

An artistic story of new york city in 1932

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



November 17, 2012 Essay II, Word Count: 2268 An Artistic Story of New York in 1932 The purpose of this essay is to discuss the ways Stuart Davis uses the elements of art and principals of design in his painting, New York Mural, 1932. In the beginning of this essay, there is a description of Davis' biological information and what was happening in New York during the years preceding the painting. It will discuss three elements of art to include: line, shape and color. The principals of design that will be discussed are unity, balance, and variety.

It will close with my personal reflection and experience that was gained from the analysis and research of the painting. Davis was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1892 to parents that were artists. His father was a newspaper art director and his mother was a sculptor. Hisfamilymoved to East Orange, New Jersey when he was nine years old. He attended school in New Jersey and left high school in 1909 before graduating to attend Henri's School of Art in New York City. He became acquainted and formed friendships with mentors, John Sloan and George Luks. These men were all part of " The Eight".

These men were all part of the Realist Art Movement and focused onpovertyand the realities of urban life for real people. He began exhibiting his art in 1910 and had his first exhibit in New York City. In 1912, he was employed by a left leaning journal that under the direction of Sloan. While he was there, participating in the groundbreaking Armory Show. His work still was in the realist mode until 1916 when he went on his own to become more of an abstract artist. He was drafted and stayed in United States as a cartographer creating maps for the US Army Intelligence Department.

Fortunately, that was short-lived and he began using a Cubist style on his work. He made a series with this Cubist style of works based on a tobacco series. He began an eggbeater series while having Edith Halpert of New York's Downtown Gallery of Art. This series began his journey away from European influenced Cubism to his own development of his own abstractive modernist style without human presence in his works. He went to Paris in 1928 and upon returning in 1929, he became fascinated and intrigued with the industrialism and post war architecture in New York City.

His words were quoted by Karen Wilkin, " On my arrival I New York I was appalled and depressed by its gigantism. Everything in Paris was human size, here everything was inhuman. It was difficult to think either of art or oneself as having any significance whatever in the face of this frenetic commercial engine. " (Wilkin, 127). At this time, the Great Depression he created relatively few works, but he constantly changed scale, medium and method, making easel paintings, ink drawings, murals and lithographs (Wilkin, 127). His art reflected social issues and his works were pictures that tell a larger story.

New York Mural was his most ambitious treatment of the city in which he touched upon the issues of prohibition, government corruption and the affairs of Al Smith (Weber, 10). His journals and historical data during these few years in the New York City political scene are confirmation of the journalistic story he told through New York Mural. It was an outrage that many foreign artists were commissioned to do work in the United States. The Museum of Modern Art in New York organized an exhibit of contemporary murals. This show is why Davis created the New York Mural.

It stirred much controversy because of the story it told about New York's economic, social and political climate. Davis wrote in his personal papers, now in collection at Harvard University: Modern art is a reflection of the advanced modern technology. Modern Art in turn has changed to industrial design (Weber, 10). In 1932, Davis painted the piece that is the topic of this essay, New York Mural. He used oil which did not dry quickly and gave him the ability to change and modify colors and lines days later. Oil paint is flexible and it was easy for him to achieve a rich luminosity while having smooth effects with a high level of detail. DeWitte, Larmann, and Shields, 186). His paintings were now made up of modern industry images with free association and with a decorative pattern that created an optical vibration (Weber, 13). The most dominant principle of design used in this piece is variety because of the artist's use of various elements of art to include: line, shape, color, form and space. Each element has many purposes to hold the viewer's attention. As you look at the picture, these elements are effective in bringing your attention to every detail as you look around the work of art.

Variety makes this picture of the skyline diverse and like no other picture of New York City. The use of lines is complimented by the variety of color used in the painting. The oil provides a shiny surface that allows the lines to be hard and well defined. Within each line are many colors hues of color. The solid primary colors give the lines true definition. Many of the colors are complementary which seems to help contract the objects while achieving depth, especially between the buildings. Some areas of the picture have both crossed-hatching and hatching and neutral solid spaces and shapes.

This helps create darkness and lightness in the details of many of the objects. Along with solid black and white areas, the hatchings create shadows and make the picture appear three-dimensional. The buildings appear in the background and random objects in the foreground because of the black surrounding the bottom images in the picture. When you are standing back from the picture you know it's a building facade but cannot see the defined shapes of the building. The cross hatching and neutrals colors help this happen as if you were in the city looking at distant buildings.

The colors are all basic colors of the spectrum with the exception of black and white in the foreground and background to create a dramatic sense of depth and value. These hues are in different shades and saturations. For example the yellow in the banana and tigers' head is close to its highest level of saturation. The yellow building is a lower saturated yellow because it is mustard in color by having brown mixed into the paint. The black used in the background, lines and inside the buildings help show the defined shapes of the objects in the piece.

The white achieves many of the same things while this absence of color is used to show brightness and the feeling of daylight where it is in the background. There is an obvious contrast by the black and white that creates the symbolism of night and day. With these neutral colors there is no need for implied lines as your eyes wonder around the picture. The directional lines are used to bring your eyes upward in the painting to the tallest building in the center which could be considered the main focal point. It is almost in the centerline of the piece which helps to achieve symmetry and balance.

This building is recognizable as the Empire State Building, the newest and tallest building in New York in 1932. Horizontal Lines bring your eyes up into the skyline while the vertical and diagonal lines create depth and dimensions. The curved lines with both thin and thickness to them help you to notice various symbols that explain the story Davis is trying to tell of that time. The foreground has many shapes utilizing volume and space that take time to identify. These contour shaped images create volume and space in the foreground.

While the yellow banana is recognizable, it has a an organic shape that makes you look closely to make sure that is what he is showing the viewer. The green banana is not as recognizable because of its dark hue of green even though it is analogous to yellow. There are mostly geometric shapes in the city's skyline. The only curved line and shape is in the shape of a funny face with a hat at the top of the purple building to the right where the three orange circles look two eyes and a nose. Symmetry is achieved through a well balanced picture.

Both sides are equally filled with positive shapes and vary with and same amount of negative space. There are concentric geometric shapes for the windows in the buildings, this creates contrast between the different buildings heights and widths. It also gives symmetry to each individual building. The six large rectangles behind the gas pump make it recognizable as a gas station with the garage door in front. The use of colors and lines help the entire picture to appear balanced. The principle of design, proportion, is used throughout this piece of art. The tiger's head and tail are recognizable in a cartoon like image.

If you did not have the research and narrative of what was going on in this time period of the artist's life, you would not understand why it is randomly placed to the right bottom of the closest building in the foreground of the buildings. The entire painting has the cartoon like feel to it. Especially with the exaggerated proportions of the hats, bananas and what looks like a butterfly on the right side boarder. These things are not to scale with the rest of the parts. The scale is in different proportions and it is mostly dramatic between the foreground and the skyline which appears father away.

The best example in the foreground is the proportion of the bananas, tire and hat. It would be a very small tire and hat or a very large banana in realistic. Davis uses scale to exaggerate some of the messages that he is trying to tell about the many things that were taking place during this time. Many of these images are defined further through many of Davis' later paintings that are enlarged and elaborated versions of this original painting. In a genius way, Davis achieves unity through this picture when you view it as a whole.

There is a direct message that the whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts (DeWitte, Larmann, and Shields, 121). He splatters various colorful shapes and organic images to tell the story. Upon first glance, the draw to this picture was because the noticeably recognizable skyline of New York City. I love New York City more than any other place that I have ever lived, worked or played. After gazing around it for a few moments, I could see many random objects beautifully tied and linked together through symbols made of shapes, space, lines and many bright, shiny colors.

It was puzzling because I did not know specific facts of history. It was obvious to me that each thing placed in the painting was deliberate and told a story. I was very interested to hear why these random objects surrounding the geometric shaped skyline were of significance to the artist at that moment in time. It is very busy, but also balanced achieving unity and balance. After reading about the artist and his other works, I was fascinated by his ability to not only tell a story but to practically expose the negative and positive events and achievements of that time.

His ego and boldness was obvious to me when I realized the offending nature of some of the references he was making representing specific people he knew and was around in New York City. I feel as though I have read a book about New York City's growth and struggles after the crash of the stock market in 1929 through the early 1930's. I am also grateful, to the authors of books and articles that explain what was happening and researches what the artist meant with different aspects of their pieces of art. I am a new fan of Davis because I love his bright shiny pictures depicting the city I love and am interested in.

He loved New York and enjoyed it while noticing some of the growth and change making the city less intimate and large and filled with the potential and realities for corruption. I believe he admired and was impressed with the new buildings and infrastructure in the city while acknowledging that it had to come at a price of greed and a degree of coldness rather than prosperity and warmth. This essay makes me more interested in the stories behind the pieces of art and the artists that created them. The thoughts, history and

personal situations are fascinating and give me a different appreciation for New York Mural.

I am going to stay mindful and open to enjoy a piece of artwork just for its beauty and the talent that it took to create rather than the book of truth and theoretical information behind it. Works Cited Debra J. DeWitte, Ralph M. Larrman, and M. Kathryn Shields, Gateways to Art, 2012, Tharmes & Hudson Weber, Bruce. Stuart Davis' New York, 1985. Norton Gallery of Art, West Palm Beach Wilkins, Karen. Stuart Davis, 1987. Cross River Press, ltd. Davis, Stuart. New York Mural. 1932. Oil on Canvas. Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach. 84 inches x 84 inches, signed and dated Date viewed: November 4, 2012