

MEYER WOLFE

The Star of All Things

The son of Lithuanian immigrants, Nashville native Meyer Wolfe (1897 – 1985) was an American painter, printmaker, and sculptor whose prolific career spanned over sixty years.

Growing up in an impoverished district located near the Tennessee State Capitol, Wolfe began sketching his district neighborhood at a young age. After studying art in Europe and moving to New York, he remained close to Tennessee, where his Nashville drawings matured during the 1930s into miniature portraits of African American life. Realistically portrayed in the style of his mentor John Sloan and American Regionalists such as Thomas Hart Benton, these works reside today in museums such as the Smithsonian, the Metropolitan, and the National Gallery of Art.

Needed for his printmaking Wolfe continued making art for the rest of his life, experimenting with different mediums as he drifted away from realism and the Regionalists. Traveling extensively with his wife, celebrated fashion

photographer Louise Dunn Wolfe, he absorbed new ideas often expressed in abstract and organic forms. This new direction continued into the 1970s, culminating in a 1979 gallery retrospective in the place where it all began, Nashville.

Fame and fortune proved elusive for Meyer Wolfe, but he was ever passionate about his work. Today these pieces exemplify a procession of styles, mediums, and themes, forming a cavalcade of twentieth century art history. With its title taken from an early Wolfe drawing, *The Star of All Things* presents artwork, documents, and objects that tell the story of a great Tennessee artist.

Meyer Wolfe stands in the 1930s with a painting completed for the Federal Works Progress Administration.



SANDRA SCHATTEN
FOUNDATION

Chapter One
Louisiana, Louisiana,
New Orleans, Chicago,
& New York
1897 - 1926



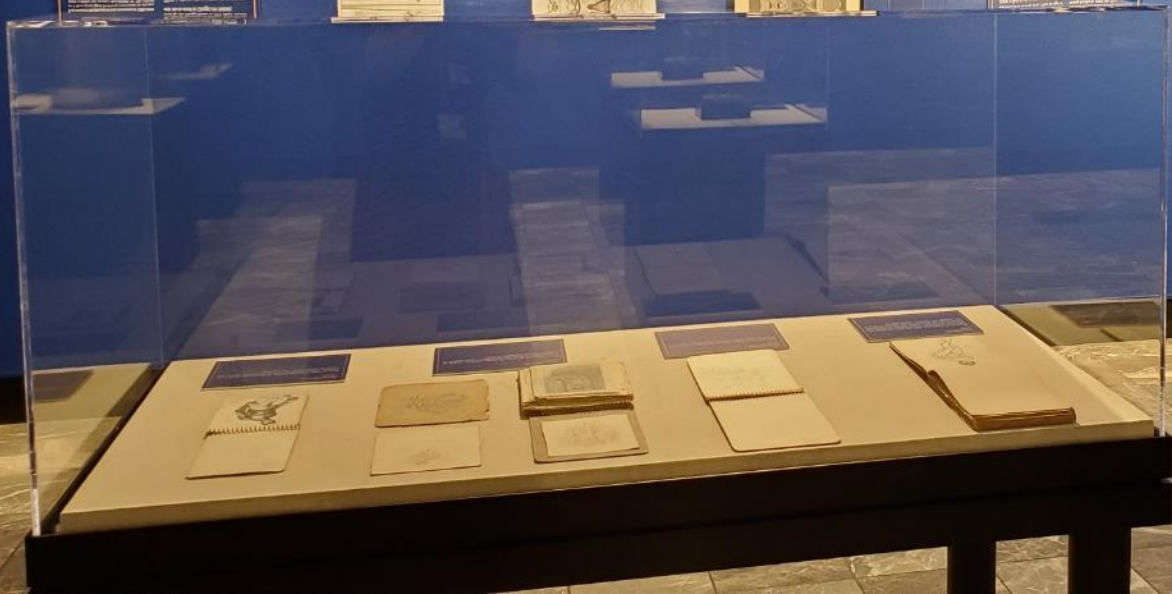
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Chapter Two
Lafayette, Seattle,
San Francisco, New York,
& England
1924 - 1933



...



Chapter One: Lithuania, Louisville, Nashville, Chicago, & New York 1897 – 1926



Jacob and Rebecca Wolfe stand for the camera in their 1892 wedding portrait. Image courtesy of Ursula Weis, Louisville, KY, USA.

Lazarovitch Woldkowitz was seventeen in 1886 when he left his home in Yurburg, Lithuania, to escape religious persecution. He emigrated to the United States and settled in New York, where he adopted the name of Jacob Wolfe and began a career as an itinerant salesman. Within a few years he was visiting Nashville, Tennessee, where a marriage was arranged between himself and fifteen-year old Rebecca Sklar. Like Jacob, Rebecca was Lithuanian and Jewish, and they married in 1892. The young couple moved to Louisville, where their son Meyer (or 'Mike' as the family called him) was born in 1897, the second of ten children.

Meyer was three when his parents returned to Nashville and his father took a job collecting scrap metal for the Werthan Company. Settling in a crowded, multi-racial neighborhood just north of the Tennessee State Capitol, the family's apartment was one of four in a pre-Civil War house with no electricity or indoor plumbing. Recent immigrants, the Wolfes had



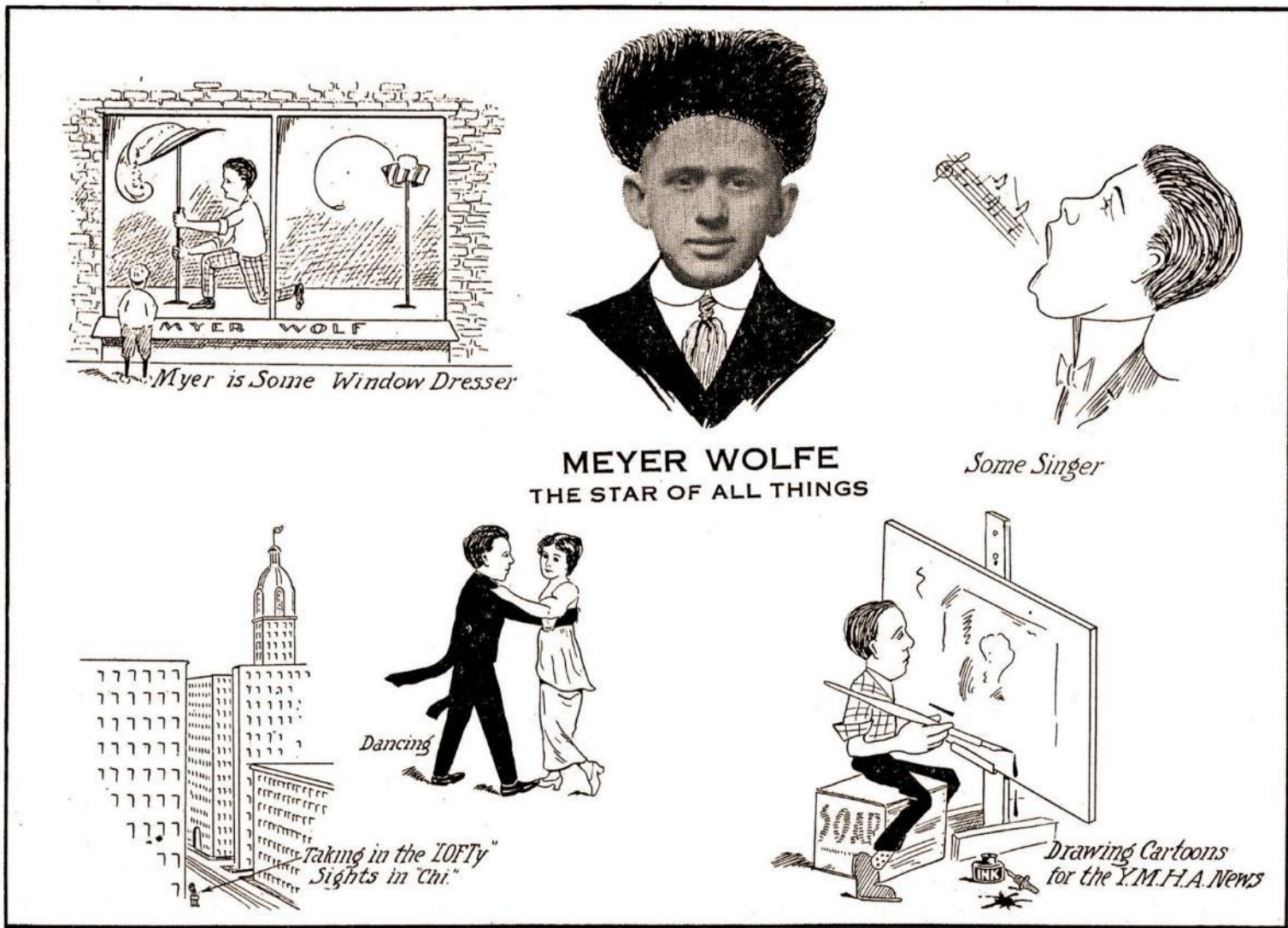
In the early 1910s Meyer, and his brothers Ben and Will, were active in the Young Men's Hebrew Association as seen here in the pages of the Y.M.H.A. newsletter. Image courtesy of Tennessee State Museum.

no regional bias against their Irish, Italian, and African American neighbors. Meyer grew up comfortable with everyone. His neighborhood informed his intellectual and artistic development.

A bright teenager with many talents, including music, theatre, and art, Meyer became involved in the Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA), a privately supported venue for arts, sports, and socializing. His drawings for *The Nashville Y.M.H.A. News* gained the attention of Carey Orr, a political cartoonist for *The Nashville Tennessean and American*. When Orr was hired by the *Chicago Tribune* in 1917, Meyer traveled with him to enroll at Chicago's Art Institute.

While in Chicago, Meyer studied and did freelance work in commercial illustration. He struggled financially however, and returned to Nashville after less than a year. By spring 1918 he was again drawing for *The Nashville Y.M.H.A. News* as well as *The Tennessean* while making new plans.

Resolved to earn a living as an artist, Wolfe moved to New York City in the summer of 1918 and studied at the Art Students League until 1920. Among his instructors was John Sloan, a painter, printmaker, and noted member of the realist "Ashcan School," who advised his students to be inspired by everyday life, make art for the love of art, and paint "what you know." Sloan would prove a lifelong influence on Wolfe as he attended classes and supported himself through illustration. Within a few years he had saved enough money to travel and study abroad.



The Star of All Things, Y.M.H.A. News, August 1915

Some of Meyer Wolfe's earliest acclaim was for his drawings published in *The Nashville Y.M.H.A. News*. In this cartoon, Meyer, or "Mike" as friends called him, pokes fun at his varied activities, including his job as a store window dresser.

Image courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

A VISION OF RELIEF

Nashville Tennessean and the Nashville American
May 21, 1918

A protégé of *Tennessean* political cartoonist and future Pulitzer winner Carey Orr, Wolfe moved to Chicago in 1917 and briefly attended the Art Institute. When his studies were upended by World War I, he returned to Nashville where this drawing was published, noting him as “the pupil of Carey Orr.”

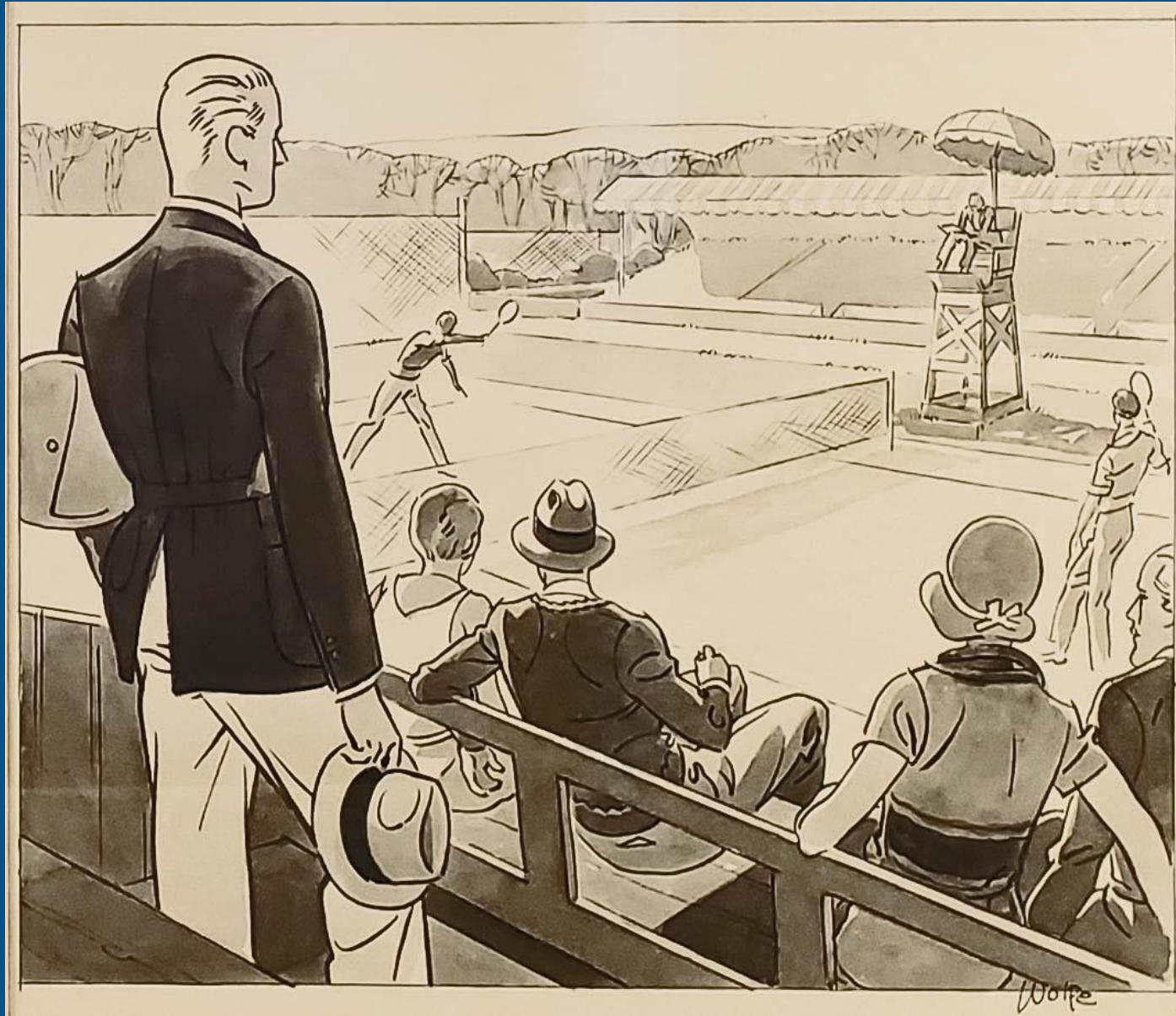


Untitled (Tennis Match)

Pen and ink
c. 1922

From roughly 1918 to 1926, Meyer Wolfe worked in New York as an illustrator for a newspaper syndicate. This pen and ink drawing is an example of his commercial artwork from the period. Through his illustration work Wolfe saved enough money to travel to Europe in 1926.

*Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs.
Lawrence K. Wolfe.*





Sketchbook
1919

Bound in its hand-drawn title and cover illustration, this collection of sketches is from White's coursework at New York's Art Students League. The book contains two model drawings from his studio classes as well as the example of a "20 Minute" timed exercise.



Sketchbook
1927

This book of drawings made during White's 1927 trip to Europe includes a quick rendition of an outdoor scene.



Sketchbook
1930s

This collection of loose drawings contains scenes of contemporary Paris, including a subtle sketch of a woman in a landscape at work.



Sketchbook
1930s

Also a collection of White's drawings, this book is an example of how White worked to document figures and scenes for future prints and paintings.

Sketchbook

1919

Based on its handwritten date and cover inscription, this collection of sketches is from Wolfe's enrollment at New York's Art Student League. The book contains live model drawings from his studio classes as seen in the example of a "20 Min -" timed exercise.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum



Sketchbook

1927

This book of drawings made during Wolfe's 1927 trip to Europe includes a quick rendition of an outdoor café.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum



Sketchbook

1930s

This collection of loose drawings contains scenes Depression era Nashville, including a subtle sketch of sculptor William Edmondson at work.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum



Sketchbook

1930s

This collection of loose drawings contains scenes Depression era Nashville, including a subtle sketch of sculptor William Edmondson at work.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum



Sketchbook

1930s

This collection of loose drawings contains scenes Depression era Nashville, including a subtle sketch of sculptor William Edmondson at work.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

high sun -
all underneath decks
in shadows -
mostly water
of the ship across sun
with fillings -

gold eagle - Bell stock - all cut out
except bottom deck + support
on 41

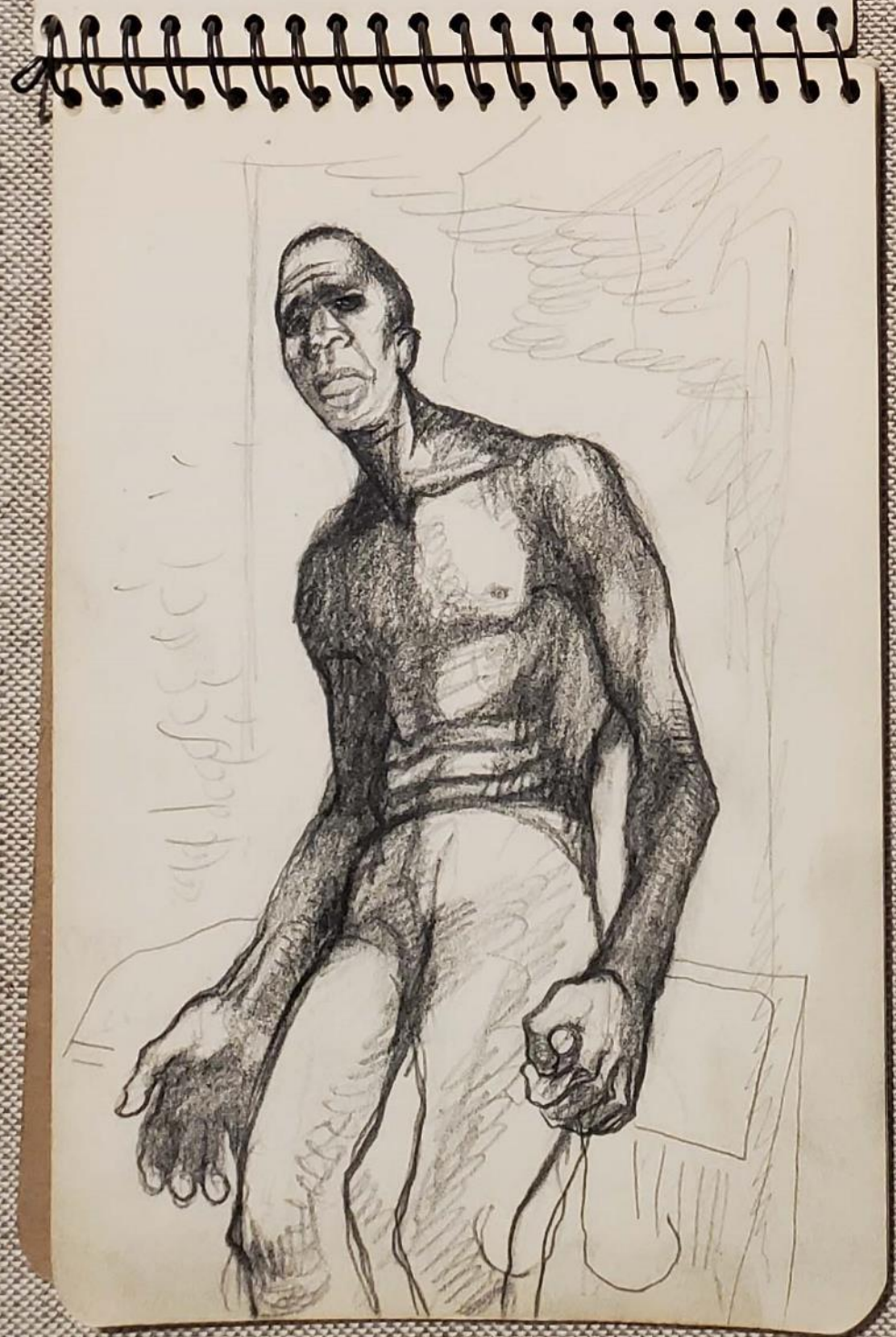


Sketchbook

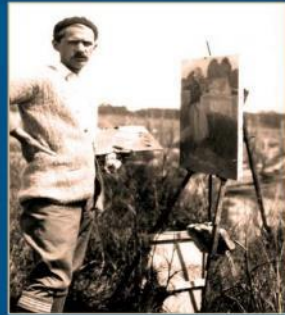
1930s

Also a collection of Nashville drawings, this book is an example of how Wolfe worked to document figures and scenes for future prints and paintings.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum



Chapter Two: Europe, Tunisia, Tennessee, San Francisco, New York, & Nashville 1926 – 1933



Wolfe studied Impressionism during his first trip to Europe. In this 1927 image he poses with his pallet and easel while painting landscapes in southern France. Image courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

In 1926, Wolfe arrived in Europe to absorb the art and architecture of the continent, and after a brief tour, applied himself to the study of art. When the rigor of courses at Paris's Académie Julian proved unsatisfying, he left for southern France and practiced landscape painting on his own. In late 1927 he crossed the Mediterranean to North Africa. In Kairouan, Tunisia, Wolfe painted whenever weather permitted, taking advantage of inexpensive local accommodations. He improved his painting while in Europe and North Africa, but this was not the most important result of the trip.

He was standing on a train platform in Tunisia when he met a young woman from San Francisco named Louise Dahl. Louise was in North Africa to enhance her skill in photography, and like Meyer, was working hard to become professionally established. Attracted to the bearded young painter, Louise later said she "just liked the look of the cut of that guy." The couple found each other intellectually stimulating, and spent their first evening together arguing the merits of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling. Following a whirlwind courtship in Africa and Europe, they sailed to New York City where they married in 1928.



Accompanied by a local guide, Meyer and Louise take a trip on burros in North Africa.

Image courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

Anticipating a return to Tennessee, Meyer contacted his childhood friend Alfred Starr about his paintings of Europe and Africa. In response, Starr arranged for Wolfe's first one artist show at the Nashville Carnegie Library on Capitol Hill in November 1928. Following this exhibition and a second one in Memphis, Meyer and Louise moved to San Francisco to be near her family. By 1932 they were living in a cabin in Tennessee's Smoky Mountains. Here, both artists documented the local people and scenery of the area –culminating in Louise's photograph *Tennessee Mountain Woman*. Its 1933 publication in *Vanity Fair* would launch her career.

In the wake of this success, the couple relocated to New York, where Louise joined the staff of *Harper's Bazaar* in 1936. Meanwhile, Meyer continued to visit Nashville periodically, observing, sketching, and thinking. Recalling his mentor John Sloan's enthusiasm for urban realism and skill in lithography, he began a series of prints in 1933 documenting life in his childhood neighborhood.



Meyer and Louise, soon after meeting in Kairouan, Tunisia, 1927. From *A Photographer's Scrapbook* by Louise Dahl's wife.

Untitled (Tunisian City)

Oil on canvas

1927

After “stifling” art classes in Paris, Wolfe left for southern France to study landscape painting on his own. By late 1927 he was in North Africa where he completed this view of the ancient Islamic city of Kairouan. Rendered in an Impressionist style, this painting may have started as an exercise. Upon Wolfe’s return to the United States in 1928, the piece was featured in his first exhibition held at Nashville’s Carnegie Library on Capitol Hill.

*Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs.
Lawrence K. Wolfe*



***Tunisian Bride
(Arab Girl in Wedding
Dress)***

Oil on canvas
1927

According to Wolfe, his adventures abroad made him feel confident in his ability to be an artist. He was thirty years old when he completed this intimate portrait of a young Tunisian woman that became a centerpiece of his 1928 Nashville exhibition.

*Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs.
Lawrence K. Wolfe*



Meyer Wolfe, Nashville Artist, Will Exhibit Paintings Here



Meyer Wolfe with one of his recent paintings, "Arab Girl in Wedding Dress."

Returning after two years of travel in Europe and Africa, Meyer R. Wolfe of 2002 Vanderbilt Place, is back in Nashville for a brief visit. Mr. Wolfe brings with him a group of his paintings and is planning to exhibit them here early next month. While abroad, Mr. Wolfe spent most of his time in Kairouan, a holy Arab city in French Africa, where he lived with a native family and painted these picturesque people in their native habitat. Later he spent much time in little traveled Mallorca, the largest of the Spanish Balearic Islands. The collection Mr. Wolfe is planning to show in Nashville is chosen largely from paintings made in these two places.

Meyer Wolfe is the son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Wolfe of this city, and spent

his youth and early manhood here. He has spent some fourteen years in the study of art at the principal schools in Chicago, New York and Paris and is a friend and former student of Michel Jacobs, the prominent painter and founder of the Metropolitan Art school of New York, who is showing his work at the Centennial Club this week.

In his lecture Tuesday evening, Colonel Jacobs paid high tribute to Mr. Wolfe's artistry and remarked that the people of Nashville will be justly proud of Mr. Wolfe, in equal measure with the Parthenon at Centennial park.

The many friends and acquaintances of Mr. Wolfe, as well as other lovers of art in Nashville, count themselves fortunate in being able to see Meyer Wolfe's first exhibition in this country.

Nashville Banner
November 15, 1928

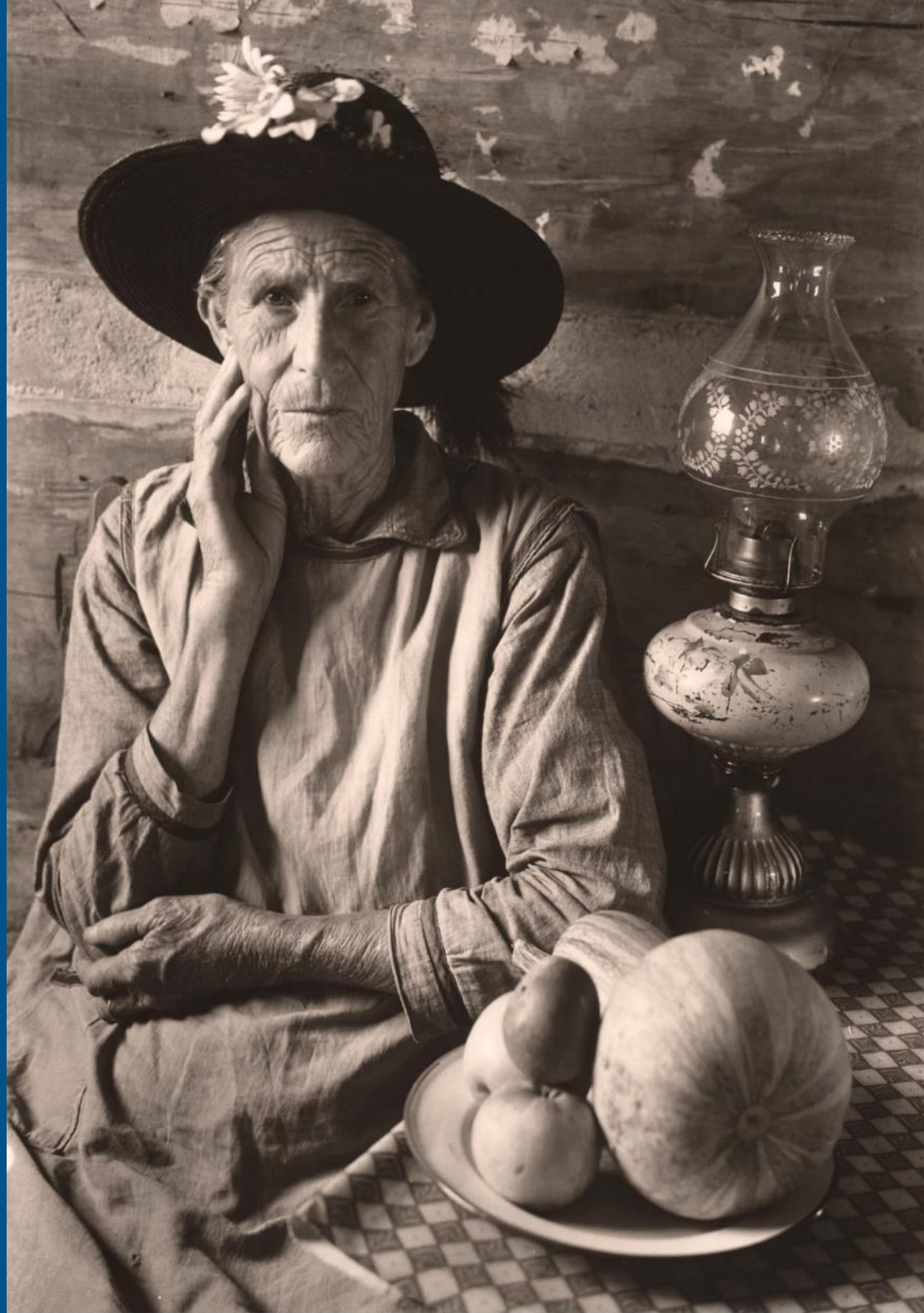
Wolfe's first solo exhibit was in late November 1928 at the downtown Carnegie Library. Featuring work from his recent trip abroad, one reviewer called it "the best single exhibition ever held in Nashville." In this article, one of Wolfe's former instructors, Michel Jacobs, tells a Nashville lecture audience they "will be justly proud of Mr. Wolfe, in equal measure with the Parthenon at Centennial Park."

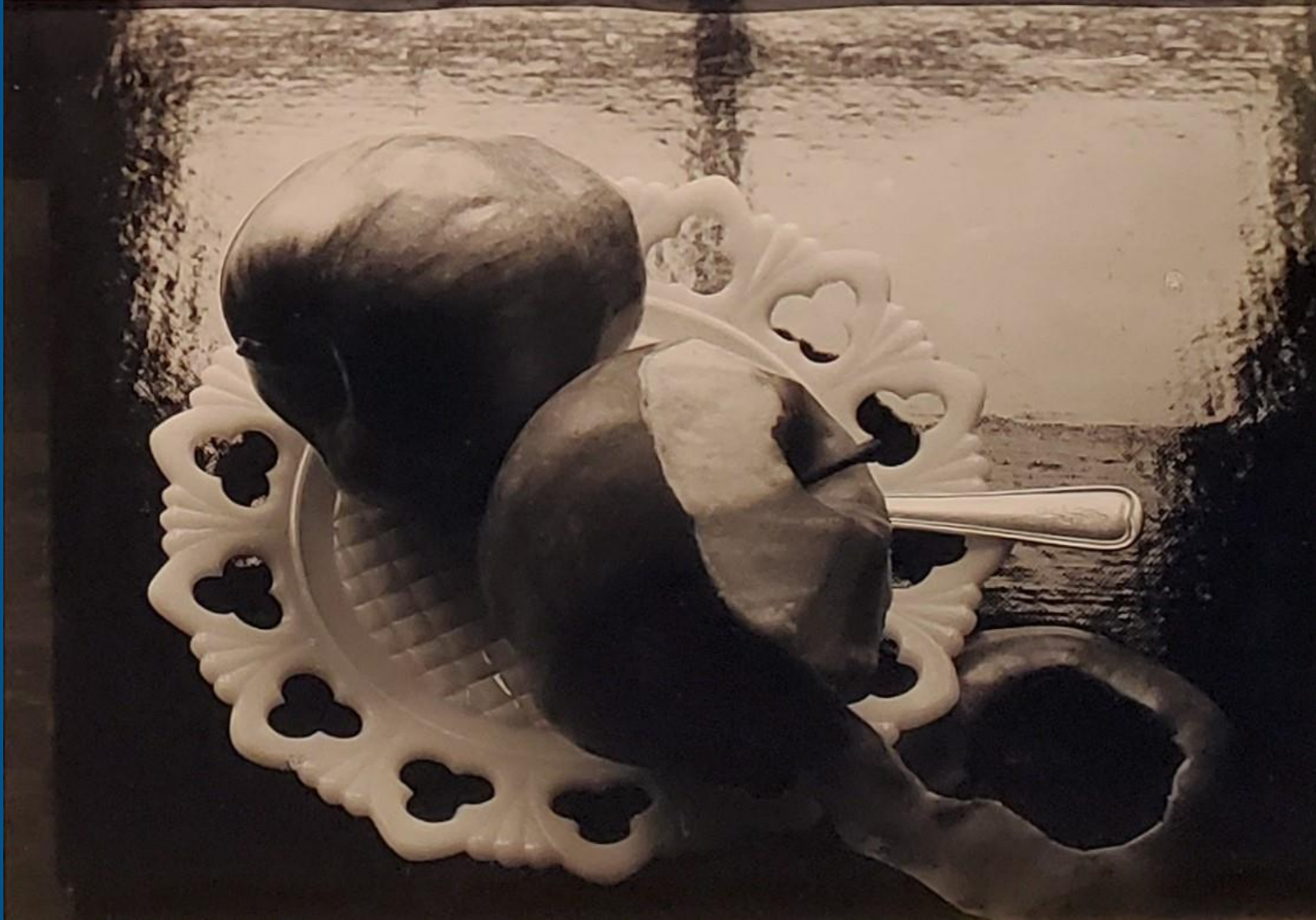
Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe

Louise Dahl-Wolfe
Mrs. Ramsey, Tennessee Mountain Woman
1932

In 1932 the Wolfes moved to a remote area of the Smokey Mountains to work. While there, Louise made photographs of local residents, developed in a makeshift darkroom powered by the battery of a Ford Model-A. After a friend of a friend shared her work with *Vanity Fair* editor Frank Crowninshield, this image was published in November 1933, launching Dahl-Wolfe's professional career.

*Courtesy of the Center for Creative
Photography, Arizona Board of Regents*





Louise Dahl-Wolfe, *Apples*, Gelatin silver print, 1931

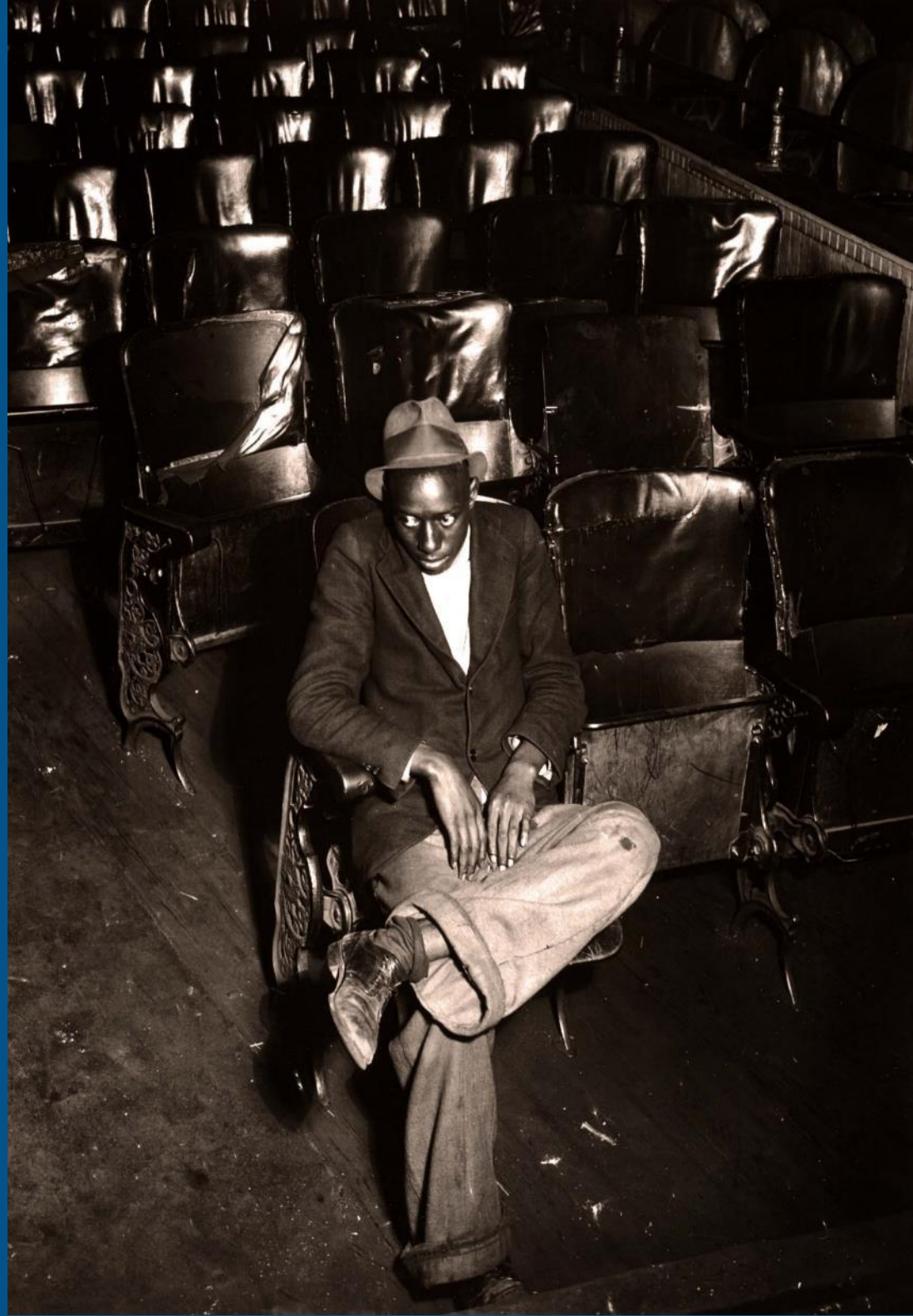
Inspired by San Francisco photographer Anne Brigman, Louise Dahl began making photographs in the 1920s. By 1933 she and Meyer were married and living in New York, where her portfolio, including a print of this still life, was reviewed by *Harper's Bazaar*. The organic shapes of the image recall the seminal photography of Edward Weston, whom the Wolfes met in 1930. Louise Dahl-Wolfe joined *Harper's* as a fashion photographer in 1936

Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe

Louise Dahl-Wolfe
At Alfred Starr's Theater, The Bijou,
Nashville, Tennessee
1932

Meyer's old friend Alfred Starr was a theatre-chain executive when Louise Dahl-Wolfe visited one of his downtown theatres and made this photo. The young man in the portrait may have resided in Meyer's former Capitol Hill neighborhood. Five years later, this image was included in *Photography 1839-1937* – the first photography exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

*Courtesy of the Center for Creative
Photography, Arizona Board of Regents*

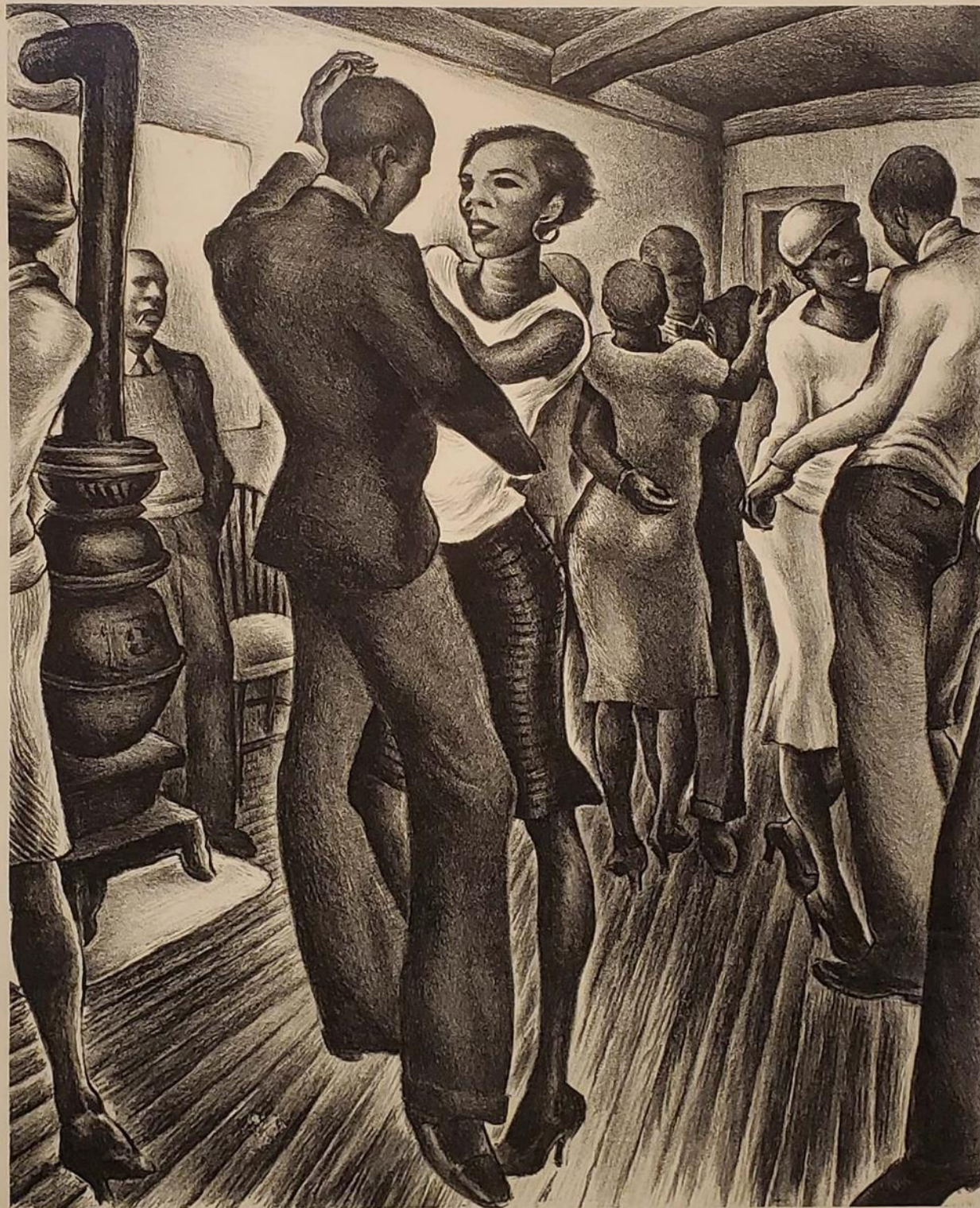


Red Eye's Hall

1934

According to Meyer Wolfe, "Red Eye" was the African American owner of a dance hall on Cedar Street (Charlotte Avenue) near Nashville's Capitol Hill. Described as a "delightful entertainer" and "colorful character," Red Eye was also a baseball fan, and "rarely missed a game" at nearby Sulphur Dell park. A center of light-hearted entertainment, his night club was the subject of one of Wolfe's first Nashville inspired lithographs.

Courtesy of Cheekwood Estate & Gardens



1934 Red Eye's Hall

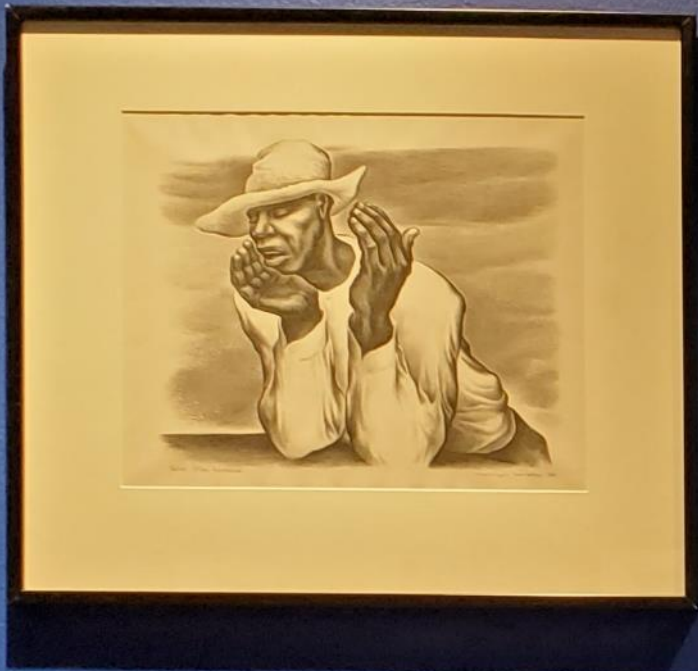
Meyer Wolfe 34



***Tuesday-Othelia*, Lithograph, 1934**

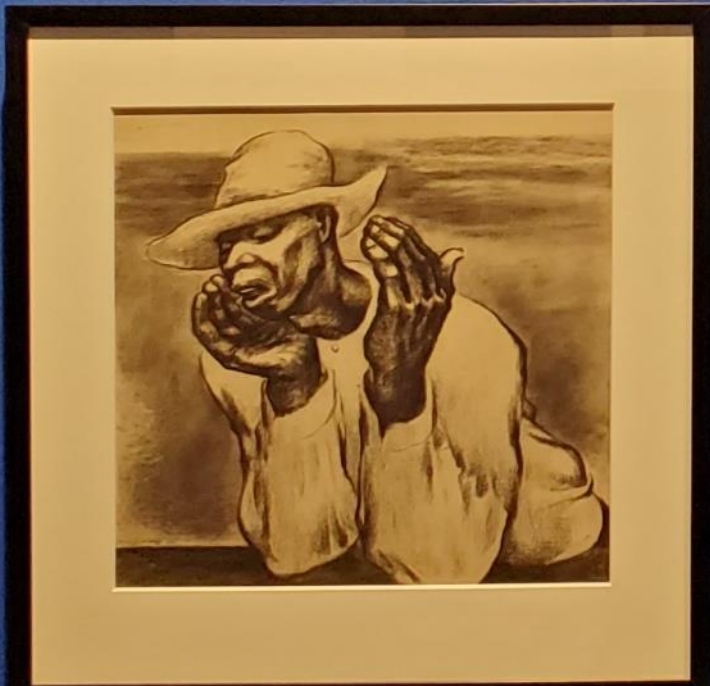
Othelia Butts was a laundress employed by Wolfe's mother on Tuesdays. A portrait of strength, Othelia appears in a number of his works. This image, along with *Red Eye's Hall* and *Vanderbilt Clinic*, are among the labor related prints and drawings in the Ben and Beatrice Goldstein Foundation Collection at the Library of Congress.

Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe



Alan Colling
Lithograph
1944

Prints from the Alan Colling series, the first time, were included in numerous American, British and Paris exhibitions, of the 1940s, including, in particular, those at the San Francisco Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum, and Library of Congress.



Alan Colling
Charcoal
1941



Alan Colling, 1938

This oil painting is the first in Alan Colling's series, now originally developed in a 2000 film.



Man Calling, Charcoal, 1942

This charcoal portrait of a Nashville resident was likely a study made in preparation for a subsequent lithograph printing and oil painting.

Courtesy of Cheekwood Estate & Gardens



Man Calling, Lithograph, 1944

Prints from the *Man Calling* series, like this one, were included in numerous American drawing and print exhibitions of the 1940s—including high profile shows at the San Francisco Museum of Art, at the Los Angeles County Museum, and Library of Congress.

Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe

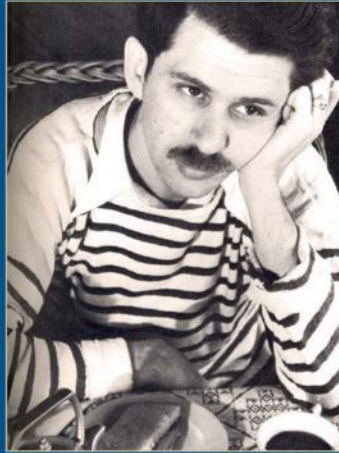


Man Calling, Charcoal, 1938

This oil painting in Wolfe's *Man Calling* series was tragically destroyed in a 2008 fire.

Courtesy of Tennessee Historical Quarterly

Chapter Three: Portraits of Nashville 1933 – 1948



The artist ponders his next move in the early 1930s.
from A Photographers Sketchbook by Louise Dahl-Wolfe

Lithography was invented in Germany during the 1790s and is a printing process based on the incompatibility of grease and water. An artist draws with a special crayon on a flat polished stone then wets the stone, upon which ink is applied with a roller. The ink is repelled by the water and adheres only to the crayon as the image is printed from the stone. Beginning in the early 1930s Meyer Wolfe employed lithography to portray an under-represented side of Nashville, specifically African American life in his formative Capitol Hill neighborhood. While some images were from direct observation in the 1930s, others were taken from sketchbooks done years before. They present persons he may have known personally, working, playing, and at worship. The religious scenes are especially intimate, as according to Meyer, he enjoyed attending black church services as a child.

Wolfe's preference for these subjects derived from both his training as an artist and childhood recollections. Recalling John Sloan's mandate to render "what you know," he was inspired by memories of the



Meyer's hands render a lithograph image in a photo taken by Louise.
Image courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe

people in his former neighborhood whose circumstances in the Jim Crow south he knew well. While artists such as Dorothea Lange specifically documented hardship during the Depression, Wolfe's portrayals do not shout social injustice, but simply evoke the hardscrabble spirit of the era. His Nashville themed lithographs and paintings present real people in real times.

During these years, Wolfe continued drawing, painting, and keeping sketchbooks. A participating artist in the Federal Government's Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) of the 1930s, he exhibited work nationwide, including *Vermont Ruin*, an oil painting sold at the New York World's Fair in 1939. But despite considerable effort, and acclaim for the Nashville series, Wolfe's success remained limited. By the late 1940s he was moving in a new direction in terms of both style and medium.



In a page from one of his sketchbooks, Wolfe documents Nashville sculptor William Edmondson at work. In the mid-1930s, the Wolfes helped him to establish his career.
Image courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe



Untitled (Railroad Bridge), Oil on canvas, 1938

In a scene near Nashville's Capitol Hill, Wolfe depicts the sun setting behind the railroad bridge that still spans Jo Johnston Avenue near Tenth Avenue North

Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe

***I Hide My Face Before
the Lord***

Lithograph
1935

This religious scene from
Nashville was included in
the 1942 *Artists for Victory
Exhibition* at New York's
Metropolitan Museum.

*Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs.
Lawrence K. Wolfe*



Spruce and Gay St

Lithograph

1934

In an unpublished memoir, Meyer Wolfe identified Nashville's "red light districts" (sic) as "confined largely to several streets north of the city" –including Spruce and Gay Streets near the State Capitol. Recalling his childhood, he said, "I knew these streets intimately since they were all on my paper route...my weekly collection was on Saturday morning so there was hardly a soul stirring and the houses were quiescent as a graveyard. When I rang the doorbell only the maid was up and about, and it was she who paid me my 10 cents for the week."

*Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs.
Lawrence K. Wolfe*



Women Bathing

Lithograph
1937

Wolfe described one bathing spot along the Cumberland River as having “a perfect sandbar, the most fun was swimming to ride the shallow waves behind a passing steamboat.”

*Courtesy of Cheekwood Estate
& Gardens*



Women Bathing - 1937

Meyer Wolfe '37

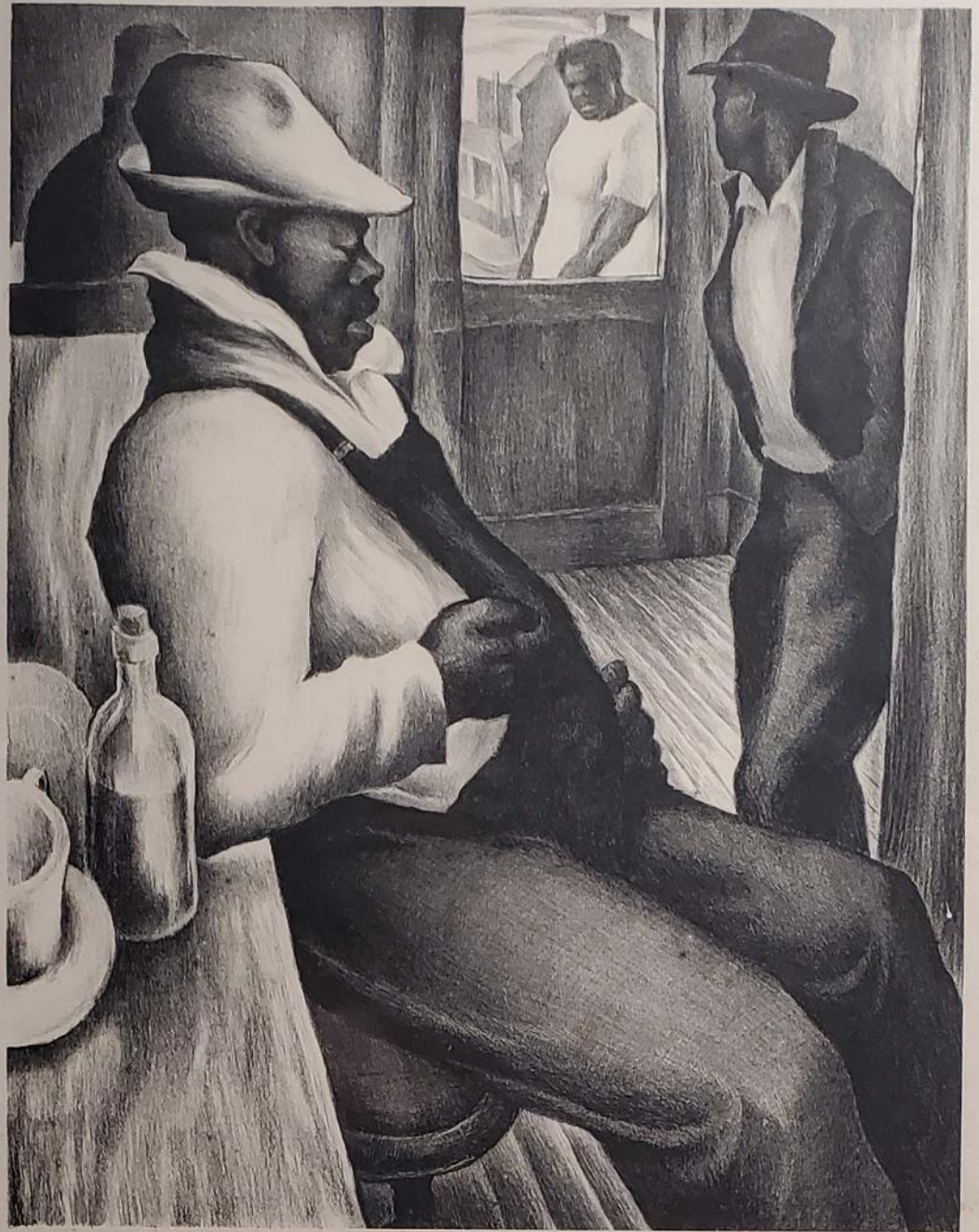
Mooney's Place

Lithograph

1936

Alcohol was prohibited in Tennessee from 1909 to 1933, and so it is possible Mooney's Place was a new drinking establishment when depicted in the mid-1930s.

*Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs.
Lawrence K. Wolfe*



Mooney's Place 2220

Lawrence K. Wolfe 1936



Baptism, Lithograph, 1934

Remembering warm summers along the Cumberland River, Wolfe wrote, "The negro churches performed their Baptisms on Sunday afternoons when there was no activity on the wharf."

Courtesy of Cheekwood Estate & Gardens



Vanderbilt Clinic, Lithograph, 1939

One of Wolfe's best known prints, this crowded scene from Vanderbilt Hospital evokes the resignation of weary people waiting to be helped.

Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe



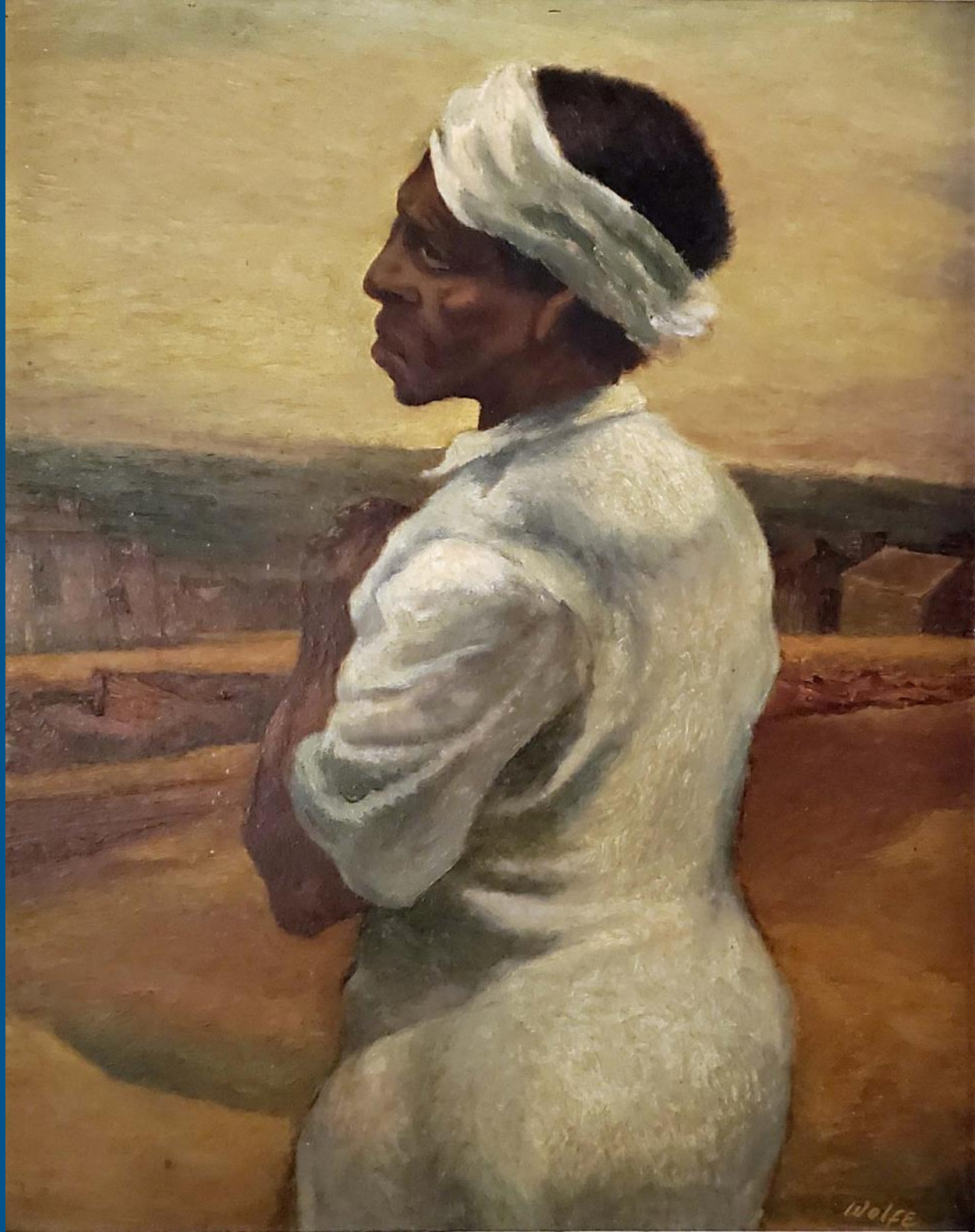
Going Home, Lithograph, 1939

Possibly returning from a long day of work, a man carries firewood as he walks with two women through a North Nashville neighborhood.

Courtesy of Cheekwood Estate & Gardens

Untitled
(Figure in a Landscape)
Oil on canvas
1934

*Courtesy of Tennessee State
Museum*

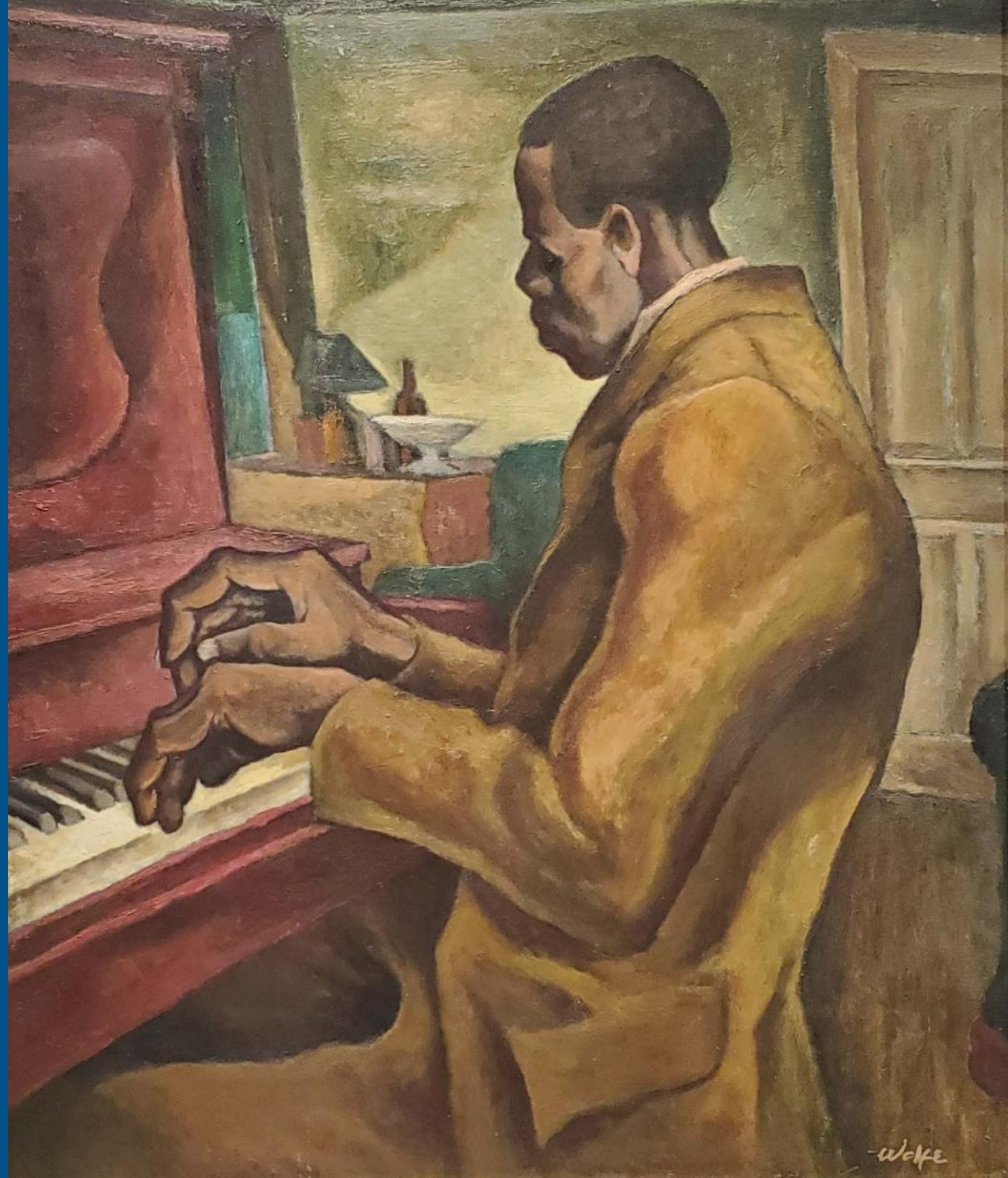


Piano Player

Oil on masonite
1944

Meyer Wolfe loved music and was known for his singing ability. *Piano Player* was completed during World War II, and could be a portrait of a Nashville musician or possibly someone the Wolfes knew in Manhattan.

*Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs.
Lawrence K. Wolfe*



Documents, 1939-1940

(1) Letter, November 22, 1939. The Board of Directors of Contemporary Art Society, Inc. has approved the exhibition which has been selected for publication. The planning committee is based at the University of Pennsylvania.

(2) Letter, March 2, 1940. The Planning Committee has approved the exhibition which is to be held at the University of Pennsylvania. The exhibition will be a public exhibition.

(3) Catalog, The Arts (1940) showing "New York World's Fair, 1939-1940." This exhibition by the National Art Society was sponsored by the NYWFA, and took place on the corner of 42nd Street and Broadway, College of Arts and Sciences.

1

NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR 1939-1940

THE NATIONAL ART SOCIETY

1939-1940

NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR 1939-1940

THE NATIONAL ART SOCIETY

1939-1940

2

NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR 1939-1940

THE NATIONAL ART SOCIETY

1939-1940

NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR 1939-1940

THE NATIONAL ART SOCIETY

1939-1940

3

Southern Vermont Art Center

1965 FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

MADEIRA VERMONT

1965

4

During his career Wolfe participated in group shows across the country. These are publications from a few of those shows.

(5) In 1934 Wolfe showed four photographs in Salts of America's national exhibition, including *Trinity, Odeon* and *East Park Hill*. He also participated in National Art Society 1939.

(7) During World War II Wolfe contributed two prints to this exhibit, 1941, shown at New York's Metropolitan Museum.

(8) After the war, Wolfe showed two lithographs, *Man Calling* and *Wynnen Sailing*, in the 1946 San Francisco exhibition.

(9) In the summer of 1965, the Southern Vermont Art Center was the site of Wolfe's first all sculpture exhibition.

5

NEW YORK NO-JURY EXHIBITION SALONS OF AMERICA, INC.

SPRING 1934

THE FORUM
ROCKEFELLER CENTER

6

AMERICAN ART TODAY

NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR

Published by NATIONAL ART SOCIETY

7

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Artists for Victory

An Exhibition of Contemporary American Art

PAINTINGS
SCULPTURE
PRINTS

SPONSORED BY ARTISTS FOR VICTORY, INC.

8

TENTH ANNUAL DRAWING AND PRINT EXHIBITION

SAN FRANCISCO ART ASSOCIATION
FEBRUARY 1934 THROUGH MARCH 1934

SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF ART

9

Southern Vermont Art Center

MADEIRA VERMONT

1965 FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

Exhibition Catalogs 1934-1965

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N E W Y O R K W O R L D ' S F A I R 1 9 3 9
I N C O R P O R A T E D



WORLD'S FAIR, NEW YORK

EXHIBITION OF
CONTEMPORARY
AMERICAN ART

APRIL 30, 1939 - OCTOBER 31, 1939

GOVERNING COMMITTEE

November 27, 1939

A. Conger Goodyear,
Chairman

Juliana Force
Laurance P. Roberts
Herbert E. Winlock
Holger Cahill

Mr. Meyer Wolfe
58 West 57 Street
New York, N. Y.

ARTISTS' COMMITTEE

Anne Goldthwaite
John Taylor Arms
Stuart Davis
Hugo Gellert
John Gregory
Jonas Lie
Paul Manship
Eugene Speicher
William Zorach

Dear Mr. Wolfe:

You will recall that it was announced last Spring that the Fair Corporation would set aside a sum, equal to five per cent of the gate receipts for attendance at the Contemporary Art Building, with which to purchase works at the Exhibition for donation to art galleries in various parts of the country.

Your painting "Vermont Ruin" has been selected by the Governing Committee to be purchased with this fund. This will account for the fact that it has not been returned to you. You will receive payment as soon as the allocation of these works to the various museums has been decided upon.

Announcement of the purchases will then be made in the press but, meanwhile, no publicity whatever should be given to the matter. We shall appreciate it if you will cooperate with us in this respect.

Very truly yours,

Elizabeth Ditchfield

Assistant Director
Department of Contemporary Art

Letter

November 27, 1939

The World's Fair Department of Contemporary Art informs Wolfe that one of his submitted works had been selected for purchase.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR 1939

INCORPORATED

58278

VOUCHER No. _____

To **Meyer Wolfe ·**
58 West 57 Street ·
New York, New York ·

CHECK No. _____ DATE _____

DATE **DEC 27 1939**

DATE OF INVOICE	YOUR INVOICE NO. OR REFERENCE	OUR ORDER NO.	AMOUNT	TOTAL
12-12-39	Sale of painting entitled "Vermont Ruin" ·			
	Sales Price	150.00		
	Less: Commission at 15%	<u>22.50</u>		127.50
	DUE DATE		DISCOUNT _____	
			NET TOTAL	127.50

Purchase Receipt

December 27, 1939

The painting *Vermont Ruin* is today in the collection of the University of Minnesota

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

Letter

March 21, 1940

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) acknowledges Wolfe's print shipment to Nashville and mentions his friend Alfred Starr assisting with publicity for a public exhibition.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum



Mr. Meyer Wolfe
58 West 57th Street
New York, N. Y

Dear Mr. Wolfe:

I received your letter and your lithographys today and am very happy to have them both. I think the lithographs will make an extremely fine exhibit.

I shall send out about 300 or 400 invitations and use all the publicity you gave me and that Mr. Starr can give me and I shall do everything to see that you get a vacation in the South Seas, though I don't see why you don't seriously consider a vacation here, which is South if not seas. If you would I am sure we will be glad to have you on the Art Project--if that would be a vacation.

Yours very truly,

Karl Kershaw
Karl Kershaw
State Supervisor
State-wide Art Project

KK:MD

Lithographs by
Meyer Wolfe

Dead Tree
Red Eyes Hall
I hide my face before
the Lord
Vanderbilt Clinic
Baptism
Conservation Piece
Museum Pieces
Tuesday
Corner Spruce and Gay

—
Prints \$10⁰⁰ each

Drawings & Small studies
in oil by Charles Cagle.

Nude on Sofa \$ 33⁰⁰
Little nude with mirror . 50⁰⁰
Margaret 45⁰⁰
Drawings . . . each . . . 15⁰⁰

—
Music by
Tennessee W.P.A. Music Project

Gallery Sponsored by
George Peabody College
W.P.A. Art Project

Catalog, The Artist Guild showing Meyer Wolfe and Charles Cagle

April 1940

This first exhibition by the Nashville Artist Guild was sponsored by the WPA, and took place on the campus of today's Vanderbilt Peabody College of Education.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

Exhibition Catalog
1934

In 1934 Wolfe entered four lithographs in Salons of America's unjuried exhibition, including *Tuesday-Othelia* and *Red Eye's Hall*.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum



NEW YORK
NO - JURY
EXHIBITION
SALONS OF
AMERICA, INC.

SPRING
1934



THE FORUM
ROCKEFELLER CENTER

Exhibition Catalog
American Art Today
National Art Society
1939

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum



AMERICAN
ART
TODAY

© NYWF

NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR

Published by NATIONAL ART SOCIETY

Exhibition Catalog
1942

During World War II, Wolfe contributed two prints to this gigantic 1942 show at New York's Metropolitan Museum.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Artists for Victory

*An Exhibition of
Contemporary
American Art*

**PAINTINGS
SCULPTURE
PRINTS**



SPONSORED BY ARTISTS FOR VICTORY, INC.

Exhibition Catalog
1946

After the war, Wolfe placed two lithographs, *Man Calling* and *Women Bathing*, in this 1946 San Francisco exhibition.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum



CONVERSATION BY THE LAGOON

ELEANOR COEN

SAN FRANCISCO ART ASSOCIATION PURCHASE PRIZE

**TENTH ANNUAL DRAWING AND PRINT EXHIBITION
SAN FRANCISCO ART ASSOCIATION
FEBRUARY 13th THROUGH MARCH 10th · 1946**

SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF ART

Exhibition Catalog
1965

In the summer of 1965, the Southern Vermont Art Center was the site of Meyer Wolfe's first all sculpture exhibition.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

Southern Vermont Art Center

MANCHESTER



VERMONT

**1965
FESTIVAL
of the
ARTS**



**Chapter Four:
Louise Dahl-Wolfe
1895 - 1984**



A lifetime of fashion and other things in the face
Louise Dahl-Wolfe was a fashion photographer and a pioneer in the field of fashion photography. She was the first woman to be named Creative Director of the magazine Harper's Bazaar in 1943. After working for Harper's Bazaar, she moved to Paris in 1945, where she worked for Christian Dior. She was also a fashion designer and a writer. She was married to the architect and designer Paul Lester Wilson.



Working with editors: Creative Director and Photo Editor
Louise Dahl-Wolfe was the first woman to be named Creative Director of the magazine Harper's Bazaar in 1943. She was also a fashion designer and a writer. She was married to the architect and designer Paul Lester Wilson.




Harper's Bazaar, March 1943



Harper's Bazaar, June 1953



William S. Edwards, 1922

William S. Edwards, 1922



John Burt Foster, 1922



George H. White, 1928



William S. Edwards, 1922



George H. White, 1928

Chapter Four: Louise Dahl-Wolfe 1895 – 1989



California native Louise Dahl in San Francisco, 1915.
From *A Photographer's Scrapbook*, by Louise Dahl-Wolfe

A student of fine art and color theory at the San Francisco Institute of Art, Louise Dahl began experimenting with photography in 1921. After meeting future husband Meyer Wolfe in Tunisia in 1927, she became a freelance photographer before joining *Harper's Bazaar* in 1936—a time when women's magazines were growing in popularity and reputation.

Working with editors Carmel Snow and Diana Vreeland, Dahl-Wolfe made fashion photography an art form in its own right, putting women at the forefront of the industry. From 1936 to 1958 her photographs for *Harper's* included 86 covers, 600 images published in color, and thousands in black-and-white. A pioneer in the use of outdoor light, vivid color, and shooting on location, her innovations and modernist touches made her work celebrated in the mid-twentieth century, influencing photographers such as Irving Penn and Richard Avedon. Dahl-Wolfe is also known for her portraits of celebrities, including dancer Josephine Baker, filmmaker Jean Cocteau, and sculptor Isamu Noguchi, and was instrumental in launching the careers of actress Lauren Bacall and sculptor William Edmondson.

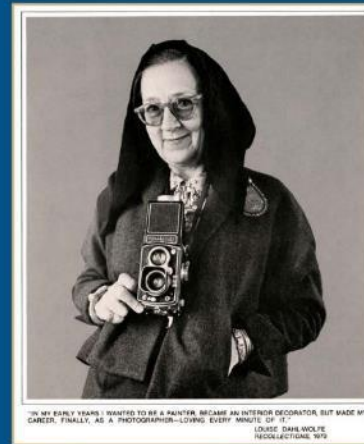


Image courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

Following her departure from *Harper's* in 1958, Dahl-Wolfe continued her portraiture and did work for *Vogue* and *Sports Illustrated*, before retiring in 1960. Years later she reflected on her life with Meyer:

"We have a lot of fun together. He's been the luckiest thing in my life. I'll tell you, if I've done anything, I've done it with enthusiasm. It is a very precious time in our life right now. I have a wonderful companion in my husband. I just hope it doesn't get too crowded before we pass out the picture."

In the wake of Meyer's death in 1985, Louise Dahl-Wolfe lived in Nashville for a time before returning to New Jersey where she passed away in 1989.



In one of Louise's favorite personal photos, she and Meyer walk arm-in-arm down a Manhattan street in 1947.
From *A Photographer's Scrapbook*, by Louise Dahl-Wolfe

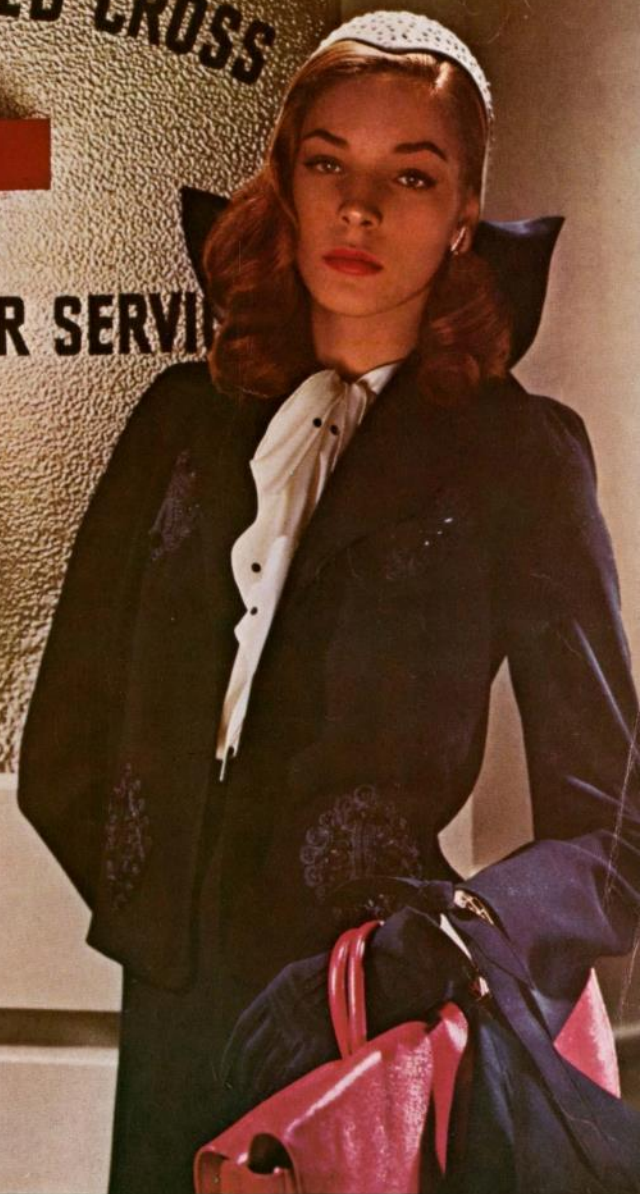
Harper's **BAZAAR**

March 1943

AMERICAN RED CROSS



BLOOD DONOR SERVICE



Harper's Bazar

March 1943

This Harper's cover featuring eighteen-year-old model Laruen Bacall got the attention of Hollywood director Howard Hawks – leading to Bacall's 1944 film debut in *To Have and Have Not* with Humphry Bogart.

Harper's June 1953

BAZAAR

Incorporating Junior Bazaar

Harper's Bazar
June 1953

Louise Dahl-Wolfe's bold use of color is seen in this cover image of 1950s super-model Jean Patchett at the Alhambra Palace in Spain.



The Clothes for Summer Everywhere · Coronation in England

60 cents

California Desert

Gelatin silver print
1948

According to Louise Dahl-Wolfe, "This was actually a fashion shoot for bathing suits but I got the model to pose nude for me; she had to put the towel around her head against the burning heat of the Mojave."

*Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs.
Lawrence K. Wolfe*



Louise Dahl-Wolfe
1945

William Edmondson

1937

Nashville sculptor William Edmondson was the subject of numerous portraits by Louise Dahl-Wolfe. In addition, she and Meyer brought his work to the attention of Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) director Alfred Barr, Jr. In 1937, Edmondson became the first African-American to have a one-artist show at MoMA.

Image courtesy of the Center for Creative Photography, Arizona Board of Regents



***Suzy Parker by the
Seine, Costume by
Balenciaga, 1953***

With an artist sketching in the foreground, this fashion plate is from one of the Dahl-Wolfe's many location shoots in Paris.

*Image courtesy of the
Center for Creative
Photography, Arizona
Board of Regents*



Orson Welles, 1938

This portrait of Welles was made the same year as his famous radio adaptation *War of the Worlds*, just prior to his 1941 film masterpiece *Citizen Kane*.

Image courtesy of the Center for Creative Photography, Arizona Board of Regents



Japanese Bath
1954

In her 1984 book, *A Photographer's Scrapbook*, Dahl-Wolfe noted the Asian backdrop of this image was constructed in a New York studio.

*Image courtesy of the Center
for Creative Photography,
Arizona Board of Regents*



Mary Sykes in Puerto Rico
1938

“People say I was demanding, and I guess I did drive my models hard. I was teased by my models for saying ‘Hold it! Hold it!’ All the time. I suppose I stormed a lot, but in the end, we’d all have a drink together.”
- Louise Dahl-Wolfe

Image courtesy of the Center for Creative Photography, Arizona Board of Regents



Harper's Bazaar
April 1958

According to Louise Dahl-Wolfe, the backgrounds of the 1958 spread were painted by Meyer or at the call his "Mike." Referring to someone's official photo photos, Dahl-Wolfe said, "Mike was one of the few who could speak the language bringing order to it. He nicknamed me 'Queen Louise' and with his unobtrusive sense of humor could bring me down off my royal horse."



LOUISE DAHL-WOLFE



A PHOTOGRAPHER'S SCRAPBOOK

Exhibition program
1980

This program was issued to visitors at the opening reception of Louise Dahl-Wolfe's Checkwood exhibition in the summer of 1980.

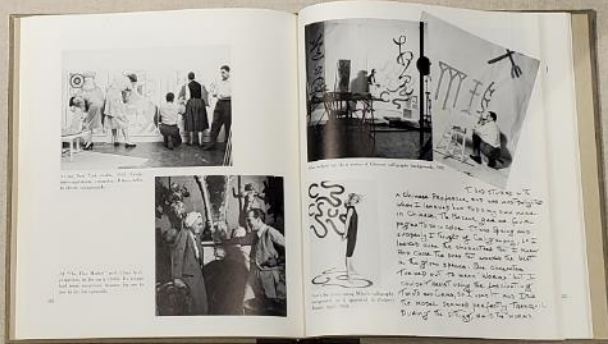
The Fashion Photography of

LOUISE
DAHL-WOLFE

June 7-July 27, 1980

CHEEKWOOD

The Botanical Gardens and Fine Arts Center
Nashville, Tennessee 37205



A Photographer's Scrapbook
1984

In the mid-1980s St. Martin's Press published an overview of Dahl-Wolfe's photography, accompanied by her descriptions of the selected images. On pages 88-89 she comments on "Mike's" (Meyer's) contributions to the backgrounds of her photo shoots, specifically referencing the April 1958 Harper's spread he helped to create.



Cosmetic Color: Vibrant Violet

- Opposite: Vibrant violet, new radiant-complexion lighting, applied here to a wand-slim chemise dress that descends in a narrowing line from a cowl collar and a back-plunging décolletage. By Grenelle-Estevex, in Oriental Textiles raw silk. About \$70. Miss Bergdorf of Bergdorf Goodman; Dayton's, Minneapolis; Joseph Magnin. Hat by Lilly Daché; Kayser's "Plaza Pink" stockings.
- Above: The irradiating glow of a violet linen suit, cut along straight lines, is heightened by a white silk damask shirt. Suit (by Harry Frechtel, in Moygashel Irish linen, about \$90) and shirt (by Maychoff) of Lord and Taylor. Suit, also at Montaldo's; I. Magnin. Mr. John hat. Extra lighting effects, both pages: Tiffany jewels; Charles of the Ritz "Moss Rose" lipstick.

A Photographer's Scrapbook
1984

In the mid-1980s St. Martin's Press published an overview of Dahl-Wolfe's photography, accompanied by her description of the selected images. On pages 88-89 she comments on "Mike's" (Meyer's) contributions to the backgrounds of her photo shoots, specifically referencing the April 1958 *Harper's* spread he helped to create.

LOUISE DAHL-WOLFE



A PHOTOGRAPHER'S SCRAPBOOK



At my New York studio, 1953. Everyone—assistants, retoucher, Mike—helps to create backgrounds.



At "The Flea Market" with Elmo Avert, proprietor, in the early 1940s. He always had some marvelous treasure for me to use in my backgrounds.



Mike helped me do a series of Chinese calligraphy backgrounds, 1957.



Here's the photo using Mike's calligraphy background, as it appeared in *Harper's Bazaar*, April 1958.

I had studied with a Chinese Professor and was most delighted when I learned how to do my own name in Chinese. The Bazaar gave me four pages to do in color. It was Spring and suddenly I thought of Calligraphy, so I looked over the characters that I knew and chose the ones that worked the best in the given spaces. One character turned out to mean "Worms" but I couldn't resist using the fascinating Twists and Waves, so I used it and IRIS the Model seemed perfectly Tranquil during the sitting, amid the worms.

Exhibition program

1980

This program was issued to visitors at the opening reception of Louise Dahl-Wolfe's Cheekwood exhibition in the summer of 1980.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

The Fashion Photography of

**LOUISE
DAHL-WOLFE**

June 7-July 27, 1980

CHEEKWOOD

The Botanical Gardens and Fine Arts Center
Nashville, Tennessee 37205

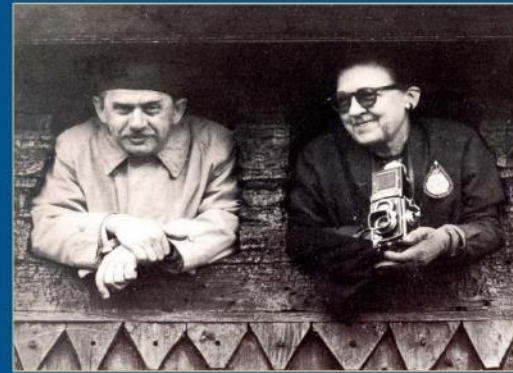
Chapter Five: Manhattan, Europe, New Jersey, & Nashville 1948 – 1979



Wolfe began making sculpture in the late 1940s. Here he is at work in his New Jersey studio, circa 1960. Image courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

In the decade after World War II, Louise became renowned for her bold, stylish imagery, that helped to define the field of fashion photography. In turn, Meyer produced backdrops for her shoots, managed her business affairs, and continued to make art, unfettered by financial considerations.

With an apartment and photo studio in Manhattan, the Wolfes purchased a country retreat in the late 1940s. Dubbed "The Creamery," the former dairy in Frenchtown, New Jersey, was transformed into a large studio



Meyer and Louise at a photo shoot in Norway, 1950.
film A Photographers Scrapbook by Louise Guth-Meyer

where Meyer continued his artistic journey. Now in his early fifties, Wolfe turned his attention to the medium of sculpture. Working prodigiously, his pieces were many and varied as he molded, carved, and welded in plaster, wood, ceramic, and bronze. The forms were often stylized, in the spirit of Modernists such as Henry Moore, but were objectively figurative.

While experimenting with sculpture, Wolfe continued painting, working in Europe when he accompanied Louise there on photography shoots. Influenced by Expressionism and Surrealism, his realist style gave way to exaggerated figures, organic shapes, and bold colors. This late work is imaginative, but not abstract. The playful and sometimes mysterious themes were likely a product of the forward-looking post-war culture in which Wolfe lived.

In November 1979 Wolfe returned to Middle Tennessee with a lifetime retrospective sponsored by the Nashville Artist Guild. As a reviewer of the time summed it up: "To see the whole array of Wolfe's work is to view the historic progression of contemporary art. One sees there the transition of style, and the impact of influence as artists reflected the changes about them." This observation remains true today as the art of Meyer Wolfe continues to evoke time and place in the art history of America.



Dior's Workroom - Paris, Charcoal, 1951

Meyer assisted Louise on many of her photography trips abroad during the 1940s and 1950s. This scene from the Parisian house of fashion designer Christian Dior was likely sketched on location.

Courtesy of Cheekwood Estate & Gardens



Dior's Workroom - Paris, Oil on canvas, 1951

Based on the previous charcoal sketch, this subsequent painting colorfully presents the Christian Dior seamstresses at work.

Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe



Conversation (The Socialists), Oil on canvas, 1951

With a whimsical nod to the cafés of Europe, Wolfe liked to call this painting, “The Socialists.”

Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe

Untitled
Wood
c. 1970

Evoking classical ruins, this sculpture was exhibited several times in the 1970s – most notably at his 1979 retrospective.

Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe

Untitled
Wood
c. 1970
Evoking classical ruins, the sculpture was exhibited several times in the 1970s – most notably at his 1979 retrospective.



Untitled
Wood
c. 1970

A larger example of Wolfe's use of exaggerated form, the organic figures of this vertical sculpture appear to be wearing crowns.

Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe

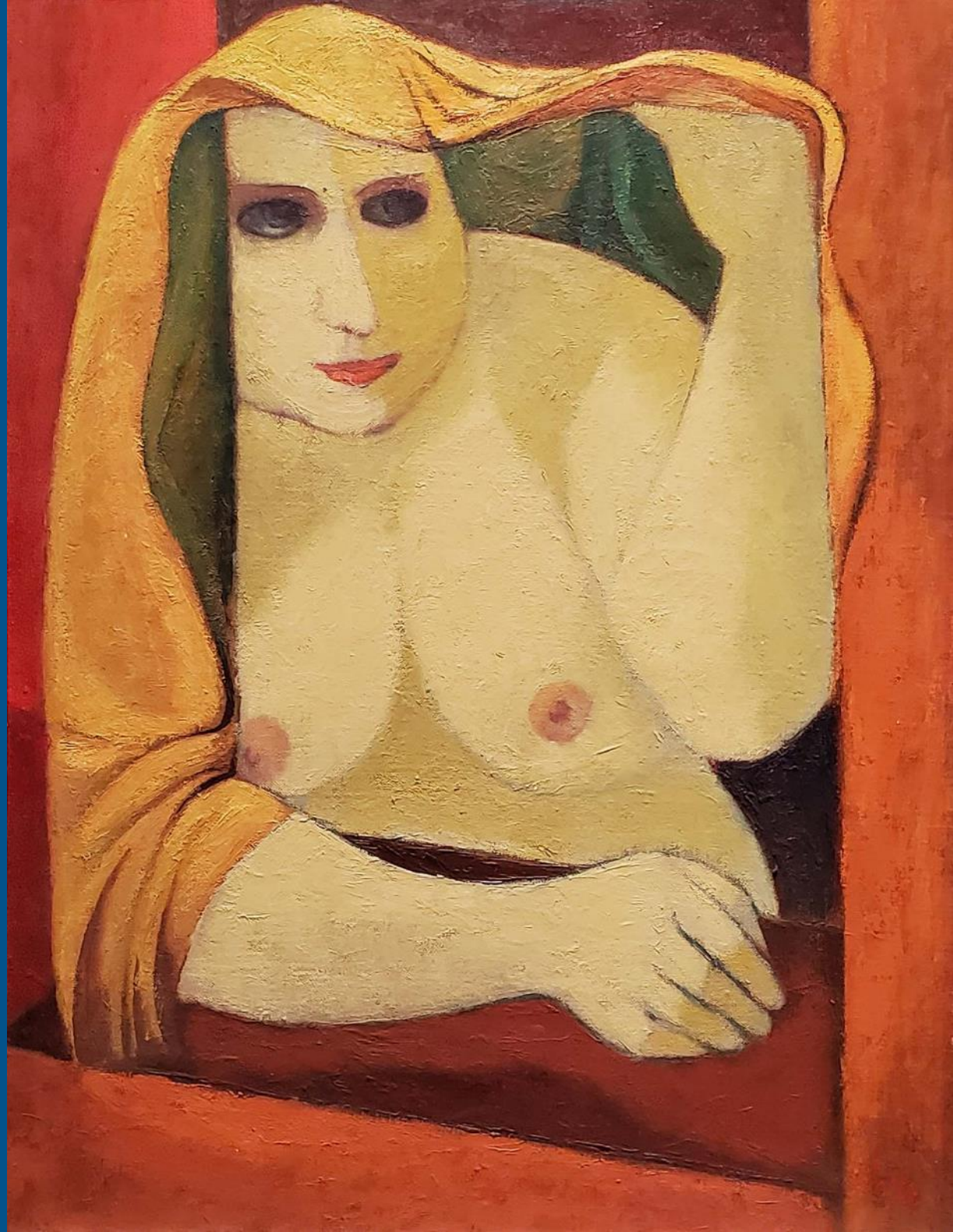


The Shawl

Oil on canvas
1948

The story behind *The Shawl* remains a mystery, but the stylized portrait is an example of Wolfe's new direction as he moved away from the American Regionalist style.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum



To My Beloved

Pastel

1958

Meyer gave this drawing to Louise to mark their 30th wedding anniversary. Despite a few differences through the years, the couple were ever devoted to one another.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

To
My
Beloved
M.W.

30
1958



Untitled

Wood relief

c. 1960

This relief sculpture by Wolfe is a good example of Wolfe's later fascination with exaggerated organic forms.

Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe



The Girls

Oil on canvas

1961

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum





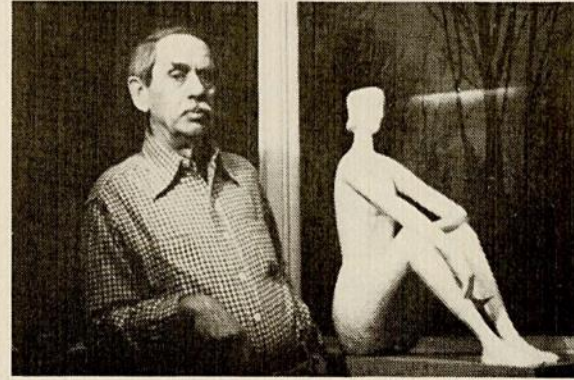
One and All II, Oil on canvas, 1972

Produced in a series advocating social harmony, this painting of four diverse profiles is a colorful glimpse into Meyer Wolfe's gentle wish for a better world.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum



Reflections of a Lifetime



Meyer Wolfe

For an artist like Meyer Wolfe, art is more a way of life than a profession. The results can be seen in the rich textures, vibrant colors and rhythmical lines of his paintings and sculpture.

A one-time resident of Nashville, Tennessee, Mr. Wolfe has studied and exhibited in both the United States and Europe. A handsome retrospective exhibit of oils, charcoals and sculpture by this internationally known artist will be shown at the Nashville Artist Guild Gallery, November 18-30.

It is an opportunity to see a lifetime collection of expressive and beautifully executed art.

Reflections of a Lifetime, Opening Invitation, 1979

With this 1979 retrospective, Meyer Wolfe's artistic journey arrived full circle. Tennessee was the site of his first one artist show in 1928, and the Nashville Artist Guild had featured him in their first exhibition in 1940. Some of Wolfe's most striking work was inspired by Nashville. When a journalist asked him about his considerable career, he modestly replied, "Both my painting and lithography give me my greatest source of pain and pleasure... I have had very little acclaim but continue to work nevertheless." Meyer Wolfe would continue to make art for the sake of art until his passing on June 9, 1984.

Image courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

**Untitled
(Mother and Child)**

Composite materials and paint
c. 1960

Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe



**Untitled
(Female with Upraised Clasped
Hands)**

Mahogany
1952

Handcrafted in natural proportion, this seemingly elated figure is an early example of Wolfe's three dimensional art.

Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

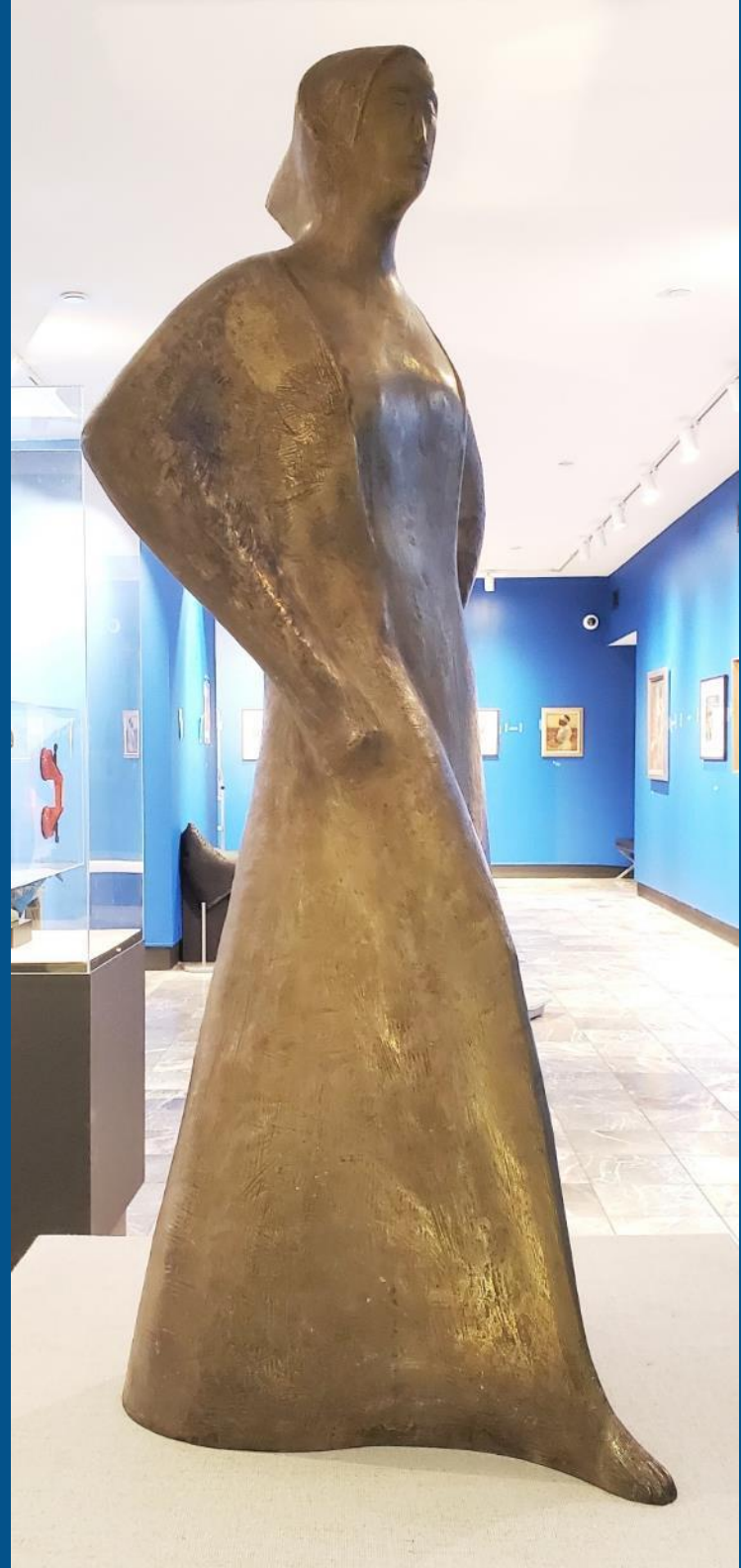


**Untitled
(Louise)**

Bronze
c. 1960

This bronze portrait of Louise was among the works displayed at the Wolfe's country retreat in Frenchtown, New Jersey.

Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence K. Wolfe



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