
Jeremy Braddock, Assistant Professor of English at Cornell University, argues that early twentieth-century collectors played a central role in shaping modern art and poetry in the United States. Since modernism was not yet institutionalized in the 1910s and 1920s, early collecting practices were “modeling and creating the conditions of modernism’s reception.” For Braddock, collecting is a form of modernist expression to be considered alongside the achievements of artists and writers. He identifies two primary forms of modernist collecting practice: interventionist anthologies and publicly exhibited private collections. Poetry anthologies edited by Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, and Alan Locke, and modern and ethnographic art collections amassed by Duncan Phillips and Alfred Barnes are among the examples Braddock deploys to illustrate the history of modernism in America. Some collectors and anthologists tempered the radicalism of modernism by placing it within established historical trends while others embraced its potential for social change.

The former is exemplified in a chapter on the Phillips Collection in Washington D.C. Duncan Phillips, initially hostile towards modernism’s radicalism, domesticated modernism by displaying his collection in his DuPont Circle mansion. The chapter on Alfred Barnes, on the other hand, shows how Barnes sought to transform society via education in modern, ethnographic, and decorative art at the Barnes Foundation, established near Philadelphia in 1925. Braddock expertly chronicles Barnes’s collecting and pedagogical theories and his relationship with the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey. Another chapter claims *The New Negro* anthology of 1925, edited by Alan Locke, combined poetry and the visual arts in unprecedented ways. As a result, Braddock makes a compelling case for the centrality of Locke’s collecting practice, and by extension African-American literature and art, in defining American modernism. The final chapter on the institutionalization of modernism in archival collections and rare book libraries is particularly illuminating for the history of librarianship.

At times, **Collecting as Modernist Practice** overwhelms as it chronicles countless collectors, poets, artists, philosophers, and other figures across many decades. While this embrace of complexity is laudable, a reader will benefit from expertise in several subject areas often treated separately. In other words, this book is not for beginners.

The illustrations, all black and white, sometimes do little to enhance Braddock’s scholarship. For example, Braddock provides a Freudian reading of several Barnes Foundation gallery installations, or “wall pictures.” In each case, the installation views are included, but not the individual works discussed. However, the breadth of his scholarship, evidenced by the seventy pages dedicated to the index and bibliography, makes this title a critical addition to libraries supporting modern art collections and modern art history programs.

Ian McDermott, Collection Development Associate, ARTstor, ian.mcdermott@artstor.org

Copyright © 2012 ARLIS/NA