

Marius de Zayas and Alfred Stieglitz Part Ways: The Publication of 291 and Formation of the Modern Gallery *

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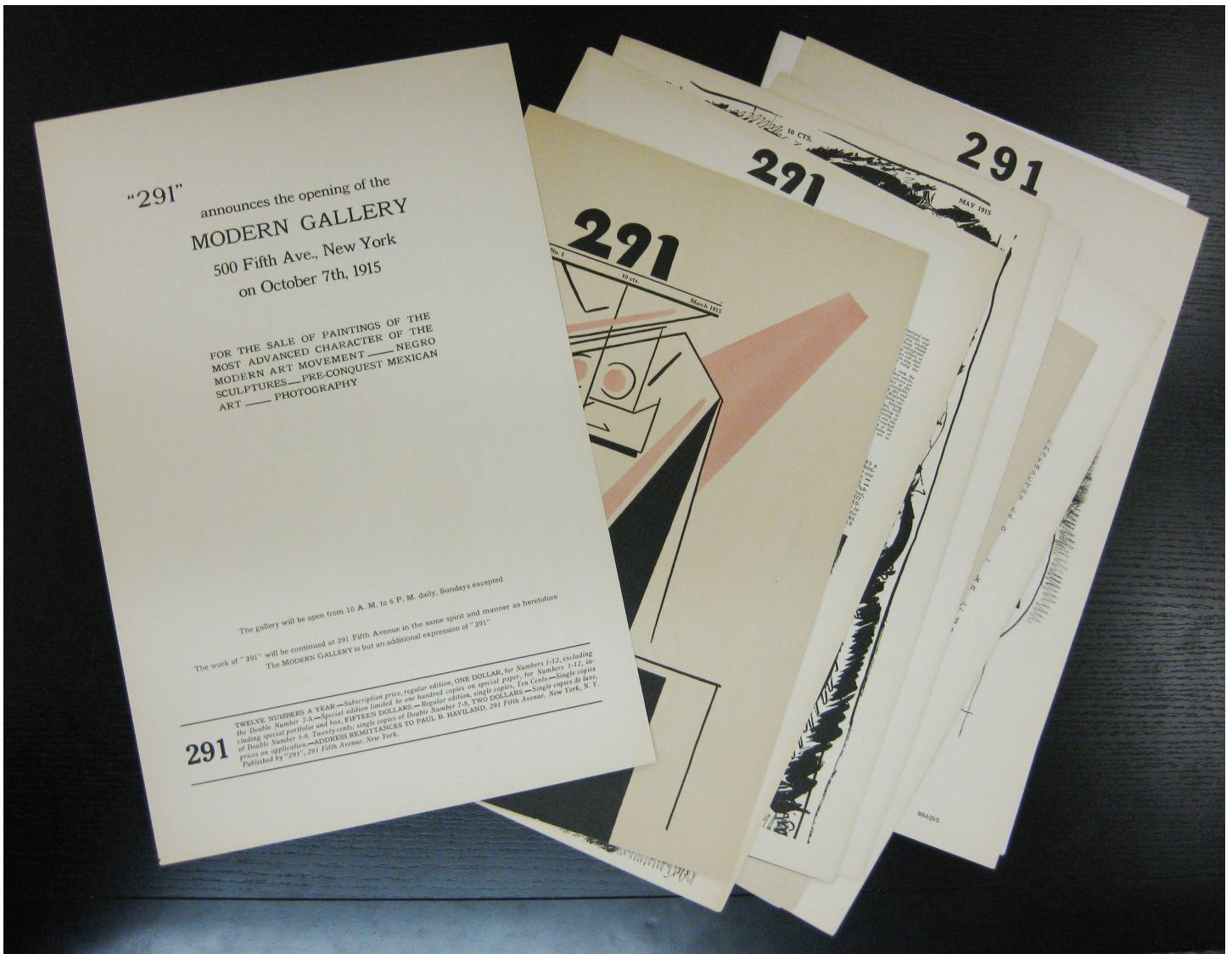


Fig. 1 Issues of 291

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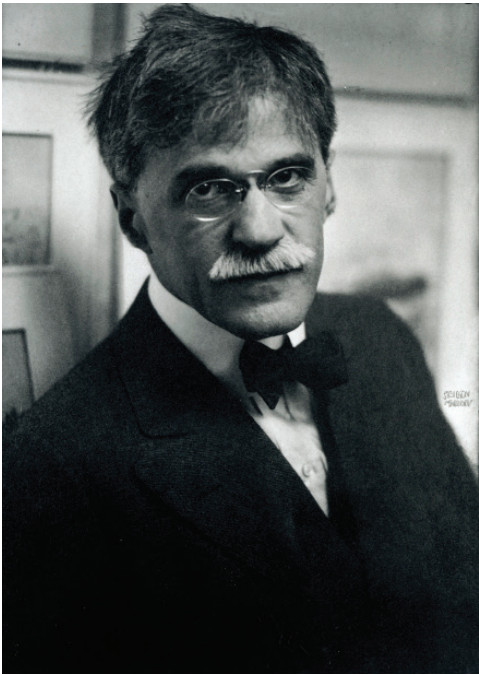


Fig. 2 Alfred Stieglitz (photo by Eduard Steichen), 1915. Metropolitan Museum of Art; Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1933

When it first appeared in the spring of 1915, the magazine *291* was unquestionably the most advanced and lavish art publication of its time (**Fig. 1**). Named after the gallery owned by Alfred Stieglitz and located at 291 Fifth Avenue in New York, it was unlike other more traditional art magazines, in that it did not merely reproduce works of art, but its large folio format, heavy paper stock, bold imagery and inventive typography demanded that the publication itself be considered a work of art—an aesthetic concept that was, at the time, truly revolutionary.

Although Stieglitz (**Fig. 2**) was officially listed as publisher of the magazine, the person who determined its content was Marius de Zayas (**Fig. 3**), who had worked closely with Stieglitz since his first showing of caricatures at the gallery in 1909. Indeed, it could be argued that de Zayas was Stieglitz's most loyal and trusted ally in his effort to introduce modern art to New York, since he was a regular contributor to *Camera Work* and, through frequent trips abroad, served as Stieglitz's liaison in securing work for various exhibitions at "291." Over the years, however, de Zayas had become increasingly disillusioned by Stieglitz's unwavering idealism, and by the

somewhat doctrinaire methods by which he ran his gallery, although he would always maintain a great deal of respect for what the dealer had accomplished (a feeling he retained to the end of his life). These same sentiments were shared by his colleague Paul Haviland (**Fig. 4**), a writer and photographer whose financial assistance had earlier saved "291" from closing, and who was now instrumental in the day-to-day operations of the gallery. Haviland and de Zayas had known one another quite well; in 1913, they wrote a book together called *A Study of the Modern Evolution of Plastic Expression*, an introductory essay on how to look at and appreciate the most current manifestations of the new art (from Cézanne to Picabia), a book that Stieglitz published through his gallery.¹

By 1915, Haviland and de Zayas had come to feel that the gallery "291" and *Camera Work* were presenting too conservative an image and, as a result, they felt that the two enterprises



Fig. 3 Marius de Zayas (photo by Alfred Stieglitz), 1913. Archives of Marius de Zayas, Seville, Spain



Fig. 4 Paul Burty Haviland (photo by Alfred Stieglitz), 1914



Fig. 5 Agnes Ernst Meyer (photo by Eduard Steichen), 1908. Metropolitan Museum of Art; Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949

failed to engage the interests of a younger audience and ignored vanguard developments taking place in Europe. They decided to launch a new magazine that would be more visually exciting and contain material that would appeal internationally. Since they wanted the quality of the new publication to be exceptional, they knew it would be expensive to print, so they enlisted the financial support of Agnes Ernst Meyer (**Fig. 5**), a former journalist for *The New York Sun*, who, in 1910, had married the wealthy banker Eugene Meyer. In January of 1915, these three likeminded individuals—de Zayas, Haviland, and Meyer—approached Stieglitz and requested his permission to call the new magazine *291*, after his gallery. Stieglitz himself later recalled how this first meeting went:

De Zayas, Haviland and Agnes Meyer felt the war had put a damper on everything. They believe we should publish a monthly dedicated to the most modern art and satire. I always had hoped there would be a magazine in the United States devoted to true satire, a form of expression sadly ignored here. Americans seemed to be afraid of it. Afraid of caricature. They enjoyed cartoons, everlasting cartoons. Was there a place, I wondered, for real caricature? Had not De Zayas made some grand ones and were they not shown at '291? They had evoked little response... Part of my positive reaction to the new magazine stemmed from the hope that it would permit De Zayas to use his genius as a caricaturist and satirist more freely..."²

When Stieglitz referred to the caricatures that de Zayas had shown at *291*, he doubtlessly had in mind those included in de Zayas's third and last exhibition held at the gallery in the spring of 1913, which was called "Caricatures: Absolute and Relative." Among the eighteen works included in this show was his *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz* (**Fig. 6**), which, as the literary scholar Willard Bohn was the first to identify, drew its inspiration from a string assembly that de Zayas had seen on display in the British Museum during a trip to London in 1911 (**Fig. 7**).³ Called a *Soul-Catcher*, de Zayas thought this primitive artifact was the perfect object to represent Stieglitz—who would do whatever he could to win adherents to his cause (which, accordingly, made him a sort of modern "soul catcher")—and he must have also felt that the repeating circular

shapes mimed the appearance of the rimless glasses his colleague so often wore (**Fig. 2**).

From his own remarks, we know that Stieglitz liked de Zayas's earlier caricatures—even those meant to represent him—but it is hard to imagine that he would have had the same reaction to those that appeared in *291*. Having given de Zayas, Haviland and Meyer *carte blanche* to control its contents, they proceeded to launch a subtle, almost covert, ideological attack on Stieglitz and his beleaguered gallery. Due in part to the outbreak of war in Europe, "*291*" was not only losing revenue through a lack of sales, but its followers had begun to lose faith in the gallery's ability to properly represent and support the new art.

The very first issue of *291* appeared in March 1915 and boldly announced its separation from Stieglitz and his gallery by reproducing on its cover a caricature by de Zayas entitled

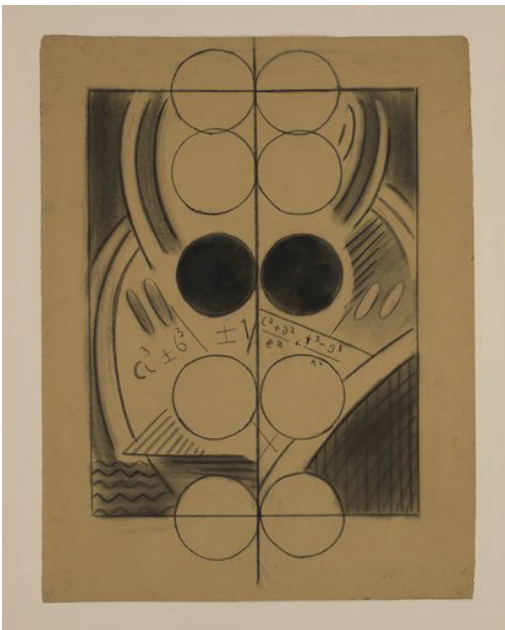


Fig. 6 Marius de Zayas, *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz*, ca. 1912, charcoal on paper. Metropolitan Museum of Art; Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949

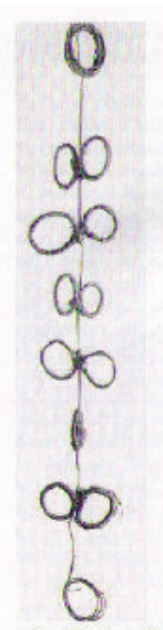


Fig. 7 *Soul-Catcher* (Danger Island). London, British Museum.



Fig. 8 Marius de Zayas, *291 Throws Back its Forelock*, 291 no. 1 (March 1915), cover.

291 Throws Back its Forelock (**Fig. 8**). The image is a geometric portrait of Stieglitz, his spectacles and mustache providing a certain identification of subject. At first glance, the title—which appears prominently to the left of the image—might be interpreted as an innocent reference to Stieglitz, who wore his hair long and was in the habit of tossing back strands that hung over his forehead, a gesture accentuated in the caricature by the hand-colored, light-orange coloration that de Zayas used to extend the geometry of the image into the distance (the orange appeared as pink in the final publication). On his first trip to America during the time of the Armory Show of 1913, the painter Francis Picabia was the first to describe the activities around “291” as a reflection of Stieglitz and his unruly hair: “291 arranges the locks on its forehead,” he wrote, “but the flames cannot scorch it, and its soul is filled with a life that fills each hour with sunshine.”⁴ However, since the title of this caricature specifically states that “291” is throwing back its forelock—and not Stieglitz personally—de Zayas was more likely referring to the frustration the venerated photographer had experienced in his efforts to promote and sell modern art through his gallery.

In using the word “forelock” (which refers to the part of a horse’s mane that falls between its ears), de Zayas may have been alluding to “forelock-tugging,” a British expression that means showing too much respect towards a person in a high position (which so many had for Stieglitz), or to “taking time by the forelock,” which means to seize every possible opportunity for advancement (a quality de Zayas felt Stieglitz lacked). The use of the verb “throw” might have been an oblique reference to the common expression “throwing in the towel,” which, means acknowledging defeat in the midst of a struggle (something we can be fairly certain de Zayas intended as well).

The remaining contents of this first issue—which consisted of only six pages—included an article by Agnes Meyer, a pen drawing by Picasso, articles and reprinted press clippings, a dialogue by Haviland with a fictional professor, a drawing by Steichen, a bizarre account of an erotic dream by Stieglitz, and a *calligramme* or visual poem by Guillaume Apollinaire. The latter work consisted of words arranged in such a way as to create the images described in the poem; in the case of Apollinaire’s construction—which he called “Voyage”—a bird and cloud appear to hover above the semblance of a train. Although the technique had been used by the Italian Futurists, and this very poem had appeared a year earlier in *Les soirées de Paris* (a magazine edited by Apollinaire), this was the first time that such an ingenious fusion of word and image appeared within the context of modern American literature.

Copies of this first issue were circulated widely, both in the United States and Europe, in hopes of soliciting subscribers. Some sixty complimentary copies were sent to Paris and Zurich; a photograph of Torres Palomar—a Mexican artist and friend of de Zayas—shows him holding a group of mailing tubes for 291 ready for the post (**Fig. 9**). It was announced that the new publication would be made available in two editions: a regular run on heavy paper that cost one dollar per year, and a deluxe printing on Japanese vellum limited to 100 copies that was priced at five dollars per year (individual copies of the regular edition were 10 cents, whereas the deluxe copies cost one dollar



Fig. 9 Marius de Zayas, Torres Palomar holding mailing tubes for 291, 1915, photograph (current location unknown).

each). About 100 people subscribed to the regular edition, whereas only eight individuals paid the additional sum for the deluxe edition. Reception to the review was mixed. Georgia O'Keeffe said that she was "crazy about it," whereas the critic Charles Caffin, art editor of the *New York American* and supporter of the activities of "291," apparently realizing that de Zayas's caricature represented an *ad hominem* attack on his old friend, dismissed the magazine as patently pretentious:

Uncouth in shape, its whole make-up is one of self-assertion and self-assured superiority, while it bristles with antagonism. Affecting a high plane of intellectualism, it is as devoid of mental nutriment as of human feeling. It is sterile. It proves how completely the old spirit of "291" is dead; and to many beside myself must bring the shock of a cruel disillusionment.⁵

In terms of visual impact, the second issue of *291*—which was released in April 1915—was far less adventurous than the first. It did not feature a single image on its cover, but rather an abundance of text and a black-and-white reproduction of a drawing by Picabia (as a result, it took on the appearance of a conventional tabloid). The surprise came when turning the page, for on the left appeared a hand-colored abstract drawing by Katharine N. Rhoades, a friend of Agnes Meyer's and a close associate of the gallery "291," and on the right a work entitled "Mental Reactions" (Fig. 10), a poem by Meyer that was given visual form by de Zayas. Until recently, it was assumed that de Zayas must have composed his work, "even conceived [of it] at the printers."⁶ However, the original maquette for this visual poem came to light several years ago, and we now know that de Zayas used a far less involved approach; he arranged for Meyer's poem to be set to type and printed, whereupon he cut up the text and pasted the fragmented words and sentences into his composition. He also clipped select words from commercial publications and, for special effect, hand-lettered others (like "Parfumerie de Nice" and MYSELF). With a brush dipped into black ink, he then added swirls and abstract geometric shapes to give the words visual expression, much in the way in which a composer orchestrates a symphony.⁷

A number of literary historians have attempted to assess the importance of this work, some within the context of the modern poetry movement, while others have related it to Dada, the movement in literature and the visual arts that would not be officially christened until 1916. Willard Bohn, a scholar with an expertise on the origin and development of visual poetry, considers "Mental Reactions" an historic breakthrough in its genre. "One can gauge the extent of his [de Zayas's] originality," he observed, "by the fact that the work is totally without precedent."⁸ Although comparisons could be made with Apollinaire's *calligrammes*, as well as with poems by the Italian Futurists, this was the first time within the context of American literature that a poem had been given such a prominent visual presence. Bohn was the first to determine that the subject of Meyer's poem consists essentially of her private thoughts about an attractive man she had encountered at a social gathering, with whom she flirts. It is clear that she did not act upon this impulse, for as the poem states: "Yes, we women, cowards, cheats all of us who, when our kingdom is offered, stop to calculate the price." It is appropriate to recall that, at the time, Meyer, married to an exceptionally wealthy man, is likely to have stopped to calculate the repercussions of a risky action that would jeopardize the security of her kingdom. Bohn was also the first to observe that *291* published a number

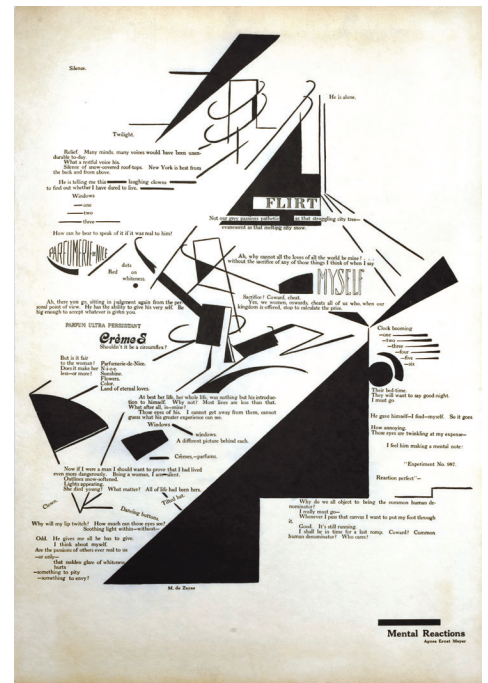


Fig. 10 Marius de Zayas and Agnes Ernst Meyer, "Mental Reactions," *291* no. 2 (April 1915).

of works by women, each of which projected a unique feminine viewpoint.⁹ The title “Mental Reactions” indicates that Meyer describes not only the act of flirtation, but, more importantly, her response to it. As Bohn explained, flirtation is “the pretense for her reflections and the poem’s *raison d’être*.”¹⁰

Several attempts have also been made to decipher a figure within the image. Some, like the literary scholar Dickran Tashjian, thinks it represents a portrait of Agnes Meyer, whereas Bohn believes that it is more complex, depicting not only Meyer, but also the gentlemen of her attraction. He goes so far as to identify Meyer’s eyebrows, her hair, chin and neck, even her breasts! For the man, he managed to locate his hair, his head (“which seems to be swiveling back and forth”) and his body. Comparing the figures, he observes a telling contrast between their eyes: “Her round eye connotes feminine softness and curves. His rhomboid eye suggests masculine strength and rigidity. Both shapes reflect sexual differentiation.” Tashjian believes that the degree to which de Zayas’s abstract shapes control the meaning of the poem is essential to its understanding. “The nervous thrusts of the visual lines add another dimension of motion,” he wrote, “suggesting thought processes in action. In these ways, an illusion of mental simultaneity is created, the random chaos of thought occasionally interpenetrated by its own internal logic and rhythm.”¹¹ De Zayas would later call this combination of words and abstract shapes a “psychotype,” which, he explained, was “an art which consists in making the typographical characters participate in the expression of the thoughts and in the painting of the states of soul, no more as conventional symbols but as signs having significance in themselves.”¹² No matter what this poetic form is called, there can be no question that de Zayas’s introduction of this concept to an American audience remains at the pinnacle of his literary and artistic achievements.

The third issue of the magazine, which appeared in May 1915, featured on its cover an abstract, black-and-white ink drawing by Abraham Walkowitz, which presented the number “291” emblazoned across the center of the page. Inside the magazine appeared another psychotype by de Zayas, this time spread across two pages and lending visual enhancement to two separate poems (Fig. 11), one written by Agnes Meyer and the other by her friend Katherine Nash Rhoades (Fig. 12). Rhodes, a painter and poet, was a tall and strikingly attractive woman, who, along with Meyer and another friend, Marion Beckett, formed a triumvirate in

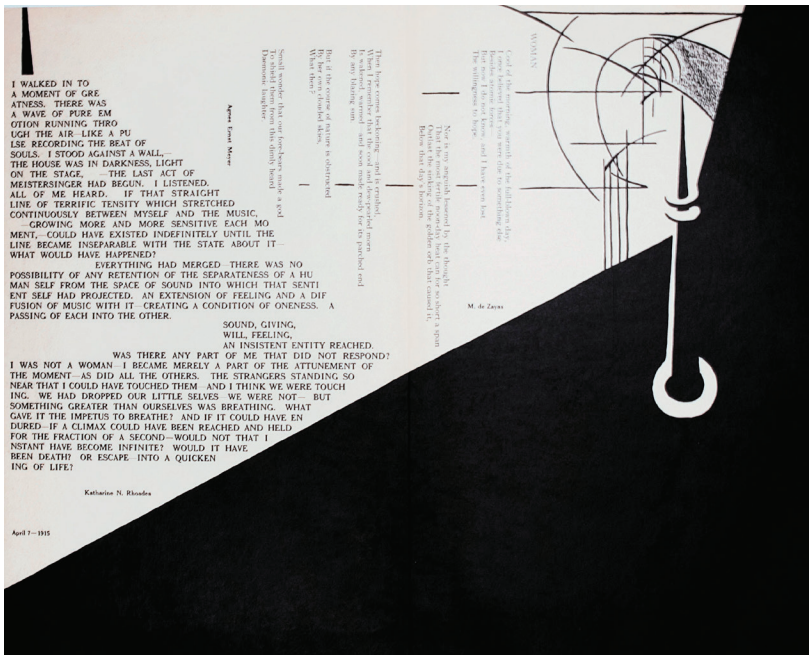


Fig. 11 Agnes Meyer, Katherine N. Rhoades and Marius de Zayas, *Woman*, 291 no. 3 (May 1915).



Fig. 12 Katherine Nash Rhoades (photograph by Alfred Stieglitz), 1915.

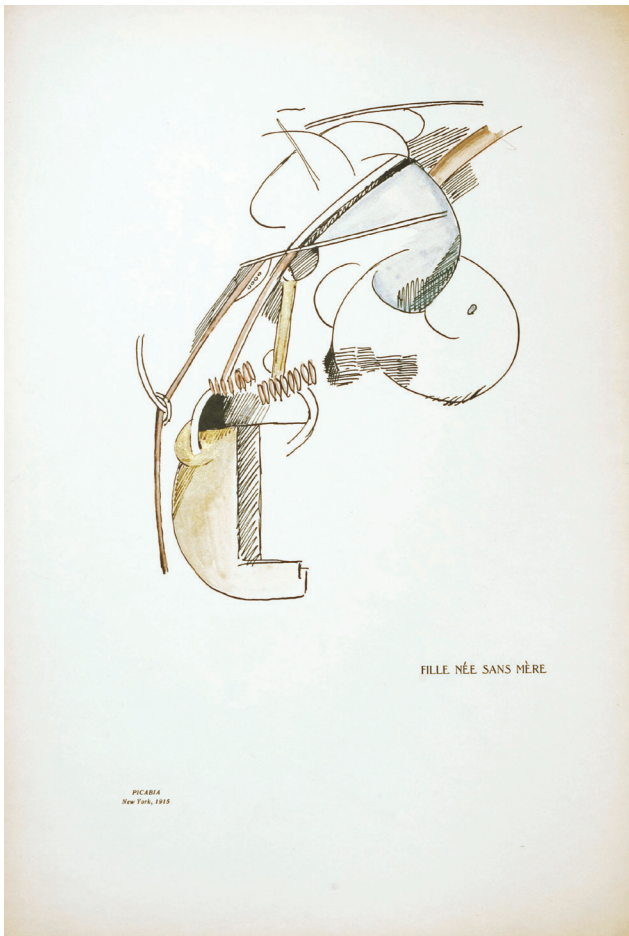


Fig. 13 Francis Picabia, *Fille née sans mère* [Girl Born Without a Mother], 1915, 291 no. 4 (June 1915).

the Stieglitz circle known as “The Three Graces.” Because this visual poem makes little effort to integrate its literary content with the image, most scholars consider it less successful, yet elegantly unites the contributions of both women. Bohn argues convincingly that the title inscribed on the work—*Woman*—was not the title given to Meyer’s poem (even though it appears directly above it), but rather the title of de Zayas’s psychotype, in this case a geometric structure that establishes the visual framework for both poems. He also observed that the composition was derived from a photograph of Rhodes that had been taken by Stieglitz, but he failed to identify the tapering shape on the right that resembles an upside-down question mark. He saw it as “fishhook,” which caused him to interpret Rhodes as a *femme fatale*, or he saw it as possibly “the handle of an umbrella,” which caused him to conclude that she may have been considered by de Zayas to represent some sort of “a protective shield.”¹³ Another look at the Stieglitz photograph shows Rhodes wearing a pair of pendulous teardrop earrings, which hang from her ears by two small circular pearls. There is little doubt that the highly stylized question mark is derived from the shape of these earrings, a detail that also serves to amplify Rhode’s feminine identity.

The fourth issue of 291 which appeared in June 1915, featured on its cover a hand-colored image of a New York City skyscraper by John Marin, the artist whom Stieglitz felt best exemplified a uniquely American expression of modernism. Among other things, this issue included a full-page reproduction of Francis Picabia’s *Fille née sans mère* [Girl Born Without a Mother], an important early machinist drawing by the artist probably made shortly after he arrived for his second sojourn to New York in June 1915 (**Fig. 13**). A photograph records Picabia diligently hand-coloring this image for both deluxe and regular editions of 291, while de Zayas attentively looks on (**Fig. 14**). The appearance of this drawing was only a prelude to the next issue of the magazine, which was devoted in its entirety to a presentation of five mechanical portraits by Picabia. Each portrait took up a full page of the magazine, which was folded in such a way that it opened into the format of a triptych. On the cover was his *Ici, c’est ici Stieglitz / Foi et Amour* [Here, This is Stieglitz / Faith and Love] (**Fig. 15**). The photographer is portrayed as a broken camera, its bellows distended and collapsed, as if to imply that Stieglitz—by means of “faith and love”—is rendered impotent in efforts to attain his “IDEAL” (a



Fig. 14 Marius de Zayas (left) watching Picabia hand-coloring copies of *Fille née sans mère* for inclusion in issues of 291, summer 1915 (Photo album of Francis Picabia).



Fig. 15 Francis Picabia, *Ici, c'est ici Stieglitz / Foi et Amour* [Here, this is Stieglitz / Faith and Love], 291 nos. 5-6 (July-August 1915), cover.

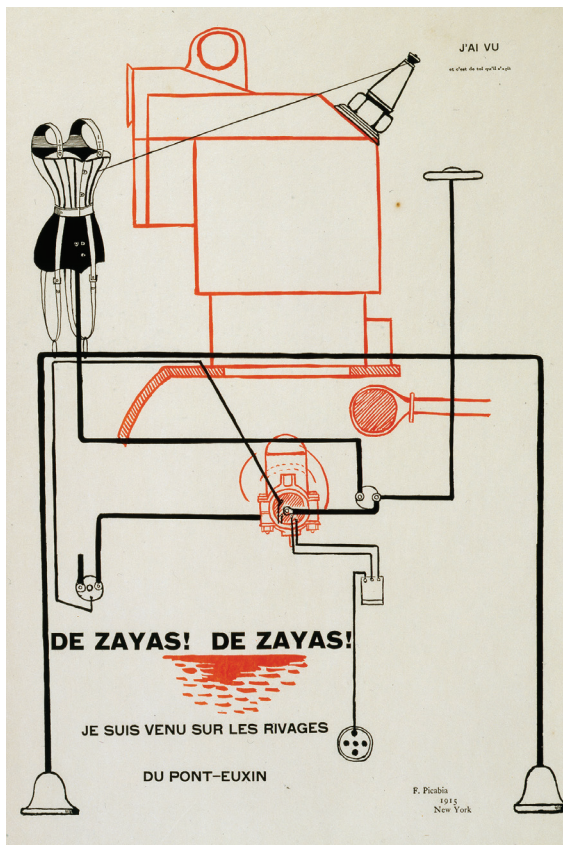


Fig. 16 Francis Picabia, *De Zayas! De Zayas!*, 291 nos. 5-6 (July-August 1915).

word in Gothic typeface that appears above the lens at the top of the image). This interpretation is reinforced by the parking brake and gearshift lever rendered in red ink below the camera; it has been observed that the gear is in a neutral position, while the brake is set, implying, perhaps, that Stieglitz is powerless to affect his situation, and thus, he can no longer be considered a guiding force in the promotion of modern art.¹⁴

Included among these portraits is one of the artist himself (represented by a car horn set against the diagram of an automobile cylinder, an appropriate symbol considering the artist's obsession with fast cars); a portrait of Agnes Meyer (as a spark plug, since she was the spark or initiating force that made it possible for 291 to exist); a portrait of Paul Haviland (as an portable electric table lamp, for not only had he made it possible for the magazine to see the light of day, but since he traveled back and forth between France and America [i.e. portable], he represented a critical link in helping to disseminate its information); and, finally, a portrait entitled simply *De Zayas! De Zayas!* (**Fig. 16**). The last of these portraits resembles an electrical wiring chart that seems to function in the fashion of a Rube Goldberg cartoon: a spark plug in the upper right corner connects to a corset, which is attached by means of a wire to an electrical post; this post is connected to a gyrating mechanical device, which, in turn, appears to provide electrical energy to a pair of automobile headlights (lower right and left corners of the composition). If this reading is correct, then Picabia might have intended the sequence of these images to provide a clue to their meaning. *De Zayas*, then, was envisioned as the catalyst through which an aesthetic transformation could be realized, from its initial spark (the portrait of Agnes Meyer) to its final product (the illumination represented by the headlights and the portrait of Haviland as a table lamp that follows). In a study devoted to this particular issue of 291, it was observed that the line drawn from the spark plug meets the corset in the position where the heart would be, and that the wire attached to the electrical system below emanates from its crotch. "In drawing attention to the heart and the genitals—the seats of emotion and procreation," concluded the scholar who made this observation, "Picabia understood the act of creating, the act of bringing objects to life, that is a central issue in both his and *De Zayas's* work."¹⁵

The last page of the Picabia machinist issue presents an untitled text by *de Zayas* (in both French and English) that is a preemptive attack on the conservative American press and a rationale for Picabia's unorthodox

approach to portraiture. “The critics do not work to develop their knowledge, or to spread knowledge,” he wrote. “They work for a salary.” He goes on to say that Stieglitz made an effort to discover the essence of American life, but, in having “employed the shield of psychology and metaphysics,” he declares: “He has failed.” Although he praises Stieglitz’s valiant efforts to present modern art to an ignorant American public, he repeatedly states that they fall short of what is needed. “He did not succeed in bringing out the individualist expression of the spirit of the community.” He concludes by suggesting that Picabia offers an approach that can succeed:

Of all those who have come to conquer America, Picabia is the only one who had done as did Cortez. He has burned his ship behind him. He does not protect himself with any shield. He has married America like a man who is not afraid of consequences. He has obtained results. And he has brought these to “291” which accepts them as experience, and publishes them with the conviction that they have the positive value which all striving toward objective truth possesses.¹⁶



Fig. 17 291 issue nos. 7-8 (September-October 1915), with Stieglitz’s *The Steerage*.

How Stieglitz reacted to this statement—or, for that matter, to Picabia’s portrait of him as a broken camera—is unknown, although it is hard to imagine that he would have missed the biting sarcasm and scathing critique on his ineffectiveness in promoting the advance of modern art. Whatever he thought, it did not prevent him from accepting Haviland and de Zayas’s suggestion that the next issue of the magazine be devoted to photography, and that it include a print of Stieglitz’s famous *The Steerage* (**Fig. 17**). Stieglitz prepared 500 proofs of the image as a photogravure pulled on Imperial Japan paper, with a small special edition on thin Japan tissue. The regular edition was sold at two dollars per copy, while the deluxe issue was to be made available only “upon request.” When Dorothy Norman later asked Stieglitz how many copies sold, he responded: “Make your estimate as low as you imagination will permit. None!”¹⁷

Shortly after this issue appeared, an announcement was printed up for insertion into the next issue of 291 to inform subscribers that a new gallery, The Modern Gallery—which would continue

“in the same spirit and manner” as “291”—was scheduled to open at 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, on October 7, 1915.¹⁸ The building in which the gallery was located has subsequently been torn down, but its appearance was captured in a painting made a few years earlier by the American Impressionist Collin Campbell Cooper (**Fig. 18**), which shows the steps of the New York Public Library on the left and, behind them, the 10-story stone and brick building at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street where the gallery was housed (one floor above street level, directly behind the flagpole). Although interior photographs of the gallery have not been located, Paul Strand took two pictures looking out the front windows, one showing



Fig. 18 Collin Campbell Cooper, *Fifth Avenue*, oil on canvas, 1913



Fig. 19 Views from within The Modern Gallery (photograph by Paul Strand), 1915.



Fig. 20 Views from within The Modern Gallery (photograph by Paul Strand), 1915.

the steps of the library across the street (the flagpole visible between the letters “E” and “R” of “MODERN” in the gallery name emblazoned across the glass: **Fig. 19**), and another showing the active intersection at the corner (**Fig. 20**), where, from the elevated viewpoint in the gallery, people can be seen crossing the street as cars and horse-drawn carriages comprise the bustling city traffic. De Zayas and company had reason to be optimistic about their new venture, for the gallery was located twelve blocks north of 291, in an area that—as today—was one of Manhattan’s most active and prestigious shopping centers.

The spirit of the new gallery may have been similar to that of “291,” as proclaimed in the announcement, but the manner of operations was certainly a change, for de Zayas, Haviland, Meyer, and now Picabia (who lent works from his own collection to provide the gallery with inventory), all agreed that Stieglitz’s insistence upon a nationalistic focus for his gallery, and his reluctance to engage in efforts to enhance the commercial potential of the new art, provided an opportunity for an alternative approach to buying and selling that they had no intention of missing. According to Stieglitz, another announcement was also prepared, but it was withheld from circulation, “because,” as he told readers of *Camera Work*, the gallery “291” felt it owed “no explanations to anyone.” Nevertheless, he decided to publish the circular because, as he explained, “the course of events necessitates a recording.” Within the text of this censored document, de Zayas outlines his real differences with Stieglitz. In listing his aspirations for the Modern Gallery, he indirectly criticizes Stieglitz and “291” for what he feels they have failed to accomplish. “It is the purpose of the Modern Gallery,” he states: (1) “to serve the public by affording it the opportunity of purchasing, at unmanipulated prices, whatever ‘291’ considers worthy of exhibition;” (2) “to serve the producers of these works by bringing them into business touch with the purchasing public on terms of mutual justice and mutual self-respect;” and (3) “to further, by these means, the development of contemporary art both here and abroad, and to pay its own way by reasonable charges.” With the bluntness of this statement, Stieglitz seems to have finally got the message. After presenting the text of this circular, Stieglitz wrote: “Mr. De Zayas, after experimenting for three months on the lines contemplated, found that practical business in New York and ‘291’ were incompatible. In consequence he suggested that ‘291’ and the Modern Gallery be separated. The suggestion automatically constituted a separation.”¹⁹

When Agnes Meyer read Stieglitz’s version of how he and de Zayas parted ways, she and her husband were furious. They immediately wrote a letter to de Zayas and expressed their sentiments in no uncertain terms (it is reproduced here because it likely reflects de Zayas’s reaction as well):

and a charcoal on the back cover by Picasso. Clearly the intent was to boost their own credibility by flanking their vanguard experiments with those of these two pioneering modernists, in the hope that they would be taken with the same degree of seriousness as their Cubist counterparts. De Zayas met Picasso during a trip to Paris in 1910, and he went on to publish an article about the artist and his work that included the transcription of remarks from an early interview with the artist (as a native Spanish speaker, de Zayas had access to Picasso that his American peers did not). Over the years, they remained in contact, and when de Zayas opened his gallery, he called upon his old friend

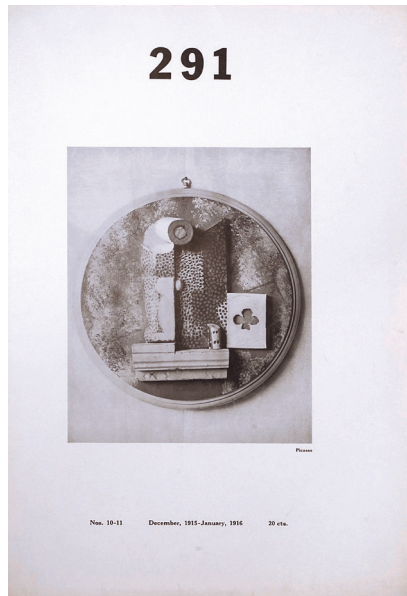


Fig. 23 291 nos. 10-11 (December 1915 – January 1916), cover.



Fig. 24 Marius de Zayas, *Portrait of Picasso*, 291 nos. 10-11 (December 1915 – January 1916).

to lend pictures for an exhibition. The Picasso exhibition—which comprised eleven paintings dating from 1913 through 1915, as well as a selection of African Negro sculpture—opened on December 13, 1915. A small checklist of the paintings on view was printed, and the December 1915-January 1916 issue of 291 reproduced on its cover a small cubist still life by Picasso of 1914 in a tondo format (**Fig. 23**, now in the Musée Picasso, Paris), and included on its first page de Zayas's *Portrait of Picasso* (**Fig. 24**). If this drawing is any indication of de Zayas's evolving style, he was headed toward the increasingly hermetic. Willard Bohn, who read the diagonal shape in the center of the composition as the horns of a bull, has interpreted this image as an illustration of the “dialogue between beauty and power,” for as he sees it, the horned figure and rose on the left “refer to Picasso’s Spanish origins, symbolized by the bullfight.” Bohn has also suggested that these elements might have been intended to represent “the delicate sensibility of his [Picasso’s] Rose Period with the brutality of his Cubist phase.”²³ Whatever its meaning, this caricature was the last de Zayas was to publish, for from this point onward he would increasingly devote his time and energy to the demands of his gallery.

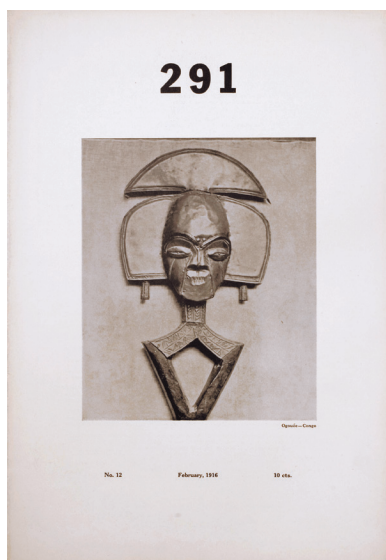


Fig. 25 291 no. 12 (February 1916), cover.

The last issue of 291 would appear in February 1916 (**Fig. 25**), coincidentally, the very month the Cabaret Voltaire opened in Zurich, Switzerland, marking the official birth of the Dada movement. On its cover, de Zayas reproduced a Kota reliquary figure (identified as Congolese) and, on the first page, published a statement that he had written about how African Art had influenced modern art. Although he would soon write a book entitled *African Negro Art: Its Influence on Modern Art* (1916), where he actually fails to cite any specific artists who were influenced by African Art, in this issue of 291 he credits Picasso with having discovered it. “Negro art has made us discover the possibility of giving plastic expression to the sensation produced by the outer life,” he continued, “and, consequently, also, the possibility of finding new forms to express our inner life.” By contrast, this final issue of 291 was far more conventional in layout, and far less experimental in content. The cause was probably a combination of de Zayas’s increased attention on the activities of his gallery, and the public’s lack of interest in the magazine (which

failed to attract new subscribers). In November of 1916, de Zayas sent copies of *291* to Tristan Tzara in Zurich, explaining that the magazine no longer existed because it has been their intention to publish just twelve numbers. "It was just an experiment," he declared somewhat dismissively.²⁵

In this same letter to Tzara, de Zayas explained that he was in the process of organizing an exhibition for his gallery on the subject of abstract art in America, and he asked if Tzara might be interested in arranging a venue in Zurich. We do not know how Tzara responded, but apparently there was little interest, for the show never materialized on either side of the Atlantic. In the two and one-half years that the Modern Gallery functioned, de Zayas presented a series of exhibitions that followed in the same spirit as "291," but which were clearly designed to surpass them. He held shows of van Gogh, Cézanne, Picasso, Picabia, André Derain and Diego Rivera, but interspersed them with thematic exhibitions of either African Art or the newest developments of modern art. In the spring of 1916, for example, the Modern Gallery held a pioneering show of abstract sculpture that included work by three unknown Americans—Adelheid Roosevelt, Alice Morgan Wright and Adolf Wolff—which he placed alongside sculpture by Amadeo Modigliani and Constantin Brancusi. After the gallery closed in 1918, de Zayas at first felt that his role as a propagandist for the new art was over, but this feeling proved not to be accurate. In 1919 he opened a gallery under his own name, the De Zayas Gallery, which began its first season with a show of Chinese paintings, followed by an exhibition of African Negro Art. During the short three seasons of the gallery's existence, de Zayas not only showed works by major French artists, but also presented solo exhibitions of select American artists: Arthur B. Davies, Walt Kuhn, John Covert, and Charles Sheeler (Sheeler took over management of the gallery when de Zayas was in Europe). Financial difficulties eventually forced the gallery to close, with regret expressed not only by the artists he represented, but by a number of journalists as well. "Few things which have recently happened in New York have caused more gloom among art lovers than the closing of the De Zayas Gallery," wrote Hamilton Easter Field in *The Arts*. "In no other gallery was the work of art so absolutely allowed to speak for itself."²⁴

The significant contribution that de Zayas made to the history of modern art in the early years of the 20th century could easily have been forgotten. Critics and art historians have devoted nearly all of their attention to Stieglitz, since his efforts had preceded de Zayas's and because he went on to open other galleries dedicated to defining the essence of an indigenous American Art. The magazine *291* could easily have vanished from history, particularly if Stieglitz had his way. In April 1917—just over a year after *291* had ceased publication—Stieglitz, "filled with a mixture of anger, bitter amusement, and a sense of vindication," his biographer tells us, sold 8,000 issues of the magazine to a paper refuse company for \$5.80, giving the money to his secretary and telling her to buy a pair or two of new gloves.²⁶ As a result, other than the copies of this review that reached subscribers, or those that were given away by de Zayas or Stieglitz as gifts, copies of this magazine are today exceeding rare.

Throughout the period when de Zayas was working on *291*, he wrote long, thoughtful letters to Stieglitz, but as soon as he opened his own gallery, their correspondence became comparatively curt and confined to matters relating to their respective businesses. The friendship and camaraderie they had enjoyed in earlier years was over, especially after de Zayas moved to Europe in the early 1920s. Whereas de Zayas was busy organizing exhibitions in Europe, Stieglitz made a concerted effort to preserve and record the role he had played in introducing modern art to New York. Even before *Camera Work* ceased publication, Stieglitz wrote to virtually everyone associated with his gallery, asking them to answer the question "What is '291'?" He clearly anticipated laudatory responses, least of all because their answers had to be returned to him. With one or two exceptions, this is exactly what occurred, and Stieglitz proudly devoted a special issue of *Camera Work* to presenting this sycophantic

collection to his adoring public.²⁶ Similarly, in 1934, he lent his complete cooperation to a group of writers—Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, Dorothy Norman, Paul Rosenfeld and Harold Rugg—who gathered essays for a book that did little more than heap praise on Stieglitz and his accomplishments (published on the occasion of his 75th birthday), where de Zayas's name is mentioned only in passing.²⁸

De Zayas, far more modest, consistently downplayed his role in bringing modern art to America, always deferring to Stieglitz. On a trip to the United States in the late 1940s (a few years after Stieglitz's death), de Zayas was interviewed by Dorothy Norman, a writer, photographer and former associate of Stieglitz, who was gathering information for a monograph. "Stieglitz had sympathy for all who protested," he told her. "He did not care whether the protest was in photography, art in other media, or any field whatever. If someone protested, he belonged with Stieglitz. Conformists, on the contrary, did not. Tremendous sensitivity and perception about the essential qualities of both things and people guided him."²⁹ De Zayas might very well have had his own separation from Stieglitz in mind when he made these remarks, as if history would pardon his differences of opinion with the great man, since Stieglitz himself would have welcomed them. By the time he was asked these questions, de Zayas had probably already put together his thoughts about the events that took place in this period. In the late 1930s or early 1940s, he met Alfred H. Barr, Jr., director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, who must have asked him to compile an account of what transpired in these years. De Zayas's response took the form of a four-volume manuscript, two volumes of text and two of illustrations. Underscoring his wish to let the facts speak for themselves. Much of his text was composed of newspaper clippings and excerpts from magazine articles (a good number from *Camera Work*). In a section of the manuscript devoted to Stieglitz, he claimed that modern art would probably have come to New York in any case—with or without Stieglitz's intervention—since many American artists traveled to Paris and there was a continuous exchange of ideas. Nevertheless, he was careful to acknowledge Stieglitz's precedence:

Stieglitz had the gift to attract attention and the ability to get hold of that attention and develop it into genuine interest. He had the gift to promote publicity, to raise controversies, and attract art critics of all creeds. He was above suspicion of working for his own ends. He was taken as an apostle worthy of consideration. In fact, he had all the qualifications of an unselfish promoter of ideas and a champion for the freedom of ideas. He was the right man and the right place and the right time. And it is an incontrovertible fact that the man responsible for the introduction of Modern Art in New York and its propaganda was Alfred Stieglitz.³⁰

Self-effacing though he certainly was, de Zayas seized the opportunity to integrate into this account a discussion of the important role he played in the activities at "291," although, curiously, he neglected to mention the three shows of his own creative work that were held there in 1909, 1910 and 1913. He also discussed his participation in the publication of *291*—saying that it was "the first publication of its kind in New York and I believe the only one since then"³¹—and he provided an account of the formation of the Modern Gallery and a summary of the important exhibitions that were held there. As always, he remained respectful of Stieglitz, and described his own participation with reticence. "I was not psychic enough to be a second Stieglitz," he wrote. "I thought the psychological experiments with the public had been done sufficiently." He then went on to explain what he felt were the essential differences between "291" and the Modern Gallery:



Fig. 26 Marius de Zayas (photograph by Paul Haviland), 1915. Rodrigo de Zayas Archives, Seville.

The attitude of the Modern Gallery vis-à-vis the public was entirely different, in fact, quite the opposite of that of the Photo-Session. Stieglitz experimented with the public; his place was, as he called it, a laboratory. I left the public to work out its own salvation; I left it alone. I experimented in combining most of the time the work of several artists, to suggest comparisons, combinations that I presented to the public for what they were worth. Besides, I do not have the ability, intelligence, and facility of speech that Stieglitz had and lavished on the public. Stieglitz had prepared the way, opened the roads, and I only had to let matters take their natural course—I let the pictures or sculptures do their own talking.³²

De Zayas's memoir of this period was not published in his lifetime. Indeed, were it not for the insight of his son, Rodrigo, who carefully preserved the manuscript in his archives, it could very well have disappeared altogether, but now editions of this book have been published in both English and Spanish.³³ The magazine *291* might also have been relegated to the dustbin of history, were it not for the fact that several literary scholars understood its importance and were insistent upon integrating it into the history of this period. In 1946, for example, it was included in the definitive anthology of little magazines organized by Frederick J. Hoffman, but not as part of the main bibliography of this book, but rather relegated to a "Supplementary List," which included ephemeral publications of an avant-garde nature. Since Stieglitz was officially listed as publisher of the magazine, de Zayas's role in the publication was temporarily forgotten. "Stieglitz's *Two-Ninety-One* strives, by typographical arrangement and photography," wrote the editors, "to effect a geometric synthesis of word and picture. The magazine's literary value lies in its attention to 'experiment with the word,' and its considering photography as an art allied with poetry and worthy of *avant-gardiste* attention."³⁴ There was sufficient interest in the magazine to warrant a bound, full-scale reprint in 1972 with an introduction by Dorothy Norman, but today, that book is almost as scarce as the original magazine.³⁵ Nevertheless, for those who seek out issues of *291* for study and evaluation, there can be no question that it was one of the most influential magazines published in the world of art during the Dada period, and it would not have contained the highly experimental work that it did without the important European contacts, organizational efforts and unbridled creativity of Marius de Zayas. Although the Modern and de Zayas galleries lasted but a few years, they, too, were significant in having elevated modern art from a mere novelty to a genuine commodity, one that not only harbored commercial potential, but a contribution to the culture that would be accessible to the general public and, at the same time, capable of generating new thoughts and ideas.

It seems to have taken even longer for de Zayas's creative work to be recognized, but now that, too, has finally occurred. In 1978, Craig R. Bailey, a graduate student at the City University of New York, published a long and detailed article on the subject of de Zayas's caricatures in *Arts* magazine and, in 1980, Willard Bohn wrote a more closely focused study of the abstract caricatures in *The Art Bulletin*. These publications were followed by several exhibitions devoted to de Zayas and his work: in 1981, an exhibition of the caricatures was organized by Douglas Hyland for the Spencer Museum of Art in Lawrence, Kansas (a show that traveled to Philadelphia and New York), and in 2004, Lisa Messinger, a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, organized an exhibition from the sizeable collection of de Zayas caricatures that was given to the museum by Alfred Stieglitz. And in 2009 the country of his birth hosted the largest and most comprehensive exhibition devoted to de Zayas and his artistic career ever assembled.³⁶ There can be no question that Stieglitz will always be recognized for the important early role that he played in bringing modern art to New York, the critical contribution that de Zayas made to this same endeavor can no longer be ignored.

Notes:

¹ Paul Haviland (1880-1950), born and raised in France, was educated at Harvard. After graduating in 1901, he moved to New York and worked as a representative of his father's well known china-porcelain factory (located in Limoges, France). Haviland, whose maternal grandfather was an art critic who had defended the Impressionists, grew up in a family surrounded by art and music. It was inevitable that after he moved to New York he would be attracted to the activities of "291." In 1908, when the gallery threatened closure due to an increase in rent, Haviland interceded, generously guaranteeing payment on a new lease. Almost immediately he became one of the gallery's most active participants. He wrote a regular column for *Camera Work*, to which he also occasionally submitted his own photographs (mostly portraits and cityscapes).

² Stieglitz, quoted by Dorothy Norman, ed., "Introducing 291," *291*, reprint (New York: Arno Press, 1972). According to a slightly variant account, Stieglitz also expressed ambivalence about the project. "I was more or less an onlooker," he said, "a conscious one, wishing to see what they would do so far as policy was concerned if left to themselves" (see Stieglitz, "The Magazine '291' and 'The Steerage'," *Stieglitz Conversations*, p. 2 [Stieglitz Archives]; quoted in Dickran Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde, 1910-1925* [Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1975], p. 29).

³ Willard Bohn, "The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas," *Art Bulletin* 62, vol. 62n no 3 (September 1980). p. 435.

⁴ Francis Picabia, *Camera Work* XLVII (July 1914), p. 72. The connection between the de Zayas caricature and the quote from Picabia was first made by Douglas Hyland, *Marius de Zayas: Conjurer of Souls*, Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kansas, 27 September – 8 November 1981, p. 118 (although Hyland mistakenly gives 1912 as the date for the *Camera Work* issue).

⁵ Charles Caffin, *New York American*, April 5, 1915; quoted in Richard Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1995), p. 343. The O'Keeffe comment came from a letter to Anita Pollitzer, August 25, 1915 (Alfred Stieglitz Archives; Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Library, New Haven), also quoted in Whelan, p. 343.

⁶ Jay Bochner, "dAdAmAgs," Francis M. Naumann and Beth Venn, eds., *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), p. 218.

⁷ The original maquette is now in the collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. For a complete description of this work, see *Modern Art: Recent Acquisitions*, catalogue 138 (Boston: Ars Libri, 2006), entry 58 (text by David Stang); see also a description of this work in *Recent Acquisitions, National Gallery of Art Newsletter*, 2007 (text by Judith Brodie).

⁸ Willard Bohn, "Marius de Zayas and Abstraction," chapter 10 in Bohn, *The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry 1914-1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 185.

⁹ Bohn, "Visualizing Women in 291," in Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, ed., *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998], pp. 240-59.

¹⁰ Bohn, *Visual Poetry*, p. 189.

¹¹ Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives*, p. 34.

¹² "'291'—A New Publication," *Camera Work* LXVII (October 1916), p. 62. This statement is unsigned, but I have here taken the liberty of attributing it to de Zayas. It is also possible that it might have been written by Paul Haviland, although de Zayas was more familiar with the subject of visual poetry and, thus, would have been in a better position to define the term "psychotype." As Bohn pointed out, the word "psychotype" was appropriated from an article by Amédée Ozenfant (Bohn, "Visualizing Women in 291," p. 241).

¹³ Bohn, "Visualizing Women in 291," p. 258.

¹⁴ The neutral gearshift level was first observed by Paul Schweizer, a student of William Innes Homer (see Homer, "Picabia's *Jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité* and Her Friends," *Art Bulletin* 58 [March 1975], pp. 110-15). Jay Bochner believes that Stieglitz accepted the sarcasm in 291—even when it was directed at him—for he points out that the photographer lent his unwavering support for publication throughout its run. As a result, Bochner interprets this drawing by Picabia quite differently: he suggests that the parking brake is not engaged, and sees it as a gun pointing into the lens of the camera at the top of the image (*An American Lens: Scenes from Alfred Stieglitz's New York Secession* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005], pp. 144-45). I find this particular detail of Bochner's argument unconvincing and, as I explain in the text that follows, I believe that once de Zayas opened his own gallery, Stieglitz eventually came to understand the biting nature of the criticism, a factor that contributed significantly to his decision to separate himself from their activities.

¹⁵ William Rozaitis, "The Joke at the Heart of Things: Francis Picabia's Machine Drawings and the Little Magazine 291," *American Art* 8, nos. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 1994), pp. 53-54.

¹⁶ Marius de Zayas, untitled statement, last page of 291 (July 1915); reprinted in *Camera Work* XLVIII (October 1916), pp. 69-70.

¹⁷ Quoted in Norman, "Introducing 291" (1972), unpaginated (for full citation see note 2, above).

¹⁸ Statement inserted into issue no. 9 (November 1915) of 291 and reprinted in *Camera Work* XLVIII (October 1916), p. 63.

¹⁹ "'291' and the Modern Gallery," *Camera Work* XLVIII (October 1916), pp. 63-64.

²⁰ A[gnes] E[rnst] M[eyer] to Marius de Zayas, undated, probably written in October 1916 (which is the date of the *Camera Work* article to which she responds); Papers of Marius de Zayas, Collection Rodrigo de Zayas, Seville (copy placed on deposit in Butler Library, Columbia University, New York).

- ²¹ "Many Enjoyable Paintings in Modern Gallery—Woman's Work," unidentified newspaper clipping (Dossiers Picabia, Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Universités de Paris); quoted in Francis M. Naumann, *New York Dada* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), p. 62.
- ²² "Exhibitions in the Galleries," *Arts and Decoration* (November 1915), p. 35. This quotation and the foregoing analysis are excerpted from Naumann, *New York Dada*, p. 62. Bochner—who points out correctly that the word "HURLUBERLU" that runs vertically down the center of this image is male in gender (otherwise an "E" would have been added at the end of the word)—does not see this drawing as misogynistic, as have most authors (including this one), but more as a celebration of female liberation, especially in contrast to Victorian sexuality (Bochner, *An American Lens*, p. 136).
- ²³ Willard Bohn, "The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas," (for full citation, see note 3), p. 439. See also Naumann, "De Zayas and Picasso," appendix C in *Marius de Zayas, How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, Francis M. Naumann, ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 212-30.
- ²⁴ De Zayas to Tzara, November 16, 1916, Dossier Tzara, Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Universités de Paris (published in Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris* [Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1965], p. 572); on de Zayas's exchange with Tzara, also see Naumann, "The New York Dada Movement: Better Late Than Never," *Arts* 54, 6 (February 1980), p. 143. Two months after this letter was sent to Tzara, Picabia, who had been living in Barcelona, released the first issue of the magazine *391*, an homage to not only de Zayas's magazine, but also to Stieglitz's gallery (by giving his publication a larger number, he implied that it would take up where the earlier endeavors that took place in New York left off).
- ²⁵ Hamilton Easter Field, "Arts (October 1921); quoted in Eva Epp Raun, "Marius de Zayas and the Modern Movement in New York," master's thesis, Queens College of the City University of New York, October 1973, p. 47.
- ²⁶ Whelan, *Stieglitz*, p. 342; see also the Stieglitz's comments as relayed to Dorothy Norman, "Introducing 291," (1972), and Naumann, *New York Dada*, p. 218.
- ²⁷ De Zayas's response to this question—written as early as 1914—unquestionably praised Stieglitz, but already contained a hint that he felt the whole enterprise could be taken further: "Not an Idea nor an Ideal, but something more potent, a Fact, something accomplished, being of a nature although perfect, by no means final or conclusive, but much to the contrary;" *Camera Work* XLVII (July 1914; published in January, 1915), p. 73.
- ²⁸ Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, Dorothy Norman, Paul Rosenfeld and Harold Rugg, eds., *American & Alfred Stieglitz: A Collective Portrait* (New York: The Literary Guild, 1934), pp. 83-84.
- ²⁹ Quoted in Dorothy Norman, "Three Conversations About Alfred Stieglitz After his Death—1946," *Yale University Gazette* (April 1985), pp. 170-71. Norman's monograph, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer* (New York: Aperture) in which she quotes extensively from her interviews with de Zayas, appeared in 1960.
- ³⁰ Marius de Zayas, *How, When and Why*, pp. 77-80 (for full citation see note 23).
- ³¹ De Zayas, *How, When, and Why*, p. 73.
- ³² De Zayas, *How, When and Why*, p. 95.
- ³³ The first publication of this text was as an article in *Arts* 54, 8 (April 1980): pp. 96-126; it was reedited and enhanced by additional appendices for publication by MIT Press (for a full reference, see note 23 above). The Spanish edition was edited by Antonio Saborit, *Cómo, Cuándo y por qué: El Arte Moderno Llegó a Nueva York* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005).
- ³⁴ Frederick J. Hoffman, et al, eds., *The Little Magazine: A History and Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 376.
- ³⁵ For a full reference, see note 2, above.
- ³⁶ Craig R. Bailey, "The Art of Marius de Zayas," *Arts Magazine* 53, 1 (September 1978), pp. 136-44; Willard Bohn, "The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas" (for full reference, see n. 22 above); Douglas Hyland, "Marius de Zayas: Conjuror of Souls," Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kansas (27 September – 18 November 1981), Philadelphia Museum of Art (18 December 1981 – 14 February 1982); Center for Inter-American Relations, New York (2 March – 4 April 1982), and Lisa Messinger, "Marius de Zayas and the Stieglitz Circle," Metropolitan Museum of Art (19 March – 27 June 2004). Worthy of note are two other exhibitions in which de Zayas's work was included; see their respective catalogues: Wendy Wick Reaves, "Marius de Zayas: Spotlight on Personality," chapter 4 in *Celebrity Caricature in America*, National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), and Charles Brock, "Marius de Zayas, 1909-1915: A Commerce of Ideas," in Sarah Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and his New York Galleries*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2001).