



HAWTHORNE
Fine Art

STUART DAVIS (1892–1964)

Lower Manhattan, ca. 1930

Pencil on paper

9 ½ x 9 inches (sight)

Estate of the artist

EXHIBITIONS: “Sketchbook Drawings of Stuart Davis (1894 - 1964),” Sylvan Cole Gallery, New York, New York, October 23 - November 16, 1988, no. 15, as New York Study I.; “Stuart Davis, Drawings, Prints & Paintings,” Associated American Artists, New York, New York, December 4, 1991 - January 4, 1992, no. 22.

REFERENCES: Stuart Davis: Drawings, Prints & Paintings (exhibition catalogue). Introduction by Stephen Long. New York: Associated American Artists, 1991, illus. n.p., cat. no. 22.; Boyajian, Ani et al. Stuart Davis: a Catalogue Raisonné. New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery in association with Yale University Press, 2007, cat. no. 317.

RELATED WORKS: Barber Shop, 1930 (cat. raisonné no. 1547); New York Under Gaslight, 1941 (cat. raisonné no. 1643)

American modernist painter Stuart Davis is known for his Ashcan-influenced scenes of New York City, as well as for his subsequent Cubist-inspired landscapes and still-lives that incorporate the brightly-colored products of consumer culture, earning them the label “protoPop.”

Davis was born in Philadelphia to creative parents who encouraged his artistic interests. His mother, Helen Stuart Davis, was a sculptor. His father, Edward Wyatt Davis, was art editor of the Philadelphia Press, which featured illustrations by George Luks and William Glackens, future members of “The Eight” who would pioneer the gritty urban realism that developed into the Ashcan Movement. Davis began his formal artistic education at the age of eighteen in New York City, where he studied with the leader of “The Eight,” Robert Henri. During these years, Davis simultaneously worked as a magazine illustrator and cartoonist at socialist publication, *The Masses*. Davis's early paintings of seamy, urban scenes with a subdued palette bear the influence of his teacher.



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In 1913, Davis contributed five watercolors to the Armory Show of 1913. It was this controversial exhibition that introduced him to the paintings of Van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse, and Picasso, and provoked his own artistic explorations. The urban landscape remained his core subject, though it became fragmented and flattened through cubist geometry, and saturated in the vibrant, artificial colors of consumer culture. Upon discovering Gloucester, Massachusetts as a summer retreat, Davis began subjecting the industrial, coastal scenery of Gloucester harbor to his formal experiments. Davis was one of the first American artists to find inspiration in the Synthetic rather than Analytic strain of cubism: his proto-Pop still lifes, which he began creating in the 1920s, featured consumer products such as eggbeaters, light bulbs, salt shakers, and packs of Lucky Strike cigarettes, depicted in the graphic, flattened manner of Cubist collage.

Davis traveled to Paris in 1928, after he was already well-acquainted with the artistic innovations of its avant-garde. He remained there for fourteen months, painting Parisian boulevards and architecture in a simplified, linear manner with bright, flat color. After returning to the United States in the 1930s, he became politically and socially active, joining the Artists Union and the American Artists' Congress, which advocated for artists while also protesting the war and fascism. At this time, he produced several public murals, including *Men Without Women* (1932), *Swing Landscape* (1938) and *History of Communication* (1939). In 1932, he began teaching at the Art Students League. He later taught at the New School for Social Research and at Yale University. Davis continued to produce colorful, geometric abstractions of New York City and Gloucester, Massachusetts, as well as still-lives featuring common objects and advertising fragments through the fifties. Their dynamic sense of rhythm and movement has provoked many to see them as the visual equivalent of jazz music, and as powerful interpretations of the energetic pulse of city life. Davis was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1956, and had a retrospective of his work tour the United States the following year. He died of a stroke in 1964 at the age of seventy-two.

Davis's works are included in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Hirschorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.; the Art Institute of Chicago; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; among many others.



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Lower Manhattan depicts the skyscrapers of Manhattan's financial district with both careful observation and exuberant immediacy. The rigid architecture is imbued with life through the subtle tremors of freehand lines. Despite the linear nature of the drawing, a great sense of volume and depth is created through variations in line weight and the exaggerated perspective of towering, clustered buildings. Though executed with realistic perspective, the abstract geometries of the skyscrapers themselves resonate with Davis's cubist aesthetic. This sketch reveals the underlying inspiration tying together Davis's Ashcan and Cubist works.