



Provincetown
Art Association
and Museum

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*Essential Beauty:
The Paintings of*

OLIVER NEWBERRY CHAFFEE



Plant Forms, c.1935

November 11, 2005—January 22, 2006

Essential Beauty: The Paintings of

OLIVER NEWBERRY CHAFFEE (b.1881 - d.1944)

The Quintessential Modernist

Oliver Newberry Chaffee came of age as an artist during a period in European and American art characterized by creative experimentation. Within this volatile artistic climate, the basic tenets and practices of western art were questioned and reevaluated. The advent of photography had begun to threaten the artist's exclusive position as image-maker. If photography could accurately reproduce the image of a face, a room, or a landscape, what was the new role of the artist? By the 1870s, artists began to ask formal questions based on individual experience: How can paint be used to convey the movement of leaves in the wind? Can color communicate emotion or capture the essence of a human face? What happens when the image of a chair is shattered to describe multiple perspectives? From New York to Paris to Provincetown, Oliver Chaffee sought out and embraced a succession of *avant-garde* art movements that considered these questions.

The work featured in this exhibition serves as a chronicle of one artist's response to radically new approaches to art-making and as a compendium of early twentieth century modern art. From Chaffee's introduction to Impressionism and the examination of light, movement and color in nature, the artist went on to incorporate the vibrant palette and expressive application of paint associated with the Fauves. Elements of Cubism, such as the flattening of pictorial space and a playful remove from pure representation, are evident in works such as *Christmas, 1930*. And the influence of primitivism further transformed Chaffee's work. His appropriation of tribal motifs and stylistic elements found on masks and ceremonial objects from the Pacific Northwest and Papua, New Guinea resulted in works such as *Crucifixion, 1933*. Throughout Chaffee's lifelong search for an essential formal vocabulary, his work was energized by his love of the places, people, flora and fauna of the tangible world.

The Shock of the New

Chaffee began his training at the Detroit Fine Arts Academy, the New York School of Art and The Art Students League of New York. In 1904 he arrived in Provincetown to continue his studies with Charles W. Hawthorne, and expand his skills as an adept colorist. Two years later he traveled to Paris, where his exposure to the paintings of Paul Cezanne and the Fauves would have a lasting influence on his work. Chaffee's inclusion in the now legendary New York Armory Show of 1913 marked his official establishment in the modernist camp. The exhibition, which featured *Pine Tree, 1913*, introduced Americans to the shocking new aesthetics of artists such as Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp and Henri Matisse.

A Community of Artists

At the advent of World War I, Chaffee was part of the exodus of artists fleeing Europe for the calmer shores of Provincetown. By 1915, Provincetown had become a study in contradictions: a stunning array of artists, writers and musicians infused the town with creative energy and a cosmopolitan sensibility. At the same time a painter could be reprimanded for setting up his easel out-of-doors on the official day of rest. Chaffee is reported to have been warned by Provincetown's chief of police, "Young man, it's against the law to do what you are doing on a Sunday, and if you keep on I'll have to arrest you."

His brush with the law notwithstanding, Chaffee maintained a lasting connection to the artistic life of the community and the Provincetown Art Association. After an extended stay in France (1921-28), he returned to Provincetown in the spring of 1928, and for the next ten years, juried and hung modernist exhibitions here; through these years he also exhibited close to fifty of his own works of art.

A Lasting Influence

Oliver Newberry Chaffee remains a seminal figure in the creative life of Provincetown, as an artist and a teacher. The Provincetown Print show in the adjoining gallery illustrates his influence and serves as a fitting companion exhibition to *Essential Beauty*. Chaffee was an original practitioner of the white-line woodblock print, and he is credited with instructing Blanche Lazzell in the technique; his print *Venus Provincetown*—included in the white-line exhibition—is an example his lyrical approach to the form.

After Chaffee's death in 1944, the painter Ross Moffett pronounced his body of work "one of the highest achievements realized by a Provincetown painter;" an assessment that has held true through a century of artistic invention and change.

Provincetown Art Association and Museum

November 11, 2005–January 22, 2006

The Conductor, 1904

oil on canvas, 24 x 20"

Collection of Ron Chapman and Crane McCune

The Little Farm, n.d

oil on board, 14 x 18"

Private Collection

untitled (Provincetown cottage), n.d

oil on board, 11 x 13"

Private Collection



Pine Tree, 1913

The Town Hill, October, No. 6, n.d.

oil on canvas, 31 x 38"

Private Collection

House Across from Red Inn, c.1913

oil on canvas, 17 x 21"

Collection of Terence Keane and Douglas Hughes

untitled (Provincetown wharf), n.d.

oil on canvas, 22 x 18"

Private Collection

Plant Forms, c.1935

oil on canvas, 30 x 24"

Collection of Robert Sanderson and Eric Branthoover

untitled (beach scene), n.d.

oil on canvas, 24 x 28"

Collection of the Pilgrim Monument
and Provincetown Museum

Christmas, 1930

oil on canvas, 28 x 36"

Collection of James Bennette and David Cowan

Provincetown Prelude, c. 1930

oil on canvas, 28 x 36"

Collection of James Bennette and David Cowan

Pine Tree, 1913

oil on canvas, 36 x 24"

Collection of James Bennette and David Cowan

White Whale, 1935

oil on canvas, 26 x 32"

Collection of James Bennette and David Cowan

Snake Charmer, 1935

oil on canvas, 20 x 24"

Collection of James Bennette and David Cowan

Sea Gulls, c.1935

oil on canvas, 24 x 30"

Collection of James Bennette and David Cowan

Easter, c. 1930

oil on canvas, 36 x 28"

Collection of James Bennette and David Cowan

Crucifixion, 1933

oil on canvas, 77 x 60"

Collection of the Town of Provincetown



House Across from Red Inn, c.1913

Bird and Dog, 1932
oil on canvas, mounted on board, 88x 48"
Collection of the Town of Provincetown

Still Life, 1931
oil on canvas, 77.5 x 59.5"
Collection of the Town of Provincetown

The March Hare, 1934
oil on canvas, 72 x 38"
Collection of the Town of Provincetown

Mad Cap, n.d.
oil on cardboard, 10.5 x 8.25"
Collection of the Town of Provincetown

Night (cat), 1934
oil on board, 18.75 x 22.25"
Collection of the Town of Provincetown

untitled (white teapot), 1935
oil on canvas, 20 x 24"
Collection of the Town of Provincetown

Vence, A.M. (Alpes Maritime), 1923
oil on canvasboard, 15 x 18"
Collection of the Town of Provincetown

Two Pelicans, 1938
oil on canvas, 21 x 18.5"
Collection of Eugene F. Kelly

Pine Tree, c.1913
oil on canvas, 21 x 25"
Courtesy of the Julie Heller Gallery

Vence, c.1924-25
oil on canvas, 20 x 24"
Courtesy of the Julie Heller Gallery

Blue Ridge Mountains, c.1924-25
oil on canvas, 21.75 x 24"
Courtesy of the Julie Heller Gallery

La Gaude - Orange Trees, n.d.
oil on canvas, 19.5 x 24"
Courtesy of Berta Walker Gallery

Red Roof Shrine and Donkey, (Vence) c.1924-25
oil on canvas, 22 x 26"
Courtesy of Berta Walker Gallery

Red Cat, 1932-35
oil on board, 32 x 25"
Courtesy of Berta Walker Gallery

Calla Lily, c.1935
oil on board, 20 x 16"
Collection of James Bakker



Night (cat), 1934

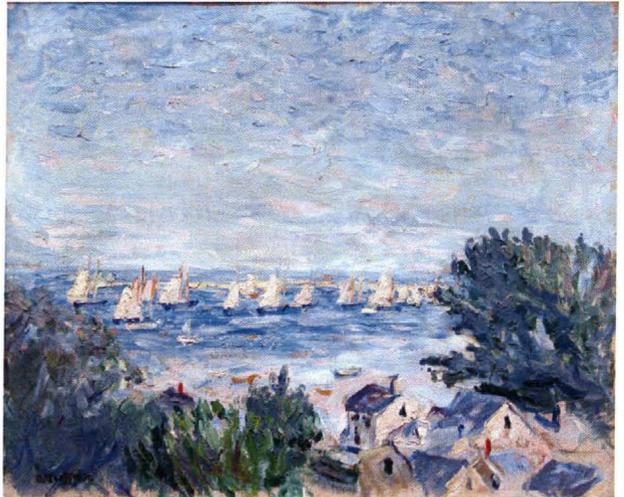
untitled, n.d.
oil on board, 12 x 15"
Private Collection

untitled, n.d.
oil on board, 12 x 15"
Private Collection

untitled, n.d.
oil on board, 12 x 15"
Private Collection

Provincetown Garden, c.1926
oil on canvas, 24 x 20"
Collection of James Bakker

The Fishing Fleet, c.1913
oil on canvas, 18 x 22"
Private Collection



The Fishing Fleet, c.1913

Experience ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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Chaffee scholar offers talk at PAAM Saturday

ART Preview

Art historian and Oliver Chaffee scholar Solveiga Rush will present a gallery talk on "the Life and Work of Oliver Newberry Chaffee" in conjunction with the exhibition "Essential Beauty: The Paintings of Oliver Newberry Chaffee (1881-1944)" on Saturday, Nov. 19 at 7 p.m. at the Provincetown Art Association Museum.

The talk is part of the 2005 Fredi Schiff Levin Lecture Series at PAAM.

Rush's talk will cover the life and work of Chaffee, examining his influences and creative evolution during 40 years of artistic production; artworks created in France, Provincetown and New York will be discussed.

Rush received her Masters in Art History from the University of Michigan in 1961. She is Professor of Art History at University College of the University of Cincinnati where she has taught since 1969. Her teaching has included Italian Renaissance Art, Baroque Painting and Sculpture, Modern European Painting and Sculpture and the Symbolist Movement in Art. Rush spent several years researching Oliver



"Jungle," a Chaffee watercolor from 1935.

Chaffee's life and cataloguing his known works in private and public collections. Her book, "Oliver Newberry Chaffee (1881-1944)," published by the Taft Museum in Cincinnati, represents

the culmination of that research.

The painter Oliver Newberry Chaffee (born in Detroit, Michigan 1881-1944) began his training at the Detroit Fine Arts



Chaffee scholar Solveiga Rush

Academy, the New York School of Art and The Art Students League of New York. In 1904, he arrived in Provincetown to continue his studies with the artist Charles W. Hawthorne, and to hone his skills as a plein air painter. Two years later he traveled to Paris, where his exposure to the paintings of Paul Cezanne and the Fauves would have a lasting influence on his work. Chaffee's inclusion in the now legendary New York Armory Show of 1913 marked his official establishment in the modernist camp. The exhibition, which featured Pine Tree, 1913, introduced Americans to the shocking new aesthetics of

artists such as Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp and Henri Matisse.

In 1914, at the advent of World War I, the painter was part of the exodus of artists fleeing Europe for the calmer shores of Provincetown; during the next four years, he painted and became one of the first practitioners of the white-line woodblock print technique. After an extended stay in France (1921-28), Chaffee returned to Provincetown in the spring of 1928. For the next 10 years, Chaffee maintained a lasting connection to the artistic life of the community and the Provincetown Art Association. He juried and hung modernist exhibitions, and exhibited close to 50 of his own works of art at PAAM. Chaffee remains a seminal figure in the creative life of Provincetown, as an artist and a teacher. After Chaffee's death in 1944, the painter Ross Moffett pronounced his body of work "one of the highest achievements realized by a Provincetown painter," an assessment that has held true through a century of artistic invention and change.

If you go ...

What: Gallery talk on the Life and Work of Oliver Newberry Chaffee

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3 Central by *Oliver Chaffee*

Mr. Chaffee, who contributes this print of his home, was one of the first of the Provincetown moderns. His recent show at the Morton Galleries in New York was well received by the critics.

