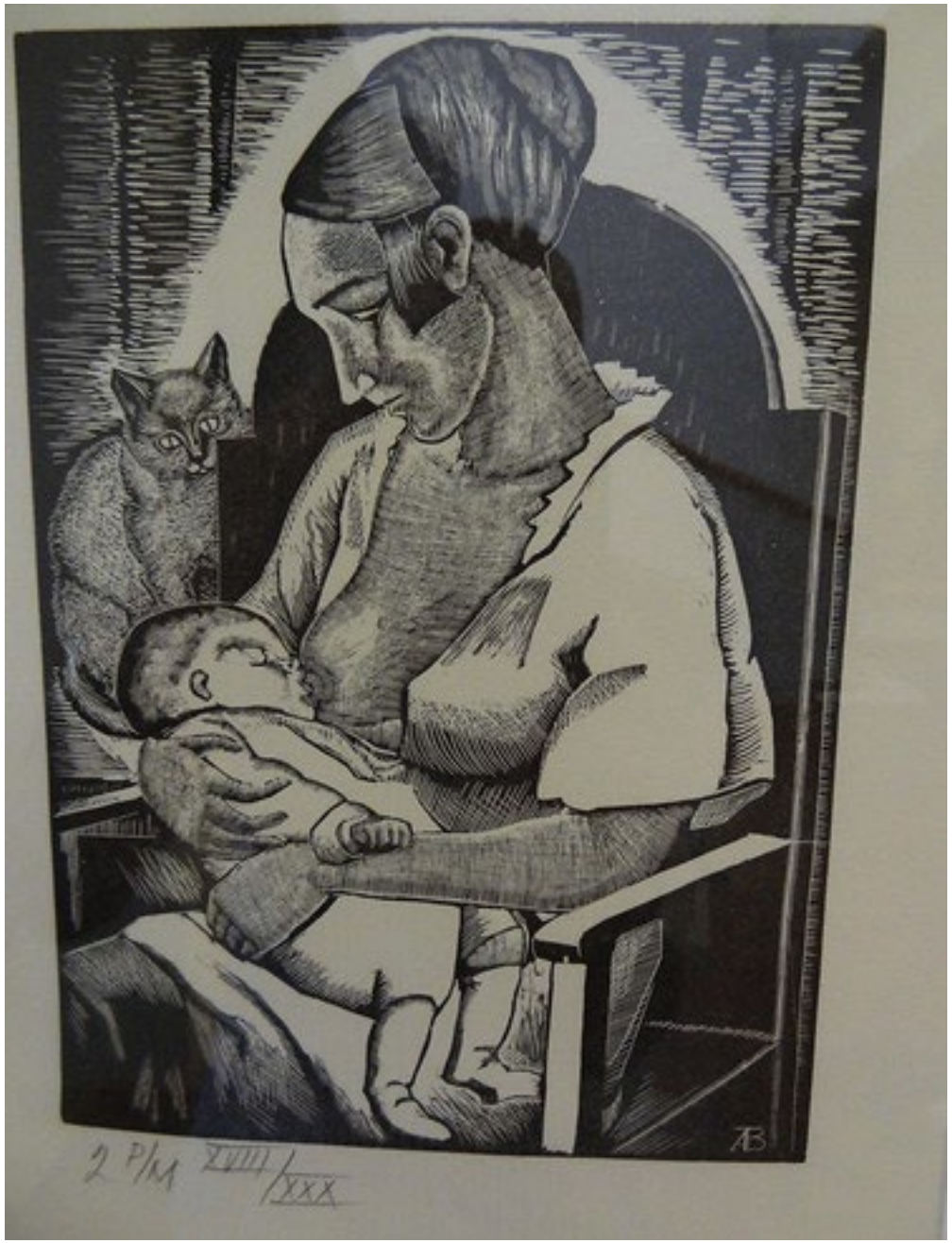
Dear Diego by Elena Poniatowska

Letter of January 2, 1922

Maternity by Angelina Beloff, 1920

Poniatowska transgresses the borders of gender, rescues and infuses her subject-characters with subjectivity, self-hood and active identity. The author formulates an "I," the subject-character, which calls into woman's representation in contemporary narratives.

The fragmented point of view, "I", that refuses to separate past, present and future. "By shuffling past, present and future, Poniatowska allows the psychological to occupy the same authorized space as the 'factual'" (Schaeffer 87-88)



“the note (Postcript) at the end invites us to go back over what we have read, interpreting the letters no longer as purely fictional, but also as ‘real’, since their content is now understood to have partially originated from Beloff’s own words] (50). Susan C. Schaffer indicates that “Poniatowska’s act of crediting Wolfe is thus recast as an effort to discredit (93).

Poniatowska explained the génesis of the novel as she started Reading Wolfe’s biography of Diego: “I read as far as the chapter on Angelina Beloff, and there I could go no further. I so much identified with her … after reading a letter in the chapter, from Angelina to Diego, I started to write Angelina’s letters to Diego, letters that were based on the historical facts that Bertram Wolfe included in the chapter”

“...The fact is that you do not write me, that you will write less and less...”

Quiela appears as image maker, and protagonist of her own story, a doubling that constructs the subject-character of their own narratives.

The physical presence of Quiela is marked by presenting a subject-character who achieves and demonstrates a capacity for control of her selfhood.

Poniatowska constitutes, in the texts, a subject-character whose body is the object of her will and becomes an acting subject in her own right.

Poniatowska is contesting, in her novels, society's official body politics by engaging the reader in the embodied appearances of Angelina Beloff's physical body.

Poniatowska's texts stand on their own because for her "writing about another life becomes the site of subjectivity, now understood as discursive, contextual, communicative." (Subjectivity 51)

Celebrating the physical and verbal strength of Beloff, Poniatowska undermines the discourse of gender reinserting the body of Beloff as individuals with a cultural history.

Soliloquy in *Dear Diego*

01

This soliloquy points to Quiela's mental functions of judging and deciding, as she states in one of the letters "he will appear, no, no he will not appear ever again because he is a product of my imagination." (49)

02

Poniatowska's narrative strategy can be explained by what St. Augustine stated in his Refraction's regarding the search of truth: " I asked myself a question and I replied to myself, as if we were two, reason and I, whereas I was of course just one." (qtd. in. Bueler 152).

03

An unfolding of the "I" takes place, as Poniatowska allows Quiela's constant questioning and answering to flow through the novel

“Do you love me, Diego? Yes, it is painful,…my personality, my habits, my entire being, went through a complete transformation…”

She acknowledges that her personality, her entire being was transformed during the years she and Diego were together:

- “I became completely Mexican, and I feel connected par preoccupation to your language, your country…Our Mexican friends are the ones who have led me to believe I could make a living in Mexico giving lessons (53).”

Quiela converses with the silent Diego as she paints giving testament to her inner transformations for she has stopped seeing lines and shadows as possibilities for drawings. Rather than observing life in purely aesthetic terms, her own suffering has put her in contact with the social situations of the life that surrounds her “…Now everything has changed and I feel sad when I watch the children crossing the street on their way to school. They are

not drawings” (42).

This indicates a radical transformation in Quiela's life that would eventually have profound ramifications when she goes to Mexico in 1932.

Poniatowska's narrative technique points to her literary productions when a dialogue is constituted in which the reader, through Quiela's voice, is also able to question Diego's silence.

In several letters Quiela poses to Diego the most important question of her life: whether he still loves her.

The Letters

Bruce-Novoa offers a commentary: “Poniatowska’s re-creation and publication of the letters can be seen, then, as an ambiguous act of opening the print media to the voice of a wronged woman who seems to prove the stereotypical rule about female behavior… in fact her text re-creates successfully the process of grieving for a lost love. Yet this type of limited interpretation is possible only if we read with those patriarchal expectations…” (121)

Sifuentes Jáuregui indicates that “the text is a struggle to articulate a loss, or rather, many losses” (72) of Diego, of the “I” and of her son and of her family

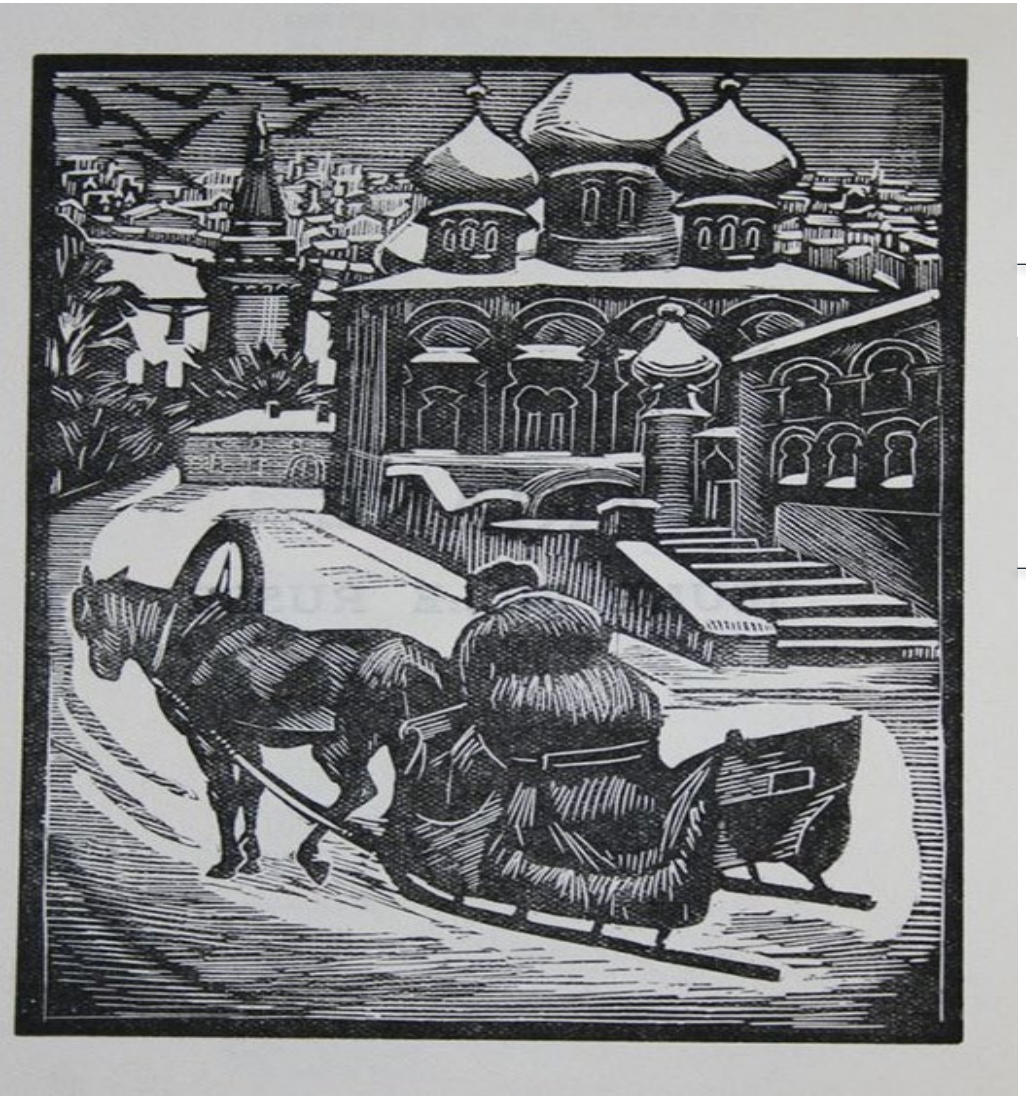
Bruce-Novoa brings to light that Poniatowska “creates the possibility of reading the letters as a recuperative healing process” (125)

Dear Diego

Wolfe have said about Angelina Beloff: “Her life was not centered in painting as his was, with all else subordinate”

Schaffer states appropriately: “In *Querido Diego*, Poniatowska does not merely exact revenge on patriarchy’s depiction of women, she also opens up for her subject a new dispersive space in which room is allowed for complexity, contradiction, and evolution” (86)

Beloff, *The Sled* ca. 1920 wood engraving



Even Rivera's delicate words for addressing Beloff as Quiela comes out of Wolfe: "Angelina was by all accounts a sweet and win her lightness and gentleness and infinite patience ? 'she was well named Angelina,' Diego said to me twenty years later ? contrasted vividly with his physic temper, and 'Mexican savagery.'"52

Finally, Quiela's summary of her relation appears in the penultimate letter, " [In a natural way without dowry, without economic agreement, without a contract, we got together believed in bourgeois institutions. Together, we faced life and thus ten years wen my life]"

Quiela is closed to madness, [I turn around in the room like someone who has l aggravated by her poverty and hunger and exacerbate response to her missives. (Rivera periodically sends her letters.) Quiela manages to navigate her agonizing present o him.

The painter, however, finally gives up on her desire: Even your colors, cleaning your palette, keeping your brushes and not getting pregnant" (Quiela, p. 65).10 But in her paintings, she rediscovers her life before Rivera: “ I am ready to accept myself as I am" (Quiela, p. 70). The ending is uncertain, her declared intention not to write Rivera again, Beloff’s decision is evident in her P.S. What is your opinion about my engravings? [Wha p. 71). This uncertainty makes the coda, in its cold and thus sums up the text's impact upon its readers.

Museo Frida Kahlo, Beloff's ; third letter to Rivera and *Dear Diego* letter of January 2, 1922.

RETRATO DE LA SEÑORA LAURA VILLASEÑOR , 1963
Angelina Beloff

The letters in the *Museum Frida Kahlo* present an Agelina Beloff that refuses to be reduced to be Diego's shadow. In her letter of February 8th, Beloff states:

"Nim, write and tell me about your work, please do not think that I will not understand because now, more than ever, I am more intelligent because I am stronger and I am more rested [my translation]. Beloff letter, V.

In this same letter, Beloff states "You do not have much faith in me. But I am sure that I am worth something."

Is Poniatowska leading the reader to see the other Beloff with this strategy?

Quiela's self-assurance and believe in herself are palpable in these letters of the museum. Although Poniatowska uses Betram Wolfe document as a referent, she also intentionally include the names of important people in the life of Beloff and Rivera in Paris and then in Mexico.

This letter mentions: Zarraga, Zadkin, Feure, Blanchard, Gris, Ortiz de Zarate, Lipschitz and Hayden. **Is**

Poniatowska contesting Wolfe image of Beloff?

Sols Sage (Be good) Juana de Arco 1917
Blanchard

The Guitarist and the Fruit Bowl (La Guitarra y el frutero), Juan Gris 1918

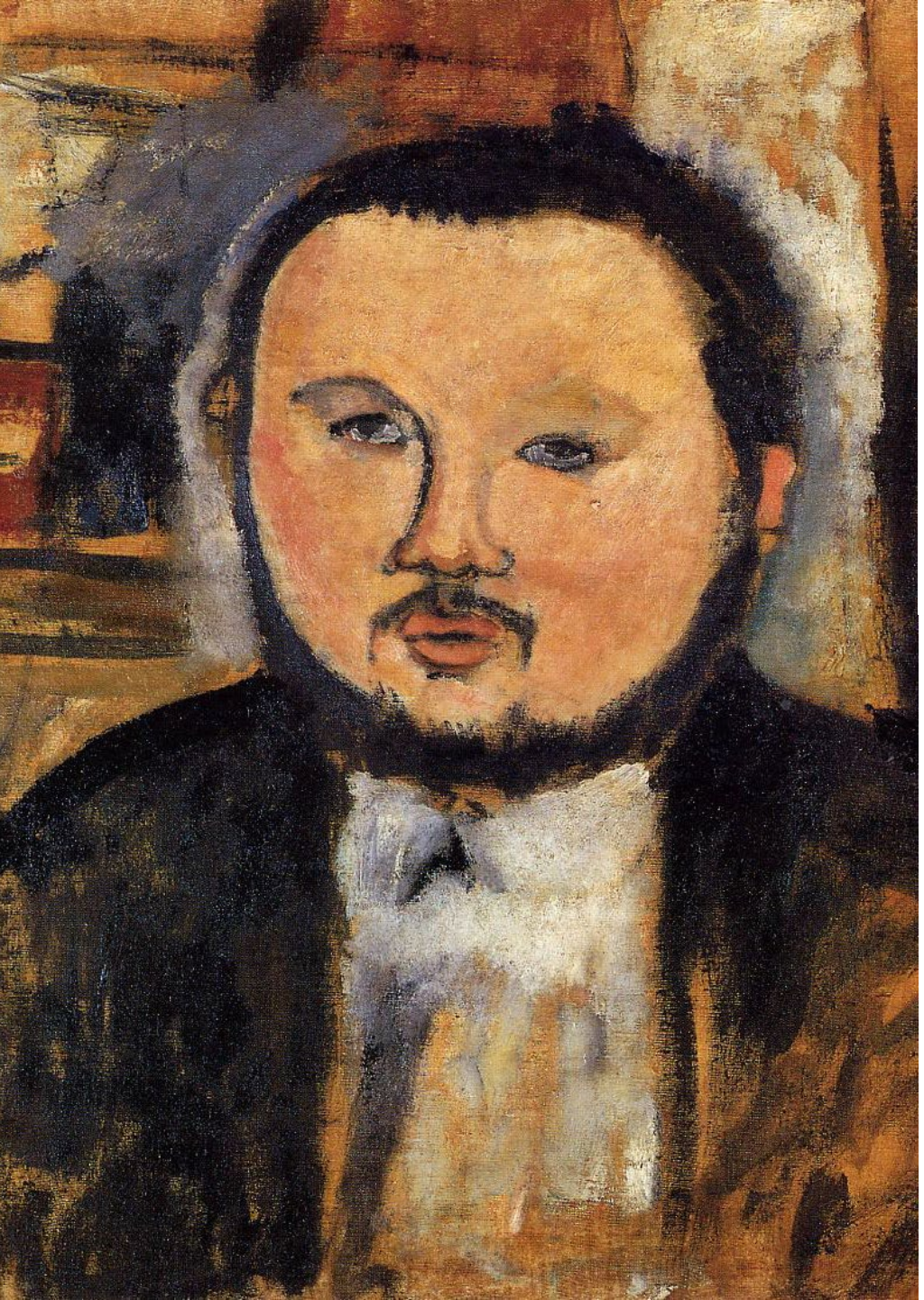
These are Beloff’s friends, Gris and Blanchard worked in the execution and point of view of a new style of painting. Both wanted that the painting was to be seen because of its plastic value no ignoring the visual experience.

Juan Gris and Maria Blanchard. ***Juan Gris**, María **Blanchard** y los cubismos (1916-1927)* video from the Museum Carmen Thyssen in Málaga, Spain.

https://video.search.yahoo.com/video/play;_ylt=Awrhcgv1ikRi3GcNaCj7w8QF;_ylu=c2VjA3NyBHNsawN2aWQEdnRpZAMEZ3BvcwMx?p=juan+gris+and+maria+blanchard&vid=39f727e417ccff254dab2ed734bab06b&turl=https%3A%2F%2Ftse1.mm.bing.net%2Fth%3Fid%3DOVP.s8YEEB7Y6UhKbIYBkObYewEsCo%26pid%3DApi%26h%3D168%26w%3D300%26c%3D7%26rs%3D1&rurl=https%3A%2F%2Fvimeo.com%2F247780052&tit=Exposición+%26%2339%3BJuan+Gris%2C+Mar%C3%ADa+%3Cb%3EBlanchard%3C%2Fb%3E+y+los+cubismos+%281916-1927%29&c=0&h=168&w=300&l=528&sigr=Wa8EkAbkdv.3&sigt=rORzMh2_w5X7&sigi=IWkxqslGeyeH&age=1513594920&fr2=p%3As%2Cv%3Av&fr=aaplw&tt=b

"A Certain Professional Secret”: Juan Gris’s Studio Practice”

https://youtu.be/J1hMV1VyDYY



Portrait of Diego Rivera
by Modigliani, 1914

Rivera and Modigliani and Beloff were very good friends. They were part of the group of artists that included Picasso, Jean Cocteau and Max Jacobson. Bothe had an argument about the landscapes.

Kawashima and Fuyita Diego Rivera 1914

Eyewitnesses said that Diego Rivera was painting a double portrait of Tsuguharu Fujita and Riichiro Kawashima in the cubist style, when the artist Manuel de Zárate ran into the studio bringing the incredible news — Picasso himself invited Rivera to pay him a visit!

Portrait of Illya Ehrenburg, 1915

https://youtu.be/vUiqvcUab38

Rivera's favorite subject matter was portraiture, a reflection of his early interest in rendering the human form and in challenging one of the most traditional art historical genres. He expertly deconstructed his subjects' visages in order to reassemble them meticulously on canvas.

The portraits in the exhibition introduce the viewer to his closest European friends and loved ones, those artists and intellectuals whose relationships proved invaluable to the young artist's development. They include several of Rivera's countrymen, notably writer Martín Luis Guzmán, painter Adolfo Best Maugard and architect Jesús T. Acevedo. The portraits also reveal Rivera's relationship with Paris's Russian émigré community, which he became acquainted with through his Parisian lovers (artists Angelina Beloff and Marevna Vorobieva-Stebelska).

Journalist, novelist, poet - Ilya Ehrenburg (1891-1967) was one of the most important Russian cultural figures of the twentieth century.

Rivera's and Blloff's circle of close friends included Ilya Ehrenburg, Chaim Soutine, Modigliani and his wife Jeanne Hébuterne, Max Jacob, gallery owner Léopold Zborowski, and Moise Kisling. Rivera's former companion Marie Vorobieff-Stebelska (Marevna) honored the circle in her painting *Homage to Friends from Montparnasse* (1962).

Ehrenburg's other world was the small cafés along the Boulevard St. Michel. He now carefully avoided the Pantheon, where the group of Russian Marxists congregated, and began to patronize La Source, another café a few blocks down the Boulevard, where young painters and poets gathered. The rising star among the painters was Diego Rivera, whose fame did not as yet go beyond the confines of the Boul'Mich. Ehrenburg became his closest friend and admirer. Rivera encouraged Ehrenburg to paint. Ehrenburg's paintings were not bad, but they couldn't stand comparison to Rivera's. Then the Mexican, who was at that time a cubist, made a rather unorthodox portrait of Ilya which the latter did not like at all; long arguments on cubism eventually shattered the friendship and drove Ehrenburg to the poets' corner of La Source. Soon after he took up writing poetry.

LIPCHITZ, JACQUES (**Chaim Jacob**; 1891–1973), U.S. sculptor

He was born in Druskieniki, Lithuania. He attended school in Bialystok and in 1909 went to Paris, where he adopted the name Jacques. There he studied and became a French citizen in 1925. In 1930 he had a large retrospective exhibition which gave him his international reputation. In 1940 the German advance compelled him to leave Paris and seek refuge in unoccupied France. In 1941 he went to the United States, and settled in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York.

Lipchitz was one of the foremost cubist sculptors – his first pure cubist sculpture is dated 1913. He was influenced by the painters Picasso and Braque, and by the visionary El Greco. He developed an interest in African wood carvings which he collected. During this early period, Lipchitz frequently worked in stone. These pieces, with their sharp edges, flat planes, and solid mass came very close to pure abstraction.

ORTIZ DE ZARATE Manuel (1886-1946), Self portrait n°6. Huile sur toile, signée et datée 1937

Chilean painter of the Montparnasse group of artists. Lived in Europe.

Amedeo Modigliani, Max Jacob, André Salmon, and Manuel Ortiz de Zárate (photographed by Jean Cocteau) - Boulevard de Montparnasse, Paris -August 12, 1916.

Manuel Ortiz de Zarate (1887 - 1946) - *Paysage verdoyant, Green Landscape*.

Notre Dame de Paris, Ortiz de Zárate

This painting reflects the characteristics of the *Montparnasse Group* which was leaving romantic motives. This painting reflects a n urban landscape.

Nature Morte
Signed Ortiz de Zárate and dated 1916. Canvas 56 x 40 cm.

Palmer Hayden

Hayden was born Peyton Cole Hedgeman in a small Virginia town roughly fifty miles southwest of Washington, DC. After moving to DC at age sixteen to live with an aunt, he took a job as a general laborer for the circus. In 1912 he enlisted in the military, but due to a mistaken reference letter, he was registered as Palmer Cole Hayden, a name he adopted as his own. By 1920 he had left the military, and he began to study painting—in New York City with Cooper Union art instructor Victor Perard and later in Boothbay Harbor, Maine, at the Commonwealth Art Colony. When Hayden traveled to Paris in 1927, his painting focus changed from seascapes to genre scenes of the thriving African diaspora in the French metropolis. Stylistically, he developed a more abstract approach that flattened the pictorial field and represented the human figure in ways that at times uneasily paralleled stereotypical portrayals of African Americans in popular culture.

THE JANITOR WHO PAINTS
Palmer Hayden

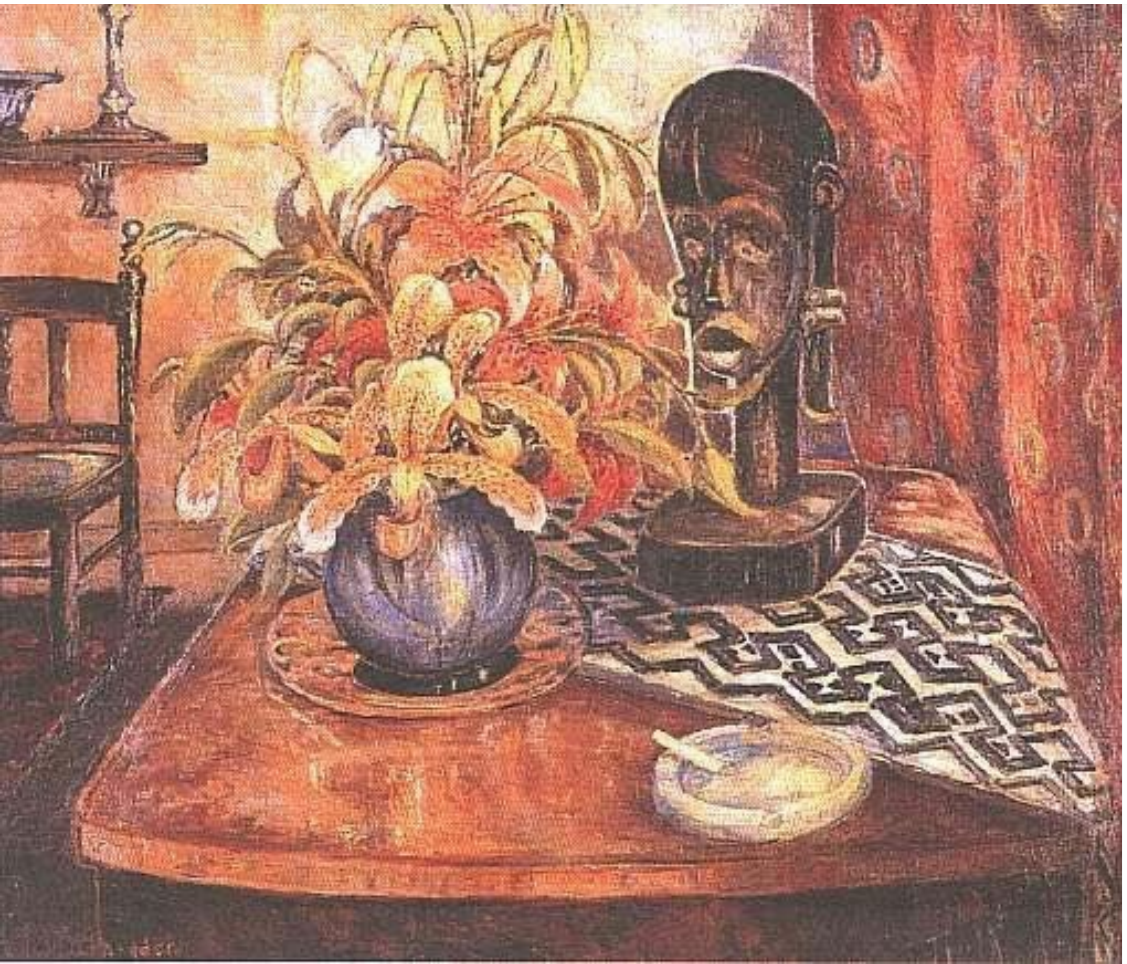
ca. 1937, repainted after 1940
oil on canvas

Title: *The Janitor Who Paints* Artist: Palmer Hayden Date: ca. 1930 Medium: Oil on canvas Dimensions: 39 1/8 x 32 7/8 in. Lender: Smithsonian American Art Museum. Hayden stated that his work, *The Janitor Who Paints*, is based on the life of his friend and the artist Cloyd Boykin: “It’s sort of a protest painting. I painted it because no one called Boykin the artist. They called him the janitor.” Hayden was often criticized for his portrayal of African Americans which drew upon caricature. Critics said he was presenting figures as caricatures for a white audience. Hayden considered his works a “symbolic reference to comedy, tragedy, and pleasure of a black lifestyle” and considered himself a “modernist who depicted modern society.”

Nous Quatre à Paris (*We Four in Paris*) Artist: Palmer Hayden Date: ca. 1930 Medium: Watercolor and pencil on paper Dimensions: 21 ¾ x 18 1/8 in. Lender: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Title: *Nous Quatre à Paris* (We Four in Paris) Artist: Palmer Hayden Date: ca. 1930 Medium: Watercolor and pencil on paper Dimensions: 21 ¾ x 18 1/8 in. Lender: *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Palmer Hayden created his works with distinct folk sensibility. He was largely self-taught and had taken a correspondence drawing course after leaving home at 16 years of age. Hayden's said to be a "mainly self-trained artist." Palmer Hayden left home when he was 16 years old to work as a circus roustabout and a house cleaner, before later joining the army. After he left the army, he worked as a janitor and an artist. Hayden won the first Harmon Foundation Gold Award for Painting. This award, along with additional funds from friends and patrons, enabled him to travel and study abroad. He studied in France from 1926-1932. *Nous Quatre à Paris* may depict Hayden and three of his friends playing cards in a café, perhaps the back room of the **café, "La Dôme," a popular meeting place for Americans, including Hemingway, Man Ray, Albert Alexander Smith**, While in Paris he painted his well-known watercolour *Nous quatre à Paris* (*c.* 1930), which features the artist playing cards with Woodruff and writers Countee Cullen and Eric Walrond, each of whom is depicted in profile with exaggerated facial features, making reference to indigenous African art.

Palmer Hayden: *Fetiche et Fleurs*, 1926



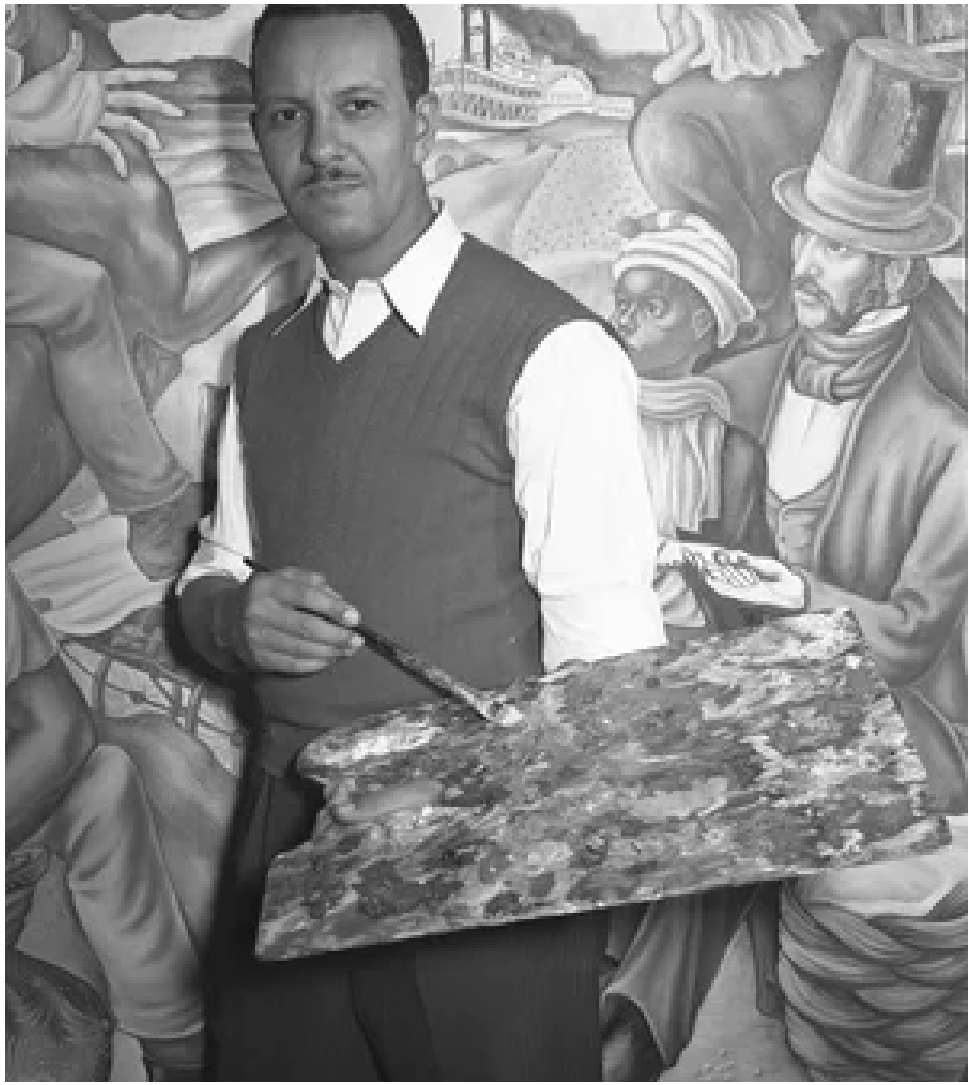
Hayden was in Paris during the final years of the *Harlem Renaissance* of the 1920s, but he had lived in New York during the formative years of that pivotal period. He knew *Harlem Renaissance* artists and shared their efforts, triumphs, and frustrations. Hayden maintained close contact with the *Harmon Foundation* while in the United States, and exhibited annually in the *Harmon Foundation* shows from 1928 to 1932 when he was in Paris.

Although Hayden received thorough academic training in New York, Maine, and Paris, his works always retained a flat naive character, which he developed independently during his youth. One of Hayden's best-known early works is *Fétiche et Fleurs* of 1926, which clearly linked Hayden with the African-Cubist tradition of Harlem and Paris.

Haley Woodruff

Woodruff grew up in Nashville, Tennessee, and went on to study art at Harvard University and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He spent four years in Paris, where he embraced European modernist styles, such as Cubism. Woodruff developed a distinctive American regionalist style in Atlanta in the 1930s and ’40s where he turned his attention to African American history and life. He understood art as an agent for social change and was inspired by the politically charged work of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. (See the Portland Art Museum poster of Rivera’s *The Fruits of Labor*.) **Woodruff spent the summer of 1938 studying with and working alongside Rivera in Mexico**. When Woodruff returned to the United States, he created some of his most widely acclaimed works: bold, brightly colored murals portraying the 1849 mutiny of African slaves aboard the slave ship *Amistad* and their subsequent trial and acquittal.

“As I said earlier, I was in Mexico back in the late Thirties, about thirty-two years ago now, and I had the good fortune to see many of those protest paintings that people like Rivera and Orozco and Siqueiros and the others had done on the walls of the schools and public buildings there. All the artists were doing it ,but strangely enough, only a few of them hang on, people like Orozco and Rivera and Siqueiros and Tamayo. the others are just journalistic kinds of reporting, so the great agony that was gone through subsequent to the Mexican Revolution and during the Revolution is there.”



Artist Hale Aspacio Woodruff was commissioned to paint the *Amistad Murals* in 1938.

"...the Federal Art Projects. You see, during the Thirties, the Arts Project was in operation. The Mexicans had begun in the 1920's. I think they began their so-called renaissance around 1923 and they had already developed a great, exciting movement down there. As you say, the influence was felt back here. There was an upsurge during the Thirties of the influence of Mexican mural painters. Almost every post office in the country had a mural painted in it. This was the influence of the Mexicans. Right at the *New School* there is a mural by Orozco. And the mural by Rivera which is supposedly still on the walls at *Radio City* was one of the great events of the day when it was first painted. So there was a general social consciousness. This is reflected in the Roosevelt Administration...Most people were too busy fighting bread and butter problems to spend time fighting race problems, but we were all in there together, you know. And this was one of the characteristics. My going to Mexico was really inspired by an effort to get into the mural painting swing. I wanted to paint great significant murals in fresco and I went down there to work with Rivera to learn his technique. " H Woodruff

Elizabeth Catlett

Catlett was born in 1915 in Washington D.C., the youngest of three children of John and Mary Carson Catlett, both schoolteachers. Her father died soon after she was born and her mother and paternal grandmother raised her. From a young age, Catlett enjoyed drawing and painting and she knew in high school that she wanted to become an artist. She won a competition for a scholarship to the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, but was rejected because she was African American. Encouraged by her mother, she attended Howard University, where she initially studied textile design before changing her major to painting…In 1942, Catlett and White moved to New York and lived in Harlem. The Harlem of the 1940s was a much different place than 10 years earlier during the Harlem Renaissance, when the *WPA*-sponsored *Harlem Community Art Center* thrived, and African American artists, musicians, and writers flourished. Catlett worked at the populist George Washington Carver School and embraced its mission. Here she met "the kind of people I had never been in contact with before. I came from a middle-class family, even though my mother had to work hard. But the school brought me into contact with working people. For the first time I began to get an understanding of the great hunger for art and culture of ordinary black people" (Bearden and Henderson, p. 422)…In New York, Catlett studied under **Ossip Zadkine** at the Art Students League. She observed Zadkine's technique in working with terra cotta and she was stylistically influenced by him as well. **Zadkine encouraged her to develop her work in a more abstract direction. Catlett was also influenced by pre-Columbian sculpture, Henry Moore's sensuous reclining nudes, and Diego Rivera's political murals.**

A *Rosenwald Fund* fellowship brought Catlett to Mexico in 1946, where she worked on her famous series of linoleum cuts, *The Negro Woman*. During her fellowship, she studied with Francisco Zuniga, one of Mexico's leading sculptors. He taught her techniques of ceramic sculpture that dated back to pre-Hispanic times. She studied wood carving and was an active member of the *Taller de Gráfica Popular*. Catlett thrived in Mexico and would remain there for decades after she married artist Francisco Mora (she and White divorced in 1946). Her three sons were born there and she became a Mexican citizen in 1962.

Elizabeth Catlett, *VENDEDORA Signed Lithograph, Portrait Seated Young Girl, Mexican Fruit Seller, 1969*

In the 1940s, Catlett traveled to Mexico on a fellowship and began to paint murals influenced by the work of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. The Mexican muralist's spirit of activism inspired Catlett to produce images of hardship by African-American women in the South, as depicted in Sharecropper (1952)—one of her most famous works. While she was in Mexico, she created a series of linocut prints featuring prominent black figures to promote literacy in the country. From 1975 until her death, she lived and worked between Cuernavaca, Mexico and New York, NY. Catlett died on April 2, 2012 in Cuernavaca, Mexico at the age of 96. Today, the artist's works are held in the collections of ***The Museum of Modern Art*** **in New York, the** ***National Gallery of Art*** **in Washington, D.C., the** ***Hammer Museum*** **in Los Angeles, and the** ***Art Institute*** **of Chicago, among others. (Artnet)**

Sharecropper, 1952

As a sculptor and printmaker, Catlett blended figurative and abstract traditions with social concerns and maintained a deep belief in the democratic power of printed art to reach a large audience. Her printmaking practice included woodcut, screenprint, lithography, and, most importantly, linoleum cut, which she learned at the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* (People's Graphic Workshop) in Mexico City. Founded in 1937, the workshop aimed to continue the Mexican tradition of socially engaged public art. It specialized in linoleum cut, a technique that produces inexpensive prints and can accommodate large editions. Catlett first visited this renowned workshop and artists' collective while she was in Mexico on a fellowship in 1946, where she found a kinship with the Mexican muralists, including **Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco**. Like them she tried, she explained, to make art "for the people, for the struggling people, to whom only realism is meaningful." (MOMA)

Harriet, Linocut, 1975

Catlett also depicts great women from African-American history, including Harriet Tubman, who is shown here leading slaves to freedom as a "conductor" on the *Underground Railroad*. Catlett's continued support of the civil rights movement in the United States during the 1960s is visible in the print completed after Malcolm X was shot and killed. It expresses Catlett's enthusiasm for the leader's successful efforts in inspiring pride in African-American women. (MoMA)
https://youtu.be/OsMexI8T8jM

https://youtu.be/znfwLwNEDSg

https://youtu.be/4xPakUbyOkg