



Walt Kuhn
American, 1877 - 1949

Green Apples and Scoop

1939

oil on canvas

overall: 77 x 102.3 cm (30 5/16 x 40 1/4 in.)

framed: 102.9 x 128.3 x 10.1 cm (40 1/2 x 50 1/2 x 4 in.)

Inscription: lower right: Walt Kuhn / 1939

Gift of the W. Averell Harriman Foundation in memory of Marie N. Harriman 1972.9.14

ENTRY

Walt Kuhn painted two major still-life compositions during the summer of 1939 when he was in Ogunquit, Maine: *Still Life with Apples* [fig. 1] and *Green Apples and Scoop*. The Gallery's painting consists of a basket of apples in the upper left portion of the horizontal composition, a large wooden scoop that crosses it on a slightly diagonal axis, and a loose group of 18 apples arranged in the middle and at the lower right; the head of the scoop rests on a blue cloth.

Apples appear in abundance in Kuhn's still lifes, and he once commented that "they reminded him of backsides," a statement that Philip Rhys Adams dismissed as "a bawdy brush-off of a difficult question." [1] According to Adams, Kuhn often had his wife or daughter arrange his fruit pieces "so that the unintended grouping could surprise him with a new idea. Then he might make a few adjustments, while avoiding the danger of unconsciously repeating himself." [2] In 1948 the artist commented that his *Red Apples* (1944, location unknown) was the result of "at least four years of investigating apples in general," [3] so the Gallery's painting represents an earlier phase of an intensive, lengthy process.

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Reflecting Kuhn's lofty ambitions as a still-life painter, the subject, emphasis on plastic form, organic tonality, and monumental quality of *Green Apples and Scoop* clearly reflect the influence of the great French precursor of cubism Paul Cézanne (French, 1839 - 1906). Kuhn strove to imbue his fruit still lifes with "dynamism," or expressive power, and described his *Apples and Pineapple* (1933, formerly W. Averell Harriman Collection) as "a plate of bombs and a hand grenade!" [4] When *Green Apples and Scoop* was exhibited at Durand-Ruel Galleries in 1946, a critic deemed it an example of "solid and magnificent painting" that was "built from simple grandeur and its color fairly sings with joy." [5] Another critic noted how Kuhn's iconic *circus clowns* achieved emotional impact through human interest and dramatic overtones, while in the still lifes "structural organization and the bold handling of pigment are so electrifying in their effect that no other dramatic associations are needed." [6] William H. Gerdtz and Russell Burke also elevated the status of Kuhn's still lifes when they selected the Gallery's painting to represent Kuhn's contribution to the genre in their classic study *American Still-Life Painting* (1971): "The emphasis on plastic form is very evident in Kuhn's famous series of clowns and circus performers, but is more vivid still in his brilliant still lifes of green apples." [7]

Robert Torchia

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COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Walt Kuhn, *Still Life with Apples and Pitcher*, 1939, oil on canvas, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation, 1966

NOTES

- [1] Frank Getlein, *Walt Kuhn 1877–1949* (New York, 1967), n. p.; Philip Rhys Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter: His Life and Work* (Columbus, OH, 1978), 188.
- [2] Philip Rhys Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter: His Life and Work* (Columbus, OH, 1978), 156–157.
- [3] Unidentified letter of Oct. 1948, cited by Philip Rhys Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter: His Life and Work* (Columbus, OH, 1978), 188.
- [4] Paul Bird, *Fifty Paintings by Walt Kuhn* (New York and London, 1940), 27.
- [5] Marion Summers, *Daily Worker*, Nov. 14, 1946, quoted in Philip Rhys Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter: His Life and Work* (Columbus, OH, 1978), 188.
- [6] Charles Z. Offin, “Gallery Previews in New York,” *Pictures on Exhibit* 9, no. 2 (Nov. 1946): 20, quoted in Philip Rhys Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter: His Life and Work* (Columbus, OH, 1978), 188.
- [7] William H. Gerdtz and Russell Burke, *American Still-Life Painting* (New York, 1971), 219, fig. 16-7.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The finely woven, medium-weight fabric support has been lined with wax and remounted on a nonoriginal stretcher. The right tacking margin was inscribed “Apple and Scoop,” followed by some illegible writing. The artist applied paint in thick layers of impasto over a commercially prepared off-white ground. He followed a strongly delineated outline executed with a fine brush in black paint. Visible pentimenti indicate changes in the drawing and modeling of the scoop. [1] The painting is in excellent condition. The surface was coated with a synthetic resin varnish.

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] Infrared examination was conducted with the Kodak 310-21x, a platinum silicide camera with a 55 mm macro lens and a 1.5–2.0 micron filter. It shows only the easily discernible black paint outline and the artist's changes that are otherwise visible on the surface.

PROVENANCE

(Durand-Ruel Gallery, New York); purchased 12 December 1946 by W. Averell [1891–1986] and Marie N. [1903–1970] Harriman, New York; W. Averell Harriman Foundation, New York; gift 1972 to NGA.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1941 Probably Walt Kuhn, Grace Horne Galleries, Boston, 1941.[1]

1946 Paintings by Walt Kuhn, Durand-Ruel Galleries, New York, 1946, no. 1.

1956 Pictures Collected by Yale Alumni, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, 1956, no. 162, repro.

1958 Walt Kuhn, Albany Institute of History and Art, 1958, no. 13.

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1960 Walt Kuhn 1877-1949: A Memorial Exhibition, Cincinnati Art Museum, 1960, no. 79, color repro.

1961 Exhibition of the Marie and Averell Harriman Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1961, unnumbered catalogue, repro.

1966 Painter of Vision: A Retrospective Exhibition of Oils, Watercolors and Drawings by Walt Kuhn, 1877-1949, The University of Arizona Art Gallery, Tucson, 1966: no. 89, repro.

1978 Walt Kuhn: A Classic Revival, Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth; Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha; Wichita Art Museum; Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 1978-1979, no. 40.

1981 Extended loan for use by Ambassador Maxwell M. Rabb, U.S. Embassy residence, Rome, Italy, 1981-1989.

1989 Extended loan for use by Ambassador Peter F. Secchia, U.S. Embassy residence, Rome, Italy, 1989-1990.

1991 Extended loan for use by Ambassador Robert H. Pelletreau, U.S. Embassy residence, Cairo, Egypt, 1991-1993.

1993 Extended loan for use by Ambassador Pamela Harriman, U.S. Embassy residence, Paris, France, 1993-1997.

1997 Extended loan for use by Secretary William M. Daley, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C., 1997-2000.

2000 Extended loan for use by Secretary Norman Y. Mineta, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C., 2000-2001.

2001 Extended loan for use by Mrs. Richard Cheney, Old Executive Office Building, Washington, D.C., 2001-2009.

EXHIBITION HISTORY NOTES

[1] A painting titled *Green Apples with Scoop* is mentioned in a review of the exhibition.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1971 Gerdts, William H., and Russell Burke. *American Still-Life Painting*. New York, 1971: 219, fig. 16-7.
- 1978 Adams, Philip Rhys. *Walt Kuhn, Painter: His Life and Work*. Columbus, OH, 1978: 187-188, 267, no. 387, color repro.
- 1980 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1980: 190, repro.
- 1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 223, repro.

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