

# Class 10: A Studio in Paris

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## A. In Search of Color

1. Class title 1 (Cassatt/Weber)
2. Section title A (Gottschalk)
3. Gottschalk and the Conservatoire

That was a kind of prelude, earlier than any of my other examples. In 1842, a young American piano virtuoso named **Louis Moreau Gottschalk** (1828–69) applied to study at the Paris Conservatoire. They rejected him; why? Not because of his talent; everybody agreed on that. Perhaps because of his age; he was only 13. Partly because of his nationality; as one professor remarked, “America is a land of steam engines.” And, although nobody was saying it, probably because of his ethnicity: who was this strange boy with French first names and a German last one? What was the strange Negro music he was playing? In fact, Gottschalk was from New Orleans and of mixed parentage. The piano piece, *Bamboula*, is based on a Creole folk dance. It was one of his first compositions, his Opus 2, and he got it published in Paris in 1849, with the subtitle “Danse des Nègres.” For, nothing daunted by his rejection, Gottschalk stayed in Paris, and was praised by **Chopin**, **Liszt**, and **Berlioz**. By the time he returned to America in 1853, he already had a European reputation. He quickly became America’s most famous composer. By this time, he was writing for enormous orchestras and conducting them himself in monster concerts inspired by his French friend Berlioz. Here is the end of his first Symphony, subtitled *A Night in the Tropics*, here rearranged for a normal-size orchestra, albeit with greatly expanded percussion.

4. Gottschalk: *Symphony #1*, ending
5. Cassatt: *Self-Portrait*, (c.1880, Washington NPG) and Sargent: *Violet* (1888, pc)

Two decades after Gottschalk returned home, Paris would have an explosion of color of its own, in **Impressionist painting**. And since most of the Impressionists did not go the academic route—indeed many had been rejected by the official *Salons* already—it was irrelevant that visiting American artists might get snubbed as Gottschalk had been. And there were surprisingly many of them. Here are two of the most famous. **Mary Cassatt** (1844–1926), on the left, arrived in Paris in 1874, the year of the first Impressionist Exhibition. She became friendly especially with **Degas**, and participated in four of the seven remaining shows. However, since I have included her in several previous courses, that is all I will say about her now. The one on the right is a painting of his sister by **John Singer Sargent** (1856–1925). It comes from 1888, two years after he had moved to London, but he had studied in Paris 1874–76, and remained there a further decade. It is clear that he has absorbed the spirit of Impressionism, and carried it with him in his move to London.

6. Sargent: *Claude Monet Painting at the Edge of a Wood* (1885, NY Met)
7. Sargent: *Cancale* (1878, Washington NG) and *Paul Helleu Painting* (1889, Brooklyn)

Although primarily a portrait painter himself, Sargent was very familiar with the Impressionists, as you can tell from this portrait of Claude Monet painting; Monet was 16 years older than he was, and Sargent looked up to him. Here are two other Sargent paintings in the Impressionist vein, a beach scene at **Cancale** in Brittany, and a later study of the younger French painter **Paul Helleu**, who was something of a *protégé* of his.

8. Sargent in his studio, 1885
9. Sargent: *Portrait of Mme. X* (1884, NY Met)

As I said, Sargent was primarily a portrait painter, and charged high fees for the privilege. These enabled him to live in a house like this one. The portrait behind him was the work which gave him the most pride; it remained with him for the rest of his life. Why? Because it was rejected by its sitter, the well-known socialite **Mme. Pierre Gautreau**. When Sargent exhibited it at the Salon in 1884, it caused an immense scandal; can you guess why? Sargent exhibited it under the title *Portrait of Mme. X*, but the sitter was well-known. When caricatures appeared in the papers, she came to his studio in tears with her mother, and gave him the money back. It was to be one factor in his decision to leave Paris.

#### 10. Landscapes by Chase, Hassam, Robinson, and Prendergast

With the possible exception of Cassatt, Sargent is undoubtedly the greatest *painter* of the many Americans who fell under the spell of the Impressionists, though that greatness lies mainly in his portraits. But there were many others who were no slouches either. Here are four others; the dates show the principal times when they worked or studied in Paris. **William Merritt Chase** (1849–1916), **Childe Hassam** (1859–1935), **Theodore Robinson** (1852–96), and **Maurice Prendergast** (1858–1924).

#### 11. Beach scenes by William Merritt Chase

**William Merritt Chase** differs from the other four in that he chose to study in Munich rather than Paris, which he thought would be too full of Americans! However. But it was Paris that really influenced him, and he made repeated trips there. The works he did back home, especially his beach scenes, are as close to Impressionism as you could wish.

#### 12. Paris scenes by Childe Hassam

Although his name sounds vaguely like an epic poem by Byron, **Childe Hassam** was a New Englander through and through. He went to Paris for three years with his new wife in 1886–89, enrolling in the **Académie Julian** to study. But he found the traditional atmosphere stifling, and soon broke away to do his own thing. In general, he avoided the company of other Americans but got to know French artists such as **Degas** (whose influence can be seen here), and **Monet**, with whom he stayed in touch until the older artist's death, returning several times to France to renew his inspiration.

### 13. Theodore Robinson, two scenes from 1892

Of the four American artists I showed, the closest to Monet in real life was undoubtedly **Theodore Robinson**, who worked in France between 1876 and 1892, the last for a continuous period of eight years. He got to know Monet well enough to move in next door to him at Giverny, and apparently they used to consult each other about their work. Stylistically, however, Robinson has little of Monet's intensity of color or artistic obsession. The larger picture here is actually painted from the Giverny hills, but Monet's waterlily ponds belong to an entirely different world.

### 14. Parisian figures by Maurice Prendergast

**Maurice Prendergast** would eventually develop an idiosyncratic quasi-mosaic style more influenced by **Gauguin** than Monet, but some of his earlier figure studies have a quality not unlike a rather more genteel Degas. The works of his that most impress me, however, are the quick sketches in a notebook preserved in the Metropolitan Museum. Unfortunately, the Met does not supply larger versions, but I find the strong colors and rapid touches of these sketches as fine as anything I have shown you.

### 15. Maurice Prendergast: from the Paris sketchbook (1891–94, NY Met)

### 16. All four artists (repeat)

So does anyone have a particular favorite, or any observations, specific or in general?

### 17. Edward MacDowell

There is a lot of visual art in today's class, and I am trying to break it up with music whenever possible. But this was not yet the era when American composers would come over to Paris in large numbers, like the painters did. One who did study there, however, was pianist and composer **Edward MacDowell** (1861–1901), who attended the Conservatoire between 1876 and 1879. After that, he went on to study in Frankfurt, and remained in Germany teaching at various music schools until he returned to the USA in 1888, soon to be hailed as America's greatest composer. So if we are hearing him in the context of French Impressionism, it would be more for his nature-inspired lyricism than for any bravura or intensity of color. Still, a piece like his famous *To a Wild Rose* (1896) does come close to the gentle Impressionism of, say, **Theodore Robinson**. Here it is, played by **Chris Childers**.

### 18. MacDowell: *To a Wild Rose*

## B. The Modernist Whirlpool

### 19. Section title B (School of Paris)

### 20. — all the artists above

Of course the pilgrimage of American artists to Paris was far from the only *French Connection* round the turn of the century. In the years before the First World War, Paris became the center of **Modernism**,

and many of the artists who contributed to this explosion of invention came from other countries: the details here are by **Pablo Picasso**, **Constantin Brancusi**, **Sonia Delaunay**, **Amadeo Modigliani**, **Marc Chagall**, **Giorgio de Chirico**, **Piet Mondrian**, and **Chaim Soutine**, each with the date they arrived and the country they came from. Art historians call this the **School of Paris**. My focus today, however, is on American artists, so I although I could easily give them a couple of classes all on their own, I shan't say any more about the Europeans—except that the music we heard was the trumpet solo from *Petrushka*, by another visitor from elsewhere in Europe, **Igor Stravinsky** (1882–1971), who arrived in 1910.

## 21. Max Weber and Arthur Dove

Here are two American artists who did visit Paris in these years, absorbed their own versions of Cubism, and brought the style back with them to the United States. **Max Weber** (1881–1961), who was born in present-day Poland, might well have been as one of the mainly-Jewish émigrés who populated the School of Paris—only he came by way of America, as his parents emigrated to Brooklyn when he was 10. **Arthur Dove** (1880–1946) was born in upstate New York in a prosperous family of English stock. Weber came over to Paris in 1905 to study at the **Académie Julian** (like Childe Hassam before him); he spent four years in the city. Dove's visit was only two years (1907–09). Both returned to America in 1909; both were given exhibition opportunities by the pioneering photographer and gallery-owner **Alfred Stieglitz**; Weber's work was panned, but Dove was well on his way to earning the title "Father of Cubism in America." Why the difference?

## 22. Weber, New York scenes (1913 and 1915)

Partly it was a matter of personality. Weber seems to have had a prickly personality; sooner or later, he quarrelled with everybody. His paintings were busy and aggressive too, using the angles and sharp edges of Cubism to represent the busy bustle of New York City. Not inappropriately, for sure, but the buying public at that time did not turn to art to reflect the clangor around them.

## 23. Weber: *The Cellist* (1917) with Picasso: *Fanny Tellier* (1910)

Not that Weber was entirely without poetry. Let's compare his 1917 painting *The Cellist* with an earlier painting of a musician by **Pablo Picasso** (1881–1973). Picasso would also be using color by this time, but his paintings had become a lot more abstract. *Fanny Tellier* captures a perfect balance between abstraction and representation; dare I call it feminine?

## 24. Dove: *Nature Symbolized #2* (1911, Chicago) and *Sentimental Music* (1913, NY Met)

**Dove's** earlier works also have sharp edges, but they are not of sharp-edged subjects; these two are of nature and music. And pretty soon, he is painting only with curved lines, and in *The Cow* at the Met. I show this also to compare to his wonderful *Cows in Pasture* (1935) at the Phillips and (keeping with the animal theme) *The Goat* (also 1935) at the Met. You can see a direct line between Dove's Cubism and **Abstract Expressionism**, while the French imports of Max Weber were largely a dead end.

## 25. Dove: *The Cow* (1912, NY Met) and *Cows in Pasture* (1935, Phillips Coll, DC)

## 26. Dove: *The Goat* (1935, NY Met)

## C. Three American Dancers

### 27. Section title C (Copland: *Music for the Theater*)

I am going to end the hour with a brief look at the three American dancers shown here. Each made her career in Paris and each introduced something revolutionary to the world of dance. They represent the three main periods I am focusing on today: **Loie Fuller** was a sensation of the very late 19th century; **Isadora Duncan** established her style in America, but came to Paris at the very start of the 20th century; and black bombshell **Josephine Baker** lit up Paris stages between the wars, took French citizenship, and even became a French secret agent during WW2.

### 28. Frederick Glasier: *Loie Fuller Dancing* (1902)

### 29. Jean de Paléologue: posters of Loie Fuller (around 1900)

**Loie Fuller** (1862–1928) was born near Chicago. She moved to Paris in 1892 at the age of 30 and took the artistic world by storm with her innovative modern dance style, created as much by the choreography of her billowing costumes as the movement of her own body. I don't think the poster really captures the fluidity of her movements; she did much better with her regular poster artist **Jean de Paléologue**. Fortunately, we do not have to make do with still pictures. We have—we *almost* have—a brief hand-tinted film of her "Serpentine Dance" captured in 1897 by the **Lumière Brothers, Auguste and Louis**. I say "almost have" because the dancer is in fact an unnamed understudy, not Loie herself. And the old technology (movies were still in their first decade!) gives a frenetic quality to the movement, which I doubt was there in the original.

### 30. Lumière Brothers: *Danse serpentine* (1897)

### 31. Isadora Duncan's Liberty scarf

What most people know about **Isadora Duncan** (1877–1927), it is how she died, when one of the long scarves she loved to wear got caught in the wheel of her motor car in Monte Carlo. Oddball and fashion icon though she was, she was also one of the founding figures Tiring of the limitations of classical technique, she advocated a return to dancing as a sacred art rooted in nature.

### 32. Isadora Duncan on the beach

As Wikipedia has it: "*She developed from this notion a style of free and natural movements inspired by the classical Greek arts, folk dances, social dances, nature, and natural forces, as well as an approach to the new American athleticism which included skipping, running, jumping, leaping, and tossing.*" And in her own words: "*Let them come forth with great strides, leaps and bounds, with lifted forehead and far-spread arms, to dance.*" There are no filmed records of her that I can find, but there are reconstructions. Here is her dance *Narcissus*, performed to a waltz by **Chopin**, and danced by **Abra Cohen**.

### 33. Duncan: *Narcissus*, danced by one of her pupils

### 34. Posters for Josephine Baker and *Le Bal Nègre*

**Josephine Baker** (Freda Josephine McDonald, 1906–75), a Black girl raised by a single mother in Saint Louis, made money as a teenager by dancing in the streets, then did a brief stint as a chorus dancer on Broadway, then came to Paris in 1925, at the age of only 19. Her first appearances in *Le Revue Nègre* were a sensation and before long she was a headliner at the *Folies Bergère* and in demand all over Europe. There are many clips of her dancing, though usually more fully dressed than her most sensational costume, which consisted only of a short skirt of fake bananas and a bead necklace. But they don't quite convey the secret of her magnetism or explain why **Ernest Hemingway** called her “the most sensational woman anyone ever saw.” I think it was also because she was not afraid to play up the stereotype of the Black as being the embodiment of some animal nature. Here is a clip from her first feature film, *Siren of the Tropics* (1927). It is a kind of origin story. Baker plays a native girl, **Papitou**. Performing somewhere in the West Indies, she falls in love with a Frenchman, **André Berval**, and follows him back to Paris. When she discovers that he is really committed to his Parisian fiancée, she says “What the heck” and launches her own career on the European stage.

35. Josephine Baker in *Siren of the Tropics* (1927)

36. Class title 2 (Which Josephine?)

The real Josephine Baker did indeed marry a Frenchman, taking French citizenship. During WW2, she worked for the Intelligence arm of the *Résistance*, smuggling messages in her music. After the war, she became more serious in her stage appearances, singing more, using her body less, and tackling issues such as civil rights. When invited back to the US as a headliner in Miami, for instance, she refused to perform unless the audience was desegregated—and that was a fight she won. She also adopted 12 children from as many countries around the world, and several continents, bringing them up in a genuine French chateau, and calling them her **Rainbow Tribe**.

## D. Americans in Paris

37. Section title D (Americans in Paris)

38. — still from the above

I was rather ambitious in making that video, I'm afraid. As it works out, I won't be able to get to African American sculptor **Augusta Savage** (1892–1962) at all; her first scholarship to study in France was revoked when the committee discovered she was Black; by the time she finally made it, her style was already formed and she was 37. My treatment of the two other visual artists here, **Man Ray** and **Alexander Calder** will be relatively brief. And I will have to outsource the writers **Fitzgerald** and **Hemingway** to a film by **Woody Allen**. The music you heard, as I'm sure you realize, was appropriately the opening of *An American in Paris* (1928) by **George Gershwin** (1898–1937), who visited in 1926 and again in 1928. The outer sections portray the bustle of the French streets, with a clutch of tuned taxi horns added to the percussion section. But its emotional heart is the central blues, as though our visitor goes into a smoky café on the Left Bank. Here is it conducted by the young Lithuanian conductor **Giedrė Šlekytė** [first name rhymes with Deirdre; second is roughly “shleh-kee-teh”].

39. Gershwin: *An American in Paris*, blues

40. Nadia Boulanger

Gershwin was one of numerous American composers who came over to France in the interwar years (and indeed after) to study with the formidable woman here, **Nadia Boulanger** (1887–1979). She was a composer herself, but as a young woman she worked tirelessly to support her sister **Lili**, whom she considered was the *really* talented one, but who was mortally ill and died at only 24. So it seems that Nadia found her real calling was nurturing the talent of others. [A composer for whom I had written an opera libretto took it to Nadia Boulanger, but I think she encouraged him to prioritize less ambitious projects, so perhaps I should have a grudge against her!] Her pupils include many of the great names of mid-20th-century music, But *not* **Gershwin**; she declined to teach him, feeling that the jazz-influenced style he had already mastered would lose its spontaneity if exposed to classical disciplines. **Ravel** rejected him for the same reason.

41. Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson

The two American composers that I will mention who studied with Boulanger are **Virgil Thomson** (1896–89) and **Aaron Copland** (1900–90). Most of the photos you find of such august figures depict them already as Grand Old Men; you simply have to guess what they looked like as students. Copland spent three years with Boulanger, from 1921 to 1924. He describes a small part of the experience in an impromptu introduction to a performance of his 1924 piece *As It Fell Upon a Day*. I will play you this introduction, in sound only, then the first minute and a half of the piece itself, in a rather artsy video. The poem is about birds singing in May; you can hear them in the instruments.

42. Copland: *As It Fell Upon a Day*, composer's introduction

43. Copland: *As It Fell Upon a Day*, opening

44. Gertrude Stein

**Virgil Thomson** worked with Boulanger for a similar time, but stayed on in Paris for almost a decade after that, becoming a fixture among the American expatriate artists on the Left Bank. I imagine that he found the climate there more tolerant of his sexuality. He found a mentor in **Gertrude Stein** (1874–1946) who had come over at the turn of the century. Together, they collaborated on Thomson's opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1928), a piece that shows the dichotomy inherent in Thomson's style: simple and approachable music linked to a text that is as *avante-garde* as you could possibly imagine. I'll play you two one-minute excerpts from different productions: the opening from a group in California, and the well-known "Pigeons on the grass, alas" section from a performance in Australia.

45. Thomson: *Four Saints in Three Acts*, prologue

46. Thomson: *Four Saints in Three Acts*, "Pigeons on the grass, alas"

47. "In Paris to Play" (Man Ray and Alexander Calder)

My point with this caption is that creating art is not so different from a child playing a game. Many of the greatest artists—Picasso is the most obvious example—are people who have managed to retain some spirit of childish play throughout their adult lives. So it is with the the two American artists shown here, though play takes a different form in each case. Both have strong connections to Paris. **Man Ray**



(Emmanuel Radinsky, 1890–1976) lived there for over half his life: 1921–40 and again 1951–76; he is much more a fixture in French art than American. **Alexander Calder** (1898–1976) spent seven years there, 1926–33, then returned to establish himself as America’s greatest sculptor.

#### 48. Various works by Man Ray

So what do I mean by “play”? The *Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists* describes **Man Ray** (catalogued under M, not R) as “American painter, photographer, draughtsman, sculptor, and filmmaker.” It is as though he couldn’t decide what medium he wanted to be in. Paris gave him the freedom to pull out every tool in the box, and when he had tried those, he invented new ones. The three works shown here are: a painting, just after he discovered Cubism, rather in the manner of Arthur Dove; a **Rayograph** of his own invention, created by putting objects directly on photo-paper and exposing it to light; and a photo called *Le violon d’Ingres*, which should speak for itself. And here is the earliest and shortest of the films the dictionary mentioned: a three-minute abstract exploration in texture and sound, with a general trajectory of chaos moving towards a kind of order. At any rate, he called it *Le retour à la raison*, or “Return to Reason.”

49. Man Ray: *Le retour à la raison*

50. Calder: *Eagle* (1971, Seattle)

51. Calder: *Crinkly, with Red Disk* (1973, Stuttgart) and *Flying Dragon* (1975, Chicago)

Man Ray’s importance is probably touted only by art historians, but everybody knows **Alexander Calder** as the creator of monumental metal sculptures all over this country and around the world. But look more closely, and you will see that almost all his sculptures, no matter how large, have something playful about them, even in their titles. And this comes about because much of his time in Paris was engaged in what other people might dismiss as mere play.

#### 52. Sandy at the Circus

Much of the time Calder was in Paris, he was indulging his fascination with the **circus**. He pursued this in paintings, prints, stand-alone sculptures, and a complete miniature circus made out of wire, strings, and scraps of fabric. Other people might have asked when he was going to give this up and get on with some *real* work, but Sandy Calder knew better. Much of his “real” work when he came back to the States can be traced as growing out of this Parisian games-playing. I’ll put a ten-minute clip of him (as a mature man) demonstrating *Le Cirque Calder*; here are some excerpts from it.

53. Calder demonstrates *Le Cirque Calder*

54. Hemingway and Fitzgerald in Paris

Of course Twenties Paris was also the place to be in literature also. Baltimorean Sylvia Beach was publishing James Joyce’s *Ulysses* through her little bookshop, *Shakespeare and Company*. **Ernest Hemingway** (1899–1961) and **F. Scott Fitzgerald** (1896–1940) were virtually permanent residents. But being prose writers, they are hard to excerpt in a class like this.

55. Woody Allen: *Midnight in Paris*, still



So I am outsourcing this to the wonderful time-travel movie *Midnight in Paris*, made in 2012 by **Woody Allen** (1935– ). The idea is that a Hollywood scriptwriter named **Gil (Owen Wilson)** comes to Paris with his fiancée. But theirs is a marriage that probably should not take place, so Gil wanders the streets alone. At midnight, a group of well-heeled Americans drive up in a vintage car and invite him to join their party. When he gets there, **Cole Porter** is playing the piano and he meets in short order **Zelda** and **Scott Fitzgerald** and **Hemingway**. Later, he will go back still further in time and meet Gertrude Stein, Picasso, and Toulouse-Lautrec. Right now I have two options, depending on time. I can play a five-minute clip from the movie itself where he first goes back. Or I can play a 12½-minute blog post summarizing the entire movie; it is exceptionally well-made, and will sum up a lot of points from earlier in the class. Or just possibly I can play both; at any rate, both will be on the website.

56. Woody Allen: *Midnight in Paris*, clip

57. Woody Allen: *Midnight in Paris*, blog summary

58. Class title 3 (still from the above)