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Robert Fishko, *Director*

MAX WEBER

(1881-1961)

Russian-born American

Not only was Max Weber the first American Cubist, he was the first artist to successfully adapt the idiom to the rapidly developing New York City metropolis. His studies and important relationships with the Parisian avant-garde of the early twentieth century uniquely placed him at the forefront of a burgeoning American Modernism. His experimentations with the European-born style, and his manipulations of its formal characteristics to embrace a broader, more varied environment, earned him a distinctly original standing in American art history.

Born in Bialystok in Northeast Poland when it was part of the Russian Empire, Max Weber and his family emigrated to the United States when he was ten years old and settled in the Orthodox Jewish section of Brooklyn.



Max Weber seated in front of *Interior with Music*, ca. 1930, Peter A. Juley & Son Collection, Smithsonian American Art Museum

At sixteen he was studying at Brooklyn's Pratt Institute under the dynamic professorship of Arthur Wesley Dow, who provided a less traditional, more instinctual approach for pupils to learn techniques of painting. Dow's expansive view of art served Weber well when he arrived in Paris in 1905, in time to see a major Cezanne retrospective and the Fauvist work of Matisse, Derain, and Vlaminck. In Paris, he participated in the circle of expatriate American artists and was a founding member of Edward Steichen's New Society of American Artists (1908-1912). His circle of influence further widened, both at the salon of the Gertrude Stein, where he met Picasso, and that of Berthe Félice de Rose where he befriended Henri Rousseau. He studied at the Académie Julian and enrolled in classes at the private "Académie" of Henri Matisse. Weber also joined the circle of Cubist theoreticians and practitioners Jean Metzinger, Albert Gleizes and critic Guillaume Apollinaire.

After Weber returned to the United States in 1909, his mind was brimming with the artistic possibilities he soon spawned in his own original, hybrid Cubism. In 1910 his paintings were displayed as part of the Younger American Painters exhibit at Alfred Stieglitz's "291" gallery, and he had a solo show there the following year. In 1913, he had his first solo museum exhibition at the Newark Museum, the first for any American modern artist.

Despite these successes, America's hesitation to embrace his artistic originality and pioneering vision worked against Weber receiving the critical and public recognition he merited. Acknowledgement first came to him from Paris in 1924, in the form of a retrospective at the Galérie Bernheim-Jeune. Then in 1930, under the leadership of modernist connoisseur Alfred Barr, the Museum of Modern Art in New York gave Weber the first solo exhibition of any American artist at that institution. Within a decade (1949-1959), the Whitney Museum, the Newark Museum, and the Jewish Museum in New York all awarded him major retrospectives. Today, Weber's talent is overwhelmingly recognized, making him one of the best-known American Modernists. Max Weber's work is included in most major American museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the National Gallery, Washington, DC, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.