

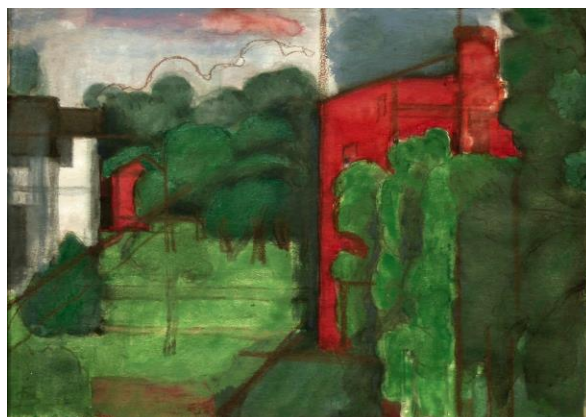


475 Park Avenue at 57th Street, New York, New York 10022
Tel: (212) 355-4545 Fax: (212) 355-4547 www.forumgallery.com

Robert Fishko, *Director*

OSCAR BLUEMNER
(1867-1938)

Irvington-Union, 1922
watercolor and gouache over charcoal on paper
4 7/8 x 6 5/8 inches
signed with artists monogram and dated
lower left: OFB 22



Provenance

The Artist

Barbara Mathes Gallery, New York
James Graham & Sons, New York
Betty Krulik Fine Art, New York
Forum Gallery, New York (acquired directly from the above, November 15, 2007)

Exhibited

Oscar Bluemner: Preparatory Drawings in Watercolor, Colored Pencil and Graphite,
James Graham and Sons, New York, NY, October 24 – December 7, 2002

Note

Beginning in 1898 Bluemner used the monogram OFB to sign his architectural renderings and art works, the F signifying Friedrich, his middle name. However, with the ascendancy of Adolf Hitler and rising anti-German sentiment in the United States, after 1933 Bluemner adopted the pseudonym Floranius, a Latinized version of the German word Blümner meaning “flower” or “blossom”. He was also known to have called his pet cat(s) by the same name.

Essay

Oscar Bluemner saw the world through the lens of an architect. Born in the Brandenburg region of Northeast Germany, he trained at Berlin’s Royal Technical Academy where for five years he studied architectural theory and design. Upon graduating in 1892, he immediately left Berlin for Chicago in time to participate in the design of the vast *White City*, built for the 1893 World’s Colombian Exposition. Bluemner married in Chicago, settled in New York, and never returned to live in his homeland. After numerous years of middling success in America as a professional architect, in 1912 he went on a grand, eye-opening tour of

Europe's art scene. When he returned to New York late that same year his mind was filled with images of the German Expressionist, French Fauvist, and Italian Futurist paintings he had scrutinized in the foremost museums and galleries in Germany, France and England. It was only fitting that three of his watercolors and two of his oils were accepted for inclusion in the American portion of the historic 1913 Armory Show, which introduced European vanguard art to the United States.

While art critics famously impugned the merit of the majority of works on display at the Armory Show and particularly those in the European section, Bluemner wrote his own editorial of the exhibition in which he denounced the very critics for their inability to critique modern art and characterized American contemporary art as passé. Alfred Stieglitz published Bluemner's essay in the June, 1913 edition of his journal *Camera Work*, through whose breathtaking imagery and salient commentaries the dealer-photographer helped transform art in America. In late 1915 Stieglitz gave Bluemner his first solo show at his gallery "291". Six years later Bluemner had another exhibition, this time at the gallery of his friend and intellectual confidante Stephan Bourgeois. In 1924 J.B. Neuman gave Bluemner a painting show, and in 1928 Stieglitz exhibited his latest watercolors. Regardless of the venue, however, Bluemner's sales remained agonizingly meager, exasperating his ongoing and often desperate financial situation.

Bluemner's urban scenes from the mid-1910s were highly segmented and geometrically complex, such as *Character of a Town in Pennsylvania*, *Lehnenburg* and *Expression of a Silk town, New Jersey* (both 1915). By the early 1920s Bluemner's motifs had condensed into simplified architectonic forms, clearly demarcated, often hard-edged, and permeated with rich colors like his particular favorite, vermilion red. Examples include *Red Port in Winter* (1922), *Glowing Night* and *Venus* (both 1924) all of whose dominant subject matter were painted in vibrant vermilion.

Always an architect and builder of conceptual images, Bluemner's approach to painting was as systematic as it was sensual. Even his prolific sketchbook studies of bucolic New Jersey and New York State, extensively annotated in both German and English, suggest a highly developed academic methodology. While his subject matter was site-specific it is not specifically recognizable, revealing his capacity for mentally melding the objective world with his subjective emotions. Bluemner's own mind and soul transformed the very places he painted into the sublime images which he had preconceived for them in an artistic progression redolent of a philosophy espoused by his famed fellow countryman of a century prior, Friedrich Hegel.

"Bluemner's affinity for Hegel's dialectic was not confined to the presumption that art bridged the gap between abstract mind and concrete nature, and in its highest state functioned as a bearer of humanity's deepest needs and feelings. They likewise agreed that essential attributes of culture were revealed through art, {...} and history itself was an organic, ongoing, creative force". (Hayes, Jeffrey R. *Oscar Bluemner*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 37)

Upon the passing of his beloved wife Lina in 1926, Bluemner moved with his two children into a secluded house in South Braintree, Massachusetts, where he lived for the remainder of his life. Isolated from the art world, he turned more and more inward, producing some of the most poetic works of his life, including *Azure* and *Imagination* (1933) and *Black by Gold* (1934). By 1936, Bluemner was very ill with a form of cancer not yet known which attacked his heart, circulatory system and, perhaps most tragically, his vision. He soon lost all ability to paint. On January 12, 1938, in physical and mental anguish, utterly destitute and despairing, in the only heated room of his home, one of the greatest and most ill-starred American Modernists took his own life.



Oscar Bluemner in 1913
(photograph by Alfred Stieglitz, coll: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)



Bluemner, *Impression of a Silk town, New Jersey*
(coll: Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN)



Blumner, *Red Port in Winter*, 1922 (Private Collection)

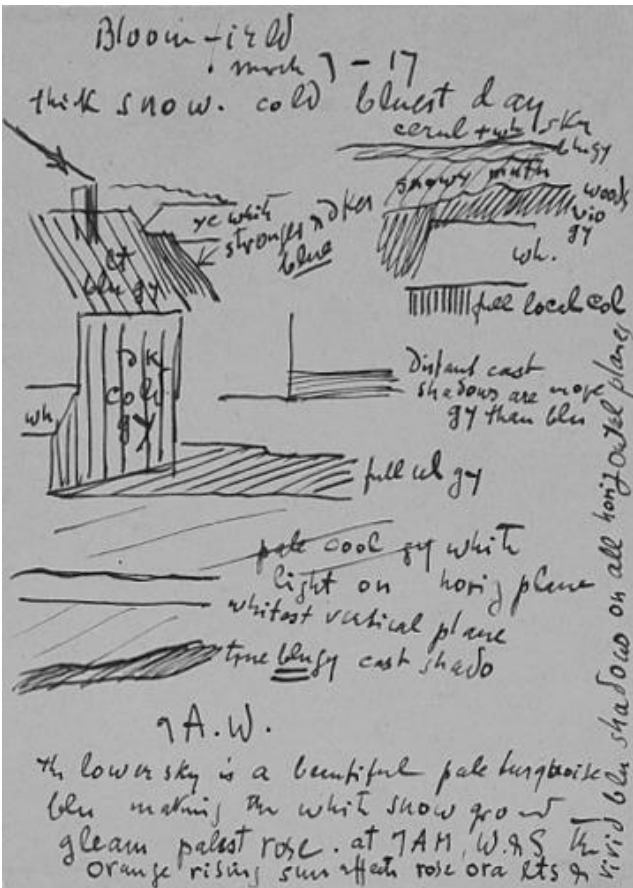


Blumner, *Black by Gold*, 1934 (Private Collection)



Ag 19-21 Oaks Pond

Bluemner, Oaks Pond, Bloomfield, New Jersey, 1921, charcoal study (Private Collection)



Bluemner, Bloomfield, New Jersey, on a Snowy Day, 1917
 (coll: Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.)