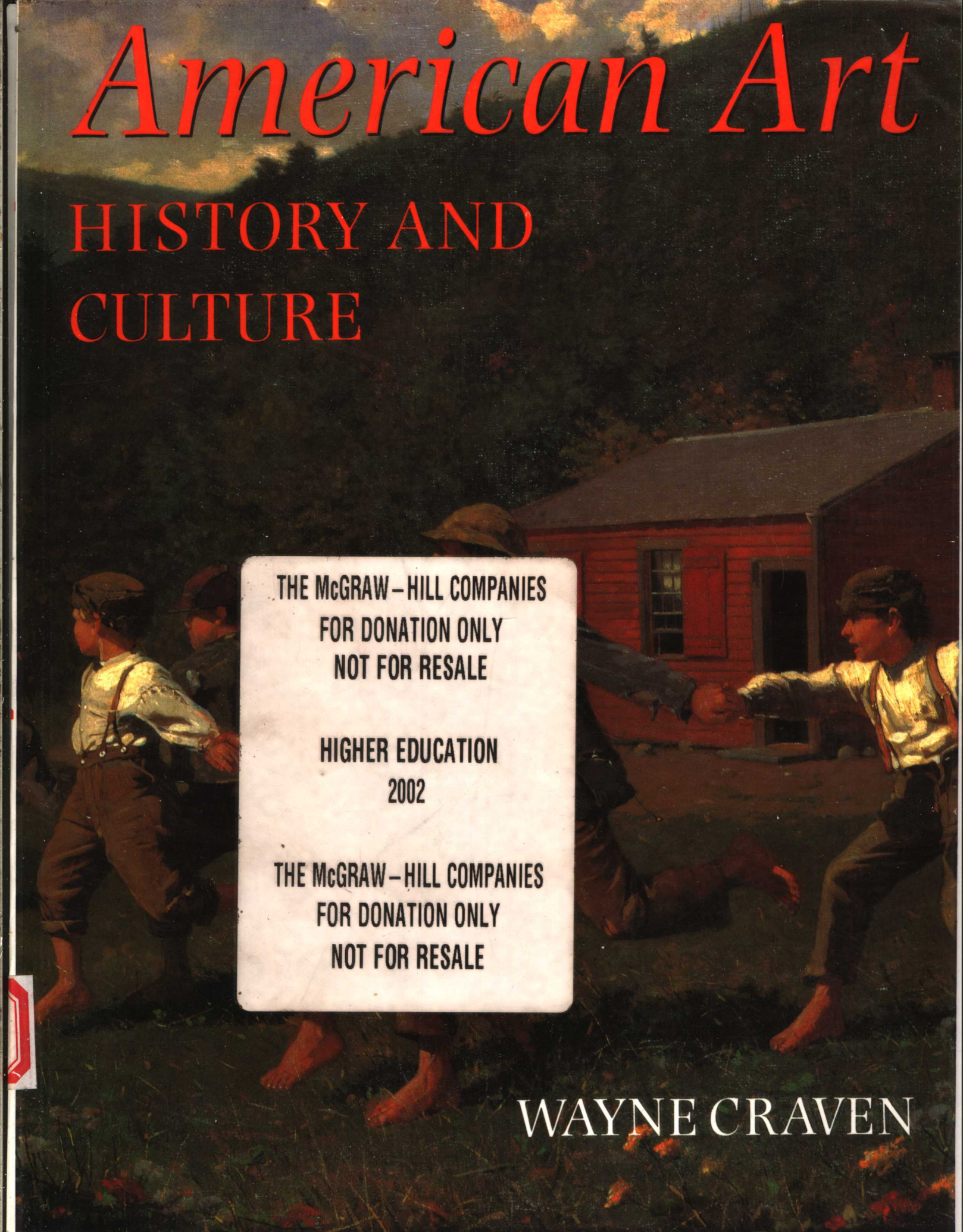
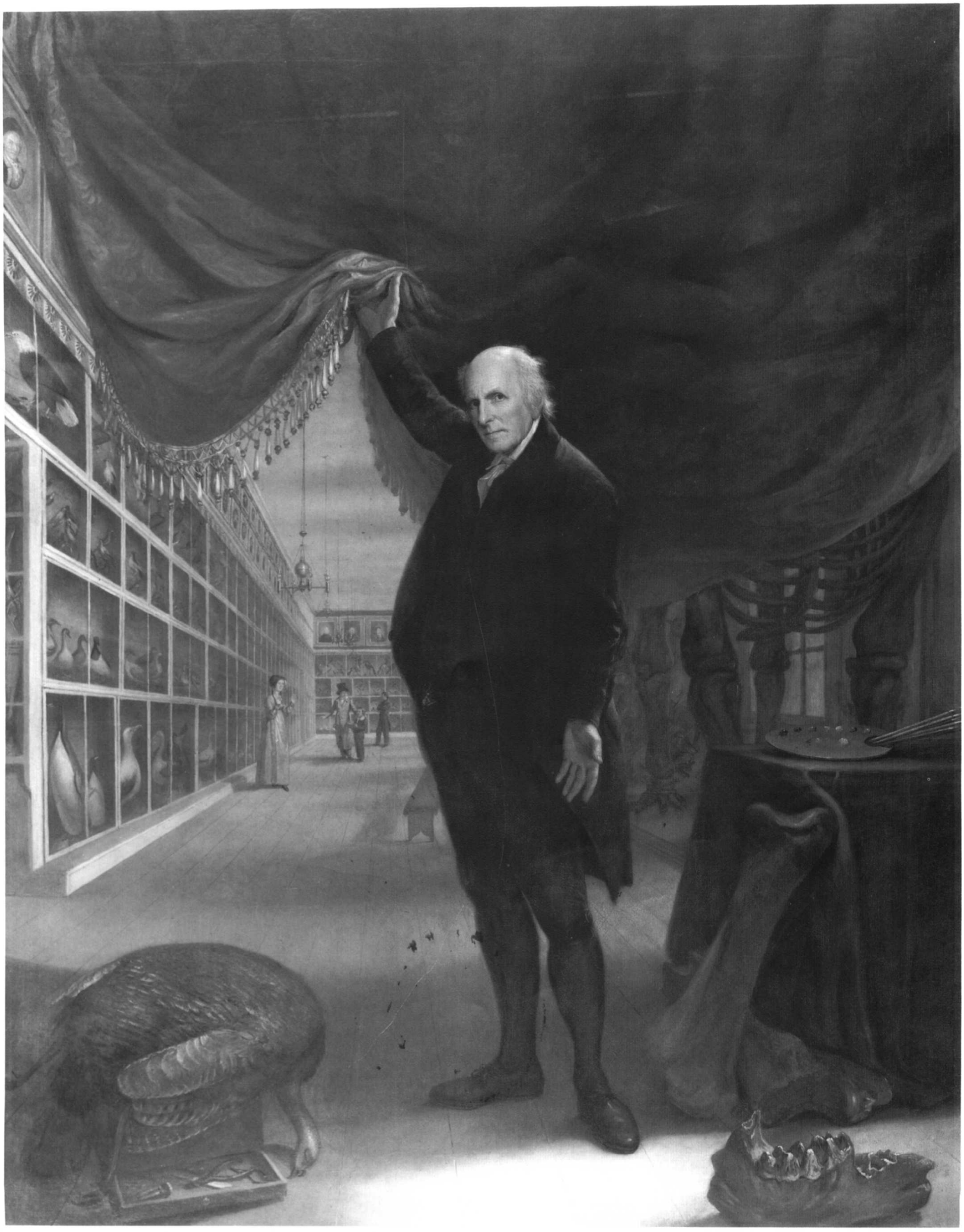
American Art

HISTORY AND CULTURE



WAYNE CRAVEN

American Art



American Art

HISTORY AND CULTURE

WAYNE CRAVEN

Boston, Massachusetts Burr Ridge, Illinois Dubuque, Iowa
Madison, Wisconsin New York, New York San Francisco, California St. Louis, Missouri

McGraw-Hill
A Division of The McGraw-Hill Companies

The credits section for this book begins on page 666
and is considered an extension of the copyright page.

Trade edition distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 93–71038

ISBN 0–697–16763–1

This book was designed and produced by
CALMANN & KING LTD
71 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3BN

Designer *Karen Osborne*
Picture Researcher *Elizabeth Loving*

Typeset by Bookworm, Manchester, UK
Printed in USA by R.R. Donnelley & Sons

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

HALF TITLE:
Nancy Graves, *Synonymous with Ceremony*, Fig. 39.20. 1989. Mixed media, 81 × 53 × 31in (205.7 × 134.6 × 78.7cm). Private collection. George Mintz and Co., Inc., Morristown, N.J. © Nancy Graves/VAGA, New York, 1993.

FRONTISPIECE:
Charles Willson Peale, *The Artist in his Museum*, Fig. 10.14. 1822. Oil on canvas, 8ft 7¾in × 6ft 7⅞in (2.64 × 2.03m). Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Pennsylvania Academy purchase from the estate of Paul Beck, Jr.

PART OPENERS:
p. 15 John Singleton Copley, *Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Winslow (Jemima Debuke)*, Fig. 7.10. 1774. Oil on canvas, 3ft 4¼in × 4ft ¾in (1.02 × 1.24m). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Maxim Karolik for the M. and M. Karolik Collection of 18th-Century American Arts.

p. 109 William Rush, *Schuylkill Freed*, Fig. 12.10. c. 1828. Wood, height 3ft 6in (1.07m). Fairmount Park Commission, Philadelphia, Pa.

p. 171 Thomas Cole, *The Architect's Dream*, Fig. 15.6. 1840. Oil on canvas, 4ft 5in × 7ft 1/16in (1.35 × 2.14m). Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio. Gift of Florence Scott Libbey.

p. 279 Richard Morris Hunt, Ballroom, Marble House, Newport, Rhode Island, Fig. 20.15. c. 1895. The Breakers and Marble House, Preservation Society of Newport County.

p. 391 Charles Sheeler, *Wheels*, Fig. 31.10. 1939. Gelatin-silver print, 6⅝ × 9⅝in (16.8 × 24.4cm). Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Given anonymously.

p. 499 Romare Bearden, *The Prevalence of Ritual: The Baptism*, Fig. 36.8. 1964. Collage (photomechanical reproduction, synthetic polymer, pencil) on paperboard, 9⅛ × 12in (23 × 30.5cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966. Photo Lee Stalsworth.

To Lorna

CONTENTS

PREFACE

Art is important and fascinating for both aesthetic and expressive reasons. Understanding the art of our past helps us to understand our culture of the present. Through a course in American art, students may learn about the history of their own country. They may come to the realization that life in the present-day United States is part of a continuum of longstanding cultural traditions.

Primary themes emerge, such as the importance of materialism in our national psyche since the days of the nation's founding. One sees the power exerted by the middleclass in establishing a popular culture, and the "leveling" effect of the prevailing ideology—democracy—on the arts. Also of importance are the lives of the artists, where they have studied, and with whom. Artistic centers such as Paris, Rome, London, Canton, and Tokyo have exerted strong influences, as have the secular and spiritual motivations that have given direction to artistic creativity in America from its earliest manifestation around 1570 to the present.

While there are several ways in which to study American art, my own approach is essentially contextual—that is, the placement of the work of art in its cultural context. This context includes the social, economic, and religious ambience in which a work was created. It sets the political, philosophical, and technological scene. It describes scientific and literary postures of the moment. These areas give direction to the creative spirit of an age. During more than three decades of teaching American art, I have become increasingly aware that students being introduced to the subject need to have a cultural and historical framework established for them. Without such structure, they may take up the study of American art in something of a vacuum.

I have therefore begun each chapter with an introduction that sets the cultural stage upon which the art of the era is created. Within the confines of a one-volume study, the themes that introduce the chapters offer the reader or the teacher a point of departure from which to direct further discussion or enquiry. In some cases a book may be analyzed extensively because its theme or literary style helps to show the spirit of a movement in its fullest scope. In other cases I merely give a title or two with the idea that the reader or instructor may pick up on such references and expand on them at will.

On a related matter, I have written this book so that it can serve diverse methodologies. I believe that there is no single "correct" methodology, and I myself choose to employ a number of them as the situation warrants. It is my hope that those who prefer one or another analytical system—from analysis of material culture to popular culture, from Marxist to feminist interpretations, from psycho-sexual to formal analysis and connoisseurship—will be able to use this text as a point of departure. It seems to me that the more of these intellectual tools that the student of American art can master, the better an understanding will be gained.

I have chosen to include five areas of the arts in this study—architecture, decorative arts, painting, sculpture, and photography—because they are closely integrated and make up the basic core of the arts of America. There are, of course, other topics that might have been included, such as film or graphic arts. But within the scope of a single volume, and often with an eye to the timeframe of a single semester, time and space simply would not allow it.

In my book I have tried to be sensitive to the contributions of minorities and women, and I have introduced these throughout my text. Usually I have preferred to integrate these contributions within the narrative of the history of American art, for I believe that is the best way. However, occasionally I have made groupings, such as African-American Sculptors, for the purpose of emphasizing their creativity. Appreciation of the breadth, depth, and richness of American art is greatly increased by an understanding of its diversity.

Finally, throughout the text I use the term "the Americans." I am well aware that America has hosted a diverse culture throughout its history—that there is no one single group of Americans. The point of view of a white male Boston merchant of colonial times was different from that of an African-American slave woman of the antebellum period. The dreams and ambitions of pioneers moving West were different from those of the Native Americans into whose lands they moved. Newly arrived, penniless immigrants working in the Chicago packing houses saw America differently from the newly rich industrial and railroad barons of the Gilded Age. Similarly, Civil Rights activists of the 1960s found America to be quite unlike the world of the white, status-quo-oriented middleclass of that era. So, having recognized those differences, I use the word "America" to mean the guiding, determining force in the culture of this country—the one that causes art to take the form it does in any given era. Thus at one time, the millionaire society of late-nineteenth-century Newport may have been the guiding spirit behind architecture. At another time the streetlife of African-Americans in the Watts area of Los Angeles may have provided the creative impulses. The term "Americans" is not intended to indicate something monolithic, static, or élitist, but refers to any sector of American civilization that has given direction to the creation of art.

W. C.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special appreciation is expressed to a number of people at the University of Delaware: President David Roselle and Provost Byron Pipes, Dean Helen Gouldner and her successor Mary Richards for their encouragement to research and scholarly publication. My chairman, William Innes Homer, has through counsel and example provided a standard of excellence, as have my colleagues in the American field, Damie Stillman and George B. Tatum. I am also grateful to James Curtis, Director of the Winterthur Program in American Culture. The many graduate students of my seminars—from art history, history, the Winterthur Program, American Studies, and elsewhere—have been wonderfully intelligent soundingboards for the ideas contained in this book. My undergraduate students of thirty-three years have helped me define a methodology for informing college students about the arts of their own country and the values they express.

Curators and registrars at a great many museums and historical societies have been of enormous assistance. I would like to thank, among others, Mary Doherty of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Anita Duquette of the Whitney Museum of American Art, Karol Schmiegel of Winterthur Museum, Graham Hood of Colonial Williamsburg, Elizabeth Broun, Director of the National Museum of American Art, Mary K. Woolever and Lieschen Potuznik of the Art Institute of Chicago, Thomas Grischkowsky and Richard Tooke of The Museum of Modern Art, and the entire staffs of the Rights and Reproductions Office and the Registrar's Office of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the New-York Historical Society.

A number of New York galleries have been especially helpful: Kennedy Galleries, Pace-MacGill, Castelli Galleries, M. Knoedler's, Berry-Hill Galleries, Robert Miller Galleries, Mary Boone Gallery, and Metro Gallery. My appreciation is also expressed to a number of private collectors who have generously allowed me to reproduce objects from their collections in this book. And several artists have been most helpful—among them Jerry Uelsmann, Duane Hanson, and Charles Parks.

Special thanks go to Regina Ryan, my literary agent. I am grateful as well to Deborah Reinbold of Brown & Benchmark, who has been a splendid liaison with the publishing house. And I am pleased to acknowledge the good efforts of my editor Ursula Sadie, the book's designer, Karen Osborne, and Judy Rasmussen, Production Director at Calmann & King, London, who have been marvelous throughout the process of publication.

Finally, although this book is dedicated to Lorna, my dear wife of forty years, I should like to mention here other members of my family who have shown the necessary patience and understanding during the long years of the writing of this book: my sister, Rebecca, and her wonderful family of Frank, Rachel, Frank E., and Sarah. My wife's sister, Nancy G. Breseke, deserves special thanks for increasing my sensitivity to the contributions of women to the arts and other areas.

PART 1

Colonial America

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEW WORLD AND NEW SPAIN

Sailing in the name of the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella, Christopher Columbus discovered the New World in 1492, and the world began to change almost immediately. The new continents became safety valves—they allowed a release of the economic, religious, and political pressures that had reached explosive stages in Europe. The sequence that followed was essentially this: First came discovery, next exploration, then conquest. This was followed by colonization, either for exploitation or for permanent settlement. But it would be over one hundred years before successful and lasting colonies were established within the boundaries of today's continental United States.

It was the wealth of the New World that first brought Europeans across the Atlantic. By 1500, fishing fleets from several European countries were harvesting the cod fish in the waters off North America. Further south, the conquistadors came, advancing under the two banners of the pope of Rome and the king of Spain. Ponce de Leon, Spanish governor of Puerto Rico, discovered Florida in 1513 when he went searching for the Fountain of Youth and for the fabled Earthly Paradise where gold was abundant and jewels hung in trees. He found instead steamy swamps, impenetrable jungles, poisonous snakes, alligators, and fierce Native American warriors.

The conquistador Hernán Cortés completed his conquest of Mexico between 1519 and 1522, virtually destroying the high culture there. Ironically, the Aztec people, led by Montezuma, had hailed him as the god they had been expecting to arrive by sea. They were terrified specifically by two of the things Cortés's small band of soldiers brought with them—the cannon that left devastation in the wake of its explosion, and the spirited horses that made men seem like centaurs. Cortés razed the Aztec capital and built in its place Mexico City, from which the Spanish viceroys ruled the vast territory that stretched from the isthmus of Panama to the unknown desert expanses beyond the Rio Grande, as far west as the Pacific.

Always there was the expectation that goldmines or cities built of gold would be found. When that did not happen, the conquistadors contented themselves with melting down the treasures of the indigenous peoples, and sending heavily laden ships back to the mother country. About 1540, the Spanish explorer Francisco Coronado marched north from Mexico City in search of El Dorado, or the Cibola—the fabled Seven Cities of Gold that were believed to exist in New Mexico. What Coronado found, of course, was the sparse scattering of adobe huts that constituted the tribal villages of the Zuni people—Pueblo Native Americans who lived in large communal houses near the Zuni River.

Spain was not alone in its interest in the New World. In 1562 Jean Ribaut tried to plant a French Huguenot settlement near the site of present-day Beaufort, South Carolina. That ill-fated effort was the first attempt to relocate people in the New World who were fleeing religious persecution back home. In 1564 the French colonizer René Goulaine de Laudonnière established a fort near the mouth of St. Johns River in Florida. It was destroyed by the Spanish the next year—the same year the Spanish created the first permanent colonial settlement in the United States, at St. Augustine. Inevitably there was international warfare as French, Spanish, and English fought to assert their claims to the lands and the seas.

There were two primary reasons for conflict among European nations—one religious, the other economic. Spain and France remained staunchly Roman Catholic following the schism brought about by the Protestant revolution. Meanwhile England's King Henry VIII had expelled Catholic bishops and priests in the 1530s in order to establish the Church of England (or Anglican Church), and Holland had become wholly Protestant. Wherever the Spanish and French soldiers went, there too went Jesuit priests and Franciscan or Dominican friars, fired with the zeal of spiritual conquest. As to the economic issue, all European nations were agreed that the wealth of the New World was desirable. The conflict came when each tried to grab it all.

In 1588 the wrath of nature caused a decided shift in the balance of power, such as the kings of nations had not been able to accomplish—the Spanish Armada was destroyed in the English Channel by a raging storm. Thereafter, England held superiority at sea, challenged more by Dutch mercantile interests than by the Spanish or the French. England's trade vessels now had less to fear, and its merchant-adventurers could concentrate on exploiting the economic potential of new lands around the globe. Although Spain