

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

NO. 106

FOR RELEASE: DECEMBER 18, 1975

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL GIVES MUSEUM OF MODERN ART STUART DAVIS MURAL

After months of careful restoration a large mural by the American artist Stuart Davis, originally commissioned in 1932 for the men's smoking lounge in Radio City Music Hall, has been installed in its new home, The Museum of Modern Art. The 10 x 17-foot mural was one of more than several dozen works by many artists commissioned more than 40 years ago by Rockefeller Center for its then new theater.

Named by a Rockefeller Center committee "Men Without Women" (probably based on the Ernest Hemingway short story), the title was later considered by Davis to be inappropriate and the Museum is simply calling the work "Mural." It contains no human figures but objects related to recreation and relaxation. Arranged across its surface in stylized flat cubist patterns are a roadster convertible, gasoline pump, package of cigarettes, cigars, sailboat, pipe, package of tobacco, tobacco pouch, playing cards, matches, and barber poles.

When the Music Hall commissions were originally announced in 1932, they were described by officials of the Center as "the most extensive and varied collection of modern American art ever planned for a commercial building." Donald Deskey, the designer who supervised the interior of the Music Hall, said the commissions marked "the first time a semi-public institution has given recognition to our progressive artists." In addition to Stuart Davis, Henry Billings, Louis Bouché and Henry Varnum Poor were among some 30 artists represented by more than 100 works of art throughout the Center and the Music Hall.

Removal of the Davis mural from the men's smoking lounge in Radio City was a complicated and expensive process as the white lead used as the adhesive proved an unusually tenacious bond fastening the huge canvas to the wall. A layer of

(more)

Japanese TOSA tissue, a layer of muslin, a layer of corrugated cardboard, a framework of wood, and an additional layer of beaverboard were attached to the surface of the painting in order to protect it during the arduous process of removing it from the building. The conservators had to cut out an entire section of the wall itself weighing more than 1,000 pounds and then carefully chip away from the back of the painting a layer of brick, a one-inch layer of mortar, and two thin layers of plaster. It was then taken to a studio where a new linen back was attached to the canvas and the cleaning and varnishing completed.

Restoration work was carried out by the Painting Conservation Studios under the direction of Bernard Rabin and Alan Farancz and in cooperation with Jean Volkmer, Chief Conservator of The Museum of Modern Art.

When the gift was announced last April, Alton G. Marshall, President of Rockefeller Center, Inc. and Chairman and President of Radio City Music Hall, said that the Music Hall is "pleased and proud to present this magnificent mural by Stuart Davis to The Museum of Modern Art where it will be more accessible to all the public, and more readily available to students and art historians."

In response, William Rubin, Director of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, expressed the Museum's gratitude, and said, "This was the first large painting made by this pioneer American painter and in its size, breadth of design and iconographic richness, it is very different from any of the five paintings by Davis now in our collection."

Other works by Stuart Davis in The Museum of Modern Art collection are: Lucky Strike (1921); Egg Beater (1930); Summer Landscape (1930); Salt Shaker (1931); and Visa (1951).

 Additional press information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, New York 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7501; 7504.
