

# Alfred Maurer:

At The Vanguard Of Modernism



*Previous Page: Maurer applied his knowledge of Fauvism to numerous brightly colored landscapes, including "Landscape (Autumn)," 1909. Here he applied offbeat colors to the path, the hill to the right, all the time emphasizing the brilliant green of the dominating trees. Collection of the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota, gift of Ione and Hudson D. Walker.*

By Stephen May

**A**NDOVER, MASS. — A good case can be made that Alfred Maurer (1868–1932) was America's first Modernist painter. A gifted and daring artist, early in the

*"Girls" and "Heads" that Maurer created in the 1920s featured brightly hued and distorted figures of young women, characterized by long necks, red lips and fashionable clothes, as in "[Three Women]," circa 1928. They were controversial in their day and make a lasting impression in this exhibition. Craven collection. (Click image to see full size)*



*Maurer's sense of abstraction and patterning is apparent in his early Fauve works, like "Still Life," circa 1910. A riot of discordant colors and spatial relationships, it brings to mind Matisse's comments in a 1908 essay that paintings are about the "art of arranging in a decorative manner the various elements at the painter's disposal for the expression of his feelings." Collection of Tommy and Gill LiPuma. (Click image to see full size)*

Twentieth Century he experimented

with Fauvism, helped introduce French avant-garde art in America and ultimately created revolutionary, adventurous compositions that presaged experiments in abstraction. An excellent overview of Maurer's diverse oeuvre is offered in "Alfred







*Among the genre scenes Maurer painted during his 1901–02 sojourn in America were beach scenes that reflected the lure of the ocean for city-dwellers. "At the Shore," 1901, was painted with bravura brushwork of simplified masses of color and form. Maurer was interested in genre scenes of working-class people, not the fashionable, decorous views created by Eugene Boudin and William Merritt Chase. Courtesy Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Ark. (Click image to see full size)*

Maurer: At the Vanguard of Modernism," on view at the Addison Gallery of American Art at Phillips Academy Andover through July 31. Co-curated by Addison curator Susan Faxon and independent scholar Stacey Epstein, who single-handedly has revived interest in Maurer through this exhibition





▲ Maurer designed this sign for the Weyhe Gallery in 1924, the year Erhard Weyhe became his dealer. The elongated neck, bright red lips and distorted body are characteristic of the paintings of young women the artist was doing in the early 1920s. Private collection.

▼ In the last years before he committed suicide in 1932, Maurer painted some of his most inventive yet engaging Cubist still lifes, like "Still Life with Pears," circa 1930–31. In this work the artist melded elements of Analytic and Synthetic Cubism, along with perspectival distortions to paint a colorful, challenging image. It took both courage and skill to display this Cubist-inspired image at a time when Cubism was under attack in American art circles. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass., museum purchase.





*Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's views of Parisian night life influenced many painters, including Maurer. In "Le Bal Bullier," circa 1900–01, Maurer captured activity around this popular entertainment center. During his 17 years in Paris, the American visited this site on many occasions. Maurer and William Glackens visited the place for a masked ball on Mardi Gras one year, for example. Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Mass.*



and shows at Manhattan's Hollis Taggart Galleries, the exhibition comprises 70 Maurer works.

Maurer was born in New York City,

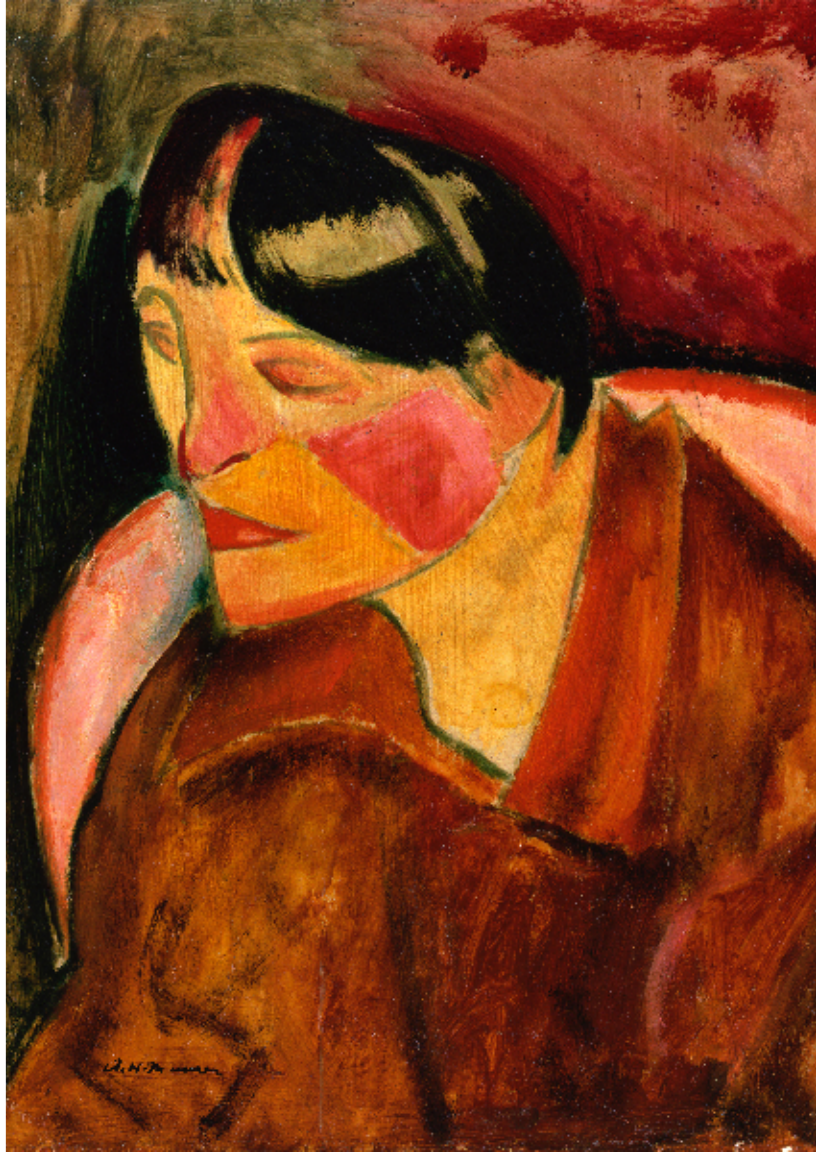
the son of Currier & Ives artist Louis Maurer, who executed representational genre scenes and came to dislike his son's Modernistic images. Young Maurer



left school in 1884 to work in the family lithographic printing business, and a year later began a decade of study in academic art at the National Academy of Design.

Maurer sailed to France in 1897, staying there most of 17 years, during which he was thoroughly immersed in the French avant-garde movement. At the outset, Maurer,

*One of Maurer's most striking images, "Head of a Woman," circa 1908, reflects his adoption of the Fauves' high-keyed palette and interest in African tribal art. This 18¼-by-15-inch tempera on French cardboard mounted on gessoed panel is in the permanent collection of Curtis Galleries, Minneapolis, Minn. (Click image to see full size)*





whose friends called him “Alfy,” created fashionable portraits that owed much to James Abbott McNeill Whistler — and a bit to William Merritt Chase — and drew critical

approval on both sides of the Atlantic. Whistler intrigued Maurer as he tried to separate himself from academic constraints. The best-known canvas of this period, “An Arrangement” of







*(Previous Page) Plunging into Fauvist still lifes, Maurer created intensely patterned decorative compositions like "Un Sucrier et Trois Croissants," circa 1908. Here, patterning on the tablecloth looks to be dissolving into moveable figures, framed by high-keyed walls and objects like a dinner plate. This work, measuring 18 by 21 5/8 inches, is in the collection of Tommy and Gill LiPuma.*

*(Left) "Alfy," as Maurer was known, had an intense gaze and a face punctuated from an early age by an ample mustache. He had a wide circle of friends and admirers on both sides of the Atlantic. Compatriot artists kept him up to date on changes in the art world that informed many of his paintings. This photograph, taken in Paris before 1914, is in a private collection. (Click image to see full size)*

1901, earned rave reviews in New York and established Maurer's career.

Eventually abandoning his Whistlerian style, Maurer began to work in a romantic Realist manner. An astute observer, Maurer depicted everything from a rendezvous of a

man and woman in a darkened café to a nocturne of Place St Michelle that resembled works by John Singer Sargent and Whistler to a club scene of men — and a cat — gathered around a somber shuffleboard game in an ambience reminiscent of John

Sloan’s iconic “McSorley’s Bar,” painted seven or eight years later in New York...

([Continued on page 1C inside the E-edition](#))

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