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Robert Fishko, *Director*

CHARLES SHEELER
(1883-1965)

Barn Abstraction, 1946
tempera on board
21 1/2 x 29 3/8 inches
signed and dated lower right
"Charles Sheeler-1946"



Provenance

The Artist and his Estate
The Downtown Gallery (Edith Halpert),
New York, NY
Sidney S. Spivak, New York, NY
Davis & Long Company, New York, NY
The Honorable Robert David and Carol
Straus, Houston, TX
Mr. & Mrs. Arthur E. Imperatore,
New Hope, PA
{ACA Galleries, New York, NY}
Private Collection, New York, NY
{acquired directly from the above}

Exhibited

Charles Sheeler, The Downtown Gallery, New York, NY, January 25 – February 12, 1949

Sheeler and Dove, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX, January 7-23, 1951
{Lent by Robert D. Straus}

First Biennial, Sao Paulo Museum of Art, Sao Paulo, Brazil, October - December 1951

*A Selection of Paintings, Drawings, Prints, and Sculpture from the Home and Office
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Robert David Straus*, Fort Worth Art Center, Fort Worth,
TX, April 2-25, 1953

Charles Sheeler: A Retrospective Exhibition

Traveling exhibition:

University of California Art Galleries, Los Angeles, CA, October 1954
M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco, CA,
November 21, 1954 - January 2, 1955
Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego, San Diego, CA, January – February 1955
Fort Worth Art Center, Fort Worth, TX, March 1955
Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA, April 7-May 5, 1955
Munson-Williams-Proctor Art Institute, Utica, NY, May 8 - June 15, 1955

Charles Sheeler

Traveling exhibition:

National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.,

October 10 - November 24, 1968

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA, January 10 - February 16, 1969

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, March 11 - April 27, 1969

American Painting, Davis and Long Company, New York, NY, 1974

Buildings and Architecture in American Modernism, Hirschl and Adler Galleries,
New York, NY, October 15 - November 21, 1980 (APG#4016)

American Works on Paper, Andrew Crispo Gallery, New York, NY, February - March 1982

The Spirit of Paper: Twentieth Century Americans, Frances Wolfson Gallery, Miami-
Dade Community College, Miami, FL, June 3 - July 29, 1982

American Works on Paper: 100 Years of American Art History

Traveling exhibition:

Davenport Art Gallery, Davenport, IA, December 11, 1983 - February 12, 1984

Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock, AR, February 24 - April 8, 1984

Oklahoma Art Center, Oklahoma City, OK, April 15 - May 20, 1984

Wichita Falls Museum, Wichita Falls, TX, May 27 - July 1, 1984

Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, TX, July 8 - August 12, 1984

Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, August 19 - September 23, 1984

Huntsville Museum of Art, Huntsville, AL, September 30 - November 4, 1984

Gardiner Art Gallery, Stillwater, OK, November 11 - December 16, 1984

Sangre de Cristo Art Center, Pueblo, CO, January 4 - March 3, 1985

Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, NE, March 17 - April 21, 1985

Lakeview Museum of Arts & Sciences Peoria, IL, May 5 - June 9, 1985

Salina Art Center, Salina, KS, August 11 - September 15, 1985

Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, MO, September 29 - November 3, 1985

Sheldon Swope Art Museum, Terre Haute, IN, November 17 - December 29, 1985

Charles Sheeler in Doylestown: American Modernism and the Pennsylvania Tradition

Traveling exhibition:

Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, PA, April 6 - June 22, 1997

Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, TX, August 23 - November 2, 1997

Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, OH, December 19, 1997 - March 1, 1998

Masters of American Modernism, Berry-Hill Galleries, New York, NY, 2000

Biennial, Berry-Hill Galleries, Paris, France, October 2000

American Paintings X, Berry-Hill Galleries, New York, NY, 2002

Charles Sheeler: Fashion, Photography, and Sculptural Form, James A. Michener
Art Museum, Doylestown, PA, March 18 - July 9, 2017

Landmarks of 20th Century American Art, Forum Gallery, New York, NY
November 8, 2018 - January 5, 2019

Literature

Halpert, Edith. *Charles Sheeler*, The Downtown Gallery, New York, NY, 1949, no. 12, Illustrated.

Sheeler and Dove, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX, 1951, no. 46

First Biennial, Sao Paulo Museum of Art, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1951, no. 63

A Selection of Paintings, Drawings, Prints, and Sculpture from the Home and Office Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Robert David Straus, Fort Worth Art Center, Fort Worth, TX, 1953, no. 27, Illustrated.

Charles Sheeler: A Retrospective Exhibition, University of California Art Galleries, Los Angeles, CA, 1954, no. 28.

Dochterman, Lillian N. *The Stylistic Development of the Work of Charles Sheeler*, Ph.D. dissertation, State University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, 1963, no. 47.26.

Charles Sheeler, National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1968, no. 109.

American Painting, Davis and Long Company, New York, 1974, no. 32, Illustrated.

Friedman, Martin. *Charles Sheeler*, Watson-Gupil Publications, New York, NY, 1975, p. 152, Illustrated.

Buildings and Architecture in American Modernism, Hirschl and Adler Galleries, New York, NY, 1980, no. 70, p. 69, Illustrated.

American Works On Paper, Andrew Crispo Gallery, New York, NY, 1982, no. 65, Illustrated.

The Spirit of Paper: Twentieth Century Americans, Frances Wolfson Gallery, Miami-Dade Community College, Miami, FL, 1982, no. 46, Illustrated.

American Works On Paper: 100 Years of American Art History, Smith-Kramer Art Connections, Kansas City, Missouri, 1983, Front Cover (Illustrated in color), p. 87, no. 80 and p. 111, no. 80, Illustrated.

Karen Lucic, *Charles Sheeler In Doylestown: American Modernism and the Pennsylvania Tradition*, Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, PA, 1997, p. 113, no. 44, Illustrated.

Masters of American Modernism, Berry-Hill Galleries, New York, NY, 2000, pp. 34-35, Illustrated in color.

Bruce Weber, *American Paintings X*, Berry-Hill Galleries, New York, NY, 2002, pp. 112-115, p. 113-114, Illustrated in color.

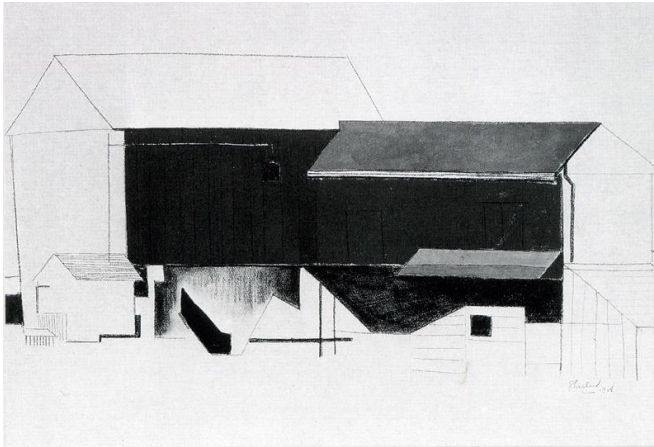
Berman, Ann E. "A Harvest of Homegrown Art," *Art & Auction*, New York, NY, January 2003, p. 120.

Brooker, Niccolo. *Landmarks of 20th Century American Art*, Forum Gallery, New York, NY, 2018, pp. 104-109 and p. 105, Illustrated.

Essay

Intermittently throughout his career Charles Sheeler returned to the subject matter he had first explored in the 1910s, Pennsylvania farmhouse barns. In 1940 he expanded on the values of a particular conté crayon drawing he had done in 1918, *Barn Abstraction*. Part of a series of drawings he executed of Bucks County barns, it was acquired by the vanguard Philadelphia collectors Walter and Louise Arensberg who befriended Sheeler and patronized his photography, paintings, and works on paper. In his 1940 oil painting which he titled *Bucks County Barn*, Sheeler expanded on his early sketch by introducing pastoral elements in the foreground, including a cow, wagon, and fence. In its enriched rural environment, the barn was now a full-fledged American Scene painting.

In 1946, Sheeler once again revisited the topic of the same barn, this time producing an egg tempera painting on board. He restored the starkness of his original 1918 drawing by removing all bucolic imagery and focusing on the formalistic vigor of Cubism. The rectangular and triangular shapes of Sheeler's 1946 *Barn Abstraction* are notably more concrete than in his 1940 genre rendition, their geometry more resolved and contours more defined. Here, Sheeler communicated his fascination with both the translucence of shadow-free forms as well as the obfuscation of shadow and form when the two overlap. He undoubtedly selected tempera with a low-keyed color spectrum (blue, purple, pink, gray, and taupe) in order to more convincingly convey the subtle implications of imbricated forms and shadows.



Sheeler, *Barn Abstraction*, conté crayon, 1918 (coll. Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Sheeler was born and raised in Philadelphia. He attended the city's School of Industrial Art, then the Pennsylvania Academy of Art where, like so many of his generation, he studied under the esteemed William Merritt Chase. In 1908, at the MacBeth Gallery in New York, the famed Ashcan School had its landmark exhibition in the form of *The Eight*. Although some of Sheeler's paintings were on view at the same venue during the same year, he quickly rejected the Social Realists for a much more imaginative form of modernism. With his close artist friend Morton Schamberg, Sheeler traveled through France and Italy where the two assimilated the art of the new. Upon his return, he began his inexhaustible love affair with American historical themes.

In 1910 Sheeler started renting the 18th Century farmhouse known as the Worthington House near Doylestown, Pennsylvania, which he eventually purchased. All the while working as an architectural photographer in Philadelphia, Sheeler spent every weekend he could at the house, photographing and sketching farms, barns, and the abundant homegrown artefacts of the Pennsylvania countryside. Often Schamberg would accompany him from Philadelphia to the countryside. Steering clear of the neighboring New Hope Impressionists, the two artists shared a burgeoning artistic sensibility. In 1918, Schamberg suddenly fell ill and quickly died in the Great Influenza pandemic. Crushed by the loss, Sheeler could hardly spend weekends in Doylestown any longer. Still, the bond he had formed with the vernacular of Bucks County remained as strong in him as the one he would soon develop with the modern machine.



Sheeler, *Bucks County Barn*, 1940 oil painting (coll. The Art Institute, Chicago)

In 1954 Frederick Wight, chair of the UCLA Art Department, wrote that “what is most American in Sheeler is not the American scene but the American way of seeing.” If the American regionalists Grant Wood and John Steuart Curry were portraying the *scene*, then Sheeler was paying homage to the *object*, never deteriorated or dilapidated in his depictions no matter how historic and always occupying an idealized, timeless present. For Sheeler, the presential purity of the object was testimony to his own values and those of a Yankee, Protestant, capitalist country: work, invention, ownership, worth. Likewise, the object for Sheeler was never meant to be symbolic, neither influenced by an artist’s personality nor redolent with associative meanings. While Cubism enlightened Sheeler, his objects always resisted the theoretical and remained actual, fully themselves in their glacial solitude. The barn.



Charles Sheeler, beside a Pennsylvania barn in West Redding, Connecticut, circa 1932; photographed by Edward Steichen (coll. Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Samuel M. Kootz, Estate of Edward Steichen / Artist Rights Society (ARS), NY)

“One of his first early successes was an abstract drawing of a barn, a barn revealed in its essentials without background of any sort. From there on he has chosen, led by an inscrutable logic, to reveal such studies of barns, with necessary variations, in all their aspects.”

(Williams, William Carlos. *Charles Sheeler: A Retrospective Exhibition*, Fine Arts Production Committees, University of California, Los Angeles, 1954, p. 7, *foreword*)