

**Ross Moffett 1888-1971**

**Worcester Art Museum**

**May 30-July 6, 1975**

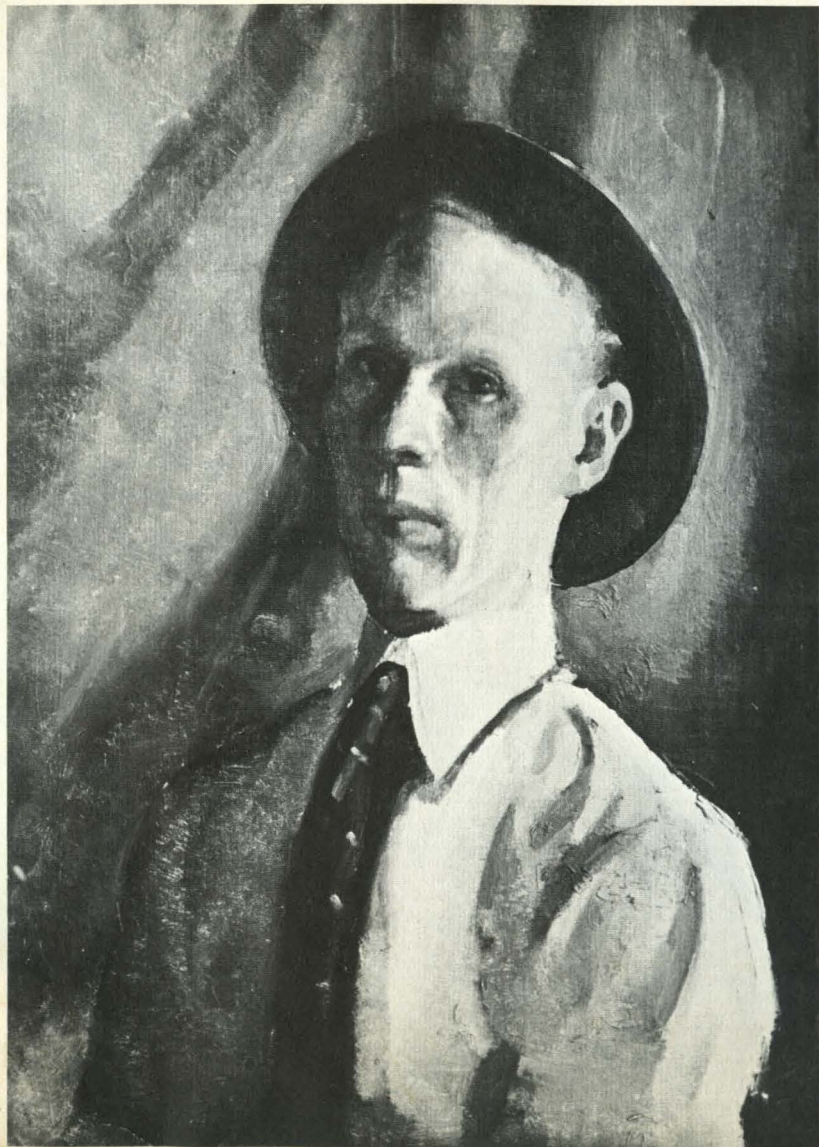
**Provincetown Art Association**

**August 29-September 29, 1975**



Self-Portrait, 1915

On the cover: The Back Street, Provincetown, 1917



## Foreword

Ross Moffett was an important figure in the development of modernism in American Art after World War I. For over half a century he lived and worked in Provincetown on Cape Cod, painting its beaches and harbors, its fishing vessels, and its people. With the general reexamination of American painting of the period between the wars, it is now time for a retrospective study of the role of Ross Moffett.

The Worcester Art Museum is greatly indebted to Josephine Del Deo for this exhibition and the catalogue which accompanies it. Recognizing the significance of Ross Moffett's work, she has written a very personal and illuminating testament to the artist. We also appreciate the generous assistance of the artist's widow, Dorothy Moffett, and other members of his family in making available a number of key works in this exhibition.

Richard Stuart Teitz  
Director  
Worcester Art Museum

Mary Javelle

## Acknowledgments

A Ross Moffett retrospective would not have become a reality without the patience, love and constant encouragement of Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett.

Nor would it have been implemented without the artistic guidance and complete dedication of my husband, Salvatore A. Del Deo.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Edwin W. Dickinson for his invaluable contribution of recollections and insights from a lifelong friendship with Ross Moffett, and to Frances Dickinson for her warm hospitality and helpful suggestions.

To George Yater for his care in photographing the works represented in this catalogue, and for his great accommodation in the photography of many paintings and monotypes over a three-year period, my most honest thanks. . . .

To those whose assistance at various times has been of inestimable importance to me: Robert Brown, Director of the New England Office, Archives of American Art; Murray M. Wax, Director of the Provincetown Group Gallery; Marston Hodgin; Mr. and Mrs. Charles Edward Eaton; Miss Faye Moffett, sister of the artist; Clarence M. Davis, cousin of the artist, my deep appreciation. . . .

And to: Vaclav Vytlačil, Bruce McKain, Henry R. Sutter, Alice Boogar and John Worthington Gregory, my sincere thanks for information and reminiscences provided. . . .

For their personal attention and superior craftsmanship in the framing of the majority of the paintings and all of the monotypes in this exhibition, I would like to thank: Chet Pfeiffer, The Artisan Shop, Provincetown; Robert Vaccaro, The Taylor Gallery, Provincetown.

I am indebted to the following museums and institutions which have made available to me much needed material for the documentation of Ross Moffett's career: Albright Knox Gallery; The Art Institute of Chicago; The Brooklyn Museum; Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute; Corcoran Gallery of Art; The Detroit Institute of Arts; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; National Academy of Design; Miami University; Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design; University of Kansas Museum of Art; Nebraska Art Association, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery. . . .

The following private owners have generously loaned paintings for this retrospective: Dr. Henry Fogelman, Ione and Hudson Walker, Joseph Acker, Clarence M. Davis, Captain Jack Papetsas, The Town of Provincetown and Provincetown Art Association.

To the Director of the Worcester Art Museum, Richard Stuart Teitz; Dagmar Reutlinger, Curator of the Collection; Leon Shulman, former Curator of Contemporary Art; James Welu, Assistant Curator; Jean Connor, Head of Public Relations and Publications, for their enthusiastic undertaking of the Ross Moffett retrospective and to the staff of the Museum for accomplishing the task of the exhibition my most heartfelt gratitude. . . .

This catalogue is lovingly dedicated to my mother, Osma Gallinger Tod

Josephine Couch Del Deo  
February 12, 1975

## Ross Moffett 1888-1971

There is a part of us that has disappeared into the recent past with a certain exquisite regret, the regret of a people for the unlimited plain, the wild water and the undiminished vigor of men who could, as a regular routine, harness eighteen head of horses to plow a thousand-acre farm. The legend of a superior life force once experienced by Americans will remain part of us, but will never again be the reality of our daily lives. Those men who lived in a period, now so seemingly remote in time and yet so near to us, will be increasingly cherished. One man is not apart from his epoch, and so, Ross Moffett's career bears out the sturdy rhythm and necessary simplicity of a tempo of life we cannot hope to duplicate. Try to imagine a contemporary painter calmly contemplating his future while homesteading land in South Dakota with no companions other than a Martin rifle and several of the "classics." Only in the earlier days of American painting were a man's ambitions equally subject to that kind of physical intrusion and isolation.

Ross Moffett as an Iowa farm boy observed the necessities of rural life and filial obedience. What determination by peculiar artistic sensibilities, however, enabled him to grow up so keenly responsive to the abundant natural wonder around him and yet completely unresponsive to the idea of farming as a way of life is a recurring phenomenon. Doing farm chores on horseback, for instance, he learned what the horse was in every physical and spiritual sense, and that "horse" steps majes-

tically, gallops, staunchly pulls and strains, runs free through his canvases with an eternal *verismo* of form. His horses are "the horse." And his people too are "the people." From the earliest significant paintings, beginning in 1917, the unquestionable stamp of his character and interpretation is one of the classic portrayal of "man." The figures exist as monumental forms posed timelessly in attitudes of human endeavor. They do not illustrate the spiritual life of the painter; they are the spiritual embodiment of the man.

Ross Moffett came from the Iowa farm with as much directness and evenness of purpose as an ear of corn. He was unswerving in his desire to paint, and in 1908 began to study under John Vanderpool and Harry Wallcott at The Art Institute of Chicago. Whatever chance led him East, we may assume that the flow of artistic genius from the western part of the country to the eastern seaboard was general at that time. There were others: John Noble, somewhat earlier, Vaclav Vytlacil, Henry Sutter, Karl Knaths and many more. The East offered the brighter atmosphere of the painting world.

And so, at the time Charles W. Hawthorne had begun to surround himself with a glory still lingering in Provincetown today, Ross Moffett moved into this circle of light with primary attributes which were to receive stimulation and refinement from Hawthorne. Moffett viewed Hawthorne's teaching from his own strongly individual vantage point, although he accepted it with natural respect.

As Edwin Dickinson, a fellow student, said in reviewing Ross's attitude toward Hawthorne, "One does not have doubts about a man who has shown himself to be above expectations." But the teacher and his pupil must part at some logical junction of the spiritual and artistic journey, and Moffett soon began to pursue his own direction with a burst of energy and an outpouring of painting.

These paintings, dating roughly from the period 1915 to 1923, show an enormous vitality coupled with a rapid growth of technique. It is evident from the two portraits done in Clearfield in 1915, one a strong, straightforward self-portrait and the other a remarkably sensitive and beautifully painted head of his father, James Warren Moffett, that Charles Hawthorne's teaching had already significantly influenced the young painter. Hawthorne's basic principle, the direct color statement to delineate form, had been successfully put to work. But even then, there was a control and interpretation far beyond the typical Hawthorne student's study. The father's eyes have a watery sadness through which an infirmity of body contrasts with the gentle strength of the features. The projection of patient, inner suffering is expressed very clearly. We see the same expression in the "Portrait of Mrs. Edith Mahon" by Thomas Eakins.

The sojourn with his family in Clearfield had been enforced by a lack of funds for living in Provincetown during the winter of 1915.

When Ross again returned to Provincetown late in 1915, he rented studio number one at Days' Lumber Yard which he occupied for the following two years. Edwin Dickinson lived next door during most of this period in studio number two. They shared models, ideas and life in general. Ross's head is centrally prominent in Dickinson's painting of "The Anniversary," and his painting "Mayme Noones in Moffett's Studio" portrays one of their most frequently shared models, the handsome Mayme Noones. Another favorite who often posed for them was the old Coast Guard hero, Ben Pot Atkins. Ross used Ben Atkins in his painting of "The Old Fisherman," which won the First Julius Hallgarten Prize at the National Academy of Design in 1921, and in several early canvases of that period such as "The Portuguese Family of Cape Cod." In the foreword to Moffett's *Autobiographical Notes*, Dickinson reveals in several intimate recollections his admiration and his bond with Ross: "I was very happy during a long intimacy, not over every branch of the things men think of, but a great deal — the thing to speak about, the thing for me to speak about is a man whom I loved and admired — I say loved, that's not the word, but let's let it go. I lived in the next studio to him quite a while."

The turning point for Moffett came in 1916. He says of that moment in his autobiography: "It was in the spring of 1916 that painting one afternoon in my studio, the thought came to me to try something radically different from the more or less studio work I had been doing

up to that moment. So I began and hurriedly completed a small canvas from which I had discarded all drawing from actually present objects. Eliminated also were bright, high-keyed colors, and all representation of sunlight, with the consequent cutting up of the picture with cast shadows. I invented and placed shapes instinctively, without premeditation. The result was a low-keyed canvas, produced largely by intuition. While it was perhaps not much of an art work and I did not keep it, I at once realized that, good or bad, I had produced a picture that was not a reflection of Hawthorne, nor of other teachers with whom I had been associated. . . .

"I continued working, endeavoring to mine the vein I had uncovered. My subject was life in Provincetown as I observed it visually during my many walks in the town, particularly in the west section where the Portuguese flavor was especially manifest. I regarded this group as proletarian, at least as a working class, and from that it was, I thought, not too difficult to connect them with farmers who also were involved with manual labor. I had, I suppose, by this time acquired a slant towards socialism, what with the war coming on and my reading of Thoreau and Tolstoy." The paintings which grew out of this revelation were unlike anything in American art that preceded them and, I believe, unlike anything that has been done since. Extemporizing his statement about life through the virtuoso handling of the figure in a landscape, Moffett portrayed a world of bleak strength, fateful

mood and stark poetry that paralleled the work of another artist expressing a similar taut and dramatic concept, the Norwegian Edvard Munch. Of the paintings from this period, "The Back Street, Provincetown," "Cape Cod Evening," "The Gossips," and two untitled works depicting symbolic figures in dark blues and blacks, which dominate a winter landscape with mystic solemnity, are the outstanding examples. Photographs exist of a number of other large paintings done in this period. They are equally compelling and enigmatic in reproduction, but their whereabouts are unknown. The sheer painting power of the forms and color Moffett used in these paintings seems to have been his most forceful statement about man and his fate. It is, moreover, expressed as only a painter can express it without loss to rhetoric. Few American painters so successfully incorporated the figure in a landscape as Ross Moffett. Unlike his teacher, Charles Hawthorne, who preferred to think of the landscape as a background behind the model, Moffett early understood the negative space of the canvas and stressed the overall two-dimensional aspect of the surface plane. In this, he incorporated the patterning of the early Italian masters as well as the "modernists."

At the same time that his statement about the world of the sea and its people was reaching a great intensity in the medium of oil painting, it was also spreading out into two other media, etching and the monotype. The etchings of 1914-1919 that we have are certainly true

poetic expressions. The Portuguese fisherman and his environment are conceived inseparably, landscape and figure undulating together in a total texture. Like Chagall, he caught the same rhythmic pulse of the two blended as one. "Back Street, Provincetown," "New England Graveyard," "Fish Houses," and "Boat Yard" are all of a similar organic conception, and it is unfortunate that Ross Moffett made no extensive use of etching as a medium. His wife Dorothy estimates that he made very few plates during his long career. Only five etchings are extant at the time of this writing.

There are also a few surviving drawings from the year 1916 which are unusual and should be mentioned as a corollary expression of the kind of philosophical commentary inherent in the oil paintings of that date. "The Hanging of Duncan Jop," "A Priest with Two Dwarfs," and the untitled drawing of hooded figures with trees are morbidly evocative.

A steady but limited production of monotypes, on the other hand, accompanied his oil painting until 1950. The earliest, dating from 1916, are full of air and light, their suggestive figures again designed expertly in the landscape. "Watching the Bathers," "On the Beach" and "The Red Parasol" plus several which are untitled depicting women and children in pleasant gambol on the shore are choice examples of the style he first employed in this medium. As his technique in oil began to assume a darker quality in the early twenties,

the accompanying monotypes also took on a richness and powerful rhythmic design. "The Impertinent Question" and a monotype in which "death," largely concealed on a horse, looms behind the foreground figure of an old man repeat the strong and symbolic motifs of his oils and drawings. But there were others that revealed the always-present humor just beneath his sober reflections. Evelyn Marie Stuart, an art critic, referred to these tragicomic monotypes as "a well-spoken jest." "The Beggar and the Uncharitable Lady" acquired by the University of Kansas is a typical example of the "jest." The monotypes represented a rather reliable source of income over the years and were widely exhibited and sold.

The evolution of this period took a short six or seven years. His work was now accepted in major American institutions of art, most notably the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the National Academy of Design, The Art Institute of Chicago and the Carnegie Institute. His successes followed closely upon each other: The Norman Wait Harris Medal in 1918 from The Art Institute of Chicago, the First Julius Hallgarten Prize at the National Academy in 1921 and Honorable Mention at the Carnegie Institute in 1921.

In 1918 the First World War briefly interrupted his career while he served a few months in the army. Shortly after his return Ross Moffett married Dorothy Lake Gregory in 1920. Dorothy Gregory was an artist herself, having

studied in New York under the famous teacher and leader of "The Eight," Robert Henri. She had earlier attended Pratt Institute, foregoing college to pursue a promising art career. While still in her teens Dorothy toured Europe with her father, Grant Gregory, an editor and journalist, and the son of the founder and first president of the University of Illinois, John Milton Gregory. This trip broadened and deepened her artistic propensities. A further inspiration to Dorothy was her aunt, Helen Gregory, who had studied painting with Whistler at a time when women were generally not welcome as serious participants in the art world. The combination of a distinguished heritage and a fine talent, which Dorothy's father had wisely stimulated, more than equipped her for study with Charles Hawthorne when she came to Provincetown for the first time in 1914. She did not come again for five years, but when she did, in 1919, the trip was to prove fateful for both artists. Ross came calling upon Dorothy wearing a hat and behaving in a grave and gentlemanly manner that was in distinct contrast to the unbridled life style of many of the town's Bohemian inhabitants. This impressed her and increased her interest in the painter whose reputation as the "young lion" of the art colony was well known.

Ross sought Dorothy out with a determination that was very characteristic. When they parted in the fall of 1919, she returned to her home in Brooklyn only to find that her father firmly refused to approve a marriage until the spring.

He confidently expected this stipulation to end the affair. But Ross Moffett proved with stubborn sincerity the seriousness of his intent by a vigorous letter-writing courtship throughout the winter months and arrived for Dorothy's hand at the appointed time the following spring. They were married quite simply in Brooklyn with no relatives attending except her father. Dorothy's mother had passed away when she and her younger brother, John, were still very young children.

The beginning days of Ross and Dorothy's marriage in Provincetown expressed a spiritually compatible union which never changed in character through fifty years of marriage. Their first studio was the old shirt factory on Court Street used previously by the marine painter, William F. Halsall, whose huge canvas of the battleship Oregon going around the Horn in 1898 was a landmark to local residents. The rather immense space of the shirt factory was warmed only by a laundry stove which served the double purpose of cooking breakfast and heating the building. Dorothy tells of going to the studio early each morning with a fresh loaf of Portuguese bread under her arm and toasting it on top of the stove. This pleasant ritual began each painting day.

The organization of a canvas now occupied Moffett more and more, and the strong tensions of his earlier paintings were gradually brought into a tempered pattern. The figures, still arranged as monumental forms, composed

themselves somewhat more quietly in the landscape. Such a painting as "Return from the Marshes" reflects a pastoral sense of man in harmony with nature. "Edge of the Dunes," "Plowing Amid the Dunes," "Return from Church," "Cattle on the Moors," "Winter Harvest," "Shank Painter Pond," and two paintings of the never-ending tragedies of Cape Cod's outer beach, "The Wreck of the Thistlemore" and "Burning Schooner," are full of a rhythm of life which expresses strong but contained drama.

Most significant of the paintings done at this time was "Planting Potatoes," a large painting of local Portuguese women in a classic pose. Like the elemental motif of Millet, women are depicted bent in a simple agrarian task, but the total organization of the canvas is strongly cubistic in construction and richly stated coloristically. It is a landmark painting.

The Moffetts traveled to Europe shortly after they were married. They toured Italy, France and Holland, spending the larger portion of their time in Italy. Ross loved Florence, which was to him the ideal city. He returned to it several times during their stay to study the works of the Renaissance masters, especially those of Masaccio. Although the influence of Masaccio and of the Italian masters in general is clearly evident in Moffett's work, the disposition of his figures most closely resembles that of Piero della Francesca. The serene composure of "Manta Wharf," for instance, depicts a scene of the working world with austere,

almost religious dignity. Moffett invests the figures of the fishermen and their families with the solemn grace of court attendants watching the discovery of the "True Cross."

France also provided inspiration at this time, and many small critiques in French of the "modernists" entered Ross's art library. Works he had acquired included studies on Derain, Cézanne, Braque, Picasso, Léger, Marcousis and Albert Gleizes, whose influence was brought directly to Provincetown through one of his students, E. Ambrose Webster. From the beginning Ross had recognized the genius of Cézanne, when, in 1913, he saw the "Woman with Rosary" in the Chicago Armory Show. The influence of Cézanne, and later of Braque, Picasso and also of Léger, certainly made themselves felt in the works which fall roughly between 1925 and 1935. Without doubt, this was one of the high points of his career, a ten-year span in which experimentation, mastery of the medium and complete surety reached full expression. The large painting "Gull Hill" is a striking example of his achievements at this time.

In 1930, as recognition of his place as one of the foremost modernists in America, he was chosen to serve on the jury of the Carnegie International together with Henri Matisse, Glyn Philpot, Horatio Walker, Karl Sterner, Bernard Karfiol and Homer St. Gaudens. It was a show that Forbes Watson described in the November, 1930 issue of *The Arts* as the best in a continually improving succession of

Carnegie Internationals. In this exhibition, Moffett showed three canvases: "The Eclipse," a thoroughly atmospheric painting in close values of a low key that subtly evokes a mysterious mood; "Red Dory," a forthright statement on the dory fisherman, now owned by the Nebraska Art Association (a more ambitious canvas using a similar subject entitled "The Cod Fisherman" had won for Moffett in 1927 the French Gold Medal at The Chicago Art Institute); and "The Conquest of Mexico," an intensely beautiful and intricately conceived abstract canvas in a very high key. A related painting, "Lost City in the Andes," was painted the year before in 1929 and uses an identical compositional approach — piling the center plane while at the same time tipping it up and forward, thus creating a powerful design thrust. Both paintings were inspired by the report of Professor Hiram Bingham on the Peruvian Expedition of 1912. A third related painting, "Prison Riot," again successfully reworks this composition, incorporating figures instead of the memorabilia of conquest.

The Frank Rehn Gallery handled Moffett's work until approximately 1940. He sold numerous paintings during their long association, but in a letter dated June, 1929, Rehn touchingly offered his apology for the less popular success of Ross's work than that of other painters exhibiting with the gallery at the time: "I am thoroughly sorry that we have not had better luck this past season, but I am

certain things will break for us soon. Work with as much individuality as yours always seems to have a struggle. . . ." The "struggle" was real enough, and it began in earnest as the new decade got underway. The Depression broke in upon Ross's career at full flood tide, as it did upon many of his contemporaries. The growth of the American painter stimulated by the impact of European painting had now gradually slowed. Industrialism's profound effect on American art and literature in general had been making itself felt for some time. Regional painting came into official favor with the WPA years and the prompting of the Federal Arts Project. Almost every major painter in America, and many lesser ones, were incorporated in this program, or fell in some way under its influence. The murals and easel paintings done for federal buildings and state municipal buildings proliferated everywhere.

Ross Moffett did four murals at this time: three in the post offices of Revere, Holyoke and Somerville, Massachusetts, and one for the Provincetown Town Hall. He also did a prodigious amount of easel painting under the sponsorship of the WPA. One of these paintings was chosen by Franklin Roosevelt to hang for a time in the White House Office building. But the ultimate fate of many WPA paintings is unknown. It is more than a surmise that hundreds of canvases were rolled and burned or used for rags after the Arts Project had produced much more art than it

could possibly allocate. The purpose of the program, however, was to keep the artists alive and productive, and this it did rather successfully. What it did to art in America is still an unresolved question.

One of the more positive benefits of the program, however, was the full participation of the major art institutions in the country, a participation, not only of exhibiting the works of American artists on a grand scale, but of purchasing outright many works of art. The Worcester Art Museum, for instance, launched an ambitious exhibition of American painters called *American Painting of Today*, which was intended to fill the gap left by the discontinuation of the Carnegie International in 1933. Francis Henry Taylor, the distinguished director of the Museum at that time, wrote of the exhibition in December, 1933: "No single class, perhaps, has suffered in the past four years from the Depression to the extent that has the artist in America. . . . The hardships which he has borne during the past few years have had, however, a sobering and reflective effect upon his art. . . . The economic restrictions imposed from without have taught him the importance of sincerity and to recognize the beauty of his native environment. Thus a new and vital feeling is abroad in American painting of today. . . . But the artist of the twentieth century may create the 'art of museums' only if the museums continue to encourage him. A traditional recognition of these responsibilities



has led the Trustees to hold this year an exhibition of American painting." Taylor's remarks initiated the central theme echoed by many art officials and institutions across the country.

The economic crisis of the thirties was quickly replaced by the crisis of the Second World War in the forties. The five years between 1940 and 1945 were not happy ones for Moffett. Although he was elected to full membership in the National Academy of Design in 1942, his painting slowed considerably during this period. In the absence of outside support for the art community in Provincetown, Ross took up the responsibility of its major organ of expression since 1914, the Provincetown Art Association. The Art Association was then at its lowest ebb, and he, rather single-handedly, maintained its functioning for the two or three years until the war ended. In 1945 and 1946 he secured a teaching position at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, through the kind offices of his friend Marston Hodgkin, also a painter and head of the Department of Fine Arts there. But he really disliked teaching, and only taught for the economic well-being of his wife and two children, Elizabeth and Alan. Some of the most interesting examples of his work during this period are his monotypes, as a large show of them in 1941 at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D. C., would indicate. A whole series of stunning monotypes in this period shows the abstract complexities of various rock crystals as seen through a polariz-

ing microscope. The imaginative organization of form brought to the medium based on both archaeological and artistic considerations is exciting, and is a direction that was expressed later in such oils as "Winter Quarters," where a compact juxtaposition of interlocking shapes is magnificently knit together. At this time Ross's work was being handled in New York by the Milch Galleries, but there is little correspondence to show the success of this connection.

A regeneration of his oil painting began in 1950 characterized by a serene but complex delineation of form and color executed in an extremely controlled manner. The structuring of his forms at times reflected a preoccupation with the science of archaeology, which had been an avocation since the thirties. The marriage of the two interests, painting and archaeology, was best reflected in a classic still life done in 1935 entitled "Artist's Geology Lesson," or "The Stones of Cape Cod." As time went by his research at sites and diggings on the Lower Cape became more extensive. Correspondence with the Robert S. Peabody Foundation at Andover, Massachusetts, The Massachusetts Archaeology Society and Harvard University's Peabody Museum, and many other archaeological institutions is voluminous. Moffett delivered lectures and prepared collections of findings in conjunction with numerous archaeological theses and papers. The work in this area alone would have fully occupied most men. But Ross's energy

was enormous and the momentum of his work influenced his outlooks, of course, but in the area of his art, it "never took charge," as Dickinson pointed out.

The combination of scientific method and artistic insight is unique in men like Moffett. It comes in a direct line from artists such as Charles Willson Peale whose enthusiasms in the field of natural science did not diminish his artistic achievements and led to the founding of both the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and a museum of natural history. Those elements of creative achievement and scientific curiosity which Peale displayed throughout his long life, and which were most happily balanced in the Renaissance man, have been in continuing, if limited, evidence in the American character since Jefferson's time. Emerson, when he delivered his lecture on "The American Scholar" at Cambridge in 1837, described a scholar as man in his most noble and liberated state: "I have now spoken of the education of the scholar by nature, by books and by action. It remains to say somewhat of his duties. They are such as become Man Thinking. . . . The scholar is that man who must take up unto himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future." Ross Moffett fits that definition; he was painter, historian, scientist and a true lover of nature, and he was a man of action when principle demanded it. As he was first and last an artist, his view of science was reflected through a humanist

nature. He had thoroughly absorbed the message inherent in Santayana's *Life of Reason* and he understood the total reaches of the creative spirit.

From 1951 to 1953, Moffett produced a series of three paintings entitled "Landslide at Highland Light." The analysis of geological strata inspired a powerful rendition of earth forms in arrested change. The same years saw him paint a complicated work of abstract interlocking shapes in an atmospheric canvas called "Winter Quarters." And the painting of a grey scene, "Winter in Wellfleet," painted somewhat earlier, won for him the Edwin Palmer Memorial Prize at the National Academy and was included in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's comprehensive exhibition of "American Painting Today" in 1950.

In 1954, the National Academy of Design chose two painters to complete murals depicting President Dwight D. Eisenhower's life for The Eisenhower Memorial Museum in Abilene, Kansas. Moffett was chosen to portray Eisenhower's civilian life and Louis Bouche to illustrate the military. This commission required two years of research and painting. When it was done and the murals mounted, they were extremely well received. A letter from Clarence Davis, Ross's first cousin and then Under Secretary of the Interior, dated November, 1956, expresses the general reaction of official Washington and of the country as a whole: "The papers all over

the country have been carrying pictures of the Eisenhower murals, and we have been very proud of you and have not been a particle reluctant to claim relationship. Apparently they have been well received, and you are to be congratulated, not only on having been chosen for the honor, but on the way in which it has been carried out." The murals had seemed to absorb his painting energy for the remainder of that decade. He was now seventy-two. The world was changing at a very rapid rate.

The Cape, and Provincetown in particular, which he loved so much, were experiencing pressures of commercial exploitation and ill-considered expansion. The Cape Cod National Seashore had been proposed as early as 1958, and in 1959, full-scale hearings began on the feasibility of establishing a National Park on America's fragile outpost. In December, 1959, Ross presented a statement to the Congressional Subcommittee on Public Lands holding hearings in Eastham, Massachusetts. It shows his willing recognition of the dangers threatening an area of rare natural beauty. "I do not, therefore, feel alone when I say that I am greatly disturbed to see the beautiful and traditional Cape Cod I have known so long being transformed through unregulated commercialism. We find that the interests of real estate expansion and the interests of conservation do not often coincide. We discover that already some of our beaches are denied for bathing and fishing. We see that one man with a bulldozer can in a few hours

tear down a splendid hill. We observe that our historic places are being immersed in an atmosphere of neon signs and honky-tonk. If this transformation is to be halted, if any part of the original and desirable character of Cape Cod is to be preserved, it will be, in my opinion, through our general Government."

From this moment on Ross threw his whole energies into the fight to establish The National Seashore. He was a sober polemicist and he did not become aroused easily, but the thoroughness with which he covered his subject and the weight of his opinions made more convincing by long association with archaeological research, led the fight to save 1400 acres of the Province Lands, a huge tract of virgin land untouched since its original deeding from the Indians in 1624. Joined as I was to this fight, the exceptional veracity of Ross's character and the logic of his analysis left a lasting impression upon me. He possessed a superior mind combined with a profoundly sensitive nature and he was able to incorporate principles in the local arena of politics with the calm absorption he had always brought to his art. The ultimate success of his efforts is a conservation achievement which cannot be overestimated.

A year after the Province Lands were totally incorporated in The National Seashore and the Park established Ross Moffett underwent surgery for cancer. This left him unable to paint during a rather long recuperation. He did, however, build a studio as an addition to

his home in 1964 in anticipation of better health, and it was here that he began to take up his work again. The introduction of acrylics was a new experience for him, and in keeping with his natural curiosity and love of experimentation, he began to incorporate their use in his work, especially on trips to Florida during the winters in the late sixties. But Florida never yielded its heart to him as did Provincetown and the Cape. Neither, strangely enough, had the mid-western interior of the country on the few occasions of his residency there.

An added stimulation to his painting in this same year came from the organization of a cooperative gallery known as the Provincetown Group Gallery. Ross served as one of the founding directors of "The Group," and the gallery subsequently filled a growing demand for works of Provincetown painters of high artistic standards. The publication of Ross Moffett's history of the Provincetown Art Association, *Art in Narrow Streets*, came in 1964. The book, begun in 1957, covered the activities of the Art Association from 1914 to 1947 and was carefully researched. Unlike similar documents that are catalogic in character, it was written with a sense for fascinating detail and personal insights that make excellent reading.

Ross Moffett's life was now drawing to a close. Still he continued to reflect on the problems of his art and to work. As a culmination of this period of productivity, he painted two remark-

able paintings in the winter of 1968, "Eroded Shore" and "Provincetown Winter." The first was a labyrinth of mangrove roots coiled on Florida sand. Peculiarly chilling because of its snake-like shapes, it had the same disposition of interlacing abstract forms that marked his paintings from the fifties on. The latter painting leaves nothing else to tell of a town which is essentially a stage. The dissolution wrought by time and abuse is gently portrayed as a sure, beautifully controlled satire in his mature style.

In 1969 he painted a heron lifting in flight from the shore of Pilgrim Lake at Provincetown's edge. In the background the rolling dunes stretch out in formal design. The sky is full of huge, sweeping blue wings — a dominance of gulls. It is a very strong painting for a man of eighty-one and it was his last. Ross Moffett died on March 13, 1971. Four days earlier, Karl Knaths passed away. Edwin Dickinson alone remains of the three friends and contemporaries who had lived and painted for more than half a century in Provincetown. Thus a "golden day" in American painting history had come to an end.

The tall, lean Scotch-Irish farm boy, concealing a refined sensitivity, painted from the beginning with all the certainty of a found love. His career began in the fertile abundance of the West, but achieved its full growth in the glacial repose of the East. It revealed a life force such as we ascribe to our common

ancestry. Ross Moffett expressed what we excerpt from our sense of history as "American." Defining it limits the totality of meaning, but recognizing it has become a knowing ritual among us all.

Josephine Couch Del Deo  
Provincetown, Massachusetts

## Paintings

Measurements are in inches, height preceding width. The works are oil on canvas, unless stated otherwise.

1. *A Street Scene, Provincetown*, 1915  
30 x 36  
Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett
2. *Self-Portrait*, 1915  
28 x 20  
Elizabeth Moffett Johnson
3. *Portrait of James Warren Moffett*, 1915  
24½ x 20  
Elizabeth Moffett Johnson
4. *Ice in the Harbor*, 1917  
40 x 50  
Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett
5. *The Back Street, Provincetown*, 1917  
40 x 50  
Provincetown Art Association; gift of the artist
6. *The Gossips*, 1917  
26 x 30  
Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett
7. *Winter Afternoon*, 1917  
36 x 46  
Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett
8. *New England Graveyard*, 1918  
40 x 50  
Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett
9. *The Old Fisherman*, 1918  
50 x 40  
Elizabeth Moffett Johnson
10. *Dune Farm*, 1919  
34 x 40  
Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett
11. *Winter from the Shirt Factory Studio*, 1920  
24 x 34  
Elizabeth Moffett Johnson
12. *Wreck in the Ice*, 1920  
36 x 46  
Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett
13. *Untitled (figures, goose, snow)*, c. 1923  
36 x 46  
Josephine and Salvatore Del Deo
14. *Return from Church*, c. 1923  
16 x 20  
Clarence M. Davis
15. *Self-Portrait*, 1920-1924  
46 x 36  
Alan W. Moffett
16. *Shank Painter Pond*, 1925  
30 x 40  
Town of Provincetown; gift of the artist
17. *Untitled (portrait of a young man)*, c. 1924  
26 x 22  
Elizabeth Moffett Johnson
18. *Wrecked Schooners*, 1927  
20 x 30  
Josephine and Salvatore Del Deo
19. *Manta Wharf*, 1927  
30 x 40  
Dr. Henry Fogelman
20. *The Eclipse*, 1927  
20 x 30  
Josephine and Salvatore Del Deo
21. *Proper Bostonians*, 1928  
12 x 17  
Karen Johnson
22. *Lost City in the Andes*, 1929  
20 x 30  
Josephine and Salvatore Del Deo
23. *Gull Hill*, 1929  
48 x 60  
Elizabeth Moffett Johnson
24. *Net Menders*, 1929  
24 x 36  
Alan W. Moffett
25. *The Castle*, 1929  
16 x 24  
Karen Johnson
26. *Conquest of Mexico*, 1930  
24 x 30  
Richard Johnson
27. *Untitled (boatyard I)*, 1930  
24 x 36  
Alan W. Moffett
28. *Untitled (boatyard II)*, 1930  
24 x 36  
Karen Johnson
29. *Prison Riot*, c. 1930  
20 x 28  
Karen Johnson
30. *Untitled (still life)*, c. 1932  
22 x 32  
Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett

31. Untitled (study of a still life), c. 1932  
Oil on cardboard  
11 x 16  
Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett

32. *Conversation on the Shore*, 1932  
48 x 60  
Richard and Gregory Johnson

33. *Pamet River*, c. 1931  
26 x 36  
Alan W. Moffett

34. *Artist's Geology Lesson (or The Stones of Cape Cod)*, 1935  
24 x 36  
Josephine and Salvatore Del Deo

35. *The Negress*, 1933  
16 x 20  
Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett

36. Untitled (still life with carrots), 1934  
20 x 30  
Karen Johnson

37. *Dark Horses Running*, 1934-1936  
20 x 24  
Alan W. Moffett

38. *Ice in Provincetown Harbor*, 1934  
20 x 30  
Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett

39. *Ice in Provincetown Harbor*, 1935  
24 x 36  
Richard and Gregory Johnson

40. *Truro Lobsterman*, c. 1937  
24 x 36  
Captain Jack Papetsas

41. *Stacking the Weir Poles*, c. 1938  
24 x 36  
Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett

42. *Higgins Wharf*, 1947  
26 x 40  
Joseph Acker

43. *Winter in Wellfleet*, 1950  
24 x 36  
Alan W. Moffett

44. *Winter Quarters*, 1951  
26 x 40  
Elizabeth Moffett Johnson

45. *Landslide at Highland Light*, 1953  
36 x 24  
Ione and Hudson Walker

46. *Wellfleet Harbor*, 1953  
24 x 36  
Josephine and Salvatore Del Deo

47. *Historical Museum*, 1961  
24 x 36  
Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett

48. *Provincetown Winter*, 1968-1969  
24 x 36  
Josephine and Salvatore Del Deo

49. *Eroded Shore*, 1969  
26 x 40  
Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett

## Drawings

From the collection of Dorothy Lake Gregory Moffett.

50. *The Hanging of Duncan Jop*, 1916  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 10

51. *A Priest with Two Dwarfs*, 1916  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 10

52. Untitled (study for *Potato Planters*), 1925  
Graphite and white chalk  
12 x 10

53. Untitled (woman at window), 1927-1929  
Black crayon on paper  
9½ x 6½

54. Untitled (standing woman), 1927-1929  
Black crayon on paper  
10 x 6½

55. Untitled (view of man from back), 1927-1929  
Black crayon on paper  
9½ x 6½

56. Untitled (view of man from front), 1927-1929  
Black crayon on paper  
9½ x 7½

57. Untitled (mural study of Indian head), 1935  
Charcoal on paper  
16¾ x 16¾

58. Untitled (study for *Eroded Shore*), 1968  
Ballpoint pen and graphite  
20 x 14½

## Watercolor

From the collection of Dorothy Lake Gregory  
Moffett.

59. *Hot Dog Stand*, 1932-1934  
14 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 19 $\frac{7}{8}$

## Monotypes

Measurements refer to plate size.  
From the collection of Josephine and Salvatore  
Del Deo.

60. *On the Beach*, 1916  
12 x 15

61. Untitled (woman with wet skirt), 1916  
12 x 15

62. *Watching the Bathers*, 1916  
12 x 15

63. *The Red Parasol*, 1916  
12 x 15

64. Untitled (death and the old man), c. 1922  
12 x 15

65. Untitled (old woman with shawl), 1922  
14 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 12

66. Untitled (dwarf, woman, child and dog),  
c. 1928  
15 x 12

67. Untitled (fat woman with bib), c. 1930  
14 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 12

68. *Dunes*, c. 1930  
10 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 15 $\frac{7}{8}$

69. *Tide Marshes*, 1931  
10 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 16

70. *Wood End Light*, 1931  
10 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 16

71. Untitled (the herd), c. 1931  
10 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 15 $\frac{7}{8}$

72. *Ice in Provincetown Harbor*, 1935  
12 x 16

73. Untitled (cranberry picker with cane),  
c. 1938  
13 x 16 $\frac{3}{8}$

74. *Section of Quartz Porphyry through  
Polarizing Microscope*, 1941  
12 x 15

75. Untitled (section of crystal through  
polarizing microscope), 1941  
12 x 16

76. *Divine, Serpentine and Feldspar*, 1941  
12 x 16

77. *Section of Homeland through Polarizing  
Microscope*, 1941  
12 x 16

78. *Provincetown Fisherman*, 1941  
12 x 16

79. *Provincetown Waterfront*, 1943  
12 x 16

80. *Fisherman*, 1947  
11 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 15 $\frac{7}{8}$

81. *Provincetown Fishing Boat*, 1948  
11 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 16

ROSS MOFFETT RETROSPECTIVE

Provincetown Art Association, August 29 — September 29, 1975

Supplementary List of Paintings:

(Measurements are in inches, height preceding width. The works are oil on canvas.)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 85. Untitled (girl carrying tub), 1916<br>14 x 18. N.F.S.    | 98. <i>The Old Captain</i> , c. 1930<br>28 x 24                    |
| 86. <i>Return of Spring</i> , 1922<br>24 x 30. N.F.S.        | 99. <i>Net Wagon</i> , 1931<br>32 x 52                             |
| 87. <i>Self Portrait</i> , c. 1920<br>30 x 24. N.F.S.        | 100. <i>Un Exercice A La Francaise</i> , 1931<br>24 x 38           |
| 88. <i>Plowing Amid the Dunes</i> , 1922<br>50 x 60          | 101. Untitled (abstract), c. 1932<br>14 x 20                       |
| 89. <i>Return from the Marshes</i> , 1922<br>40 x 50. N.F.S. | 102. Untitled (abstract), c. 1932<br>16 x 24                       |
| 90. Untitled (three figures), c. 1922<br>50 x 40. N.F.S.     | 103. Untitled (stones with clay heads), c. 1933<br>16 x 20. N.F.S. |
| 91. Untitled (cutting ice, green sky)<br>36 x 46             | 104. <i>Crossing at Harkins Run</i> , c. 1937<br>24 x 36           |
| 92. <i>Provincetown Church</i> , c. 1924<br>36 x 46. N.F.S.  | 105. <i>Truro Rider</i> , 1935<br>20 x 30. N.F.S.                  |
| 93. <i>The Cod Fisherman</i> , 1926<br>48 x 60. N.F.S.       | 106. <i>Fertade's Wharf</i> , 1935<br>20 x 30. N.F.S.              |
| 94. <i>The Potato Planters</i> , 1925<br>36 x 46. N.F.S.     | 107. <i>Marine Disaster</i> , 1938<br>30 x 48                      |
| 95. <i>Road Builders</i> , 1929<br>34 x 48                   | 108. <i>Studio Corner</i> , 1949<br>12 x 16. N.F.S.                |
| 96. Untitled (black woman, kerchief), 1929<br>14 x 18        | 109. Untitled (heron, Pilgrim Lake), 1969<br>N.F.S.                |
| 97. <i>The Eclipse</i> , 1930<br>24 x 30                     |  |

— Prices on request at the desk for works not in collection —

N.F.S. = Not For Sale

## Etchings

From the collection of Dorothy Lake Gregory  
Moffett.

82. *Back Street, Provincetown*, 1914  
7½ x 6½
83. *Untitled (boatyard)*, 1919  
8 x 6
84. *Untitled (studio piece)*, 1919  
6½ x 5¾

## Chronology

- 1888 Born February 18, Clearfield, Iowa
- 1907 Registered for study at the Cummins School of Art, Des Moines, Iowa
- 1908 Spent three months at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts beginning in February . . . transferred studies to The Art Institute of Chicago where he remained until 1913
- 1910 Art studies at Chicago interrupted by a year of homesteading land in South Dakota in Tripp County, east of the Rosebud Indian Reservation
- 1911 Resumed study at The Art Institute of Chicago
- 1913 Saw "The Armory Show" at The Institute . . . arrived in Provincetown, Massachusetts in June with Henry Sutter to spend the summer studying with Charles W. Hawthorne
- 1914 Spent the winter of 1913-1914 with Henry Sutter and Vaclav Vytlacil in New York . . . studied at the Art Students League . . . returned to Provincetown in the summer and rented a studio in Days' Lumber Yard next to Hawthorne . . . in the fall returned to Clearfield to spend the winter with his parents
- 1915 In the summer returned to Provincetown
- 1915-1917 Lived and worked in the studio next to Edwin Dickinson in Days' Lumber Yard establishing a friendship which continued for the remainder of his life
- 1916 Exhibited for the first time at the Provincetown Art Association
- 1918 Inducted into the U.S. Army . . . received the Norman Wait Harris Silver Medal from The Art Institute of Chicago for his painting, "The Old Fisherman"
- 1920 Married Dorothy Lake Gregory in Brooklyn, New York . . . established permanent residency in Provincetown
- 1921 Received the First Julius Hallgarten Prize from the National Academy of Design for his painting, "The Old Fisherman" . . . received Honorable Mention for the same painting from the Carnegie Institute
- 1923 Traveled to Europe for several months, spending much of the time in Italy and France
- 1924 Birth of Elizabeth Moffett, October 29 . . . with the painter Heinrich Pfeiffer began the "Provincetown Painting Class," a school of instruction
- 1926 Birth of Alan Moffett, November 9
- 1927 Received the French Gold Medal for his painting, "The Cod Fisherman" from The Art Institute of Chicago . . . served on the first "modernist" jury at the Provincetown Art Association with Karl Knaths, Edwin Dickinson and others
- 1928 First one-man show at the Frank Rehn Gallery in New York . . . one-man show at The Art Institute of Chicago
- 1929 Served on the jury for the Annual Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts



## Exhibitions

- 1930 Served on the jury of the Carnegie International
- 1932- Assistant Professor of Fine Arts at  
1933 Miami University, Oxford, Ohio
- 1934 Represented Massachusetts at the "Century of Progress" exhibition at The Art Institute of Chicago with the painting, "Shank Painter Pond"
- 1935 Visited Florida for the first time . . . served on the jury for the Annual Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
- 1936- Painted murals for post offices in  
1938 Holyoke, Revere and Somerville, Massachusetts . . . completed murals for the Provincetown Town Hall and High School
- 1938 Elected as an Associate Member in the National Academy of Design
- 1939 Exhibited "Marine Disaster" at the New York World's Fair
- 1942 Received full membership in the National Academy of Design
- 1945- Assistant Professor of Fine Arts at  
1946 Miami University
- 1951 Received The Edwin Memorial Prize at the National Academy of Design for "Winter in Wellfleet"
- 1954 Commissioned by the National Academy of Design together with Louis Bouche to paint the murals for the Eisenhower Memorial Foundation in Abilene, Kansas
- 1956 Completed the Eisenhower murals which were dedicated November 24
- 1960 Began work to save 1400 acres of virgin land known as the Province Lands within the proposed boundaries of The Cape Cod National Seashore Park
- 1964 Privately published *Art in Narrow Streets, The First Thirty-Three Years of the Provincetown Art Association* . . . founded the Provincetown Group Gallery with others and served as one of the founding directors
- 1964- Underwent treatment for cancer  
1965
- 1967 Served on the jury for the Provincetown Art Association with Edwin Dickinson and Karl Knaths, the same jury which had served in 1927 for the first "modernist" exhibition
- 1970 Artist in residence at the third session of the Fine Arts Work Center, Provincetown
- 1971 Died March 13
- The Art Institute of Chicago; one-man show 1928/ 1929
- Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.; one-man show 1941/ 1942
- Frank Rehn Gallery, New York; one-man shows 1928, 1931
- Athena Gallery, New Haven; one-man show 1969
- Provincetown Group Gallery; one-man shows 1964-1970
- Albright Knox Gallery, Buffalo
- The Boston Tercentenary Fine Arts Exhibition
- The Brooklyn Museum of Art
- Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute
- Cleveland Museum of Art
- City Art Museum of St. Louis
- Currier Gallery, Manchester
- The Detroit Institute of Arts
- Grace Horne Gallery, Boston
- Heistand Gallery, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio
- Indianapolis Art Association
- Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art
- Montclair Art Museum
- The Museum of Modern Art
- National Academy of Design
- The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
- Nebraska Art Association, Lincoln
- New England Society of Contemporary Art, Inc., Boston
- Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
- Provincetown Art Association
- Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

## Museum Collections

J. B. Speed Museum, Louisville  
Stuart Art Club, Boston  
Springfield Museum of Fine Arts,  
Massachusetts  
University of Illinois, Urbana  
University of Kansas, Lawrence  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts  
Vose Gallery, Boston  
Whitney Museum of American Art  
Whitney Studio Club, New York  
Worcester Art Museum

### Foreign

Musée Galliera, Paris  
Musée Galliera, Marseille

Corcoran Gallery of Art  
National Academy of Design  
Nebraska Art Association, Sheldon Memorial  
Gallery  
Miami University, Hiestand Gallery  
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts  
Provincetown Art Association  
J. B. Speed Museum  
Whitney Museum of American Art  
University of Kansas

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Untitled, 1916-1917

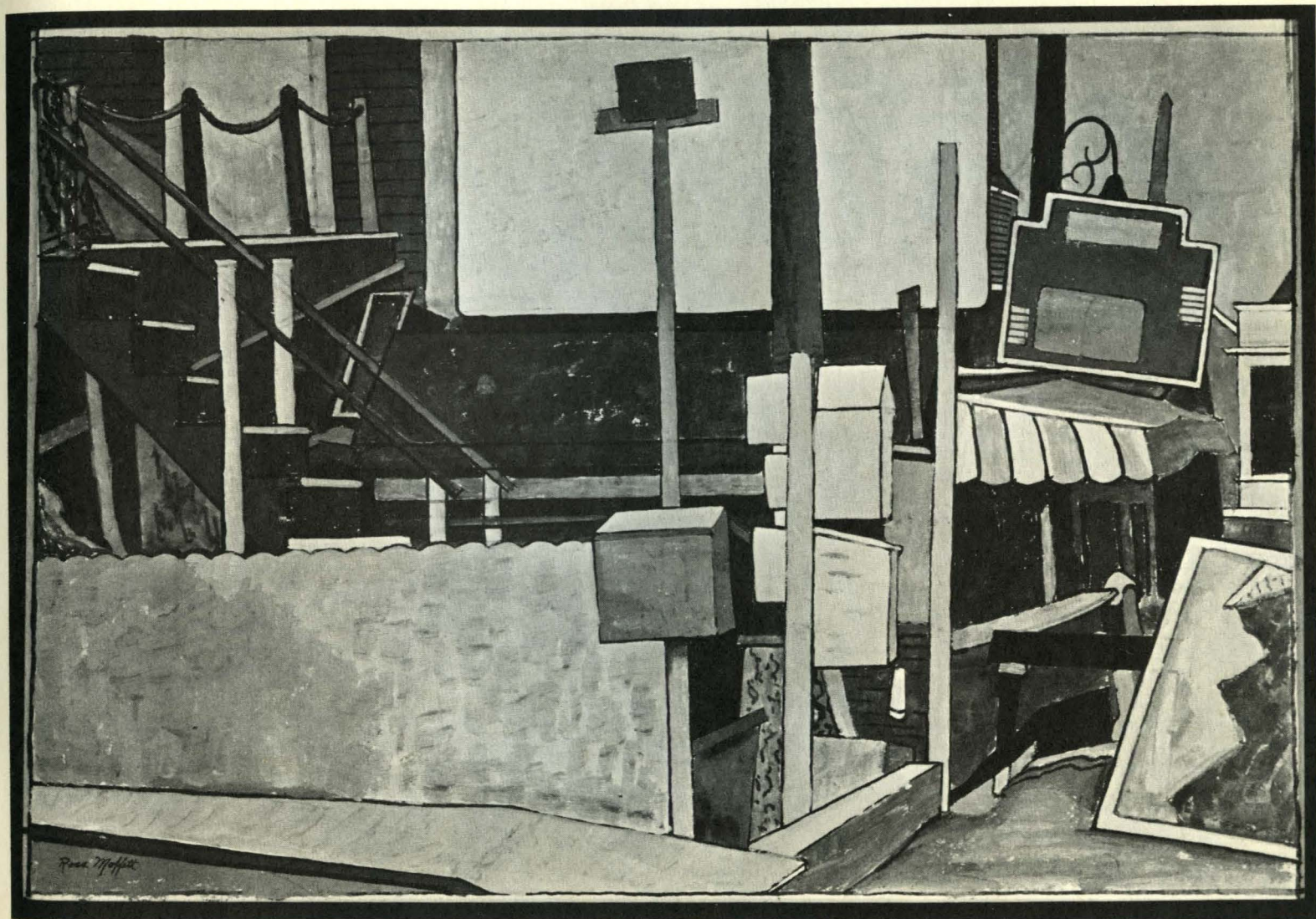


Ice in the Harbor, 1917





Hot Dog Stand, 1932-1934



Shank Painter Pond, 1925

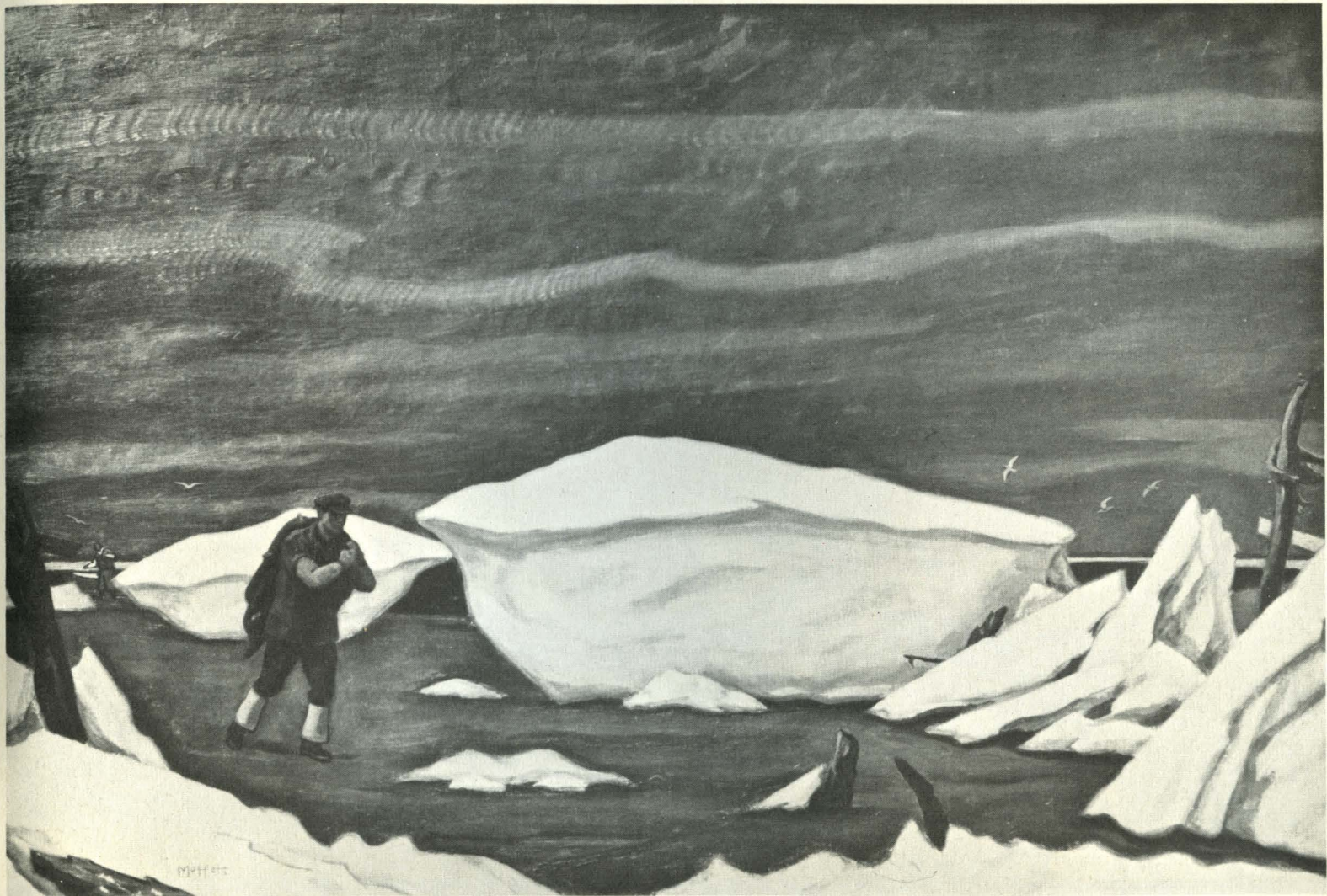






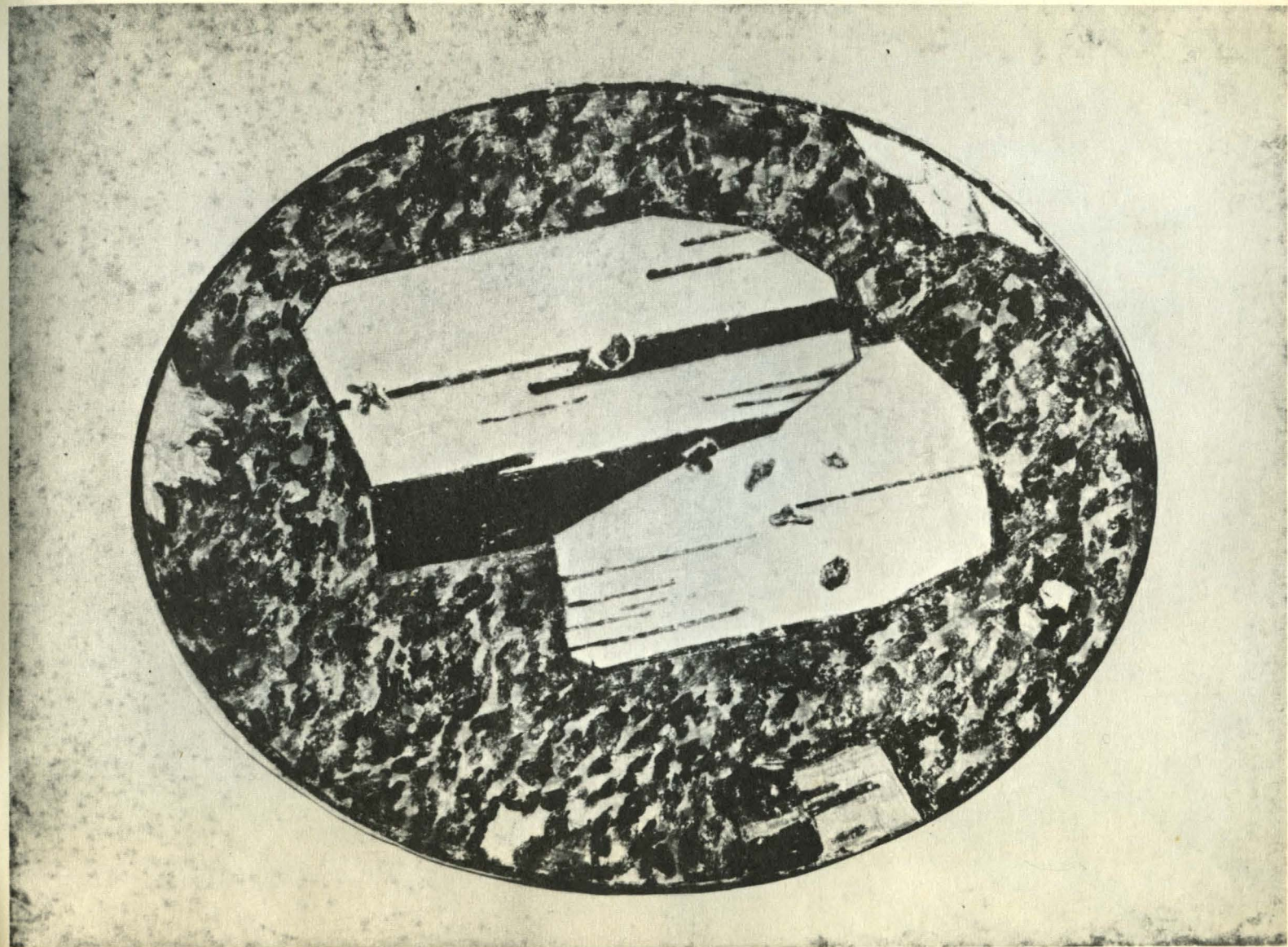


Ice in Provincetown Harbor, 1935





Section of Quartz Porphyry Through Polarizing Microscope, 1941



Landslide at Highland Light, 1953





