71

American Painting is one of Davis’s most famous and studied paintings. Nearly twenty years after finishing the painting, Davis described it as the most important work of his career. This monumental painting attempts to describe the struggles of the American working man. Davis ﬁlled the painting with numerous modern objects from the ’30s; the most prominent are the Wedell-Williams Racers. Davis painted the ﬁrst version of the painting in 1932, and then completely repainted large portions of the canvas. Davis painted the ﬁrst version of the painting in 1932, and then completely repainted large portions of the canvas.

- Who are the mysterious ﬁgures?
- What questions do you have about the painting?
- Who do you think Davis was talking about in his paintings?
- Which images do you think Davis may have been inspired by?
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