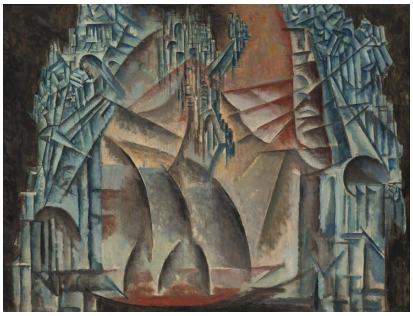
NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS
American Paintings, 1900–1945



Max Weber
American, born Poland, 1881 - 1961

Interior of the Fourth Dimension

1913

oil on canvas
overall: 75.7 x 100.3 cm (29 13/16 x 39 1/2 in.)
framed: 87.9 x 112.4 x 4.4 cm (34 5/8 x 44 1/4 x 1 3/4 in.)
Inscription: lower right: MAX WEBER 1913
Gift of Natalie Davis Spingarn in memory of Linda R. Miller and in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art 1990.78.1

ENTRY

In January 1909, Max Weber returned to New York City after an extended stay in Paris, where he had associated with the avant-garde circle of Guillaume Apollinaire (French, 1880 - 1918), Robert Delaunay (French, 1885 - 1941), Jean Metzinger, and Albert Gleizes (French, 1881 - 1953). He had been particularly impressed by the early cubist paintings of Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881 - 1973). Like his American modernist contemporaries John Marin (American, 1870 - 1953), Joseph Stella (American, 1877 - 1946), and Abraham Walkowitz (American, 1880 - 1965), Weber regarded New York as a city of the future. For these artists, New York's skyscrapers, public transport systems, terminals, and suspension bridges lent themselves to being interpreted in the same semiabstract style that Delaunay had used to depict the Eiffel Tower in Paris. [1] In New York, Weber's choice of urban subject was reinforced by his association with Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864 - 1946) at the 291 gallery and through the direct encouragement of his close friend the photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn (British, born United States, 1882 - 1966).

Interior of the Fourth Dimension is justly considered "one of Weber's most intriguing scenes of New York." [2] In the bottom foreground a ship enters the city's vast harbor at night, surrounded by towering skyscrapers. The form directly above the ship, between the two masses of buildings, is probably a bridge. Weber's incandescent metropolis resembles a Gothic cathedral set against dark voids, like parting curtains, at the left and right edges. [3] The complex interpenetration of planes unites the buildings, ship, and bay into a single, vital entity. Weber placed great emphasis on powerful beams of electric light, tracing their path as they pierce and fragment buildings before descending into the bay. Scholar and curator Percy North has suggested that this visualization of light was inspired by the artist's familiarity with the special electrification effects used during the 300th anniversary celebrations of Henry Hudson's exploration of the Hudson River in 1909. [4]

Unlike orthodox analytical cubism, in which the fragmentation of solid matter is achieved through a methodical breakdown of its structure, Weber's adaptation of the style has an expressionistic quality. He likely derived the high vantage point from Coburn, who had made an important series of photographs of Manhattan from the tops of skyscrapers. [5] Weber's description of his later *New York at Night* [fig. 1] applies equally well to *Interior of the Fourth Dimension*: "Electrically illuminated contours of buildings, rising height upon height against the blackness of sky now diffused, now interknotted, now pierced by occasional shafts of colored light. Altogether—a web of colored geometric shapes, characteristic only of the Grand Canyons of New York at Night." [6]

The painting takes its title from a pseudoscientific theory, derived from Einstein's theory of relativity, that had been current among avant-garde artists during Weber's last year in Paris. Weber wrote the first published discussion of the concept in an influential one-page treatise that appeared in a 1910 issue of *Camera Work*:

> In plastic art, I believe, there is a fourth dimension which may be described as the consciousness of a great and overwhelming sense of space-magnitude in all directions at one time, and is brought into existence through the three known measurements. It is not a physical entity or a mathematical hypothesis, nor an optical illusion. It is real, and can be perceived and felt. It exists outside and in the presence of objects, and is the space that envelops a tree, a tower,

> a mountain, or any solid; or the intervals between objects or volumes of matter if receptively beheld. It is somewhat similar to color and depth in musical sounds. It arouses imagination and stirs emotion. It is the immensity of all things. It is the ideal measurement, and is therefore as great as the ideal, perceptive or imaginative faculties of the creator, architect, sculptor, or painter. [7]

In the same article, Weber further noted that “this boundless sense of space or grandeur” and “dimension of infinity” was universally present in the art and architecture (including the “tunnels, bridges, and towers”) of different historical eras and cultures. He stipulated that although the fourth dimension was spiritual, it arose from perceived reality: “The ideal dimension is dependent for its existence upon the three material dimensions, and is created entirely through plastic means, colored and constructed matter in space and light. Life and its visions can only be realized and made possible through matter.” [8] When *Interior of the Fourth Dimension* was exhibited in Baltimore in 1915 (where a reviewer pronounced it “the most abstruse, obscure thing on the walls”), Weber was quoted as having specified that the interior of the fourth dimension “is the space around an art form which is stirred by the essence with which that form was vested by the artist.” [9]

Interior of the Fourth Dimension possesses a grandeur consistent with the artist’s mystical theory but atypical of European analytical cubist painting. Modern art scholar Dominic Ricciotti has argued, “In an effort to signify the interrelatedness of time and space, Weber achieves a motion that is effectively Futurist.” [10] In comparison to the artist’s later futurist-influenced paintings such as *Rush Hour, New York*, however, the imagery in *Interior of the Fourth Dimension* is static and symmetrical. The components of the fragmented cityscape form a cohesive whole that is stable rather than in motion. The painting’s most prominent lines reflect the power and energy of electrification, serving a function distinctly different from futurist “lines of force” that indicate the chaos of the modern urban environment. Weber’s use of other lines that suggest sequential motion may reflect the influence of Marcel Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912, Philadelphia Museum of Art), which he had seen at the Armory Show earlier in 1913. [11] In *Interior of the Fourth Dimension*, Weber celebrated the vitality of the city while centering and grounding the scene in a stagelike arrangement. By activating the spaces between and around the elements of his composition (bridge and buildings, ship, and beams of light), Weber made the theory of the fourth dimension visual and vibrant.

Weber's preparatory gouache study for this painting is in the collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art [fig. 2]. At larger than half scale and with the complexity of the final painting, the gouache reveals Weber's nearly fully developed ideas for the oil on canvas.

Robert Torchia

July 24, 2024

COMPARATIVE FIGURES

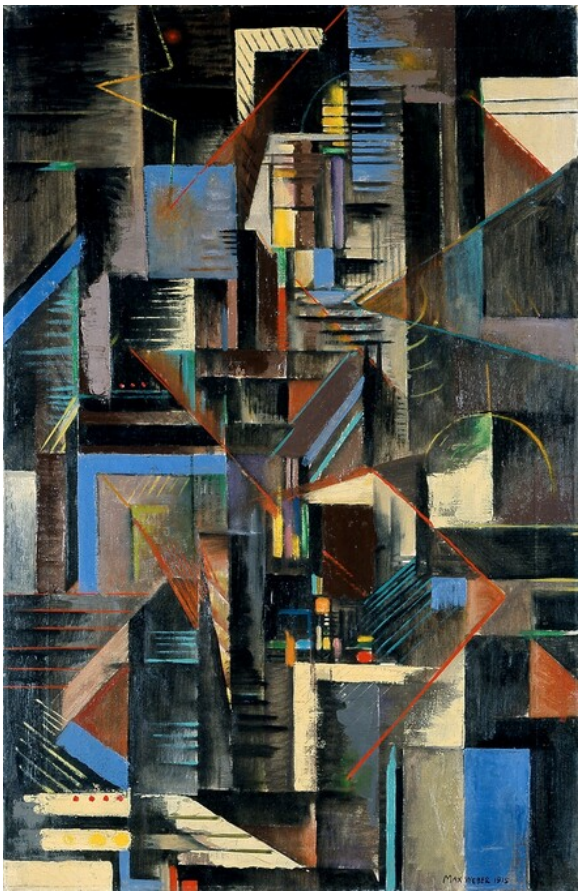


fig. 1 Max Weber, *New York at Night*, 1915, oil on canvas, Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Mari and James A. Michener, 1991.338. Photo by Rick Hall

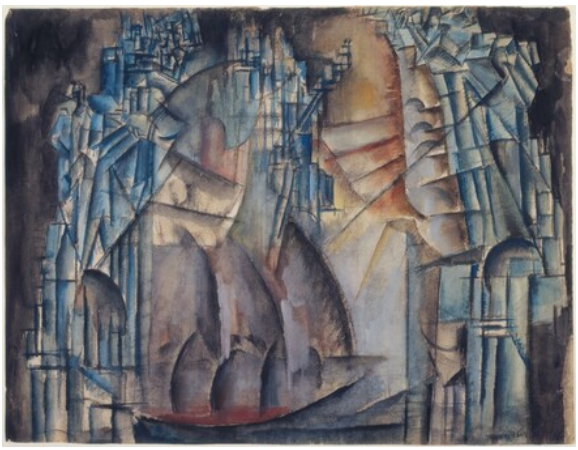


fig. 2 Max Weber, *Interior of the Fourth Dimension*, 1913, transparent and opaque watercolor over black crayon, Baltimore Museum of Art, Saidie A. May Bequest Fund, 1970.42. Photo by Mitro Hood

NOTES

[1] For a summary of artists' attitudes regarding New York, see Wanda M. Corn, "The Artist's New York: 1900–1930," in *Budapest and New York: Studies in Metropolitan Transformation, 1870–1930*, ed. Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske (New York, 1994), 275–308.

[2] Percy North, *Max Weber: American Modern* (New York, 1982), 57.

[3] This analogy was made by Marla Prather in *Art for the Nation: Gifts in Honor of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art* (Washington, DC, 1991), 288.

[4] Percy North, *Max Weber: The Cubist Decade, 1910–1920* (Atlanta, GA, 1991), 46n72. The event is described in David Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880–1940* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 62.

[5] For a discussion of Coburn's influence on Weber, see Percy North, *Max Weber: The Cubist Decade, 1910–1920* (Atlanta, GA, 1991), 31–34. An example of one of the photographs in Coburn's series is *The Octopus* (1912, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

[6] Weber quoted in Alfred H. Barr, *Max Weber Retrospective Exhibition, 1907–1930* (New York, 1930), 16.

[7] Max Weber, "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View," *Camera Work* 31 (1910): 25.

[8] Max Weber, "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View," *Camera Work* 31 (1910): 25. The full text is quoted in Percy North, *Max Weber: The Cubist Decade, 1910–1920* (Atlanta, GA, 1991), 95. Weber's article was translated into French, quoted, and discussed by Guillaume Apollinaire in *Les Peintres Cubistes: Meditations esthetiques* (Paris, 1913). For a discussion and comparison of the texts, see Willard Bohn, "In Pursuit of the Fourth Dimension: Guillaume Apollinaire and Max Weber," *Arts Magazine* 54 (June 1980), 166–169. For a discussion of the fourth dimension, see Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "A New Facet of Cubism: The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidian Geometry Reinterpreted," *Art Quarterly* 25 (Winter 1971): 410–433, an article that was later incorporated into her book *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton, NJ, 1983).

[9] W. W. B., *Baltimore News*, March 14, 1915, quoted but not identified in Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton, NJ, 1983), 176. The reviewer praised some of the more conservative works Weber had executed prior to leaving for Paris and opined that *Interior of the Fourth Dimension* was "incomprehensible"; he

found the artist's deliberate departure from naturalism "as purposeless as it would be, say, if Bernard Shaw deserted English to write his plays in Cingalese. The fact that Cingalese may be a beautiful language and that it might, by some queer turn, become the vogue would hardly condone or justify such an act."

[10] Dominic Ricciotti, "The Revolution in Urban Transport: Max Weber and Italian Futurism," *American Art Journal* 16 (Winter 1984): 50.

[11] Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton, NJ, 1983), 176.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The fabric support has been lined with wax and mounted on a nonoriginal stretcher. The tacking margins are present. The painting is in very fragile condition due to the ground's slick surface, which has resulted in poor paint adhesion and extensive flaking. Significant paint losses had been restored in the past, and more recent damage was treated in 1990.

Michael Swicklik

July 24, 2024

PROVENANCE

Purchased 1915 from the artist by Nathan J. Miller for his wife, Linda R. Miller, New York; by inheritance 1936 to her daughter, Helen Miller Davis, New York, until at least 1959;[1] her daughter, Natalie Davis Spingarn; gift (partial and promised) 1990 to NGA; gift completed 1997.

[1] She lent the painting to exhibitions in 1956 and 1959.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1915 Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Max Weber, The Print Gallery, New York, February 1915, no. 21.

1915 [Max Weber], Jones Galleries, Baltimore, 1915.

1915 [Max Weber], Montross Gallery, New York, 1915.

1956 An Exhibition of Oil and Tempera Paintings, Gouaches, Pastels, Woodcuts, Lithographs and Drawings by Max Weber, Celebrating the artist's 75th birthday, The Jewish Museum, New York, 1956, no. 5a, as Fourth Dimension Interior.

1959 Max Weber: Retrospective Exhibition, The Newark Museum, 1959, no. 16, repro.

1982 Max Weber: American Modern, The Jewish Museum, New York, 1982, no. 31.

1991 Art for the Nation: Gifts in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1991, unnumbered catalogue, color repro.

1991 Max Weber: The Cubist Decade, 1910-1920, travelling exh. organized by the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, 6 venues, 1991-1993, no. 37, repro. (shown only at first three venues: High Museum of Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Corcoran Gallery of Art).

2000 Max Weber's Modern Vision: Selections from the National Gallery of Art and Related Collections, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2000, brochure, fig. 3.

2001 Inheriting Cubism: The Impact of Cubism on American Art, 1900-1936, Hollis Taggart Galleries, New York, 2001-2002, pl. 39.

2008 American Artists from the Russian Empire, Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg; State Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow; San Diego Museum of Art, 2008-2010, no. 1, repro.

2012 Max Weber: Bringing Paris to New York, Baltimore Museum of Art, 2013, no. 24, repro.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1982 North, Percy. *Max Weber, American Modern*. Exh. cat. the Jewish Museum, New York, and three other venues. New York, 1982; 57-58, fig. 31.

1983 Henderson, Linda Dalrymple. *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art*. Princeton, 1983: 176, fig. 53.

1984 Ricciotti, Dominic. "The Revolution in Urban Transport: Max Weber and Italian Futurism." *American Art Journal* 16 (1984): 50.

1991 North, Percy, and Susan Krane. *Max Weber: The Cubist Decade, 1910-1920*. Exh. cat. High Museum of Art, Atlanta, and five additional venues, 1991-1992. Atlanta and Seattle, 1991: 34, 42, 56, color pl. 37.

2000 Oja, Carol J. "George Antheil's Ballet Mecanique and Transatlantic Modernism." In Townsend Lundington, ed. *A Modern Mosaic: Art and Modernism in the United States*. Chapel Hill, 2000: 187, 193.

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