

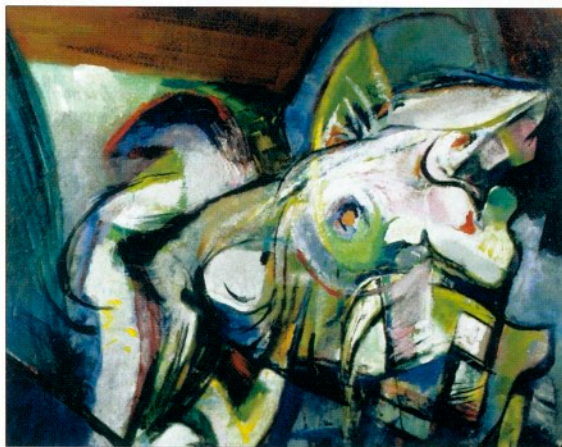
'Marking Modernism'

Hollis Taggart

This stunning and historically intriguing show, subtitled "A Decade with Carles, Dawson, and Maurer," focused on three American artists who were part of the modernist vanguard in the early years of the 20th century. There were oils by Philadelphia colorist Arthur B. Carles (1882–1952) that ranged from early landscapes to late abstract works, painted in the '30s. These included his astonishing *Blue Nude* (1937), a turbulent squall of aquas, greens, pinks, reds, and black that anticipated Abstract Expressionism by more than a decade.

And there were buoyant landscapes and still lifes in Fauve colors, showing Manhattan-born Alfred Maurer (1868–1932) at his most appealing. In the late '20s, Maurer's artistic personality seemed to splinter, and he swung between decorative whimsy and dark, disturbing works. His *Cubist Heads* (ca. 1930), which can be read as two men nose to nose in profile—or one head cleaved in two—perhaps forebodes his suicide a couple of years later.

It was midwesterner Manierre Dawson (1887–1969) who was farthest from the art-world mainstream. He worked first in Chicago as an architectural engineer and then as a farmer in Michigan. But painting and sculpting were his true callings. After a trip to Europe in 1910, he began



Arthur B. Carles, *Blue Nude*, 1937, oil on canvas, 30" x 37".
Hollis Taggart.

painting cubistic takes on the Old Masters. His kinetic, pink and beige *Birth of Venus* (1912) evokes Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (No. 2), of the same year. In *Blue Boy* (1912), the red and gold background belies the work's essential chill.

Each of these three artists visited Paris before the war, showed work in the Armory Show of 1913, and helped shape modern art in America. Yet until recently these artists were eclipsed by larger figures in the canon. Hung side by side, their paintings here offered an alternative view of early-20th-century modernism.

—Mona Molarsky